

Guidance on lone working

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to minimise health and safety risks to staff and students. It is based on the [Health and Safety Executive's \(HSE\) guidance on the risks of lone working](#) and should be read in conjunction with our Health and Safety Policy and Risk Assessment Policy.

Some potential issues that the HSE suggests may need addressing when planning safe working arrangements in respect of lone workers are provided in the appendix.

2. Definitions

Standard working hours – between 9.00am and 6.00pm

Normal working hours – for some groups of workers this may be different from Standard working hours, and will be defined locally by management where necessary, e.g. for shift workers

Out of Hours - outside standard working hours at times when staffing levels are likely to be reduced, i.e., before 9.00am or after 6.00pm, or at weekends, or when the University is closed to normal business

Lone working - The HSE defines lone workers as 'those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision', so they might not therefore be able to contact others in an emergency. Lone working can take place during normal working hours or outside these hours. The HSE suggests that lone workers may be found in a wide range of situations, for example:

People in fixed establishments

- People working alone in premises, e.g. in workshops, laboratories, maintenance and security
- People who work remotely
- People working separately from others, e.g. porters, cleaning staff, staff or students carrying out research based in the community
- Some research and training establishments, leisure centres
- People working outside normal hours, e.g. cleaners and security, production, maintenance or repair staff

Mobile workers working away from their fixed base

- Workers involved in construction, plant installation, maintenance and cleaning work, electrical repairs, lift repairs, painting and decorating
- Students undertaking either a placement, research in the community or in laboratories
- Service workers, drivers, engineers, architects, researchers and similar professionals visiting domestic and commercial premises

Certain high risk work shall require at least one other person. This includes:

- working in a confined space, where a safe system of work (SSOW) is mandatory;
- people working at or near exposed live electricity conductors;
- other electrical work where SSOW dictates that at least two people are sometimes required.

3. Responsibilities

3.1 Managers

As a part of their programme of regular workplace risk assessments managers are responsible for identifying any activities which might involve lone working and for putting in place arrangements to eliminate or control the risk. Staff and their representatives should be involved in these risk assessments; which should be reviewed regularly (according to the [Risk Assessment Policy](#)); and arrangements to eliminate or control risks should be communicated to all staff, students and visitors.

When recruiting for lone working positions, managers should incorporate any requirements for lone working on the Risk Assessment form section of our [job description and person specification template](#).

3.2 Employees and students

Employees are responsible for taking reasonable care of themselves and other people affected by their work activities and co-operating with the university in meeting its legal obligations. They are also responsible for following the control measures arising out of risk assessments (see Section 4). Consider individual factors (age, experience, pre-existing conditions, etc) that may put workers at higher risk during lone work.

Members of staff who are working late in the evening or occasionally working alone in a university building should:

- Inform their line manager/supervisor of the hours that they intend to work.
- Put in place “Buddy system” whereby identify a colleague/friend/family member who would know your location, time of work, and who will contact you at a regular intervals and know what to do if the lone worker (you) does not respond in time, e.g. call Security on 02073203333 and report on the location of the lone worker and type of work being undertaken (office work/ lab experiment/ exhibition preparation).
- Familiarise with the university’s [First Aiders](#), the nearest first aid box and the relevant emergency number(s) for summoning help in an emergency.

General precautions for lone working staff can include:

- keeping their calendar up to date with all appointments

- notifying their line manager of any changes to their plans
- ensuring access to a telephone
- taking reasonable care for their own safety and to not expose themselves to unnecessary risk

4. Risk assessments for lone working

Most of the time, risk of lone working should be included in the risk assessment for a work activity. Guidance on undertaking risk assessments and templates can be viewed on the [H&S Policy Guidance page](#).

Please contact H&S team on HSZone@londonmet.ac.uk for more information, advice and guidance.

5. Potential issues that the HSE suggests may need addressing when planning safe working arrangements

Can the risks of the job be adequately controlled by one person?

Lone workers should not face increased levels of risk when compared to other employees. To achieve this, extra risk control measures might be necessary. Precautions should take account of normal work and foreseeable emergencies, e.g. fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents. Risk assessments should identify situations where people work alone and ask questions such as:

- Does the workplace present a special risk to the lone worker? eg due to location?
- Is there a safe way in and out for one person?
- Are there any chemicals or hazardous substances being used that may pose a risk to the worker?
- If the work involves handling and lifting objects, can this be safely done by one person?
- Is more than one person needed to operate essential controls for the safe running of equipment or workplace transport?
- Is there a risk of violence?
- Are young, pregnant or disabled workers particularly at risk if they work alone?
- Are there any other reasons why the individual (for example a less experienced trainee) may be more vulnerable than others?
- Has the employee received sufficient information, instruction and training to enable the work to be completed safely?
- Is there a suitable means of communication or summoning assistance, should this be required, by phone, radio alarms etc.?
- Can any necessary temporary access equipment, such as portable ladders or trestles, be safely handled by one person?
- Can all the machinery and goods involved in the workplace be safely

controlled and handled by one person?

Staff and postgraduate students/researchers should not be permitted to work alone, until the nature of the work has been assessed and the identified risk control measures have been agreed and implemented. Postgraduate students/researchers must, in addition, obtain prior approval from their academic supervisors before working alone, and the supervisor must be given details, in advance, of such periods.

Undergraduate students are not permitted to work alone in a laboratory and/or workshop at any time.

If a person has a medical condition, are they able to work alone?

Deans, directors and line managers should make reasonable enquiries to ensure that staff are fit to undertake lone working, where necessary seeking advice from our [Health and Safety Team](#) or [Human Resources](#).

Consideration should also be given to both routine work and foreseeable emergencies that may impose additional physical and mental burdens on an individual.

Training for lone workers

Sufficient information, instruction and training in the undertaken activities is particularly important where there is limited supervision to control, guide and help a lone worker. Lone workers must be sufficiently experienced and fully understand the risks and how those risks are to be managed/controlled. They should be clearly informed by their line manager or a delegated specialist as to the limits of what can and cannot be undertaken by them while working alone.

Supervision of lone workers

The level of supervision required must be based on the findings of a risk assessment coupled with an assessment of the level of competence of the individual concerned. It must not be left to individuals to decide whether they require assistance. Further advice and guidance is available from the [Health and Safety Team](#).

The procedures put in place to monitor lone workers and lone working may include actions such as:

- Managers/relevant colleagues periodically visiting site where people working alone;
- Ensuring visits/meetings are recorded on outlook calendar and log books are maintained
- regular contact between the lone worker and manager, using either mobile phones, telephones, radios or e-mail;
- automatic warning devices which operate if specific signals are not received periodically from the lone worker, e.g. staff security systems;

- other devices designed to raise the alarm in an emergency, these can be operated manually or automatically by the absence of activity e.g. ‘man-down’ alarms or panic alarms;
- checks to ensure that a lone worker has returned to their base or home once their task is completed.

Lone workers who become unwell, have an accident or there is some other emergency

Deans, directors and line managers must ensure that lone workers are capable of responding correctly to emergencies. The risk assessments should be designed to identify all reasonably foreseeable events and to identify what control measures must be implemented to manage or control those risks.

Lone workers must be trained in our emergency procedures and how to [report incidents/accidents](#).

6. Further information

[Health and Safety Executive Lone Working Guidance](#)

[Suzy Lamplugh Trust – Training and Resources](#)