

University College Dublin



Home Visits / Face To Face Interviews Safety Guidelines for Staff / Students

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UCD Safety, Insurance, Operational Risk and Compliance (SIRC)

Office

University College Dublin
Home Visits / Face to Face Interviews – Safety Guidelines for Staff / Students

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Revision History:

Revision 0: January 2009. This is an original document

Revision 1: Aug 2015. This is the first review of the original document. This edition expands the sections on Emergency Procedures; Personal Safety and Risk Assessment and includes a section on Insurance considerations. Link to updated Risk Assessment Template also included.

1.0 Introduction

These guidelines are applicable to all research activities, undertaken by University staff and students involving home visits or face to face interviews with members of the public. Personal safety is of concern for all involved although it should be noted that the vast majority of people who participate in such research pose no risk / threat to University staff or students.

This document is designed to help researchers complete their research, without placing themselves in danger by taking appropriate precautions against foreseeable hazards.

The aim of this document is to:

- provide a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities of staff and students
- document the procedures which should be followed in order to ensure the health, safety and welfare of staff and students while carrying out such visits and face to face interviews

For information on safety training contact sirc@ucd.ie

In conjunction with this document, reference should also be made to the [UCD Fieldwork Safety Guidelines](#).

2.0 Roles and Responsibilities

UCD has a duty to ensure that persons engaged in such research are not placed in danger; similarly all researchers have a statutory obligation to take reasonable care for their own safety, health and welfare and that of any other person who may be affected by their acts or omissions at work. It should be noted here that the University considers postgraduate students to be employees from a safety management perspective.

The Head of School / Unit has a legal responsibility for ensuring that safe systems of work are adhered to within the school / unit, including home visits and any other fieldwork.

2.1 Supervisors (Chief Investigator / Responsible Academic / Student Project Supervisor)

Research supervisors are responsible for the health and safety of all staff / students under their control for the duration of the research activity, and are also responsible for ensuring that they have received any necessary briefing, training or induction prior to work commencing.

Persons responsible for supervising research must ensure that:

- A risk assessment is carried out and risk control measures are identified where deemed necessary. A fieldwork risk assessment template is available on the [SIRC Office Website](#).
- Appropriate incident management and emergency response plans are in place.
- All incidents and accidents are reported to the [University SIRC Office](#) by completing a UCD Incident Report Form; these hardcopy forms are available from the University SIRC Office.
- Proper procedures are followed in the planning and execution of the work.
- The research is subjected to regular and appropriate supervision.

2.2 Researchers

All persons carrying out such research are under the obligation to work and behave in a manner, so as to not endanger their own safety or the safety of those around them. Researchers must have read and understood the relevant risk assessment and any other safety documentation relating to their

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work and adhere to the control measures set out in the risk assessment prior to commencing their research.

3.0 Insurance on Fieldwork

All persons undertaking fieldwork must consider what insurance requirements they have and what insurance is available to them from the University. This can be ascertained by emailing insurance@ucd.ie

UCD does not extend insurance cover to extracurricular activities that may arise as a result of fieldwork e.g. social activities.

3.1 Fieldwork Abroad – Travel Insurance

All persons travelling abroad should ensure that they have adequate travel insurance in place. Persons organising fieldwork abroad should contact the University SIRC Office to obtain details and extent of cover available under the University's Travel Insurance Policy. Email details of planned fieldwork including dates, duration, location and completed fieldwork risk assessment to insurance@ucd.ie

There is very limited travel insurance cover provided by UCD for undergraduates. Undergraduate students are strongly advised to obtain their own cover or to extend any health insurance that they may hold in Ireland. In the event that medical treatment is required abroad and travel insurance is not held, then this could lead to a student incurring very large medical bills.

All persons travelling within the EU and the EEA are advised to obtain a [European Health Insurance Card \(EHIC\)](#). This allows access to the public health systems of countries within these areas and is free of charge.

Before travelling abroad persons should familiarise themselves with the current situation in their destination country. This is especially important for any areas where there may be reports of civil or political unrest. Up to date travel advice is available from the [Department of Foreign Affairs](#) website and the [UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#) website. If either of these agencies recommends against non-essential travel to a particular area, then that travel should not be undertaken. Travel to an area where a travel advisory exists may invalidate any insurance cover.

3.2 Insurance Confirmation for Third Party Site / Landowners

Landowners and third party sites often request confirmation of insurance from UCD when providing access. UCD SIRC Office can provide third party public liability insurance confirmation letters where required. Email insurance@ucd.ie with details of the proposed research visit. Schools / Units should not sign any agreements with a third party in relation to insurance arrangements/ indemnities without confirming the situation with the [UCD SIRC Office](#).

