



QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

FIELDWORK IN CONFLICT ZONES

Research Governance, Ethics and Integrity Team
Research and Enterprise Directorate

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This policy has been developed to guide and support researchers planning to undertake research/fieldwork in areas that are at high risk of political/civilian instability i.e. where the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or another National Consulate advises against all but essential travel.

The Policy outlines responsibilities for key personnel within the University in terms of considering the need to undertake the research/fieldwork, and the decision making process required.

The key function of this Policy is to articulate the University's requirements of the researcher in terms of planning their research/fieldwork, robustly assessing potential risk, developing appropriate strategies to mitigate the risk and ensuring this is an ongoing and managed processes throughout the duration of their research/fieldwork.

It is the Researcher's responsibility to involve their Head of School/Institute Director/Supervisor throughout the development of travel plans and also duration of the research/fieldwork. The Researcher must also work closely with Insurance Services in the Finance Directorate to ascertain the most up-to-date intelligence from the University's appointed travel risk Management Company.

A risk assessment template has been developed (Appendix 1) to support researchers in their preparations. It is expected that a risk assessment is carefully completed, giving full consideration to potential risks and how these are to be mitigated, for each episode of travel.

2. Rationale

- 2.1 Queen's University, Belfast, is a research intensive University that promotes collaborative national and international research. With an international reputation the University's social scientists are best placed to research current and past international challenges through inter-disciplinary research. Through the research conducted by or on behalf of University researchers, society can gain from the University's meaningful contribution to the building of peace, security and inclusivity throughout the world.
- 1.2 Given the breadth of social science research there may be occasions when it is necessary to conduct research in-country. This fieldwork is vital to informing and building knowledge and deeper understanding. However, the countries within which it may be conducted could potentially be unstable, and/or actively undergoing conflict and strife. It is necessary that those seeking to undertake fieldwork in hostile or remote locations understand the potential risks involved and that due consideration is given to mitigation of the risks.

3. Objectives

The objective of this policy is to enable decision making regarding research to be undertaken in areas that are of high risk due to political/civilian instability i.e. where the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#) or another National Consulate advises against all but essential travel. It will do this by providing:

- 3.1 A standard approach to the review of studies to enable the decisions of research in conflict zones to be made systematically, objectively and at an appropriate level within the University.
- 3.2 A structured approach to considering the value of the research, assessing and mitigating the risk and giving due consideration to whether the fieldwork has approval to proceed.
- 3.3 Guidance to staff and/or PGR students who wish to undertake fieldwork as part of their research and an outline of the support that must be given to ensure the effective delivery of research in order to complete important research projects to an appropriate scholarly standard.
- 3.4 A document providing up-to-date and relevant information/guidance, which is supported by a Frequently Asked Question Section on the Research Governance website.

4. Statement

- 4.1 Travel to conflict zones remains rare for undergraduate and postgraduate taught levels, even for students undertaking the MA in Conflict Transformation and Social Justice or in Violence, Terrorism and Security. However, any such proposed travel will be assessed through this policy.
- 4.2 For PGR students an examination of the risks involved in any proposed travel to conflict zones is integrated into the assessment of the viability of the research project. This should begin at the time of initial review, or earlier if necessary, and any plans to travel must be discussed on a continuous basis with supervisors.
- 4.3 Members of academic and/or research staff planning research in conflict zones must submit a risk assessment to a research ethics committee and state clearly in the risk assessment that they have complied with this policy. This applies to all research in conflict zones, not just research involving human participants.

5. Responsibilities

Senate: As the governing body of the University, Senate has ultimate responsibility for ensuring the health and safety of the University's staff and students while at work.

Vice-Chancellor is directly accountable to Senate and has ultimate executive responsibility for the health and safety at work of staff and students. In respect of implementation and oversight of this policy, he/she has delegated management responsibility to Faculty Pro Vice Chancellors (PVCs).

Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor will ensure arrangements are in place for the implementation of this policy in their Faculty and assure themselves that an appropriate approach to mitigate the risk has been identified.

He/she will consider the proposed fieldwork and when reviewing it he/she will be responsible for ensuring due regard has been paid to health and safety considerations.

He/she shall consult with relevant persons (e.g. the Head of School/Institute Director/Supervisor) before determining whether the research can proceed. The decision of the Faculty PVC will be communicated to the relevant line manager for ongoing communication to the researcher.

He/she shall also ensure that the Vice-Chancellor is informed of the proposed research.

Oversight and emergency response decisions shall be delegated to the Head of School/Institute Director/Supervisor.

Head of School/Institute Director/Supervisor: Head of School/Institute Director/Supervisor will be closest to the researcher/research team planning the fieldwork, and it will be the responsibility of the Head of School/ Institute Director/Supervisor to ensure the fieldworker(s) have:

- (i) the necessary competence {and experience} to undertake the proposed fieldwork;
- (ii) the researcher has fully considered the risks involved through the completion of a comprehensive risk assessment;
- (iii) that a safe system of working has been established, with the necessary local and home contacts identified;
- (iv) Contingency plans are developed and shared;
- (v) The University's insurers have considered and given cover for the fieldwork;
- (vi) The Faculty PVC is fully apprised of the proposed fieldwork to enable them to decide whether it is permitted to proceed.

The Researcher(s) is ultimately responsible for ensuring they have carefully considered and planned their research to ensure travel into areas of conflict is necessary to deliver the required outcome. They must:

- (i) Ensure they are fully aware and cognisant of the political, cultural, health and environmental issues in order for the risks to be identified;
- (ii) Identify each risk posed within the area of risk and detail the steps taken to mitigate against the risk;
- (iii) Undertake the research with integrity and ensure that local law, religious beliefs and customs are upheld;

- (iv) Accept the decision(s) communicated by the Head of School/Institute Director/Supervisor as final.

Where there is a team of researchers travelling to an area of conflict, the PI would normally be responsible for ensuring the above steps are undertaken on behalf of the team.

6. Definitions

Conflict Zone	Areas of the world where the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office 'advise against all but essential travel' due to terrorism creating extreme and imminent danger, civil unrest, coups or natural disasters.
Fieldwork	Any work carried out by staff or students for the purposes of teaching, research or other activities while representing the University off-site.
Researcher(s)	An individual, be they academic staff, contract research staff or PGR student and/or group of people undertaking fieldwork on their own and/or as part of a team. Note , this definition and policy provisions exclude visiting researchers.
Home Contact	Key person within the University, such as Head of School/Institute Director/Supervisor who has been nominated and is contactable in an emergency and/or for general support.
Local Contact	The person or organisation who supports the researcher(s) in country/on location for the activity.
Emergency plan	Detailed plans about how to respond to an unforeseen/emergency situation.
Contingency plan	Detailed plans that can be put into action when and if the original plan is compromised, enabling the ongoing safety and protection of the researcher(s).
Threat analysis	Consideration of security and political threat levels, health risks and/or significant natural hazards.

7. Policy

- 7.1 Any proposed field trip that involves travel to a country that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 'advises against all but essential travel' will be considered on a case by case basis.

