Organisational Arrangements for the Management of Risk Arising from Fieldwork

Health and Safety Service
1. Introduction

The majority of staff and students will undertake fieldwork or off-site academic-related activities (as defined below) in some form or other while they are at Birkbeck. These organisational arrangements for the management of fieldwork are intended to ensure the health and safety of fieldwork participants so as far as reasonably practicable.

The key components of the College’s arrangements are:

1. Clearly identifying responsibilities for implementing these arrangements at every stage of the process.
2. Ensuring that all individuals organising and or participating in fieldwork receive adequate information and training and are competent to discharge the responsibilities assigned to them.
3. Undertaking adequate planning and risk assessments for fieldwork, and implementing appropriate measures to avoid, reduce or mitigate any risk identified.

2. Scope and definition

These arrangements cover all fieldwork undertaken by Birkbeck staff or students whether in groups or as individuals, whether in the UK or overseas. The policy uses the definition set out in the sector Guidance on Fieldwork produced by the Universities Safety and Health Association (USHA) in association with the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) where fieldwork is defined as:

“any work or activity undertaken by staff and students, for the purposes of teaching, research, study, recruitment activities, attending conferences or other activities while representing the Institution offsite.”

These arrangements do not apply to students undertaking activities on work placements in other organisations over which Birkbeck does not have any control. In these circumstances the host organisation will normally be responsible for the health and safety of the student whilst they are working under the supervision of the host organisation.

Consultants and other third parties carrying out fieldwork whilst working on behalf of Birkbeck are required to adhere to its requirements to undertake suitable and sufficient risk assessments and put in place any control measures, arrangements and precautions deemed necessary as identified by the risk assessment.

These arrangements do not cover activities or actions undertaken during “down time” i.e. a period of time, occurring before, after or within the overall duration of the
fieldwork, but outside the jurisdiction of the College. Nevertheless, whenever possible, fieldwork participants should be provided with sufficient information to enable them to exercise care for their personal safety during “down time” activities.

3. Responsibilities
These arrangements are to be implemented through the College’s line management structure as outlined in the Health and Safety Policy and the Organisational Arrangements for the Management of Health and Safety.

Executive Deans and Directors
Executive Deans and Directors must ensure that there are adequate arrangements for managing fieldwork within their school or department and that these arrangements are implemented and maintained.

Heads of Departments
The Heads of Department bear the main responsibility for approving or withholding authorisation for fieldwork to be undertaken in high risk environments (for example areas where the FCO advise against all travel).

The Heads of Departments will be responsible for bringing to the attention of the Senior Management Team any fieldwork activity which has the potential to seriously damage the reputation of the College.

Heads of Department are responsible for authorising fieldwork undertaken by their staff and students and must ensure that:
1. They are familiar with the contents of these organisational arrangements and related procedures.
2. There are satisfactory local arrangements for planning and organising fieldwork;
3. A competent fieldwork leader is appointed for each fieldwork venture having taken full account of their experience and qualifications relevant to the fieldwork proposed;
4. The role and responsibilities of all of parties are clearly understood by all involved in the planning and undertaking of the fieldwork activity;
5. An appropriate level of supervision by staff with relevant experience and training is provided for fieldwork activity;
6. Authorisation is withheld until the planning and risk assessment process is complete;
7. Adequate and suitable sources of information and advice are available to fieldwork leaders and participants, including access to specialist security consultants in circumstances where fieldwork is planned in areas subject to FCO travel warnings
8. Adequate financial resources are available to fieldwork leaders to enable procurement of training, equipment and provision of additional staffing to support the fieldwork;
9. Fieldwork leaders are empowered, in the interest of health and safety, to change itineraries or abort the fieldwork if necessary.
10. Adequate records are kept of fieldwork, including list of participants, travel and fieldwork itinerary, contact details etc.
Fieldwork Leaders
The fieldwork leader has overall responsibility for planning and supervising fieldwork to ensure it is managed safely.

