



## LONE WORKING AND OUT OF HOURS WORKING

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ), RISK ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE AND CASE STUDIES

This FAQ / Guidance document should be read in conjunction with the QMUL Health and Safety Standard on Lone Working and Out of Hours Working (ref OHSD\_GA025, <http://www.ohsd.qmul.ac.uk/standard/index.html>). This document also provide guidance on completing the QMUL risk assessment template for lone working and out of hours working (risk assessment template ref OHSD\_GA018, <http://www.ohsd.qmul.ac.uk/forms/index.html>) and provides a number of case studies relevant to tasks conducted at QMUL.

## 1.0 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

### 1.1 *Who is a 'lone worker'?*

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) defines a lone worker as '**those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision**'.

In terms of the QMUL H&S Standard for this topic, it has been defined in terms of the provision of H&S assistance - 'A person who has neither **visual nor audible communication with someone (physically)** who can summon assistance in the event of an accident, illness or other adverse event is considered to be a '**lone worker**'.

### 1.2 *Is it 'illegal' to work alone on QMUL premises?*

In most cases, No. However, a lone worker (staff, student or a visitor/contractor) should not be put at any more risk compared to others. H&S law (see 1.5 below) then requires the employer (i.e. the manager / supervisor) to ensure that a safe environment is created for the lone worker to do their tasks safely. There are however specific higher risk work tasks that must **not** be done alone (see the QMUL H&S Standard section 8.2 for details).

### 1.3 *What are 'normal working hours' and 'out of hours' on QMUL premises?*

QMUL views **8 am to 6 pm on normal working weekdays as 'normal working hours'**, where the full complement of health and safety related assistance (e.g. first aid, security, health and safety advice) is able to be provided to staff, students and others. Outside of these hours, the capacity of QMUL to provide health and safety assistance will be markedly reduced. Persons working on QMUL premises outside the 'normal working hours' will be considered to be working 'out of hours'.

#### **1.4 Is it 'illegal' to work 'out of hours' on QMUL premises?**

No. However, an out of hours worker (staff, student or a visitor/contractor) should not be put at any more risk compared to others. H&S law (see 1.5 below) then requires the employer (i.e. the manager / supervisor) to ensure that a safe environment is created for the out of hours worker to do their tasks safely. There are however specific higher risk work tasks that must **not** be done alone or out of hours (see the QMUL H&S Standard section 8.2 for details).

#### **1.5 I supervise or manage a number of people (staff and/or students and/or contractors) that work alone or work out of hours but what legislation is there that forces me to do anything?**

Employers have responsibilities for the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees and the health and safety of those affected by the work, e.g. visitors, such as contractors and self-employed people who the employer may engage. These duties are specifically noted under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSW Act) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work (MHSW) Regulations 1999. Additional topic based H&S legislation specify prohibitions or restrictions for higher risk work (see the QMUL H&S Standard section 8.2 for details).

#### **1.6 What do I as manager or supervisor need to do to ensure the safety of lone or out of hours workers under my management or supervision?**

It is the employer's (i.e. manager / supervisor) duty to **assess risks** to lone and/or out of hours workers and **take steps** (implement measures) to avoid or reduce (control) risk so that the worker is not at any more risk than others (see the QMUL H&S Standard section 6 for roles and responsibilities and section 9 for risk assessment).

These H&S responsibilities **cannot** be transferred to the lone or out of hours worker. However, the manager/supervisor must involve the lone or out of hours worker when considering (assessing) potential risks and identifying measures to avoid or reduce (control) the risks from working alone and/or out of hours.

The lone or out of hours worker as an employee has a responsibility to take reasonable care of themselves and other people affected by their work and to co-operate with their employer (manager / supervisor) in meeting their legal obligations.

Non-employees (e.g. undergraduates, visiting researchers, contractors) must abide by the health and safety requirements specified by their QMUL host (e.g. course tutor/supervisor, academic host, estates and facilities manager).

