



## MEMORANDUM ON SUPERVISION AND FIELDWORK

### I. Supervisory contact with Research Students

For reasons of monitoring the safety, welfare and progress of students, and fulfilment of visa monitoring requirements, the University expects that research students' supervisors maintain contact with each research student **at least once per month during term time** and during students' fieldwork. When there are two supervisors, best practice is to copy both/all in all correspondence.

#### *1.1 During term time when not undertaking fieldwork:*

The Divisional and SAME **Code of Practice on Supervision** states that supervisors should **meet with each student** regularly (typically for one hour, two to three times per term) – i.e. **at least once per month**.

#### *1.2 During fieldwork:*

Supervisors should have **written contact** with students **at least once per month**. In the case of destinations that are **FCO-flagged** (<http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>) it is advised that contact should be made **at least twice per month**.

The student is expected to make contact with their supervisor at least once per month (twice per month in the case of FCO-flagged destinations). If a supervisor does not receive contact from a student **within a month from the previous contact** the supervisor should **email or telephone the student** immediately using the emergency details given on the fieldwork form (please refer to the travel forms the student gave you to authorise their travel; copies are held by the SAME office), keeping the School Fieldwork Officer and Gil Middleton informed. **If no contact is made/received within a subsequent month** then the situation must be *escalated* to the DGS and via the DGS to the Divisional Safety Officer (Dr Chris Williams; [chris.williams@socsci.ox.ac.uk](mailto:chris.williams@socsci.ox.ac.uk)).

Thus no more than two months in total may elapse without contact between supervisor and student during fieldwork without escalation to the DGS and Divisional Safety Officer.

#### *1.3 Reporting*

For each reporting period of the Graduate Supervision System (GSS) supervisors should record on the GSS form for each student the amount of contact with that student during that reporting period, whether the student is in Oxford or on fieldwork.

The Fieldwork Safety Officer and Director of Graduate Studies will have access to GSS reports so that they can be aware in good time of instances where regular contact has not been reported.

# Check sheet for fieldwork supervisors

[Further information is contained in the accompanying *Practical guidance for fieldwork supervisors on H&S and Risk Assessment*]

- Initial discussion of research with your student
  - ✓ Consider fieldwork safety implications when discussing initial research ideas and methodologies with your student. Can risks be designed down (e.g. different location)?
  - ✓ Has the student checked the [FCO](#) advice for the country and advice from their own government where appropriate?
    - Flag high risk research to HoD (whether it is high risk due to the location or the activity); consider academic merit of high risk projects \*
  - ✓ Consider additional contacts/training [Refer to [Available training and Available Resources](#)]
  - ✓ Where there is a supervisory team, agree which supervisor will take formal responsibility for managing the risk assessment process and period of fieldwork  
[\*Travel to FCO flagged regions have to be approved by HoD following review by the Safety Office]
  
- Approx. 3months prior to fieldwork
  - ✓ Has your student arranged to visit [travel clinic](#) for travel health advice where appropriate?
  - ✓ Has your student arranged VISA/ checked requirements?
  - ✓ Does the research have CUREC approval/ has CUREC approval been applied for?
  - ✓ Talk through the risk assessment and detailed arrangements [Refer to: [Key aspects of risk assessment for discussion with students](#)]
  - ✓ Approve Risk Assessment when content [Refer to: [What it means to approve a risk assessment](#)]
  - ✓ Advise student re [university insurance](#) and departmental approval process
    - Review by [DSO](#) (and possibly [DivSO/SO](#)).
    - Final approval by DGS/ HoD.
    - Student will be advised by DSO when travel is approved and insurance cover in place
  
- Immediately prior to departure - Check point
  - ✓ Confirm with your student that the risk assessment it is still valid and any pre-departure actions have been completed, review any changes
  - ✓ Ensure you have contact details and vice versa. Confirm arrangements for keeping in touch
  
- During fieldwork
  - ✓ Keep in touch [See [Keeping in touch](#) & [Escalation if contact is missed](#)]
  - ✓ Provide support if something happens [Refer to: [If there is a crisis while the student is in country](#) and [ANNEX: CASE STUDIES OF SITUATIONS THAT HAVE OCCURRED](#)]
  
- On return from fieldwork
  - ✓ Debrief
  - ✓ Guide your student to further support if required
  - ✓ Pass on any lessons learned to DSO