- 7.2 The FCO's travel advice reflects the Government's ability to deliver consular services. The researcher is responsible for checking the FCO website and, where necessary, that of their own national government when seeking advice on whether it is safe to travel or not.
- 7.3 The research must be adequately planned, sufficiently in advance of any intended departure, to allow for due consideration of the research proposal by relevant internal staff and external providers.
- 7.4 As part of the planning process a detailed research protocol must be developed. Where necessary the research protocol will be reviewed in accordance with the University's Policy on the Ethical Approval of Research. The protocol must clearly describe the intended research and provide a detailed rationale. The methodology must be clearly described and it should address the following:
- 7.4.1 What activities are to be undertaken;
 - 7.4.2 Who will be involved in the research (researcher and research participant(s));
 - 7.4.3 The research location(s);
 - 7.4.4 When the research will be conducted and duration of fieldwork;
 - 7.4.5 How the research will be managed;
 - 7.4.6 Where the researcher will be located, accommodation and travel;
 - 7.4.7 What local contact/support arrangements are to be in place;
 - 7.4.8 What travel documents are required and/or health vaccinations and/or authorisations/legislation to be complied with;
 - 7.4.9 The communication arrangements with Home and Local Contacts;
 - 7.4.10 Emergency and contingency planning arrangements;
 - 7.4.11 Budget to undertake the fieldwork.
- 7.5 For environments that the FCO 'advises against all but essential travel' it is fundamental to analyse all potential threats. Consideration must be made of the security, political, violence threat levels, any significant natural risks and/or potential risks to personal health. The research must be considered in the context of the environment wherein it will be conducted.
- 7.6 The researcher should ensure that risk to themselves and risk to those participating in the research are carefully considered.
- 7.7 The researcher should familiarise themselves with local laws, customs, religious beliefs and behaviours as part of the risk analysis. Cognisance of this will be reflected in the research design. Likewise the transfer of data, samples (human or environmental) and relevant information collated from participants will also be detailed as part of the design.
- 7.8 Risks identified in paragraphs 7.4, 7.5, 7.6 and 7.7 must be documented in a risk assessment, further guidance is provided in Annex 1. When documenting these risks, emergency and contingency plans must be considered as an integral part of the risk assessment. The risk assessment should also clearly identify all additional further actions required before the field trip can proceed.
- 7.9 This risk assessment must be considered within the School/Institute. Where possible, staff with experience of the culture/environment and who have a political awareness of the country should be involved in the risk assessment review. By ensuring staff with relevant expertise are involved, this should facilitate the Head of School/Institute

Director in providing the necessary information and/or assurance(s) to the Faculty PVC.

- 7.10 The benefits of the fieldwork will be considered when determining the intrinsic or residual risks involved. However, the University is legally required to determine whether a risk has been controlled 'so far as is reasonably practicable' (Health and Safety Executive).
- 7.11 The risk assessment must be provided to colleagues in the Insurance Office who can liaise with the University's insurance broker. The University's insurers may respond indicating the conditions, normally an additional premium, under which insurance will be offered. In cases where the decision to travel is approved, costs of additional insurance premiums should normally be borne by the Researcher, as part of the research grant. Costs should be borne by the School when approved travel is undertaken by students.
- 7.12 The University's insurance cover is only extended to staff and students of the University. In the event that the fieldwork group consists of persons who are not part of Queen's University Belfast, they need to arrange their own insurance.

In accordance with the requirements of the University insurance brokers, the researcher must contact the University's Insurance Services Office, part of the Finance Directorate, which will liaise with the specialists designated to advise on travel risk management. Staff from the Insurance Office will advise the researcher, who in turn must discuss all issues with their Home Contact(s).

- 7.13 Staff/Students must also complete the University's travel notification form, found on the [Insurances Services](#) webpages.
- 7.14 The risk assessment must be a 'live document' and maintained throughout the period the researcher is conducting fieldwork. Updates should be communicated to the Home Contact.
- 7.15 In cases where the FCO 'advises against all but essential travel' while a researcher is already there, it is the responsibility of the researcher to monitor the evolving situation, liaise closely with the Home Contact who, in turn, can contact the Finance Directorate to take advice regarding insurance. The researcher(s) may be asked to return to Belfast or to undertake specific actions to mitigate the risk(s) pertinent to the developments in-country.
- 7.16 Researchers must consider their personal training needs, both in terms of the research to be undertaken but importantly their personal safety and emergency response. Training needs should also be considered as part of the risk assessment and discussed with a specialist provider. A list of these is attached as Annex 2.
- 7.17 As a minimum all field researchers will have basic first aid training, further information can be sought from Safety Services.
- 7.18 The research supervisor, line manager, Head of School and/or Institute Director must review the training and competence of the researcher. This review should lead to further discussions where additional needs are identified. The review of training and competence should also inform the decision making process as to whether the research can proceed.