3.3 Insurance confirmation and Ethical Approval

All research involving human participants is subject to ethical approval from the UCD Human Research Ethics Committee. Further details on this process are available from the [UCD Office of Research Ethics](#). Such research also requires insurance cover. Each application is reviewed upon submission to the Office of Research Ethics and details of the insurance cover in place provided.

4.0 Safety Procedures & Considerations

4.1 Venue for Appointment

When a research project is in the initial planning stage, consideration should be given to the idea of asking participants to come to the University rather than meeting off site. This is a safer option, but will not be appropriate or workable for many projects for a variety of reasons. Where possible, appointments should be held in public areas/ spaces.

4.2 Scheduling Appointments

When contacting the participant to schedule a meeting a number of questions should be asked to gain some basic information in order to conduct a preliminary risk assessment. Important questions to ask include:

- Is there adequate parking available at the location?
- What contact will the student / staff member have with residents of the home during a visit?
- Where are the entrances / exits located in the building selected for the meeting?
- How many people will be on the premises / involved during the research? Who are they and what relation are they to the participant?
- Does the participant own any pets? If so will they pose a risk? (e.g. vicious dogs, overfriendly large dogs) If they pose a risk can they be restrained or kept separate during the interview?
- You should advise the participant, you will ring them closer to the visit date to check they are still available for the home visit and to recheck their details.

4.3 Organising Transport

Once the fieldwork site has been selected persons are encouraged to reconnoitre the area before fieldwork starts. The following should be considered:

- Is there reliable local public transport?
- Are reputable taxis firms easy to access?
- Is it safe to use private cars and leave them in the area?
- Is there a local rendezvous or contact point for researchers?

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- Are there appropriately priced and comfortable hotels within easy reach?
- Are there local tensions to be aware of such as strong cultural, religious or racial divisions?
- What do local sources, such as the Gardai, say about risks in the research location?

4.4 Photo Identification

Staff and students should use their staff/ student photo ID card to provide identification to study participants.

4.5 Personal Safety

The safest way to conduct such research is to work in pairs. Two or more persons must be present for all studies involving participants with a history of violence or other issues, or covering issues that may be considered as provocative to some participants. If the presence of a second interviewer is considered distressing for the interviewee, then the second interviewer can observe from a discrete distance.

When interviewing vulnerable person(s), the interviewer should choose a location so that they are observable at all times i.e. office with glass panels, open door, and public space. No home visits are to be conducted if a participant has a history of aggressive behaviour, violence or sexual harassment, or if you believe you will be at risk.

4.6 Working with Minors

Participants who are minors (under the age of 18), should have an adult representative, such as parent or guardian etc. present during any meeting. If the presence of a parent / guardian is considered distressing or likely to stress the interviewee, then a location should be chosen so that the accompanying adult can observe from a distance.

Researchers intending to work with minors must ensure that they satisfy Garda Vetting requirements, where appropriate. Further details relating to UCD programmes are available from [UCD Registry](#).

4.7 Risk Assessment Training

Staff / students should be competent in carrying out dynamic on site risk assessments. They should constantly be on the lookout for hazards which may arise during the course of their work and be able to analyse and eliminate / control the risks they identify.

4.8 Preparation for the Visit

Ensure you are familiar and comfortable with the vehicle you will be driving. Before leaving visually check the tyres and make sure you have enough fuel and ensure you have your street directory and any maps you may require.

Find a reliable person who is happy to act as your contact person. For students this should be your supervisor and for all staff researchers a co-investigator or supervisor.

The contact person's duties will include:

- **Being available** to take calls for the time you are out on the road
- Logging your calls
- To act appropriately, if you call in with a problem or if you miss a scheduled call
- Holding a copy of your itinerary with instructions to call for help in the event that you do not check in by a prearranged time

If possible, visit the site of the interview prior to the meeting and ensure that you are familiar with the area.

4.9 Communication

Have your mobile switched on and with you at all times when you are out on a home visit or meeting a study participant. Ensure your mobile is in working order and fully charged prior to leaving. Save your contact person's number and any emergency numbers.

Ensure you adhere to whatever call-in schedule you have organized with your contact person. If you encounter any problem or issue when out, ring and let your contact person know so it can be duly noted.

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Always check the participants' address / meeting location in advance to see if they are in a mobile phone black spot area. If they are, a second person should attend, either to assist or to observe.

