



RESEARCHER SAFETY, INCLUDING INTERVIEWING IN NON-PUBLIC PLACES AND CONSIDERATIONS WHEN EMPLOYING LOCAL/ CASUAL STAFF FOR RESEARCH PROJECTS/ FIELDWORK

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1. Emotional and physical safety considerations/ University travel risk assessment and University travel insurance

Minimising harm to both participants and researchers is an ethical consideration for everyone involved in a research study. Although safety assessments are handled by departmental or divisional safety officers (not by the research ethics committees), it is important that all University staff and students are aware that they should be covered by [University of Oxford travel insurance](#) for research trips outside the UK. In order to take out University travel insurance, a risk assessment will need to be completed. This should identify who is exposed to risks and how these risks can be reduced (or eliminated where this is possible).

This risk assessment should also include consideration of the risks to the safety and welfare of ancillary staff or local workers. Note that the University travel insurance will not cover local/ casual staff for e.g. emergency medical cover. For further information on general issues when engaging casual and local workers on research projects/ fieldwork please see our guidance in [section 3](#) below.

Risk reduction measures might include changing the way the research activity is carried out (different location/ timing/ travel routes), contracting workers with sufficient and appropriate experience/ training, providing training, acquiring local knowledge, or providing protective equipment. The risk assessment should include contingency plans for foreseeable emergencies. Researchers should ensure they have key University contact numbers and contact these for advice, where necessary, as soon as is practicable.

Please contact your departmental/ faculty safety officer for further information and also familiarise yourself with the [University's Safety Office website](#), which includes guidance on safety in fieldwork and lone working. The Safety Office has also produced [advice on conducting fieldwork during the coronavirus pandemic](#), including fieldwork abroad.

Even if you are not based within the Social Sciences Division, the [Division's 'Safety in Fieldwork' web pages](#) contain very helpful information, including personal safety when interviewing, safety when travelling in high-risk countries, avoiding/ dealing with secondary trauma, culture shock, and guidance for lone female researchers. Please also see [informative videos about researchers' real-life fieldwork experiences](#). This [video about \(ethical\) issues encountered while doing fieldwork with street children](#) points to many sources that the student researcher found useful, including [the University's online counselling service](#).

Your Division may also produce [guides for fieldwork supervisors similar to the Social Sciences Division's](#) – please contact your Divisional Safety Officer for information. Further information about fieldwork safety training and procedures can be found below:

Humanities

Visit the [Humanities division health and safety webpage](#) and contact your faculty safety officer.

Social Sciences

Visit the [Social Sciences division fieldwork webpage](#) and contact your departmental safety officer.

Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences

See the guidance above and please contact your departmental safety officer.

Medical Sciences

See guidance above and contact the divisional safety team via the [Medical Sciences division safety webpage](#).

2. Interviewing people in non-public places

Some consideration should be given to research in non-public places and to appropriate methods of mitigating risks arising from this. Unless there are strong reasons for interviewing people in their own homes or other non-public places consider meeting in a safe, mutually convenient, quiet public place, where you cannot be easily overheard. Some public places might not necessarily be safe, e.g. small shops.

- If interviewing in a non-public place is essential or unavoidable, please follow the advice given below:
- Please read the reminders listed in [Staying safe when you are interviewing; common sense reminders](#).
- Think about the safety risks of the location/ area and interview time before you agree on the interview.
- Whenever visiting participants in their home or another non-public place, inform someone (supervisor/ family/ friend) where you are going to be.
- Call that person when you arrive at the interviewee's home or non-public place and arrange a time to check in again with your contact later. Ensure you call your contact when you leave the interview location.

- If the contact person does not hear from you, they should call you.
- If you have any concerns about the situation, you should leave immediately.
- It is expected that no research should be undertaken in a participant's home or other non-public place unless two people can go together, particularly if the researcher is female, although it is appreciated that this is not always possible.
- If there is thought to be a significant risk associated with a particular visit, a specific risk assessment (expanding on the points above) should be made and recorded.

You also may find the [Safety Guidelines of the Social Research Association](#) useful.

