

Key Risk Area (KRA)

KRA 2.4 Working Alone or in Isolated Situations

1. Purpose

This document provides guidance to ensure all workers, students, contractors, conjoints and other members of the University of Newcastle (University) community are aware of safe work practices when working alone or performing isolated work.

2. Scope

This Guideline applies to all health, safety and wellbeing activities of staff, students, visitors (including volunteers and contractors), Council members, and other persons interacting with the University of Newcastle (workers); the operations of staff of University aligned Research Centres and controlled entities; and all activities conducted by or on behalf of the University of Newcastle on and outside of the University's campuses.

3. Guidelines

3.1. Risk Management

Risk assessments will be conducted by Leaders / Supervisors with input from workers to identify potential isolated work situations. When identifying these situations, the following will be taken into consideration:

- The isolated work will take place out of normal working hours e.g. on University campuses in offices, laboratories, workshops, off site in other work locations;
- No one else will be working in the immediate area at the time;
- The location is remote and an individual or team are on their own, isolated from the assistance of others because of the time, location or nature of the work.

When isolated work situations have been identified, a risk assessment will be completed prior to commencing new tasks, and will be reviewed when conditions or the task changes.

The general [Health and Safety Risk Assessment Form](#) should be used to assess hazards in accordance with the Guideline [HSG 3.1 Health and Safety Risk Management](#).

In addition, health and safety risk assessment forms or checklists have been developed for particular hazard categories to assist in identifying specific hazards and risk controls. The Working Alone/Isolated Work Checklist (**pending**) can also be utilised to assist with the risk assessment. In completing the risk assessment and checklist, the following hazard considerations must be reviewed:

- The duration of the work and the hours involved, taking into consideration how many hours the person has already worked in the previous 24 hours, or how many days the person has already worked in the previous 7 to 28 days;
- Type of work e.g. handling hazardous substances or dangerous goods; using plant, tools and other equipment; work that is dangerous to perform alone such as entry into restricted areas or manual handling;
- The location of work e.g. office, laboratory, workshops, off site in other premises, off site in the field;
- The person's experience, capability and physical ability to perform isolated work;
- Existing risk controls and whether they can be applied;
- Access to food, beverages and break areas;
- Available means of communication;
- Available assistance;
- Travel arrangements e.g. travel home after working prolonged hours when fatigued; travel to remote off site and/or off-road locations.

Risk controls for isolated work or when working alone should include some or all of the following:

- Documented SOPs for all the tasks to be undertaken when performing isolated work;
- Authorisation of Workers who are competent to perform isolated work with a register maintained of these authorised personnel. See Attachments 2 and 3 for examples of Assessments of Competency to Work Alone after Hours for Office and General Workspaces and Research Laboratories;
- Clear definition of tasks which can be undertaken in the circumstances, or which should definitely not be undertaken;
- Documented procedures for communicating with the person performing isolated work;
- Supply of an appropriate and reliable means of communication e.g. land line phone, mobile phone, two-way radio or GPS device or satellite phone if working in a geographically remote location;

- Regular call-in arrangements for the person performing isolated work to report to their Leader/Supervisor or designated contact person;
- Arrangements for another person to physically visit the work area at regular intervals to make contact if possible, e.g. University Security Officers informed the person is performing isolated work on site after hours and requested to visit the location every hour to make contact;
- Arrangements for access to food, beverages and break areas;
- Arrangements for safe travel home after prolonged hours when fatigue or availability of safe transport could be a consideration;
- Safe travel arrangements for remote off site work e.g. provision of suitable vehicles; off road driver training if required; additional food, water, first aid supplies and tools.

For more information on remote work and travel refer to [KRA 1.3 Fieldwork](#) and [KRA 2.5 Travelling on University Business](#).

3.2. Assessment of Training and Competency

Workers and visitors will receive relevant information about isolated work and working alone hazards during their induction.

All Leaders/Supervisors and Workers who are involved in managing or undertaking isolated work will receive instruction and training so they understand the requirements of this KRA.

General training will include the following topics:

- Recognition of situations where isolated work is likely to occur;
- The University's risk assessment procedures;
- SOP for the work to be undertaken with particular reference to specific requirements for isolated work;
- Specific equipment and tools required for the isolated work.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) are an essential part of a safe systems of work and are an important part of an overall health and safety management system and framework and are fundamental in the training and orientation of new workers and students in hazards of the specific process or activity. Standard Operating Procedures are also a valuable tool in assessing the level of understanding or competency regarding on-the-job training. For further details on the development of a SOP and appropriate competency assessment, refer to Guideline [HSG 4.2 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Induction, Training and Competency](#) and [KRA 1.12 Standard Operating Procedures](#).

