

P.23 Lone working and out of hours working

Lone working is working without anyone else within calling distance that would be able to provide assistance. Lone working can occur during the day – *e.g.* during lunch hours, during holiday periods, *etc.* as well as at evenings and weekends. Only low risk laboratory work should be undertaken by lone workers and it is the responsibility of PIs to make sure that all members of their group are aware of this. Exactly what types of lab work that can and cannot be done by a lone worker must be established by the PI. The person within calling distance of a lab worker needs to be capable of providing assistance in an emergency. It is the risk of the laboratory task alone that must be assessed and not the competence or the experience of the lone worker. Risk assessments for the task to be undertaken should be carried out and reviewed regularly. Further guidance is provided in the University Lone working policy and guidance (issued 04 October 2016;

https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/documents/UA004_Lone_Working_Policy_2016.pdf).

Out of hours working refers to work outside the normal working hours, times at which supervisory staff may not be available for advice or assistance. For the purpose of this procedure, we will use the following as normal hours: 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday, except bank holidays. Less experienced workers may encounter difficulties when working out of hours and, without supervisory advice, they may push on with work and create a situation with unacceptable safety risks. PIs must review the training and competence of those undertaking particular tasks to decide whether they can be allowed to carry out such tasks out of hours. The procedure for lone working will also need to be applied if there is nobody within calling distance.

This procedure is designed to:

- Raise the awareness of the dangers of lone working
- Distinguish between lone working and out of hours working
- Inform staff of permissions required for lone working and out of hours working
- Provide guidance for out-of-hours working.

Lone working

- 1) All laboratory workers must be informed of the additional hazards associated with lone working and of its distinction from out-of-hours working. Lone working can take place out of hours and also during the working day. Someone working in the evening might be a lone worker but, equally, might not be.
- 2) Only low risk laboratory work may be undertaken by lone workers and PIs should define what tasks may be undertaken by lone workers. It is the task that needs to be assessed and not the competence or experience of the lone worker. Experienced workers can have accidents too. Consider what could go wrong and whether the presence of someone else within calling distance could make a difference to the outcome; *e.g.* if there were a spillage of a chemical onto the lab worker, would someone else be able to help with the emergency response – likewise if there were a fire?
- 3) In most laboratories lone working should be the exception rather than usual practice.

- 4) Postgraduate and Honours students must be alerted by their supervisors to the situations in which lone working might arise during normal hours and out with normal hours.
- 5) Lone working by students should only be allowed only for low-risk tasks that have been authorised by supervisor/PI.
- 6) Laboratory workers should identify that other people are working within calling distance. They should continue to check on this situation throughout the day or night. If this is not the case, then they need to be aware that they are a lone worker. If not permitted to do the tasks as a lone worker, then they must find another person or cease their work until they are no longer a lone worker.
- 7) A person in calling distance needs to be able to assist in an emergency. A friend who is unfamiliar with laboratory work is unlikely to be suitable leaving you effectively as a lone worker.
- 8) Use of the [SafeZone app](#), enabling rapid contact to University Security, is strongly encouraged during Lone Working.

Out of hours working

- 1) You must have explicit permission from your supervisor for out-of-hours working. The experience and competence of those undertaking the work is the key factor in deciding if they can carry out a particular task out of hours.
- 2) At the same time as giving permission for out of hours working, supervisors should indicate whether there must be someone else present within calling distance to avoid lone working.
- 3) If working out of hours, let your supervisor or someone else know when and where you are working; exchange your name and telephone contact number; phone or text to indicate when you leave. The use of the [SafeZone app](#) is recommended for both lone working and out-of-hours working.
- 4) Undergraduate students are not allowed to work out of hours unless supervised.

[Back to Contents](#)