They shall:

- Comply with these organisational arrangements and any local rules established within the School/Department.
- Ensure that the fieldwork activity for which they are responsible is properly planned, including conducting feasibility studies and preparatory visits to fieldwork locations where practical.
- Undertake a fieldwork threat analysis, where fieldwork is to be undertaken in areas subject to FCO travel warnings, or areas where high levels of crime, civil unrest or any social behaviour are likely. *(The threat analysis examines potential security and political threats as well as natural hazards and health risks. The threat analysis must consider any possible threat to individual fieldwork participants arising from their race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.)*
- Complete a fieldwork risk assessment, and ensure that any protective and preventive measures identified by the risk assessment as being necessary are put into place.
- Seek advice from safety, security and travel specialists both internally and externally such as:
  - the Health and Safety Services,
  - Occupational Health Service,
  - The Insurance Officer,
  - Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)
  - Security Specialist consultants appointed by the College.
- Allocate specific supervisory duties to participants.
- Keep the Head of Department informed of any issues that arise during the planning and risk assessment process that have the potential to damage the reputation of the College.
- Obtain authorisation from the Head of Department: Provide the Head of Department with sufficient information on the outcome of the risk assessment process, including any residue risks which cannot be avoided to enable them to make an informed decision on whether or not to authorise the fieldwork activity, or refer it to the Executive Dean.
- Obtain medical declarations and personal information from all participants and check the forms for any medical conditions that may affect the participants’ ability to safely perform the activities requested. To refer on, where necessary, to Occupational Health for advice.
- Obtain insurance cover for Travel & Personal Accident for participants from the Insurance Officer.
- Allocate a competent person to lead each sub-group where necessary; and
- Delegate explicit responsibility to the leader of each sub-group to know the total number and identities of the participants they are responsible for supervising.
- Ensure that details of the fieldwork, including list of participants, travel and fieldwork itinerary, contact details etc. are logged with the Department.
- Notify the Health and Safety Office of any accidents, incidents or injuries which occur whilst fieldwork is being undertaken.
- Have in place an emergency plan, which includes notifying the College and acquiring assistance in the event of an emergency.
- Agree a “check-in” routine to reassure London that all is well. Failure to check in will lead to Emergency Procedures being activated.

The fieldwork leader is responsible for ensuring a suitable and sufficient risk assessment is in place and for ensuring that all safety precautions are observed for the duration of the fieldwork. This duty may be passed to other responsible persons (e.g. Boat Skipper) but the overall duty to ensure the safety of the fieldwork participants remains with the fieldwork leader.

Fieldwork Participants - Students and Staff
It is the responsibility of fieldwork participants to heed, understand and observe any instruction given to them by a supervisor and to bring any questions or problems, particularly those of understanding, to the attention of their supervisor.

Participants must acknowledge their own responsibilities for the health and safety of both themselves and others. This includes any activities undertaken during “down time” when they are not under the jurisdiction of the College.

Participants must co-operate with the Fieldwork leader during all phases of the fieldwork activity including providing information when requested regarding medical conditions.

The authority and responsibilities of the fieldwork leader, or any other designated supervisor in relation to safety, must be clearly defined and understood by all members of the party.

Fieldwork undertaken by lone individuals
Where fieldwork is undertaken by lone individuals, the individuals themselves will be responsible for undertaking adequate planning and risk assessment, and seeking authorisation from the Head of Department.

Academic Supervisors must ensure that Students undertaking fieldwork complete a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. Additionally, they should continue to exercise their duty of care for the student whilst they are away.

Individuals undertaking lone or self-managed fieldwork must ensure that details of the fieldwork, including travel and fieldwork itinerary, contact details etc. are logged with the Department.

Health and Safety Committee
The Health and Safety Committee will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of these arrangements. They will receive reports on any accidents or incidents which occur during the course of fieldwork.
OR: They must be notified of any accidents, incidents or health problems needing medical attention, occurring during the course of fieldwork.
4. Risk Assessment

The Fieldwork risk assessment will be undertaken by the Fieldwork Leader or by the individual participant undertaking lone or self-managed fieldwork. The Fieldwork Leader and other individuals required to participate in the process should receive appropriate risk assessment training.

The risk assessment should be appropriate and proportionate to the circumstances. For example, low risk activities such as visits to other established academic institutions either in the UK, Western Europe or the US will not normally necessitate a detailed risk assessment. However, consideration will need to be given to those with particular needs, for example; arrangements for evacuating in the event of an emergency for persons with mobility or sensory impairment.

