

COVID-19

Guidance for Fieldwork and External Research Visits/Travel within the UK: Staff and Research Students

1. Purpose

To support implementation of the [Readiness Approvals Flowchart](#) No.5 with regard to Fieldwork and External Research Visits.

The government may permit travel for essential reasons but that in itself does not mean that the visit should automatically go ahead. Cognisance must be given to the potential risk to staff and students of acquiring the virus and other hazards that may be created or increased because of Covid restrictions e.g. if a manual handling task is usually conducted by two people who are within 2 metres of each other, then a suitable type of mask (not a face covering) will be needed.

2. Scope

This document applies to all staff who have responsibility for organising and supervising fieldtrips and external visits, including: line managers responsible for the work activity; Heads of Department (HoD)/Heads of School (HoS) who are responsible for signing off the risk assessment; and Executive Deans who have the responsibility for approving the trip.

3. Approval

Executive Dean approval must be sought prior to any fieldtrip or external research visit/travel taking place. It is advisable to provide timely justification and seek approval **prior** to progressing any plans.

4. Justification

The reasons why a visit should take place must be detailed for the HoD/HoS and Executive Dean to understand the essential nature of the visit. A completed general health and safety risk assessment must also be completed and provided to support the justification for the trip (see Section 5).

The following points must be considered as part of the planning and risk assessment process.

4.1 Is travel permitted?

Check UK, Scottish and other devolved government webpages (see links below) for latest guidance on whether travel is permitted. This will depend upon level of restrictions applying in the area where the staff/student departs from, where the fieldwork or visit is to be undertaken, any stop-off locations or travel connections points such as airports and train stations. The governments may allow travel for work purposes if it cannot be done from home (and where the work is essential). Please note government guidance regularly changes and should be checked as part of the planning process and immediately before departure so staff/students are following the latest guidance.

Although government advice may permit travel, if the destination of the fieldwork or visit is to an area:

- Where surge testing is being carried out to identify new variants of Covid in England, then travel on University business.
- Where the last 7-day positivity rate per 100,000 population is above 200.

Then the application and risk assessment should specially address these aspects e.g. how research activity will be interacting with the local community and what measures are in place to minimise risk of transmission.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-protection-levels/pages/protection-level-4/>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-travel-and-transport/>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/surge-testing-for-new-coronavirus-covid-19-variants>

https://public.tableau.com/profile/phs.covid.19#!/vizhome/COVID-19DailyDashboard_15960160643010/Overview Check cases by neighbourhood.

<https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/cases> Check cases by area (last 7 days) then by nation or region as appropriate.

4.2 Is the trip essential?

In all cases the member of staff/student should detail the reasons why the trip should go ahead to enable the HoD/HoS and Executive Dean to decide whether the trip is indeed critical and essential. Appendix 1 contains an extract of the definition of critical and essential research.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-laboratories-and-research-facilities/pages/overview/>

Can the trip be delayed until restrictions are lifted or eased? Remember restrictions are in place because there is high prevalence of the virus so travelling across local authority boundaries or to other parts of the UK can perpetuate this situation as well as potentially increasing the risk of staff/students acquiring the infection. Can some of the work be done by a colleague in the collaborating institution as a short-term measure to avoid the need to travel. Some fieldwork activities or visits may be necessary to meet completion deadlines.

Has an extension to the deadline been explored or requested given the current Covid restrictions? There may be cases where the research is time sensitive e.g. samples may be irretrievably lost and cannot be replicated.

4.3 Duration of trip.

Can this be minimised as far as possible to avoid an overnight stay and be undertaken safely within a day e.g. no driving for long periods? If the trip involves driving for long periods, this can introduce fatigue and increase the potential for road traffic accidents. Where a stay overnight is required this should be booked through the University's travel management company, Key Travel. Note accommodation providers may have reduced capacity or may not be open.