4.10 On-Site Safety

- Park in a spot where you can't be blocked in or obstructed from leaving.
- Watch out for slip / trip hazards both outside and inside the meeting location.
- Check to see that any pets, which may pose a risk, have been restrained or kept separate during the visit / meeting.
- Introduce yourself and show your ID, remember to check that they still consent to the home visit before entering the premises.
- Familiarise yourself with your surroundings as you enter the premises, make sure you will remember the path back to the exit / entrance.
- Chose a seat where you don't have your back to a doorway and where you can clearly see all doorways into the room.
- Keep your car keys on you at all times.
- Make sure you keep all your personal documents, mobile phone, wallet etc. secure at all times.
- Try to keep to your appointment times and don't linger at any premises longer than you need to.

5.0 Emergency Procedures

While the vast majority of face-to-face interviews will proceed without incident, it is a necessary part of the risk assessment process to consider what to do in the event of an incident/ accident occurring. Details of the relevant emergency responses should be detailed in the risk assessment and all researchers / interviewers should be made aware of these emergency responses. All fieldworkers should prepare an emergency plan for all reasonably foreseeable emergencies in advance of undertaking fieldwork. This may include the following:

- A list of emergency services and other supports available locally.
- A means for summoning help in the event of an emergency.
- Responses to incidents, accidents, severe weather, violence and aggression, etc. as deemed appropriate.
- Method for contacting the University and next of kin.
- Itinerary details in the event that the fieldwork group needs to be contacted.

5.1 Getting Lost on Route

- Always plan your trip before you set off by consulting your maps / street directory.
- If you become lost while driving to or from a home visit, pull over in a safe area and check your map or street directory.
- Always carry a current street directory / map with you when you're out on the road, do not depend on smart phones / tablets, as coverage might be sparse.
- If you still cannot locate where you are, drive to the next signposted street and recheck your maps.
- Other options include backtracking until you are in a familiar area or ringing someone you know who is familiar with the area for help.
- Ring your contact person to let them know what's happened if it is going to affect your home visit schedule or you are at all worried.

5.2 Vehicle Breakdown

- Part of planning the fieldwork, researchers should identify at least two breakdown assistance companies; their contact details should be stored in phone prior to departure.

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- If your vehicle breaks down when you are on the road, ring the breakdown service.
- If, possible, try to pull off the road into a safe spot and wait for assistance.
- If, you break down in the middle of the road put on your hazard lights and when safe to do so (no traffic approaching) exit the car and move to a safe spot, well off the road.
- If passers-by offer to push the vehicle off the road, only do so if a break in the flow of traffic allows this exercise to be done safely.
- If / once your car is parked off the road in a safe place you, should remain in the car (with the doors locked, if it is an unsafe area or you are at all worried).
- If you are on a motorway, exit the vehicle, call motorway services using the nearest roadside telephone and remove yourself to a safe distance away from your vehicle and the motorway.
- Ring your contact person to let them know what's happened and they will contact any home visit participants that will be affected by the delay, to explain and reschedule their home visit if necessary. You may need to complete a University Incident Report form.

5.3 Vehicle Accident

- If you are involved in a car accident it is your responsibility to inform the Gardai.
- Ensure you get the details of any other drivers involved (name, address, licence number, make, model, car colour, registration, insurance company and policy number).
- Ring your contact person who will both notify your Supervisor and contact any home visit participants that will be affected to explain and reschedule their home visit.
- If you sustain any injury or suffer any pain or discomfort from the accident you should notify your supervisor and seek medical help by reporting to a hospital emergency department. Ensure you complete a University Incident Report form as soon as possible after the occurrence. If you do not have an UCD Incident Report form at hand, please email the [University SIRC Office](#) to detail the accident / incident as soon as possible.

5.4 Driving a UCD Vehicle

This procedure for breakdown or accident reporting is intended for anyone using, operating, or otherwise responsible for a University vehicle:

- All drivers are made aware of the 24hr contact number, in which to call the UCD Transport Pool Manager, should their UCD vehicle breakdown or an accident or incident occur. This number shall be placed on the dash of each vehicle.

