Fieldwork risk assessments

Fieldwork risk assessments are likely to be complex. It is not possible to cover everything that may be necessary to consider in this guidance. Rather it is expected that those leading, or when travelling alone, undertaking fieldwork will have the requisite experience in their field of study to carry out an appropriate risk assessment. What is provided here is simply a checklist of some of the things that may need to be considered.

Fieldwork risk assessment checklist

Site Hazards
- Has access to the site been authorised by the appropriate legal entity?
- Is there a risk of dangerous natural phenomena occurring, e.g. avalanche, volcanic eruption, earthquake?
- Will any climatic extremes e.g. dry/desert, storms, etc. be encountered? Are appropriate measures in place to deal with dehydration, exposure to sun, exposure to cold, etc?
- Is the site located in difficult / hazardous terrain, e.g. in a mountainous area or an area prone to flooding? Is any training to cope with this necessary?
- Does the site location cause any communication difficulties and how will these be addressed?
- Does the work involve hazardous activities such as excavation, working in confined spaces, working with hazardous substances or chemicals? Has a safe system of work been produced? Is any protective clothing required?

Transport / Travel
- Is your School / Department aware of your travel plans? If your travel plans change, have you informed anyone?
- When using private transport, i.e. hire cars, vehicles supplied by partner organisations, is it suitable for the purpose and properly maintained?
- Are there at least two drivers who are appropriately licensed and insured?
- Are you aware of where you are going? Do you know the route?
- If using specialist vehicles, are the drivers adequately trained?
- When travelling on foot is suitable clothing being worn and adequate rest periods allowed for?
- Is public transport being used? Is it safe? Do local regulations allow all items being transported to be carried on public transport?

Equipment
- Is the equipment being used appropriate for the task? Are participants properly trained in its use?
- Are visual safety inspections of equipment being carried out before use?
- Is any of the equipment being used for the activity more likely to become unserviceable in the local environment?
- Is appropriate storage available, particularly for valuable equipment?
- Are spare parts or local repairs likely to be available?
- What are the local standards of electrical safety? Is electrical equipment compatible?
Fauna / Flora
- Is contact with wild or domestic animals likely? Risks from bites, stings, dermatitis, rabies, etc.
- Are there disease-carrying biting insects in the area? How will protection be provided?
- Are any poisonous / stinging plants likely to be encountered? How will protection be provided?

Health and Emergencies
- What are the local arrangements for emergency services, if any, and are you equipped for a worst case situation?
- What are the arrangements for first aid provision?
- How will food and water hygiene standards be maintained?
- Is stress, for example caused by poor accommodation, remoteness of the location, illness, language barriers, fatigue, exposure to crime, simply being away from home, likely to be a problem? How will this be overcome?
- Are all team movements on and off-site planned and communicated with the group leader? What action will be taken if someone goes missing?