#### **1.7 What resources are available for me as a Manager or Supervisor to complete a risk assessment and to identify the safety measures for lone or out of hours working?**

The QMUL H&S Standard on Lone Working and Out of Hours Working, this guidance document and also the HSE leaflet 'Working Alone in Safety'

(<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>) will assist those who supervise and/or manage lone workers and those working out of hours. You should also consult your School / Institute / Directorate local H&S rules and procedures as these documents will have specific local information and local safe working arrangements / procedures.

You can also contact your School / Institute / Directorate Safety Coordinator and/or the Occupational Health and Safety Directorate H&S Advisers for further advice. (Contact details at <http://www.ohsd.qmul.ac.uk/contact/index.html>). For certain high risk activities, specific training can be arranged by OHSD or the School / Institute / Directorate for staff planning the work in order to effectively assess and identify suitable measures, so lone working can be either avoided or is managed in a safer way (e.g. for Working Safely at Height, Working Safely in Confined Spaces etc).

A number of charity / government or commercial websites also give practical measures how to establish and remain safe during lone working.

*Examples –*

Charity - Suzy Lamplugh Trust <http://www.suzylamplugh.org/>,

Government - HSE <http://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/lone.htm>,

NHS <http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/4248.aspx>,

Commercial organisations (QMUL OHSD does **not** validate the content or services of these organisations):

<http://www.loneworkersafetyexpo.com/>

<http://www.guardian24.co.uk/>

<http://www.bsia.co.uk/lone-workers/about-bsia-lone-workers>

**1.8 I work alone and also out of hours in an office which is 'low risk', why do I have to complete a risk assessment?**

Persons working alone or out of hours in offices carrying out typical office activities (using a PC or laptop, reading, typing, filing papers) are unlikely to be at significant risk, **provided** adequate fire, security and communication procedures are in place.

**However**, conducting a risk assessment will identify **any individual circumstances** that may put the person at additional or significant risk (e.g. a particular medical condition, a certain disability) *or* changes to the environment during certain times (e.g. changes to access and egress points or fire assembly points during out of hours) *or* change to the provision of assistance during certain times (e.g. reduced number of first aiders during out of hours). Measures can then be identified and taken to provide alternatives that can provide the same level of health and safety.

**1.9 Can I as a manager or supervisor complete a single lone working or out of hours working risk assessment for all of my team / group's tasks on campus?**

Where the tasks are of low risk, and if all of the team or group is conducting the similar or identical tasks, then yes. However, individual circumstances (see FAQ 8 above and the risk assessment section 9 of the Standard) must be taken into account, and if any person is at additional risk, e.g. because of a temporary or long-standing illness or disability, their individual circumstances must be assessed. The QMUL Lone Working and Out of Hours risk assessment template (ref OHSD\_GA018) makes provision in both cases.

## 2.0 RISK ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

Guidance is provided below for completing the risk assessment template (ref OHSD\_GA018) for lone working and/or out of hours working activities:

**2.1 Hazard identification and risk evaluation** (*section 1 of the risk assessment template*): Identify all hazards specific to the lone working / out of hours activity.

**The key hazard categories** are identified in the risk evaluation table for ease of assessment with examples:

Work environment / location - examples of hazards: *segregated / restricted area, room containing hazardous substances, location open to inclement weather, remote location on campus; inadequately ventilated space.*

Process and equipment - examples of hazards: *manual handling of equipment or bulky / heavy loads, operation of a lathe / abrasive wheel, handling a hazardous substance (explosive, oxidiser, highly toxic or pathogenic) in the laboratory, working at heights, work during hours of darkness – lack of light for process, cleaning an area of higher risk.*

Violence / aggression towards the lone / out of hours worker: examples of hazards: *handling cash in areas of risk, security patrols in areas of higher risk, encountering unpredictable / violent persons.*

