

Lone working and mobile working in further education

This guidance has been developed to provide practical guidance to UCU members who, in the course of their duties, may find themselves working alone and/or working away from their principal place of work.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) says lone workers are 'those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision.' Three broad groups of workers are at risk: those working alone on site; working away from base; and homeworkers.

If your activities involve you working for a significant amount of time without the benefit of interaction with other workers or supervision then you are working alone.

Lone working does not only happen when you work in isolation from other staff. It might just be that you are the only person in a particular part of the workplace, or that you are working shifts or unsociable hours, or that you are just the first or the last person in the workplace.

TRAINERS, ASSESSORS AND WORK-BASED LEARNING

Vocational trainers, assessors, instructors and those delivering work-based learning programmes will often be working alone or away from a fixed workplace. Trainers and assessors can often be employed by a college to deliver training and assessment in workplaces which are so geographically remote from the college that they effectively work either out of their car boot or from home.

Trainers and assessors, on work-based learning programmes where the learners work shifts, are sometimes also asked to work during night shifts particularly in areas such as manufacturing and health and social care.

Some assessors have reported to UCU that they are expected to be in their learner's workplace in the middle of the night until the early hours and then with very little sleep be back in the college for a normal 9am-5pm day. Others have reported concerns about working alone during early mornings and late at night. One assessor reported that she was afraid to park her car in a hospital car park as the walk from the car park to the hospital was poorly lit and a public right of way. Another concern raised with UCU is visiting learners in domestic premises for one-to-one sessions.

EXAMPLES OF LONE WORKING AND MOBILE WORKING

Lone working in a fixed workplace: early starters/late finishers; reception duties; working in small offices where you may be the only person in on a particular day (or for part of it); working in vocational workshops

Working away from your usual workplace: attending training courses/conferences; travelling to/from meetings/recruitment events; staying away from home overnight; visiting members of the public at their home or work

Mobile workers without a fixed workplace: workplace trainers and assessors delivering training and assessment in workplaces which are remote from the college; delivering one-to-one training sessions in domestic premises.

GENERAL HAZARDS ARISING FROM LONE WORKING

People who work alone face the same hazards in their daily work as other workers. However, for lone workers the potential for harm is often greater. So it is essential that the risks from lone working are specifically accounted for in a comprehensive risk assessment and safe system of work.

Hazards which lone workers may face include:

- sudden illness, accidents or emergencies arising out of their work and the lack of immediate access to first aid equipment or assistance
- fire, manual handling, chemicals and hazardous substances
- inadequate provision of rest, hygiene, and welfare facilities
- violence and abuse from members of the public or learners
- intruders and theft.

This list is not exhaustive. A comprehensive risk assessment should identify all foreseeable hazards arising from the work task - see below.

SPECIFIC HAZARDS ARISING FROM LONE WORKING

A number of the common issues which are of concern to UCU members working alone are discussed below. There are many others and UCU health and safety representatives should make sure that issues which are of particular concern in their own workplace are taken into account when the risk assessments are carried out. The HSE has produced guidance on lone working which includes a useful checklist for carrying out a lone working risk assessment: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>

VIOLENCE

Violence at work is an increasing problem for many UCU members. However, staff working alone are potentially more vulnerable.

Violence at work is any incident where a person is intentionally abused, threatened, or assaulted at their work, and which endangers their safety, health, wellbeing, or work performance. It covers insults, threats (with or without weapons), or physical or psychological aggression exerted by people from inside or outside the organisation against a person at work.

Employers must ensure that they assess the risk of violence and implement measures which will prevent or reduce this risk. Alternative arrangements, additional staff or the use of security agencies such as the police to deal with high-risk situations, should be considered.

In general, employers will need to look at all aspects of the work activities including working practices and systems of work, the workplace, staffing levels, the information and training provided and reporting procedures. They should also consider:

- avoiding the need for lone working as far as possible
- ensuring lone workers receive ongoing conflict resolution training
- information gathering and sharing about learners with a history of violence
- putting arrangements in place for meeting learners away from the workplace in domestic premises (where home visits are essential)
- identifying visits which should not be carried out in the evening or night by lone workers
- ensuring that staff who work away from base leave details of their itinerary, and report back to base at regular intervals
- establishing procedures and communications with the relevant emergency services.