## Notes

1. It is the student's responsibility to carry out and follow the risk assessment as well as manage their fieldwork on a day to day basis.
2. Ultimate responsibility for approving fieldwork lies with the Head of Department.
3. Unapproved travel would not constitute university business.
4. Departments may wish to tailor the check sheet to their own arrangements, in particular to reflect course timings

## 2. SOCIAL SCIENCES DIVISION HEALTH & SAFETY OFFICE

### Practical guidance for fieldwork supervisors on H&S and Risk Assessment

#### Supervisors' role

- To discuss the health and safety implications of the research proposal with your student; discuss ways to manage the risks; and alert **HoD** if plans include visiting **FCO flagged regions\*** or is high risk for other reasons (such as activity or advice from individual's own government where applicable)
- To approve your student's risk assessment.
- To identify any additional training.
- To keep in regular contact while your student is away on fieldwork/ university travel (see "Keeping in touch" below).
- Debrief your student and pass on any lessons learned to your **DSO**.

*[\*This travel has to be approved by HoD following review by the Safety Office]*

**Where there is a supervisory team agree which supervisor will take formal responsibility for supervising the risk assessment process and period of fieldwork.**

#### Key aspects of risk assessment for discussion with students.

- What experience & in- country support does your student have – can you help them identify contacts?
- Does your student need letters of introduction/research permits etc.?
- Are significant risks reduced to a reasonable level that you both feel comfortable with (see the departmental risk assessment form)?
- What might foreseeably go wrong (ill health, robbery etc.); what are your student's contingency plans?
- Is the key information recorded in the risk assessment; does the risk assessment reflect your discussions and the arrangements in place to reduce the significant risks? Is the detail proportionate to the risks?
- Does your student need any further training/ information/ advice (e.g. vaccinations, malaria tablets, language training, first aid training, familiarisation with local culture / laws)?
- Does your student need any specialist equipment (e.g. satellite phone) & associated training?
- Agree contact arrangements (see below); Emphasise the need for your student to keep you updated
- If high risk, can the research be done in a safer way (e.g. alternative location, Skype interviews etc.); Will the research add to the body of knowledge; i.e. do the academic merits justify the risks involved?
- Is there sufficient flexibility in the plans to undertake alternative work should the situation change (to obviate pressure to continue regardless)?

**This discussion is best undertaken face to face where possible, particularly where the student has been away from Oxford for a significant period of time.**

Interviewing – aspects to consider

- Who are they interviewing and where?
- Is the topic area or context politically sensitive, controversial, dangerous or emotionally challenging?
  - Will any of these aspects put them at increased risk?
- Will someone know their itinerary?
- Have they read the safe interviewing reminders (available on the *Social Sciences fieldwork* pages – see "**Available Resources**" below)?

## What it means to approve a risk assessment

- ✓ You have talked through the H&S risks of your student's fieldwork and the arrangements in place to mitigate these risks (and the risk assessment reflects this discussion); you are content that the key risks have been identified and mitigated.
- ✓ You are confident your student is well prepared, their fieldwork is well planned and they have contingency plans for foreseeable eventualities.
- **Common sense approach - exercise reasonable care.**
- **You are not saying the travel is risk free. You are trying to help your student foresee things that might go wrong, pre-empt them or ensure your student is equipped to deal with them.**

## Keeping in touch

**Frequency and nature of contact.** What is appropriate is a judgement proportionate to the risks involved. Factors which may influence this are (in no particular order):

- Whether they are changing location (consider "check-ins" before and/or after each location move if feasible, particularly if they are travelling alone).
- Lone working/travel (who knows their itinerary & will raise the alarm if there is a problem).
- Whether your student will have communication issues –is there robust local support?
- Whether your student is conducting high risk research (due to location or topic area) or conducting research in a rapidly changing environment – consider more frequent contact.
- The robustness of your student's local support network.
- The length of time they are away.

[Frequency of contact could range from daily, for extreme high risk situations such as following a terrorist attack or uprising (*Case Study 1*), or monitoring a potentially very serious situation (*Case Study 2*), to monthly for long term, low risk fieldwork staying with family/ with a robust network of local support. **Contact should be never less than monthly**]

Tips/ good practice:

- ✓ Make clear to your student what you expect from them, in particular that they contact you at the agreed times; agree a course of action if contact is lost.
- ✓ Remind your student to keep you & the department (e.g. DSO) updated of any changes in arrangements, contact details, local developments or nature of research; confirm this on check-ins. Review risk assessment if necessary.
- ✓ Make contact after major events which might impact their safety (e.g. earthquake, terrorist attack).
- ✓ Think about any periods you will be unavailable for and make alternative arrangements. For example check-ins with another supervisor or the DSO. It might also be helpful to provide an alternative contact on your out of office message.
- ✓ Check you have details of their in-country contact and vice versa.