- 7.19 While the researcher is on fieldwork, communication with the Home Contact is vital. Prior to departure, a communication protocol must be developed that will address the method(s) and frequency of communication to be used, and the procedure to be followed should communication not occur within an agreed timeframe.
- 7.20 As part of the risk assessment, the researcher must consider travel advice in sufficient time to access vaccinations and other relevant prophylaxis medication. Where the researcher is taking medication, they must ensure sufficient is taken with them to cover a period beyond the planned timeframe for fieldwork. Care should be taken to ensure that medications do not compromise the researcher when passing through border controls and entering/exiting countries. Should there be potential for this to occur, suitable arrangements must be made to carry the necessary documentation for the medication to be carried.
- 7.21 Each researcher must consider their own level of fitness and what is required to complete the research.
- 7.22 It is highly unlikely that any such travel will be undertaken by undergraduate or taught postgraduate students. Should approved travel of this kind be undertaken by a group of researchers, then lead investigators are responsible for the duty of care to their research team.
- 7.23 Researchers who plan to travel to a country from which they originate must also comply with this policy, as they are representing the University and undertaking an activity which may pose a greater risk to them.
- 7.24 If a decision is taken not to allow the travel to be undertaken, or if the insurance broker refuses to provide cover or the cost of cover is prohibitive, then the researcher (and supervisor, if the researcher is a student) will be informed in writing by the Head of School/Institute Director/Supervisor that the trip is not insured, and that the research trip should not be undertaken.
- 7.25 The operation of all these procedures should be consistent with the University's [Travel policy](#).
- 7.26 All Researchers returning from hostile environments will undergo debriefing with their Supervisor/Line Manager/Institute Director. Any concerns for the physical or mental well-being of the Researcher will be addressed through the University's Occupational Health structures.

8. References

Guidance on Health and Safety in Fieldwork. Universities Safety and Health Association (USHA) in association with Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA). May 2011.

Annex 1 – Risk Assessment

Travelling to an area of civil unrest and political instability requires a detailed assessment of the identified risks by the activity planned. All risk assessments should be undertaken by the person who plans to undertake the fieldwork, or the person co-ordinating the fieldwork. The risk assessment should include the risks to both those participating in the fieldwork and others who may be affected.

The purpose of the risk assessment is to document carefully the activities involved, identify the foreseeable hazards and risks associated with those activities and to describe the control measures to be implemented to reduce the risks.

The following table has been provided to prompt the researcher when developing the risk assessment. Each risk assessment should be individual to the research being conducted within the intended location. It should include and reference the sources of information used to inform the risk assessment.

Environmental Threat		
Consideration or Threats	How risk has been considered/mitigated e.g.	Review panel's comments
Describe in detail: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-political instability; • Lawlessness/criminal elements in the society; • Patterns of attacks on civilians and overseas travellers, timing of attacks and groups conducting them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate socio-political and cultural awareness; • Detail UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice; • Detail advice sought from “Control Risks” or other security advice provider. • What personal safety and security awareness and specific training needed or taken in the past. • What are the emergency procedures in the event of risk to personal safety e.g. through kidnapping. 	

Travel/Accommodation and other logistical matters		
Consideration or Threats	How risk has been considered/mitigated e.g.	Review panel's comments
<p>Detail:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel arrangements to and from the country; • How internal travel will be managed. • Consider issues such as immigration and customs; • Use of public transport and/or hire of vehicles; • Accommodation to be used – public or private residences; security arrangements at accommodation. • Access to finances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine what travel insurance is required, check for kidnap and ransom cover, if applicable; • Consider necessary visas – have visa restrictions been considered/detailed? • Check passport expiry dates and requirements for country of destination; • Carry secondary sources of ID (e.g. copies of passport, insurance information, telephone numbers and contact details for Embassy, Consulates). • Is public transport regulated? If yes, how. • Have you checked the credentials of any additional personnel hired in country to act as driver etc.? • Is planned accommodation in a secure zone, what security is in place? What incidences have occurred there previously? • What availability is in place for emergency funds in the event of money/card thefts? The Researcher should ensure insurance covers this. 	

