**Division of Health Research, Lancaster University**

**Lone Researching Policy**

This document is to be used in used in conjunction with Lancaster University guidance for lone working[[1]](#footnote-1), the Core Principles of Lone Researching document, and the DHR risk assessment proforma. This policy is owned by the DHR Research Committee, but updated with reference to DHR Education Committee, FHE Research Ethics Committee, and the DHR SHaW Committee.

**1. Objectives**

To ensure that:

1. Risks to members of staff and students engaged in lone researching activities are reduced to as low as reasonably practicable, including mentally, emotionally and physically;
2. The nature and value of lone researching activities is both acknowledged and valued within FHM;
3. The safety of staff and students is appropriately managed when they are undertaking lone researching activities as part of their employment and/or programme of study within FHM;
4. Lone researching is a responsibility of and priority for a range of members of staff, not only those undertaking the lone researching activity.

**2. Scope**

These arrangements apply to all employees and students directly or indirectly engaged in lone research activities within FHM, including as follows:

* Faculty / Divisional managers;
* Heads of Department;
* Principal investigator / line manager / research supervisor;
* Project team;
* Researcher;
* Lone researching safety partner
* Student

**3. Glossary of terms**

***3.1. Researcher***

The individual member of staff or student who is undertaking lone researching as part of their employment and/or programme of studies within DHR.

***3.2. Lone researching***

‘Lone researching’ can be distinguished from ‘lone working’ in a number of ways, as follows:

1. Researchers may not actually be alone, in that there is likely to be a research participant(s) present during fieldwork;
2. The context of lone researching is where the researcher is remote from their employment base, support structures and collegiality;
3. They are likely to be in unfamiliar surroundings with degrees of unpredictability in their circumstances;
4. Research participants cannot and should not be relied upon to provide support to researchers, and may in fact pose a threat to researchers or be in need themselves.

***3.2. Lone researching safety partner***

The Lone researching safety partner is a person who has agreed responsibility for acting as a point of contact for the lone researcher, and for raising an appropriate alarm at key junctures. They may be a colleague, other authorised person (as agreed as part of the research ethics approvals for the research study), or authorised external safety partner (e.g. an external support via a system such as SkyGuard).

**4. Responsibilities**

***4.1 Vice-Chancellor***

4.1.1. Overall responsibility for the safety of persons at Lancaster University rests with the Vice Chancellor;

4.1.2. A Health & Safety committee exists to monitor the implementation of these arrangements; the DHR SHaW Committee meets as part of the DHR Staff Meeting, and feeds into the FHM SHaW Committee.

***4.2. Deans and Directors***

Are responsible for ensuring that:

4.2.1. Their Heads of Department are aware of and comply with the agreed arrangements for Lone Researching.

***4.3. Head of Department***

Are responsible for ensuring that:

4.3.1. Lone researching is included on the departmental hazard profile where any lone researching activities may occur;

4.3.2. An effective administrative system is developed to implement the arrangements which should include communication, information and training;

4.3.3. Line management systems are used to ensure that all staff and students within DHR are are informed of the requirement to comply with the Lone Researching Arrangements.

***4.4. Principal Investigator / Line manager / Research supervisor***

Is responsible for ensuring that:

4.4.1. They themselves comply with the Lone Researching Arrangements.

4.4.2. They actively support and engage with the topic of lone researching.

4.4.3. Researchers and students for whom they have responsibility comply with the Lone Researching Arrangements.

4.4.4 All lone researching arrangements made comply with the current regulatory frameworks including GDPR and other information security and governance requirements.

***4.5. Project team/researcher/student***

Are responsible for ensuring that:

4.5.1. They comply with the Lone Researching Arrangements and demonstrate safe lone researching practices

4.5.2. They actively support and engage with the topic of lone researching.

4.5.3. All lone researching arrangements made comply with the current regulatory frameworks including GDPR and other information security and governance requirements

***4.6. Lone researching safety partner***

4.6.1. They comply with the Lone Researching arrangements and demonstrate safe lone researching practices.

4.6.2. They actively support and engage with the topic of lone researching.

**5. Guidance for lone researching**

***5.1. Necessity***

At the research design stage, careful consideration is given to whether lone research working is necessary and whether there are alternative ways of gathering the required data. Research designs should minimise lone researching in a way that remains commensurate with the methodological rigour of the design.

***5.2. Costing***

At the grant application stage, the cost of any required lone researching resources is to be calculated and included in the grant application.

***5.3. Training***

Training needs are to be identified for all members of staff and students involved in the research programme in relation to lone research working. If identified as required, each relevant person should engage in training. This may be project specific training, training in specific lone researching technology or similar. Each involved person should feel competent and confident in the operation of the lone researching policy.

**5.4. Risk assessment**

5.4.1. Prior to the commencement of lone research working, a thorough risk assessment is to be conducted. This should address the specific risks associated with the lone research working context; the situations which might arise for the lone researcher; and how as a team these situations might be managed. This should be done using the DHR Risk Assessment Proforma.

5.4.2. Throughout the duration of a project where lone researching is a requirement, there should be ongoing appraisal which continues to assess the risks in a lone research situation. Consideration should be given to any risk which may have been identified for the lone researcher as fieldwork has been underway. This process should focus on how any risks have been managed and addressed, and whether there is any learning that can be used to improve future lone research working.

**5.5. Checking in and out**

A clear procedure is to be established for checking in and out of lone research activities. This should be established by the Principal Investigator or Research Supervisor at the research ethics application stage, as relevant Research Ethics Committees may wish to assure themselves of the appropriateness of the lone researching arrangements. A system must be in place for the researcher to check in and out of lone research working, using either / both a safety partner and lone working technology e.g. SkyGuard. In addition, decisions should be made regarding the sharing of information between the researcher and safety partner, and what method of communication is to be used while the researcher is lone working. Please refer to the Core Principles document for further details. DHR currently has access to the SkyGuard system, please consider using this and see DHR office for further details.

**5.6. Emergency procedure and response**

A clear emergency procedure and response must be agreed and in place for the period of time in which lone researching is required on a project. The limitations of the agreed emergency procedure and response must be acknowledged and minimised. Please refer to the Core Principles document for further details.

**5.7. Debrief, follow up and incident and near miss reporting**

Regular opportunities are to be provided to participate in debriefs following lone research working. These opportunities should involve all members of the project team including the Principal Investigator / Research Supervisor, the wider project team, the researcher and the lone researching safety partner. Consideration should be given to whether the researcher has had to deal with any difficult situations while undertaking lone research working, and whether there is any learning that can be used to improve future lone research working. It should be made clear how and with whom the researcher can engage in a debrief following lone research working, with a particular emphasis on minimising the impact of any experiences on the researcher.

If any concerns are raised, or the emergency procedure and response has had to be triggered, these should be reported using the Lancaster University Accident and Near Miss reporting system: <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/depts/safety/reportanaccident.html>, and the Head of Department informed.

**6. Acknowledgements**

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1. Lancaster University (2016) ‘Guidance for Lone Working’. Available at: http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/depts/safety/files/lone-working\_2016.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)