**Escalation if contact is missed** (taking account of any course of action agreed with your student)

- Try an alternative method (e.g. phone rather than e-mail).
- Contact in-country contact(s)
- Consult with HoD & other department and college staff as relevant. Decide when it is appropriate escalate to division / university/ contact next of kin /embassy.
- ✓ Use a common sense and proportionate approach to escalation. For example, if a scheduled Friday contact is missed, urgent follow up/ escalation over the weekend may not be a proportionate response, unless it is a high risk scenario or there is a particular reason to be concerned.

## If there is a crisis while the student is in country

**Location related (violence, epidemic, natural disaster – See Case Studies for real examples):**

The student should follow local government (& their own government) advice and contact the insurance emergency helpline as a first port of call in a local emergency. You can support your student by:

- Making contact with your student to establish the situation on the ground, their welfare, local support, and need to stay. Discuss exit options (flights, logistics etc) vs options for safely remaining.
- Following the FCO advice (**DSO & DivSO** can provide additional advice through Red 24 – the university insurer’s security advisors).
- Asking your student to contact the insurance emergency helpline where appropriate. For example if they need to evacuate or change flights (a condition of insurance \*). They can also get consular assistance from their government where appropriate.
- As appropriate work with and apprise HoD, HoA, DSO, DGS, DivSO, Safety Office and student’s college. This will be a team response.
- Agree a plan (e.g. monitor, pull out, remain somewhere safe)\*

*[\* Note insurance may only cover flight changes if the FCO advises against travel to the country or those in-country to leave. There may be situations therefore where the department would wish to consider reimbursing flight costs.]*

### **Personal/ health crisis:**

Their first port of call for medical treatment is the insurance helpline. If you are contacted by your student you can:

- Help your student identify someone to help them locally.
- Advise them to contact the insurance emergency number where relevant (e.g. for medical treatment). For reimbursement of stolen goods a police report must be made.
- Liaise with your student’s college as appropriate
- Consult further as appropriate (HoD, HoA, DSO, DGS, DivSO, Safety Office, insurance).
- Discuss options and agree a plan

### **Notes**

1. Supervisors (or other staff) are not expected to “be on call” particularly when away themselves.
2. Managing a situation is not purely down to the supervisor and can involve college, HoD, HoA, DSO and wider where appropriate.
3. The Student Counselling Service offer on-line counselling –see Available Resources below

### **Available training**

- Departmental training (risk assessments, personal safety);
- [Divisional training](#) (personal safety & secondary trauma workshops);
- University training ([first aid for fieldworkers](#); [fieldwork planning and supervision](#))

### **Available Resources**

- Department Web Learn site (forms, range of guidance, links to further information)
- [Divisional fieldwork pages](#) – a portal to lots of information and links, including training courses, guidance on personal safety (interviewing, personal safety tips) & secondary trauma, health advice and country specific information.
- [Fieldwork experiences website](#). Note: Divisional Safety Officer can assist in putting students in touch with others (e.g. others who have been to a particular country)
- University policies on [Overseas travel](#) and [Safety in Fieldwork](#)
- [University Travel clinic](#) (for vaccinations, prophylaxis and individual health advice)
- [University insurance](#)
- [Student counselling](#) (there is on-line service fieldworkers can access)

## **Abbreviations/Acronyms**

**SSD** = Social Sciences Division

**FCO** = Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK Government travel advice)

**FCO flagged region** = regions that the FCO advise *against all travel* to or *against all but essential travel* to, This information can be found on the [FCO](#) website listed on a country by country basis.

