

## 10. LONE WORKING

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**10.2.1 Aim:** To define what constitutes “lone-working”, and describe restrictions based in part on the competence of workers and the activity to be undertaken, whereby only suitably qualified people will, for health and safety reasons, be permitted to work alone, and then only on activities that have not been defined as “high risk”.

**10.3.1 Introduction:** The justification for this lone-working policy is to protect workers from the potential for harm where they may be attempting to carry out, alone, a procedure that should safely be done only with more than one person present, and to ensure that support is immediately available for workers should they be injured or become unwell and unable to seek help for themselves.

10.3.2 There is some potential also for the safety of lone-workers to be (or feel) threatened by one or more unauthorised persons entering the building and compromising safety arrangements (Security arrangements are set out in Section 20 of this Manual).

**10.4.1 Definition of “Lone-Working”:** The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) defines lone workers as:

- People working separately from others;
- A person working entirely alone on the premises; or

- People working outside *hours of expected building occupancy* (see definition at Paragraph 9.4.1).

10.4.2 A person will, therefore, be considered to be working alone within any University building on the Edinburgh bioQuarter campus, and at any time at all, if there is no other suitably able person present within the area of the building where they are located whom they could call upon for assistance in the event of an emergency. This does not imply that the policy covers only work outside “hours of expected building occupancy” (see definition at Paragraph 9.4.1), since there may be occasions during hours of expected building occupancy when a worker may be alone within an area for significant periods of time.

10.4.3 In line with the University’s Health and Safety Policies, any proposed out-of-hours work that entails a potential risk of serious injury, fire or other significant hazard, should control measures for some reason fail, is effectively prohibited.

10.4.4 Such work must be scheduled instead to take place wholly within periods of expected building occupancy, and with all necessary control measures and emergency procedures *etc* in place.

10.4.5 *In exceptional circumstances*, it may be possible for *some* work to be undertaken that would usually be prohibited outside hours of expected building occupancy, *providing that* special measures are first put in place to provide a level of control that is *at least* equivalent to that which would apply during “normal working hours”; this will be permitted only on a case-by-case basis after first obtaining the approval of the relevant Principal Investigator or other relevant line manager.

10.4.6 Nevertheless, it remains the guiding principle that work should be planned to be done wherever possible during “hours of expected buildings occupancy” (see definition at Paragraph 9.4.1), when it is more likely that there will be the usual complement of Fire Wardens, First Aiders and other specially safety-trained staff to provide support in the event of something going wrong.

**10.5.1 Policy:** Agreed policy for lone-working within any of the Edinburgh bioQuarter buildings on this campus is based on a principle of:

- Excluding certain groups of people (based on minimum essential levels of experience and qualification to undertake work unsupervised); and
- Excluding certain types of activity (based on the relative hazards represented by the activities concerned, as judged by a formal risk assessment, with some activities being *absolutely prohibited* for lone-workers).

**10.6.1 Implementation:** Laboratory-based activities should be carried out as far as possible *within* “hours of expected building occupancy” (see definition at Paragraph 9.4.1), and with an appropriate complement of suitably experienced staff present within the area.

10.6.2 The first requirement, in formally assessing the risk associated with lone working, will be for the Principal Investigator or other relevant line manager to judge whether lone-working is necessary at all. In many cases, adjustment of working

patterns during the normal working day will enable workers to have access to equipment that otherwise may be thought most likely to be available only after hours of expected building occupancy, when most colleagues (including many of those trained to provide emergency support *e.g.* Fire Wardens, First Aiders, *etc*) have left the building. A template for a lone-working risk assessment, and guidance notes, are available at:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/health-safety/online-resources/risk-assessments>

10.6.3 Only when alternatives have been explored and rejected as genuinely impractical, and a formal risk assessment for lone-working has been completed and signed by the Principal Investigator *and* each prospective lone-worker, with all necessary control measures having been put in place, and for tasks that are deemed truly essential, should authorisation be given for a person to work alone within a building.

10.6.4 The formal risk assessment for lone-working prepared by the Principal Investigator or other relevant line manager, and signed also by each prospective lone-worker, *must not* conflict with the policy and procedures described in this Section and in Section 9 (Out-of-Hours Working) of this Safety Manual or with University of Edinburgh safety policies.

10.6.5 The presence of UofE Security Officers, who regularly patrol through University buildings on the Edinburgh bioQuarter campus, does not constitute sufficiently regular contact with staff and students to warrant lone-working without other more substantial arrangements having been put in place.