Specific individual conditions that may increase the risk: Certain disabilities or medical conditions; age, gender or being a new or expectant mother may increase the risk to a lone worker / out of hours worker. *Sensitive or Medically Confidential data / information of an individual must not be disclosed explicitly in this risk assessment, see section 6.3 of the Standard for further assistance for disclosure / non-disclosure.*

Work times: Identify whether the lone / out of hours worker's intended work times or patterns would increase risk and/or create additional risks. *Shift work scheduled from 1 am – 7 am in an area of significant risk.*

Other hazards: specify if other hazards that do not fit into the above categories are likely to be encountered.

**2.2 Risk Evaluation** (*section 1 of the risk assessment template*): evaluate the initial risks – a simple risk evaluation of the 'likelihood of the adverse event' x 'the consequence (severity)' should be applicable for most QMUL activities.

**Low, L** = where the likelihood and consequence of an adverse incident are low;

**Medium, M** = where the likelihood is possible and consequence of an adverse incident is of medium risk (e.g. ill health can be easily treated, minor cut or bruise injury sustained);

**High, H** = where the likelihood is probable and the consequence of an adverse incident are of high risk e.g. a severe/serious injury, ill health or fatality may occur;

Describe the **existing** health and safety control measures and **identify any further** control measures that are required.

The residual risk or the likelihood of the adverse event should **not** remain high; such work must **not** proceed and alternative safer methods of work should be investigated.

Where specific hazards are covered by another risk assessment, this should be cross referenced (e.g. risk assessments for COSHH chemicals, Bio-COSHH, Radiation Project Approval, Genetically Modified Organisms, Working at Height, Manual Handling, Working on Electrical Systems, High Powered Lasers) and the implications for lone and out of hours work assessed. Other H&S critical documents such as Permit to Work / Safe to Work permits should be identified here.

**2.3 Risk Control Measures** (*section 1 of the risk assessment template*): Identify existing control measures, assess their effectiveness and specify any additional controls that may be necessary.

Consider alternative work methods or patterns, personal or equipment protective equipment, protective devices for the worker, warning and alarm methods or devices.

**2.4 Identify all those who may be at risk** during lone working and/or out of hours working (*section 2 of the risk assessment template*). It is important that all those identified are made aware of the findings of the risk assessment and understand the necessary control measures. Where individual conditions and/or circumstances create additional risks, an individual risk assessment should be completed (see FAQ 1.9 above).

**2.5 Specific information, instruction and training** (*section 3 of the risk assessment template*): e.g. emergency procedure for laboratory staff / students in hazardous substance spills, out of hours procedure for cleaning staff, personal safety training for security staff.

**2.6 Increased communication systems / procedures** (*section 3 of the risk assessment template*): e.g. supervisor periodically visits and visually monitors lone / out of hours workers; regular contact between the lone / out of hours worker and a member of supervisory staff or QMUL Security is maintained - by responsive messages – e.g. email, telephone, texts or twitter messages or by responsive visual contact media (e.g. skype, facetime) or by Security patrol checks (physical or audible/visual responsive methods).

**Training:** Identify the level of training and extent of training required, taking into account the nature of the lone and/or out of hours activity. Consider the knowledge and experience of individuals, particularly young or new workers. Lone and Out of Hours workers should also understand when and where to seek guidance or assistance from others.

**Monitoring and Supervision:** The extent of the monitoring and supervision during lone and/or out of hours work will depend upon the level of risk involved and the ability and experience of the lone or out of hours worker.

**Examples of supervisory measures:**

- Periodic telephone contact with the lone worker / out of hours worker
- Periodic site visits
- Regular contact (e.g. responsive or reaction requiring methods – telephone / mobile, skype / facetime)
- Automatic warning devices (e.g. motion sensor)
- Manual warning devices (e.g. panic alarm)

**2.6 Emergency Procedures and First Aid / Medical Assistance (section 4 of the risk assessment template):**

Identify that the emergency procedure and first aid / medical assistance arrangements relevant to the lone or out of hours working person and activity been put in place AND the person knows the arrangements (e.g. *an emergency, procedure, experimental protocol or method statement with emergency procedure detail can be inserted / added to the detail column*).