**HoD** =Head of Department/ School/ Faculty

**HoA**=Head of Administration

**DSO** = Departmental Safety Officer

**DivSO** = Divisional Safety Officer

**H&S** = Health and Safety

## ANNEX – CASE STUDIES OF SITUATIONS THAT HAVE OCCURRED

### **Case Study 1 (real scenario): You have a student in Cairo during the uprising in 2013.**

The FCO advice has changed:

*"In view of the continued unrest in Egypt, the FCO recommends against all but essential travel to Egypt except for resorts on the Red Sea in South Sinai and those resorts on the Egyptian mainland in Red Sea governorate"* <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/egypt>

The advice for those there already is as follows:

*"British Nationals in-country already in Egypt:*

*Although we are not recommending immediate departure at the moment, British Nationals already in Egypt in areas where we advise against all but essential travel **should consider whether they have a pressing need to remain**. While in Egypt they should stay at or close to home or a place of safety (e.g. their hotel), keep a low profile and pay close attention to their personal safety, particularly in the larger cities. They should take particular care to avoid crowds. The situation is changeable and they should continue to watch our travel advice closely.*

*We are not advising against the use of Cairo airport as a transit stop providing you do not leave the airport grounds."*

- 1. What do you do?**
- 2. Who do you consult/inform and**
- 3. What do you advise your student to do?**

### **Case Study 1: Actual events**

#### **1. What did their supervisor do?**

Made contact with the student; found out where they were; what the situation was on the ground; what their options were; their need to stay

- Student managed to get a room in hotel near the airport away from the trouble
- Student had following options
  - Waiting a week and getting their planned flight for onward travel to Sudan (arrived daylight hours)
  - Getting out on the earliest flight that day (leaving in a couple of hours) which would arrive in Sudan middle of the night (no accommodation or airport pickup). There were only a couple of seats left – decision needed ASAP.
  - Getting another flight in 2 days' time (so can arrange accommodation and airport pick up)

#### **2. Who did the student and supervisor consult?** Insurance (student contacted helpline before flights were changed)\*, HoD, HoA, Red24 Security information, DSO & DivSO (who had access to Red24 information). College informed.

#### **3. What did they agree?** Student got the flight in 2 days' time – giving them chance to arrange airport pick up and accommodation. Check-in arranged to confirm safe arrival in Sudan.

\* Insurance covered the flight change. It is a policy condition that helpline is contacted BEFORE any flights are booked/changed. They may only cover flight changes if the FCO advises against travel to the country/advises those in country to leave. There may be circumstances where the department wish to consider reimbursing flight costs.

## Case Study 2 (real scenario): You have a student in Sierra Leone at the time of the emerging Ebola crisis 2014:

- **21 March**; GUINEA; first confirmed case of Ebola
- **29 March**; SENEGAL / GUINEA; Land border closed to prevent spread of Ebola virus
- **11 June**; SIERRA LEONE; Land borders with Guinea and Liberia closed due to Ebola
- **18 June**; Ebola cases increase in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia
- **1 July**; West Africa Ebola infections and fatalities increase. The World Health Organization (WHO) states cumulative death toll in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone has exceeded 460
- **31 July**; WHO update - number of fatalities increases to 729 (with 1,323 infections)
- **3 August**; GUINEA; Emirates airline suspends operations in country
- **6 August**; numerous airlines cancel flights amid Ebola outbreak (including British Airways). FCO do not advise against travel, but say if you intend to travel there make sure you can get out again
- **4 September**; Ebola death toll reaches 1,900; insurance will not evacuate suspected cases (includes anyone with undiagnosed fever)

**Student is working in government offices in Freetown; Risk of catching Ebola is therefore low**

1. **What do you do?**
2. **What information / advice do you seek & who do you consult**
3. **What do you advise your student to do?**

## Case Study 2: Actual events

### 1. What did they do?

Made contact with student (June onwards); took advice on risk of catching Ebola (& how to avoid it); monitored and reviewed the situation daily; scoped out flight options; established insurance situation (would they pay for early flight out); established academic need to stay.

### 2. What information / advice did they seek & who did they consult

WHO for information on disease progression, local advice and information on the disease itself; Insurance, HoD, Red24 daily information, Safety Office, DivSO (had access to Red24 daily information, and WHO advice\*).

### 3. What did they advise the student to do?

Check in daily; contact insurance emergency number ; keep abreast of local advice and WHO advice; check out flight options and consider need to stay.

- **6 August**: Head of Department made the decision that the student should return to the UK and that the department would cover the costs. This was due to the real concern of them being stranded there following suspension of flights. Insurance would not pay the flight cost (as the FCO did not advise against travel or advise evacuation).

*\*Safety Office and Divisional Safety Officer may also be able to get in touch with other university personnel who have additional information or are able to support on the ground (to work out localised risks or what actions might be possible)*