Conducting Research		
Consideration or Threats	How risk has been considered/mitigated e.g.	Review panel's comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detail the culture and its acceptability of research outlining what might be considered the acceptable norm. • Will research be overt/covert? • How will informed consent be addressed? • Where, what, when and how will the research be conducted? • Refer to paragraph 6.4 in policy section for further considerations. • What are the threats to personal safety and security when undertaking the research in the country? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider and describe how participants are to be recruited in an ethical manner. • How research integrity shall be maintained? • How research data will be protected? • How will the researcher protect themselves? 	
In-Country Contacts		
Consideration or Threats	How risk has been considered/mitigated e.g.	Review panel's comments
<p>What contacts are available to provide in-country support, and in what capacity will they operate?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will local contacts be accessed, used for everyday support, used for contingency and emergency planning? • How are they known to the researcher? • Describe previous work with identified persons; • Detail how information regarding in-country contacts will be shared with Home Contact. 	

On-going Communication		
Consideration or Threats	How risk has been considered/mitigated e.g.	Review panel's comments
<p>Detail the communication plan with both the Home and Local contacts, addressing matters such as method, frequency, contingency plans should communication channels breakdown.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a detailed communication plan to include all phone numbers, alternative email address, skype, what's app and other communication accounts. • Provide and take with you contact information for all local accommodations, transport, Local contacts, relevant consular office contacts for researchers home nation. • What procedure has been developed to address communication failures? • How will help be summoned in the event of an emergency and from whom? • How will you communicate with next of kin? 	

Health and Well-being		
Consideration or Threats	How risk has been considered/mitigated e.g.	Review panel's comments
The Researcher must consider their own health and well-being before travel. In particular, their fitness to perform the research, any existing health conditions that need ongoing medication, what vaccinations and prophylaxis (such as malaria) is required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detail the medical advice sought prior to travel; • Identify additional vaccinations required for travel area; • How Researchers plan to protect themselves from insect/animal bites, food and/or water contamination • What first aid training is in place and how medical emergencies will be addressed? • What is the procedure in the event of medical emergency, who to be notified (this should also include medical insurance). 	

Panel's summary following consideration of the risk assessment:

Annex 2 – Specialist advice and training

Foreign and Commonwealth Advice:

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

National Health Service – Healthcare Abroad:

<http://www.nhs.uk/nhsengland/Healthcareabroad/pages/Healthcareabroad.aspx>

Travel Health Pro:

<http://travelhealthpro.org.uk/>

University Safety Services – First Aid at Work

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/EstatesDirectorate/UniversitySafetyService/SafetyTraining/SpecialistTraining/>

Personal Safety – Live Life Safe:

<http://www.suzylamplugh.org/Pages/FAQs/Category/personal-safety>

Travel Risk Management Specialists (this is not an exhaustive list):

Drum Cussac - <https://drum-cussac.com/>

Securewest - <https://www.securewest.com/travel-risk-security-management/>

FocusPoint - <https://www.focuspointintl.com/>

Solace Global - <https://www.solaceglobal.com/>

Hostile environment and emergency first-aid training (this is not an exhaustive list):

Control Risks - <https://training.controlrisks.com/en/courses/hostile-environment-training>

Blue Mountain - <http://www.bluemountaingroup.co.uk>

Hostile Environmental Awareness Training - <http://hostile-environment.co.uk/>

HASP Training – <https://www.hasptraining.co.uk>

AKE International - <https://akegroup.com/training/>

Aid Training - <https://www.aid-training.co.uk/training-courses/security-and-conflict-management-courses>