**2.7 Additional Information (section 5 of the risk assessment template):**

Any other process or information relevant to the lone working / out of hours working and so far not identified should be noted here.

**2.8 Risk Assessment sign off / approvals (section 6 of the risk assessment template)**

The assessment should be carried out by the line manager / supervisor in consultation with the lone / out of hours workers concerned. Where this task is delegated to another competent person, the line manager / supervisor must ensure that they are able to do so.

Where **significant** risks are involved or remain, approval / permission from the Head or Director of Department / Directorate, School or Institute should be obtained.

**2.9 Users sign off (section 7 of the risk assessment template):**

All persons at risk from lone working and/or out of hours working should sign to attest that they have read and understand the findings of the risk assessment and

are knowledgeable of the control measures required. This section is applicable for a group assessment.

## 3.0 CASE STUDIES

### 3.1 ‘Lone Working\* and Personal Safety’ during Psychology interviews with member of the public.

The following example is taken from the Education Service Advisory Committee (ESAC) / HSE publication ‘Managing health and safety aspects of research in higher and further education’

A psychology school conducts interviews with members of the public who are paid for their time. Researchers interview the subjects alone, sometimes in sound proof rooms. If a researcher comes to harm, it could be hours or several days before his/her absence is noted.

Actions taken included:

- a. The supervisor assesses the risks involved in the project. Although there has never been an incident affecting personal safety, the supervisor consults with researchers and safety representatives and identifies a number of improvements.
- b. The Head of School sanctions changes to the way subjects are selected for interview, introducing a ‘registered participant panel’ which involve more detailed information from the participant.
- c. The University Council provides financial support to allow the school to provide a waiting room, which would prevent people from having general access to the premises, and to integrate the school’s office and interview facilities. This means there would always be somebody in the vicinity of the interview rooms to help in an emergency. The University considers further security measures for the school.

\* Even though 2 people are present in the room, ‘lone working’ conditions are in place as the member of the public’s behaviour is the main risk, and the member of the public cannot be relied on to obtain assistance.

### 3.2 Lone Working and manual handling / trip incident.

A post-graduate student was working on his thesis late in the evening. His monitor unexpectedly failed and in order to carry on with his work he searched for a replacement. He knew there was a computer in the group’s laboratory to which he had a key. The laboratory was one floor above his office and the lift was over the far side of the building so it was quickest to use the stairs. The nineteen-inch monitor in the laboratory would pose some difficulty due to its size and weight but as the distance was relatively short the student wasn’t particularly concerned. The student was able to remove the monitor from the

lab but as his hands were full he could not lock up again so decided to return and lock the lab afterwards. On his way down the stairs the student struggled to see the edge of the steps due to the size of the monitor. Before he reached the lower floor he tripped on the monitor cable, which had been dangling, from the back of the monitor. The student was unable to stop himself and fell down the remaining steps, knocking himself unconscious. He was found, still unconscious, by a security guard on his rounds later that evening. The accident is reported to the HSE which decides to investigate.

*H&S deficiencies in this scenario:*

A manual handling procedure did not appear to be in place for the dept and no aids for manual handling were provided. The post graduate student was unaware of the risks involved and did not know the risk reduction measures that could have been applied to ensure the task was done safely. The post graduate student appeared to be alone in the area, and did not seek assistance to move the monitor.