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- Any University vehicle which is involved in an accident, resulting in damage to the vehicle and / or involved in an accident resulting in personal injury or private property damage shall follow these steps:
 - Stop immediately.
 - Take steps to prevent another accident at the scene.
 - Dial 112 to call An Garda Síochána / ambulance and other emergency vehicles.
 - Do not move injured parties. Encourage all injured parties to seek medical attention.
 - Contact the UCD Emergency Line on 01 716 7999 if on campus, or the emergency contact number printed on the vehicle dashboard, if outside of the campus.
- Prompt reporting of claims is essential. All accidents should be reported immediately to An Garda Síochána without exception.
- Do not make statements to anyone except An Garda Síochána or the UCD Transport Pool Manager. Do not sign any papers concerning responsibility.
- The driver is responsible for obtaining contact and insurance information of the driver of any other vehicle involved in the accident.
- The driver should record as much information as is available and note the details of any subsequent vehicles that may have been involved including the name, license number, plate number, make, model, and year of the car, how the accident happened and information about any witnesses.
- Where necessary, the driver should take photos of the incident and of any damage to the vehicle.
- Notify your manager immediately.
- The driver is responsible for completing and returning any forms that are required.
- All questions from solicitors, the other party to the accident and/or others should be referred to the [UCD SIRC Office](#).
- Any court cases, which may arise from the use of a UCD registered vehicle, must be reported to the [UCD SIRC Office](#).

5.5 Medical Emergency

- If a medical emergency arises while you are undertaking a home visit, call for help on 112 and wait until help arrives.

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- Ring your contact person to let them know what's happened, so they can contact any home visit participants that will be affected to explain and reschedule their home visit, if necessary.

5.6 Reporting Incidents and Near Misses

An incident during fieldwork resulting in serious injury or a fatality must be reported to the UCD Duty manager as soon as possible after the occurrence by calling the UCD 24 hour Emergency Line on 01 716 7999.

All incidents and near misses must be reported to the University SIRC Office as soon as possible after their occurrence by completing a University Incident Report form available from [UCD SIRC Office](#).

5.7 Violence and Aggression

During a home visit / interview, monitor for signs of impending violence such as facial expression, verbal threats, clenched fists and / or increase in breathing rate, etc. If during a home visit you feel at all threatened:

- Summon help if needed.
- Try to appear calm, speak slowly, clearly and softly and use simple language.
- Do not attempt to contradict the person, if they are angry.
- Do not move closer to, or touch them.
- Avoid body language such as crossed arms, hands on hips or shaking fingers.
- Avoid direct eye contact.
- If you can withdraw, step back slowly and retreat out of the premises.
- If you cannot withdraw you are entitled to use reasonable force to protect yourself.
- If you are injured seek medical assistance, notify your supervisor and contact the Gardaí.
- Ensure you complete a University Incident Report form as soon as possible thereafter.

If, the staff / student conducting the home visits fail to ring their contact person at a scheduled time, the contact person should:

- Ring the designated mobile phone (the researcher may have forgotten to ring in, be in a mobile black-spot or have a flat battery).

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- Ring the last participant to ensure that they have left their location.
- Ring the next participant to see if they have arrived; ask the participant to get them to ring if / when they do arrive.
- Ring the next participant on the list in case the researcher has accidentally missed an appointment.
- Ring the researchers' home in case they have arrived home or have been in contact with someone there.
- Notify their supervisor of the situation.

You should notify any incidences of violence and aggression to your Supervisor/ PI immediately. A University Incident Report form should also be completed, and returned to the [UCD SIRC Office](#).

6.0 Risk Assessment

The ultimate aim of a *Risk Assessment* is to assess the risk from the planned activity to the health and safety of persons carrying out the activity and to identify control measures designed to reduce the risk to as low a level as possible.

All fieldwork is unique and there will be variables that need to be considered for each instance of fieldwork.

The University SIRC Office has prepared a [Fieldwork Risk Assessment Template](#) to assist in this process. Alternatively staff and researchers may complete their own designed template / form.

6.1 Steps in completing a risk assessment relating to face-to-face interviews

i. Identify and assess the problem

Consider all possible sources of information about possible hazards that may be involved with home visits / face to face interviews. Conduct a preliminary off-site check with participants when you contact them to schedule their appointment. Ask about access, people who may be present, whether they own pets etc.

ii. Eliminate or control the risk

Once the hazards have been identified and the risks to those undertaking the home visits assessed, you need to either eliminate or reduce the risks. Elimination is the best way to address the hazard. Consult with other staff / students working on the project and / or with the SIRC Office about the best way to address the identified risks and hazards.

iii. Plan the procedures with safety in mind

- Always keep mobile phones switched on during a home visit. The phone should have a programmed emergency number.
- Train in risk management techniques so you can do a risk assessment when you arrive at a home or location. If the situation is too risky, e.g. exposed syringes, intoxicated participant, unleashed snarling dogs, etc., do not continue with the visit.
- Leave the address of where you are going, including expected arrival and return times, with an appropriate person (contact) who is:
 - Available during all working hours
 - Able to monitor departure and return times

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- Able to respond appropriately in the event that you have an emergency
- Carry identification with you which specifies you are working for the University
- Establish code words to be used on the telephone to alert co-workers / supervisors that you are in a threatening position.
- Establish a procedure where you phone in after each home visit at a predetermined time
- Discuss with the Gardai the best methods of contacting them in an emergency.
- Choose a safe place to sit in a participant’s home, such as near an external door

iv. Review

Having put in place ways to control hazards involved with home visits / interviews review them regularly (Did it work? Did it create another hazard?) to ensure they are effective.