Laboratory areas have very specific requirements, so each laboratory will need to determine what constitutes an expected level of competency to be able to allow workers and students to perform isolated work. This can include developing a period of experience in which it would be reasonable to expect that workers and students had become proficient and fully aware of the safety issues and critical responses required in a number of likely scenarios, for example:

- Responses to fire alarms, freezer alarms, incubator alarms;
- Basic first aid responses to help another student or Worker;
- Familiarity with Security resources and contact numbers;
- Power failures, impacts on equipment breakdowns, contacting Leaders/Supervisors;
- Safe performance of all key procedures, including full awareness of risk assessments and SOPs as appropriate.

Developing this level of competence may take 1-3 months for an office or general workplace environment and 3-6 months for a laboratory or workshop, depending on the laboratory or workshop. Supervisors should evaluate workers and students by testing their responses to a number of relevant scenarios and appraising their capacity to respond and answer questions. Assessment of Competency to Work Alone Out of Hours – Office and General Workspace (**pending**) and Assessment of Competency to Work Alone Out of Hours - Research Laboratory (**pending**) for example competency assessments. Time frames for assessing competency are noted on the forms.

4. Definitions

In the context of the Health and Safety Management System Framework:

Employer	Means the University of Newcastle (the University).
Executive Committee	Consisting of the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellors, the Pro Vice-Chancellors, the Chief Operating Officer, Chief People and Culture Officer and the Chief Financial Officer, the University Secretary and the President of Academic Senate.
Hazard	A situation, condition, or event, including a person's behaviour, that exposes a worker to a risk to their health or safety during the course of work in a workplace, that has the potential to cause injury, illness or even death or to damage buildings, plant or equipment.
Isolated Work	Work that is isolated from the assistance of other persons because of location, time or the nature of work. In some cases, other people may be available on site but not in the immediate vicinity e.g. a student working alone in a laboratory after hours with the University Security Officers on

	patrol across the University. In other cases, the worker could be in a remote location off site when there is no-one around.
Leader / Supervisor	Any member of the University who is responsible for supervising staff and/or undergraduate or postgraduate students and/or for leading research projects.
Worker	Includes an employee, conjoint, student on work experience, contractor, sub-contractor, and volunteer. A person is a worker if the person carries out work in any capacity for the University or another person conducting a business or undertaking, including work as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) an employee, or (b) a contractor or subcontractor, or (c) an employee of a contractor or subcontractor, or (d) an employee of a labour hire company who has been assigned to work in the person's business or undertaking, or (e) an outworker, or (f) an apprentice or trainee, or (g) a student gaining work experience, or (h) a volunteer, or (i) a person of a prescribed class.

5. Responsibilities

A comprehensive list of health, safety and wellbeing responsibilities is provided in [HSG 1.2 Roles and Responsibilities Guideline](#).

Specific responsibilities under this Guideline include:

Leaders and Supervisors

- Ensure a risk assessment is conducted to identify possible hazards and risks for situations where workers are performing isolated work;
- Ensure Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are developed for isolated work;
- Ensure workers who may perform isolated work are identified and provided with information and training in the SOPs applicable to the work to ensure they have the necessary skills and experience;
- Ensure appropriate means of communication are provided and ensure that communication is able to be maintained; and
- Ensure hazards and injuries are reported via University reporting systems.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team

- Provide assistance to Leaders/Supervisors to identify situations where workers may perform isolated work;
- Provide input to risk assessments when required and the development of appropriate SOPs;
- Assist with communicating the requirements for isolated work when required.

Workers

- Ensure the SOPs for isolated work are followed;
- Never undertake isolated work if the task requires more than one person; and
- Maintain regular contact with the designated contact person when this is a requirement.

6. References & Related Documents

The following documentation is referenced in, or applicable to this Guideline:

[HSG 1.2 Roles and Responsibilities](#)

[HSG 3.1 Health and Safety Risk Management](#)

[HSG 4.2 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Induction, Training and Competency](#)

[KRA 1.3 Fieldwork](#)

[KRA 1.12 Standard Operating Procedures](#)

[KRA 2.5 Travelling on University Business](#)

7. Amendment History

Version	Date of Issue	Approval	Section(s) Modified	Details of Amendment
1	June 2015	Director, People and Workforce Strategy	-	Original version as Guideline
2	October 2023	CPCO	All	1. All sections reviewed for legal compliance 2. Updated content in all sections 3. Added new/renamed Related Documents 4. Added Amendment History 5. Amended document control header and footer

8. Appendices

Nil