**10.7.1 Members of Staff:** Staff may work outside “hours of expected building occupancy” (see definition at Paragraph 9.4.1), only with the express knowledge and explicit permission of the relevant Principal Investigator or other relevant line manager, who must first have formally assessed the work as being essential but “low risk” (see definition at Paragraph 10.11.1), and something which can be carried out safely in isolation by a person with suitable experience.

**10.8.1 Undergraduate Students and Inexperienced Members of Staff:** Undergraduate students and members of staff not yet formally considered to be suitably experienced, may *not* work outside “hours of expected building occupancy” (see definition at Paragraph 9.4.1), in any area of the buildings, unless supervised by experienced staff, regardless of the activity they propose to engage in.

**10.9.1 Post-Graduate Students:** Post-graduate students will, as they proceed through their respective training programmes, increasingly be considered sufficiently skilled and experienced to be authorised to work unsupervised, and perhaps also to work alone within an area/building, if strictly necessary, but specifically only in respect of those activities where the necessary skills have already been gained as part of their training programme to the satisfaction of their supervisor (see Paragraph 10.10.1).

**10.10.1 Evidence of Competence to Work Alone:** The properly endorsed Induction Training Record and Personal Training Record of each student and staff member (see Appendix 7 of this Manual) will be used as the means for an individual to

demonstrate their fitness to undertake a procedure with diminishing levels of supervision being required, including authorisation to work alone within a building if strictly necessary. A Personal Training Record must, therefore, be properly endorsed for the activity that a post-graduate student or staff member proposes to undertake unsupervised, and a formal risk assessment (see Section 8 of this Manual) must have been conducted beforehand for the activity concerned (in addition to the risk assessment for lone-working), if they are to be permitted to work unsupervised and alone within any building; furthermore, that risk assessment must have been signed both by the worker and their supervisor.

10.10.2 No worker will be permitted to access or work with radioisotopes, pathogens and toxins or genetically modified organisms, alone, outside “hours of expected building occupancy” (see definition at Paragraph 9.4.1), or at any other time, without first having attended the relevant University training courses.

10.10.3 Lone-working is not permitted in liquid nitrogen plant rooms under any circumstances at all.

**10.11.1 “Low Risk” Activities:** Subject to the general requirement that all work should be carried out as far as possible within “hours of expected building occupancy” (see definition at Paragraph 9.4.1), and with an appropriate complement of experienced staff present within the area, the following activities will generally be permitted on a lone-working basis, irrespective of the status of the worker:

- Any purely office-based activity that has been previously approved on a lone-working basis, for each worker on a named-worker basis in the relevant written risk assessment, by the worker’s supervisor; and
- Laboratory-based activities which have been formally assessed as “low risk” and where the worker is not exposed to any additional risk by working alone (in each case, the appropriate activity-based and COSHH risk assessments should first be consulted).

**10.12.1 “High Risk” Activities:** The list of activities that are *expressly prohibited* on a lone working basis, *irrespective of the status of the worker*, includes:

- Laboratory-based activities where the risk assessment states explicitly that it is not permitted for the work to be done safely by a lone worker;
- Entry to a liquid nitrogen plant room;
- Any work in a Containment Level Three biological facility (including work with genetically modified organisms, and derogated CL3 laboratories);
- Any work entailing exposure to levels of radiation that have been formally assessed as dictating the need for supervision by a peer or senior colleague;
- Manual handling involving heavy or otherwise hazardous materials (e.g. moving compressed gas cylinders);
- Setting up a fumigation procedure;
- Work involving flammable solvents (volumes greater than 200ml);
- Work involving use of a Bunsen burner (or equivalent); and
- Work involving entering the *Controlled Area* of the biomedical MRI. (Work on an out-of-hours or lone-working basis entailing use of the biomedical

MRI will be permitted, subject to standing arrangements described in Paragraphs 10.6.1 to 10.6.13 of this Section and in Section 9 of this Manual, only if a lone-worker does not enter the *Controlled Area*. Further guidance will be found in local rules for the biomedical MRI.

10.12.2 Attention is drawn also to Paragraph 9.7.1 in Section 9 (Out-of-Hours Working), which lists activities that are prohibited outside “hours of expected building occupancy” (see definition at Paragraph 9.4.1).

10.12.3 Attention is drawn also to any and all local rules that may exist for a laboratory, which may impose further restrictions (*e.g.* prohibition of ultracentrifugation outside hours of expected buildings occupancy, on the basis that there is increased risk of damage accruing from incorrectly set-up centrifuges if these cannot be checked first by a competent worker).