For more information see:

- UCU H&S factsheet violence at work which includes a model violence survey:
https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/6644/Violence-at-work---UCU-factsheet/pdf/hsfacts_violenceatwork.pdf
- HSE guidance: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg69.pdf>

HOME WORKING

UCU has members whose base workplace is their home; and we have many members who do work at home when they are not required to be in the workplace. Where working from home is part of the employee's normal contractual arrangements, then the employer continues to have the usual duties and responsibilities in respect of health and safety; they need to ensure the workplace is safe for the kind of work being done there, so that means risk assessment. UCU continues to make arguments and demands to improve conditions for those who do work at home; the provision of proper display screen equipment and use adjustable seating to those working at home is a good example.

WORKING IN ISOLATION AND REMOTE LOCATIONS

The following should be considered when risk assessments are carried out for staff who work in remote locations:

- 1 a safe means of travel to and from the workplace/premises - including when working out of hours
 - 2 the time it will take to do the work and how frequently the employee should report in and what will happen if they don't
 - 3 access to toilets, rest, refreshment, and first aid equipment
 - 4 policy and procedures for reporting and responding to emergencies
 - 5 the ease with which emergency services are able to reach the isolated area easily and safely without hindrance.
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WORKING IN A LEARNER'S HOME

Where work is carried out in a learner's home, employers should include - within the risk assessment - knowledge of any hazardous historical information on the learner or relatives who are regularly on the premises at the time that the worker arrives. This may include issues relating to drugs or alcohol misuse, and/or mental health conditions that have led to previous violent incidents or other hazards.

Some employers have refused to include this information in risk assessments citing data protection as their reason for this refusal. However, if these issues are not included in the risk assessment it will lead to workers facing unnecessary risks and it is likely that any prevention measures introduced will be insufficient. If this proves to be an issue you may need to seek further advice from UCU.

DRIVING AT WORK

The main risk for drivers working alone is fatigue, long hours and the possibility of breaking down in an isolated area. Some members may have to spend long periods driving alone as part of their work activities. The risk could be increased by employers expecting staff to use their own vehicles. Low pay in the public sector could mean that some vehicles are poorly maintained, and this should be taken into account during risk assessments.

A lesser understood risk relates to insurance.

Employees who use their own vehicles for work-related activities will require an extension to the standard cover usually offered by vehicle insurance policies, which is limited to social, domestic and pleasure purposes, and to travel to and from a single place of work. So any work-related travel won't be covered.

Employees who use their own vehicle for work-related purposes should ensure they have an extension to their normal insurance policy that covers use for work - for their own protection. UCU cannot emphasise too much how important it is that drivers are correctly insured - the financial costs to individuals and society of uninsured drivers is huge - the human cost can be even greater.

Some employers now link the payment of mileage expenses to proof that the necessary cover extension is in place. That way, they ensure they have complied with the advice in the joint HSE/Department of Transport guidance leaflet 'Driving at Work: managing work-related road safety' to ensure that employees who use their own vehicles for work purposes are correctly insured. Download from: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg382.pdf>

The guidance says that employers should have a clear policy on work-related vehicle use, and that risk assessments are conducted and regularly reviewed. Many employers now provide advanced or further driver training for people who are required to drive at work.

UCU recommends some basic standards for using personal transport for college business.

- There should be adequate and realistic time allowances for the journey so as not to encourage speeding or risk taking.
 - Contact timetabling should ensure that travel doesn't take place during a lunch break so people aren't tempted to eat and drink while driving.
 - Management requirement for staff to travel should be limited as far as possible, perhaps to a specific number of occasions a week and not be the norm.
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- There should be a limit on the number of journeys on any one day - one is good.

EMPLOYER LEGAL DUTIES

There is no general legal prohibition on working alone. However, under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers have an absolute legal duty to all identify hazards, assess and then control risks arising from lone working and associated work tasks. If the risk assessment shows that it is not possible for the work to be done safely by a lone worker, then other arrangements must be put in place. Where there are more than five employees the risk assessment must be kept as a permanent record.

Employers are also under a duty to provide:

- facilities for first aid under the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations
- welfare provisions under the Workplace (Health Safety and Welfare) Regulations
- suitable equipment and training in their use under the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations and the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations.

Employers must also report certain accidents suffered by employees, including violent incidents, under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations - RIDDOR. (This is separate from the duty to record all accidents in the accident book).

Employers must ensure that, in complying with their general legal duties to carry out risk assessments, they take full account of the risks of work carried out alone and make sure that these risks are eliminated, reduced or minimised.

UCU safety representatives must be consulted on the appointment of the 'competent person' assigned by the employer to carry out the risk assessment and should be involved in the process of identifying hazards, assessing risk and evaluating appropriate control measures.