In line with the Scottish Government [Stay at Home](#) requirements, minimising the amount of time the member of staff or student is out of their home will help reduce the spread of the virus, therefore the aim should be to keep the trip as short as is necessary to carry out the essential activity and ideally within a day or two. Extended stays should be avoided because if the member of staff or student contracts Covid during the trip they will have to self-isolate at the location. They may not have access to the usual support structure that

can be afforded to them at home. Government guidance does not permit students to move households during periods of more severe restrictions and lockdowns.

4.4 Method of travel

Avoid public transport and car sharing where possible and follow guidance on travel and transport in the link below. Walking and cycling are the preferred modes of transport, but this is not always possible for research in remote locations or in other parts of the UK or where equipment has to be transported. Therefore, if a car is the most suitable option, it is preferable for staff to travel on their own in separate vehicles. Where car sharing has to take place, then guidance in the document below should be followed along with a requirement to wear a suitable mask (not a face covering).

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-travel-and-transport/>

5. Risk Assessment and other pre-requisites

Any justification for fieldwork or external visit must be supported with a detailed risk assessment addressing the various relevant hazards associated with the fieldwork itself, Covid, travel, accommodation, lone working, manual handling, weather conditions, emergency arrangements etc. Risk assessors must complete the risk assessment training to ensure they are familiar with the risk assessment requirements. If visits are to another institution then their health and safety arrangements for reducing the risk of Covid transmission must be obtained, read and understood before travel and followed once at the institution. The risks must be reduced as far as is reasonably practicable. The risk assessment should be reviewed in the days before the trip to take account of any changes in government guidance.

The member of staff/student undertaking the trip must ensure they complete the Health Self-assessment before travel.

[Staff Health Self Assessment](#)

[Post Graduate Student Health Self Assessment](#)

6. Supporting Information and Guidance

- Risk Assessment online training <https://bookings.strath.ac.uk/Home/Course/5375>
- e-Risk System <https://safetysystems.strath.ac.uk/ra.php>
- Management of Road Risk
<https://www.strath.ac.uk/safetyservices/documentationforms/ohsstandards/>
- Travel and Work Off Campus
https://www.strath.ac.uk/media/ps/safetyservices/campusonly/localrules/Travel_and_Work_Off_University_Campus.pdf
- Student Placements
https://www.strath.ac.uk/media/ps/safetyservices/campusonly/localrules/Student_Placements.pdf

Appendix 1 – Essential Work

The University will use the guidance contained within the Scottish Government Covid-19 Guidance for Laboratories and Research Facilities to determine if work is essential.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-laboratories-and-research-facilities/pages/where-we-are-now/>

Essential work in laboratories and research facilities

Laboratories and research facilities located in areas subject to protection level 4 or lockdown should only carry out work that is critical and essential.

Critical and essential work is defined as an activity that

- cannot be delayed until the protection level for the area has been lowered
- cannot be carried out at home or outdoors
- is safe for the people involved (based on risk assessment)

and falls within at least one of the following categories:

- any activity, in any discipline, that is directly or indirectly related to any of the following:
 - medicine
 - human health and wellbeing
 - public health
 - health and safety
 - healthcare, social care or self-care
- any indoor activity that is needed to enable or support outdoor experiments, surveying, sampling, field trials or other field work
- any activity on long-term experiments, surveys, analysis or trials, the disruption or delay of which would have long-term negative research impacts that could not be easily undone at a later stage
- any work carried out by a postgraduate student, research student, apprentice or trainee, the disruption or delay of which would delay or endanger obtaining their degree or certification
- any activity needed to look after living organisms or parts thereof on-site, or any other type of collection, machinery or other resource that needs regular attention on-site, or any other activity needed to safeguard health & safety or animal welfare on-site
- any short-term activity (such as testing, analysis, short experiments) that contributes to protecting, supporting or enabling any of the following:
 - national security
 - national critical infrastructure
 - a criminal or judicial investigation or process
 - any other official process, investigation or certification
 - biosecurity, plant health or animal health and welfare
 - food security or food safety
 - environmental protection or nuclear safety
 - international trade
 - construction or manufacturing industries
 - a legal or statutory duty
- any activity needed to enable or support any of the above.