**10.13.1 Required Experience and Qualifications:** The following people will, having satisfied the requirements set out at Paragraph 10.10.1, be deemed to be “experienced” within their normal working remit:

- Academic staff;
- Post-doctoral staff;
- Other suitably qualified senior technical staff; and
- Postgraduate students transferred onto PhD track who have undergone a suitable programme of training and for whom a suitable competence assessment has been carried out by their supervisor.

10.13.2 The training requirement set out in Paragraph 10.17.1 are a further requirement before commencing/approving work to be done on a late and/or lone-working basis.

**10.14.1 Other Post-Graduate Students:** Post-graduate students who have not completed a suitable programme of training, and for whom a suitable competence assessment has not been carried out by their supervisor (see Paragraph 10.10.1), should under no circumstances be permitted to carry out laboratory-based work alone, unsupervised or out of “hours of expected building occupancy” (see definition at Paragraph 9.4.1), unless permission has been sought and granted from the Principal Investigator *and* where appropriate direct supervision is available. See also the training requirement set out in Paragraph 10.17.1.

**10.15.1 Short-Term Students:** Honours projects, special study module students *etc* and visitors are *not* permitted to carry out laboratory-based work alone, unsupervised or “out of hours of expected building occupancy” (see definition at 9.4.1), unless permission has been sought and granted from the relevant Principal Investigator *and* where appropriate direct supervision is available. Regular or long-term visitors with a demonstrable record of acceptable experience compatible with the evidence of competence described at Paragraph 10.10.1), *may* be permitted to work unsupervised during “hours of expected building occupancy” (see definition at Paragraph 9.4.1), providing that a formal activity-based risk assessment *and* suitable competence assessment has been carried out by the Principal Investigator.

**10.16.1 Academic, Academic-Related, Post-Doctoral, Post-Graduate and Technical Staff from Other Departments:** Visiting staff, however highly qualified in their own fields, cannot be expected to be acceptably familiar with local emergency procedures (fire escape routes, location of spill management kits, *etc*) and should, therefore, under no circumstances, be permitted to carry out laboratory-based work alone, unsupervised or out of hours of expected building occupancy, unless permission has been sought and granted from Principal Investigators *and* where induction training has been provided and appropriate direct supervision is available. See also the training requirement set out in Paragraph 10.17.1.

10.16.2 Post-graduate students are classed as “visitors” in the context of relevant legislation because they lack a formal contract of employment with The University of Edinburgh. They must not, therefore, be held or made responsible for supervision of inexperienced staff or students outside of *hours of expected building occupancy* (see definition at Paragraph 9.4.1), although they may undertake *limited* supervisory duties during hours of expected building occupancy with the permission of a member of the academic or senior technical staff.

10.16.3 Having been granted authorisation to work alone within any area of either building, the worker will conform to **all** relevant generic and local rules governing health and safety.

**10.16.4 IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT ANYONE WORKING OUT OF “HOURS OF EXPECTED BUILDING OCCUPANCY” (see definition at Paragraph 9.4.1), OR “WORKING ALONE” (see definition at Paragraph 10.4.1), IS COMPLETELY FAMILIAR WITH AND WILL COMPLY AT ALL TIMES WITH EMERGENCY PROCEDURES.**

10.16.5 Emergency procedures outside hours of expected building occupancy are essentially the same as for those during normal working hours, but those authorising or proposing to conduct work outside hours of normal building occupancy must take account of the likelihood that some or even all of the safety support staff present in the building during the normal working day (First Aiders, Fire Wardens, *etc*), may not also be present within the building.

10.16.6 Staff present within the building outside of hours of expected building occupancy should evacuate as they would during the normal working day (see Sections 5 and 6 of this Manual for details). Building security staff will use the log books referred to at Paragraphs 9.6.1 to 9.6.5 to inform attending fire-fighters.

**10.17.1 Training:** The Edinburgh bioQuarter Buildings H&S Committee has resolved that before commencing work on a late and/or lone-working basis, the worker must first have attended and completed a late and lone-working training course provided by the Campus H&S Manager.

**10.18.1 Security:** Guidance on aspects of building security and personal vulnerability is included in Section 20 of this Manual.

**10.19.1 Further Information:** General information on procedures for lone-working appears on the University's Health and Safety web site:

<http://www.docs.csg.ed.ac.uk/Safety/Policy/Part1.pdf> (Paragraph 4.10)

*Last reviewed/updated: 03<sup>rd</sup> July, 2025*