*H&S measures that have been identified to reduce the risks:*

- a) The dept has now ensured that a risk assessment has been conducted for lone and out of hour work in the office areas of the dept. Higher risk tasks have been designated to be done within normal working hours and/or by at least two persons.
- b) A suitable trolley has been procured for manual handling tasks.
- c) The dept staff and post graduate students have been issued with guidance on manual handling, and the dept line manager / supervisor have assessed the training needs for staff / postgraduate training in safe manual handling. Those identified as needing the training have now attended the training.
- d) A reminder of the dept emergency procedure (who to contact, how to contact) has been issued to all staff / students by the Head of Dept and included in the monthly dept meeting.

### **3.3 Lone Working and Fall from height injury incident**

A roofing company employee fell nearly five metres and landed on a concrete patio suffering several major injuries. The HSE investigation found the worker had been allowed to work alone on several occasions, without anyone monitoring what he was doing. The company failed to ensure the work was properly planned, adequately supervised and carried out in a safe manner, in breach of the Work at Height Regulations 2005. (HSE Prosecution case 4262529)

*H&S deficiencies in this scenario:*

- a) The working at height task/s had not been planned adequately in advance or risk assessed, neither were the safety control measures identified or implemented.
- b) The Company manager had failed to establish safe working procedures and methods.

*H&S measures that should have been identified to reduce the risks:*

- a) A risk assessment should have been conducted to identify the risks of the task/s (e.g. working at height, working alone, manual handling and other task risks etc in terms of the individual and working environment) and to establish who may have been affected (the injured worker and potentially anyone who came to assist following the incident).
- b) The tasks should have always been planned as a two-person operation to avoid lone working.
- c) Sufficient safety control measures should have been identified and implemented (e.g. suitable ladder, mobile platform etc for the task should have been identified, ladder / platform checks set up, training and information provided to the task workers how to work safely at height and in those particular locations and for further individual and environmental safety risks).

### **3.4 Lone Working and Exposure to hazardous substance incident – splash of a hazardous chemical onto face:**

This incident occurred late at night, and the laboratory worker concerned was alone in the laboratory clearing up and placing items into a fridge. During the clear up process a chemical bottle broke resulting in a chemical splash to the eye/face. This was primarily due to congested / inadequate storage space in the fridge (housekeeping processes were inadequate). There was inadequate knowledge and awareness of out of hours emergency procedures on site, and the injured person was unable to obtain assistance until a few hours later on.

*Health and safety measures identified to improve H&S:*

- a) **Local lone working / out of hours procedures** were reviewed by the dept to ascertain that procedures in place were appropriate; if not, to review and revise. Information was to be given to all staff and students or a reminder provided.  
Of particular consideration were the awareness of **whom to inform** and **how to inform** when working out of hours / lone working (e.g. Security and Supervisor / Lab Manager and method of informing)

**How to obtain** assistance (e.g. call the emergency number) – first aid / medical and other services

Injury / ill health - **If first aid not available on campus**, call for ambulance via the emergency number

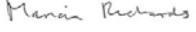
Supervisors / lab managers to **assess competence of person** to work out of hours and **provide validation** (to consider training, experience, hazardous nature of tasks / substances, hours of lone working, assistance available).

- b) Wearing of appropriate and suitable personal protective equipment for task and/or area that work is being conducted in (to consider *own* and *others* work around, *including storage*).
- c) Awareness of emergency procedure for spills and releases of hazardous substance(s).

- d) Awareness and use of appropriate containment for handling of hazardous substances (to be specified on risk assessment), particularly gaseous / vapour / aerosol / mist releases.
- e) Safe and secure storage of hazardous material in fridges / freezers / cupboards (adequately segregated and contained with inventory and hazard information).

## Document Control

**Version 1** (QM\_OHSD\_GA027\_Sep 2014\_Lone Working and Out of Hours Working FAQ and Risk Assessment Guidance)

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Date of Issue:	7 <sup>th</sup> October 2014
<b>Date of next Scheduled Review: 7 Oct 2015</b>	

<u>Revision(s)</u> Version No.	Date of alteration and re-issue	Details of changes	Changes made by