3. Engagement of casual and local workers on research projects/ fieldwork

It may be the case that local and casual workers (e.g. translators, interpreters, guides) employed on University research outside the UK do not have the same levels of worker protection under health and safety regulations that would be legally required in the UK. They may also not be employed by an agency that provides insurance cover to their workers. The following guidelines recommend actions for researchers in such cases, in order to address ethical responsibility:

- Employ, where possible, local workers hired through reputable companies that provide insurance, reasonable working conditions and a fair wage for casual workers hired through them.
- Where it is not possible to engage workers through such companies and they must be engaged directly, ensure that a fair wage is paid and that workers have full information about the work entailed, including possible areas of greater risk, so they can make an informed decision as to whether or not to take part, and that there is no element of coercion in the relationship between the researcher and the local worker.
- As mentioned in [section 1](#), all researchers should be covered by [University of Oxford travel insurance for research trips outside of the UK](#), and for this a travel risk assessment will need to be completed. The travel/ research risk assessments should include local workers as well as University staff. The risk assessment identifies significant risks that might be encountered by the researchers/ local workers and what measures can be put in place to reduce the risk. In many cases, if the risks to the researcher are reduced, so the risks to other workers should similarly be reduced.
- **However, please note that the University travel insurance will not cover local casual staff for e.g. emergency medical cover.** When considering the risks to such staff, the risk assessment should also reflect the availability and quality of emergency care available to them in the course of the research, if something did go wrong, and ensure that suitable mitigation measures are in place.
- Please also consider the requirement for confidentiality agreements and suitable contracts with local workers. A sample agreement is provided in Appendix A, which Legal Services designed in collaboration with the Department of Sociology. However, it is appreciated that a formal agreement or contract is not always feasible and/or that the wording may need to be simplified further as appropriate.
- Local workers must not be subject to risks that would be unacceptable for University of Oxford staff or students.
- Justification for engaging local workers to conduct research on behalf of University of Oxford staff or students must be provided within the ethics application form.

4. Further resources

Please see the Safety Office's policy statements on [Safety in Fieldwork](#), [Overseas travel](#) and [risk assessment of work related violence](#).

The book "[Safety and Security for Travellers](#)" has been provided by some departments to year abroad students in the past and may be helpful.

[Social Research Association's Safety Guidelines](#)

[Code of Conduct for Ethical Fieldwork](#) (2022)

The University of Oxford's [Preventing Harm](#) policies, procedures and services

5. Appendix A: Confidentiality agreement sample for non-University employees (e.g. casual/ local fieldworkers)

Department/ Faculty of xxx
Address
Telephone:
Email: enquiries@xxxx.ox.ac.uk



Website: www.xxxx.ox.ac.uk

place and date

I, _____, being appointed a Research Assistant/ Interpreter/ Transcriptionist for the purposes of a research project in [country, location] [describe project ie dates/ subject matter] (the "Research Project") on behalf of the University of Oxford (the "University") agree:

- (1) that all information (whether or not recorded in documentary form, or stored on any magnetic or optical disk or memory) about the Research Project including and in particular personal information regarding the participants of the Research Project coming into my possession or of which I am made aware in the course of my involvement in the Research Project will remain confidential ("Confidential Information").
- (2) not to disclose any Confidential Information to any person, company or other organisation whatsoever at any time other than to the Responsible Researcher named below or persons nominated in writing by this Researcher, and to use my best endeavours to prevent the publication of or disclosure of any Confidential Information. that I shall only use the Confidential Information for the purposes of conducting research activity for the Research Project and not for any other purpose.
- (3) that all the documents and recordings (including but not limited to forms, notes, voice recordings and electronic documents) regarding the Research Project given to me for the duration of the Research Project will remain the property of the University and that I will handle with care and protect all such documents and recordings.
- (4) at the conclusion of the Research Project or on termination of my appointment, whichever is earlier, to return all documents and recordings provided to me or produced by me for the purposes of discharging my duties as a Research Assistant/ Interpreter/ Transcriptionist during the Research Project to the University, and to delete irretrievably any Confidential Information (including any copies) stored on any magnetic or optical disk or memory, including personal computer networks, personal e-mail accounts or personal accounts on websites, and all matter derived from such sources which is in my possession or under my control outside of the University's premises
- (5) to inform the Responsible Researcher immediately if I become aware of suspect that any Confidential Information has been disclosed to any person, company or organisation other than the Responsible Researcher or any person nominated in writing to receive that Confidential Information by the Responsible Researcher.

Responsible Researcher: [name]

Signed as a deed on [DATE] by

in the presence of:

.....
[FULL NAME OF PARTY]

.....
[NAME OF WITNESS]

.....
[signature of party]

.....
[signature of witness]

[ADDRESS OF WITNESS]

[OCCUPATION OF WITNESS]