Establish the Risk Rating

‘Hazard’ is defined as the potential to cause harm, while ‘risk’ is defined as the potential of the hazard to cause harm under the actual circumstances of use.

The assessment of risk from the hazards identified is based on the linkage of the probability of occurrence with the severity of injury or material loss (the hazard effect) resultant from that occurrence.

All staff and postgraduate students must be familiar with the contents of the risk assessments that are relevant to their work. Training and further information on workplace safety and risk assessment is available from the [University SIRC Office](#)

In assessing the risk associated with the planned fieldwork, the matrix below may be used:

Table 1 Risk Assessment Matrix

		Severity of Outcome of Exposure		
		Slightly Harmful	Harmful	Very Harmful
Probability of Exposure	Unlikely	Trivial	Acceptable	Moderate
	Likely	Acceptable	Moderate	Substantial
	Very Likely	Moderate	Substantial	Intolerable

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Probability is determined based on an assessment on how likely it is that an adverse event related to the hazard concerned will occur. Probabilities are graded as:

1. *Unlikely*: the adverse event being considered will occur only rarely.
2. *Likely*: the adverse event being considered will occur on a frequent basis
3. *Very Likely*: the adverse event being considered is almost certain to occur

Severity is based on the degree of personal injury or damage to property likely to occur in the event that the adverse event occurs. Severity of outcome is graded as:

1. *Slightly Harmful*: e.g. superficial injuries; minor cuts and bruises; nuisance and irritation; temporary discomfort; minor infection; minor material damage.
2. *Harmful*: e.g. lacerations; burns; concussion; sprains; minor fractures; dermatitis (temporary); asthma (temporary); long term discomfort; infection requiring medical treatment; significant material damage.
3. *Very Harmful*: e.g. fatality; amputation; major fracture; severe poisoning; cancer; life shortening condition / disease; deafness; head injuries; eye injuries; substantial material damage.

Based on the matrix above, establish the risk rating by linking the probability of an adverse occurrence with the severity of injury or material loss (the hazard effect) resultant from that occurrence. Risk assessments are graded as trivial risk, acceptable risk, moderate risk, substantial risk or intolerable risk.

- *Trivial Risk*: No further action required.
- *Acceptable Risk*: No additional risk control / reduction measures required
- *Moderate Risk*: Further risk control / reduction measures should be considered and implemented where possible. Hazards graded as *Moderate Risk* must be closely managed.
- *Substantial Risk*: Further risk control / reduction measures must be identified. If the risk cannot be reduced further then the hazard must be strictly managed and the frequency and duration of the hazard must be reduced to as low a level as practicable along with the number of persons exposed to the hazard.
- *Intolerable Risk*: All work involving this hazard is prohibited until further control measures are implemented

The aim of any risk control/reduction measures identified and implemented are to reduce the residual risk from the hazard to as low a level as is reasonably practicable.

7.0 Contact Information and Useful Documents

UCD SIRC Office website – www.ucd.ie/sirc

[UCD Fieldwork Safety Guidelines](#)

[UCD Fieldwork Risk Assessment Template](#)

[UCDA7 Presence on a Third Party's Site Risk Assessment](#)

[UCD Travel Safety Guidelines](#)

[UCD Travel Insurance Guide](#)

Travel Advisory Websites - [Department of Foreign Affairs](#)

[UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#)

[UCD Registry Garda Vetting Information](#)

UCD Campus Services / Campus Duty Manager

- Website - <http://www.ucd.ie/building/code/campusservices.html>
- 24 hour Emergency Line – 01 716 7999 or 7999 from internal extension
- General queries number – 01 716 7000 or 7000 from internal extension

Weather Information and affected transport updates

- [Met Eireann](#)
- [Department of Transport](#)
- For updates on conditions on Motorways and National roads visit the NRA's - [The Road Weather Information System](#)
- Check the [Garda website](#) for travel warnings
- For update on the latest traffic news visit the [AA Roadwatch website](#)
- [Local Authority websites](#)