For more information see:

- UCU H&S factsheet on risk assessment: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/310/Risk-assessment-a-brief-guide-to-putting-it-all-together-Oct-15/pdf/ucu_factsheet_riskassessment_oct15.pdf
- HSE guidance: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.htm>

WORKING ON ANOTHER EMPLOYER'S PREMISES

UCU members may be required to work on other employers' premises. Their own employer's risk assessment should identify the risks of their work and any special risks arising from the fact that they work alone. The risk assessment should also identify whether any aspect of their job could be hazardous to the health or safety of other employees.

There is a legal duty on employers to co-operate and co-ordinate their health and safety arrangements wherever their work activities interact. Factors that need to be covered include the provision and maintenance of equipment; the provision and maintenance of protective clothing; training and first aid provision; fire and emergency procedures; the procedure for reporting accidents, incidents (including violence, abuse and harassment) and ill-health, and a named competent person to contact if there is a problem.

INFORMATION, INSTRUCTION, TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires employers to provide information, instruction, training and supervision to ensure employees' health, safety and welfare at work. The nature of lone working means that employees are not under constant supervision, so alternative arrangements must be made by the employer. The provision of adequate information, instruction, and training can provide employees with the competence to work on their own. However, the employer must establish a system of work for the monitoring of lone workers to ensure that they remain safe. The risk assessment should identify the level of supervision required and the means of providing it. The risk assessment should also set out the procedures under which the lone worker reports to base.

BARGAINING GUIDANCE FOR WORKPLACE TRAINERS AND ASSESSORS

CASELOADS

Many non-lecturers, eg trainers and assessors, report that their work/caseload is completely unregulated and that there are no agreements or upper limits in place to protect them from excessive workloads. This situation is made worse when staff are employed on casual contracts of employment when they feel their future employment may be jeopardised if they refuse extra work. Branches should survey non-lecturers to find out the factors which are the most important in affecting their overall workload before seeking to negotiate an agreement with the college.

UCU branches should seek to reach agreement with colleges on maximum appropriate caseloads taking into consideration factors such as:

- number of learners coordinating
- number of learners assessing
- number of learners training
- geographical travel required between college and workplace placements
- impact of large framework programmes
- embedded key skills numbers
- assisted and supported learners
- other factors which contribute to workloads.

UNSOCIABLE HOURS WORKING

Non-lecturers, usually trainers and assessors, on work-based learning programmes where the learners work shifts are sometimes also asked to work during night shifts particularly in areas such as manufacturing and health and social care.

Some assessors who work unsociable hours may say that they are only doing so for their own convenience to allow for a better work-life balance. However, often this is a consequence of trying to accommodate an excessive workload.

UCU branches should seek to reach agreements with colleges that cover all staff who are required to work unsociable hours that ensure:

- unsocial hours working is only required when there is no alternative
- minimum rest breaks between working shifts
- staff are compensated for being required to work outside normal hours
- travel time to work based placements is included in overall worktime
- assessors have weekly working hours the same as other staff, eg 35 hours p/w
- no statutory safety and working time regulations are breached.

TRAVEL AND HOMEWORKING

Trainers and assessors can often be employed to deliver training and assessment in workplaces so geographically remote from the college that they effectively work either out of their car boot or from home. After surveying trainers and assessors who work away from the college UCU should incorporate their concerns and seek agreements with colleges on arrangements for working from home and on the road that ensure:

- staff are compensated for any extra costs incurred (eg increased insurance premiums, electricity etc) associated with use their car or home for business purposes
- appropriate equipment for home working is provided
- appropriate equipment for working on the road is provided (eg mobile, hands free)
- travelling time is included in working time
- all travel mileage costs are covered
- mileage remuneration rates are the same for all staff
- access to appropriate college facilities when required to attend (desk, storage space etc).

RESOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

TUC Guidance on Lone Working:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/LoneWorking2.pdf>

HSE guidance and checklist on Lone Working: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>

HSE guidance on violence: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg69.pdf>

HSE advice on homeworking: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg226.pdf>

HSE guidance on risk assessment: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.htm>

Joint HSE/Department of Transport guidance leaflet *Driving at Work*:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg382.pdf>

UCU factsheet on risk assessment: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/310/Risk-assessment-a-brief-guide-to-putting-it-all-together-Oct-15/pdf/ucu_factsheet_riskassessment_oct15.pdf

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https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/6644/Violence-at-work---UCU-factsheet/pdf/hsfacts_violenceatwork.pdf

UCU health and safety factsheet library: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/hsfacts>