Generic risk assessments can be used for repeat visits to low risk destinations, however the Fieldwork leader must ensure that the generic risk assessments is suitable and sufficient given the level of competence of the participants.

Activities involving visits to potentially heightened risk environments, whether in the UK or overseas, will require a more detailed written risk assessment to be undertaken. This list is not exhaustive, but examples of heightened risk environments and activities include:

- Visits to areas subject to political instability, civil unrest or disorder, natural disasters or high levels of crime or anti-social behaviour such as drug misuse or prostitution.
- Visits to areas which pose a risk to health due to disease, poor sanitation and poor hygiene or food contamination
- Visits to environments where there are political or security threats against any individual travelling, or against a group they may represent, for example due to religion, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or political affiliation
- Research involving the collection or transfer of data regarded as sensitive or likely to attract the attention of the security services in the country visited
- Lone working by participants with limited experience of, or familiarity with, the area to be visited
- Visits involving physical and environmental hazards such as travel across extreme or hazardous terrain, extremes of weather or exposure to dangerous wildlife

The risk assessment should identify potential hazards arising from the nature of the fieldwork activity, the environment and location where the activity is taking place, and the individual(s) undertaking the activity. The risk assessment should identify the control measures that will be taken to avoid, mitigate or control the hazards, as well as identifying persons responsible for taking action in given timescales.

Risk assessment should be a dynamic process. Participants and all those concerned with the management and supervision of fieldwork activities must be mindful of the fact that risk levels can escalate as circumstances change, therefore the risk assessment must be kept under review.
Risk assessment checklist and templates are available to assist fieldwork leaders.

5. Competence and training
Heads of Department must be satisfied that the fieldwork leader has the personal capability and competence to lead, especially under possible adverse conditions, and has sufficient awareness of their obligations to those under supervision.

Fieldwork leaders, independent fieldworkers and participants working off-site need to be competent to plan and undertake fieldwork safely. Competence in this context is defined as being not only an appropriate combination of knowledge, experience and qualifications, but also to acknowledge one’s own limitations.

It is important to recognise that a leader’s and/or fieldworker’s competence in an academic subject, or in research techniques, is different from competence in management, leadership and supervisory skills.

For some activities, formal qualifications may have to be sought. For example, if outdoor fieldwork were to involve diving or mountain climbing, relevant training would be required.

The risk assessment should help identify training and induction requirements for fieldworkers. Training should be provided prior to departure where possible, or during the fieldwork if more appropriate to do so.

6. Insurance
Fieldwork Leaders are responsible for ensuring that adequate insurance is in place for proposed activities and locations by contacting the Insurance Officer.

Individuals undertaking lone or self-managed fieldwork must also contact the Insurance Officer (IO) to ensure that they have adequate insurance for the activities to be undertaken and the areas to be visited. In particular the IO must be notified of any planned fieldwork activities in areas subject to FCO travel warnings, as travel to these areas may involve exclusions and additional premiums.

7. Emergency response planning
All fieldwork activities must have an emergency plan, setting out what the Fieldwork Leader and College will do in the event of an accident or incident. The level and depth of emergency planning required will relate directly to the level of risk associated with the fieldwork. The emergency plan should be in place before the fieldwork begins. The plan should set out in what circumstances the plan will be activated and who by. Normally the Fieldwork leader will activate the emergency plan, but deputies must be appointed in the event of the Fieldwork leader becoming incapacitated.

The plan must indicate who within the College activates the plan in the event of contact being lost with the fieldwork party. The emergency plan should, where relevant, cover the following:

- Available support
• Missing persons procedure
• Methods for contacting next of kin
• Civil unrest and natural disasters
• Medical emergencies and repatriation
• Financial plan for emergencies
• Communication strategy
• Media management plan

Where external stakeholders, including partner institutions or third party providers, have roles or responsibilities in the emergency plan, it is vital that they are briefed (preferably face-to-face).

All participants should be briefed on the arrangements for dealing with emergencies. Dealing with a medical emergency is a possibility which should be considered for all fieldwork including supervised fieldwork and independent fieldwork. Considerations include the duration of the work, the remoteness of the destination, the fitness of participants, access to medical assistance and standards of health care available.