Remote or Isolated Work in Research Environments Guideline

Section 1 - Purpose and Scope

(1) The University of Queensland (UQ) acknowledges that the nature of research and study sometimes requires UQ workers to work flexible hours to attend experiments or special tasks. Work performed without the assistance or presence of other persons due to location, the nature of work, or timing (such as work at any time of the day, or on weekends and public holidays) is regarded as remote or isolated work, and requires additional hazard identification and risk mitigation measures.

(2) This document provides guidance for these workers and their supervisors to establish systems and processes to support safe work during times such as weekends, nights or public holidays, when there is usually reduced local emergency response and support.

(3) This Guideline should be read in conjunction with the [Health and Safety Risk Management Procedure](#).

Out of Scope

(4) This Guideline does NOT apply to UQ workers who are participating in the following activities:

a. Work off-campus or fieldwork (see [Work Off-Campus and Fieldwork Procedure](#));
b. Working from home (see [Flexible Work Policy](#));
c. Work relating to UQ-approved travel (see [Travel Policy](#));
d. International work locations;
e. Students on placement or undertaking work experience (see [Work Integrated Learning and Work Experience Policy](#)).

Regulatory Context

(5) UQ must manage risks associated with remote or isolated work as far as reasonably practicable and have current emergency plans and procedures in place (s48 [Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011](#)). Managers and supervisors are obliged to ensure effective health and safety risk management measures are in place, that they are appropriate for the level of risk within their area of responsibility, and to ensure that workers are familiar with the risk mitigation measures and emergency procedures.

Section 2 - Process

(6) Remote work or work in isolation should be avoided or minimised as far as is reasonably practicable. Where this sort of work is identified as critical to normal operation, a risk assessment of planned activities must be conducted in the [UQSafe](#) system to determine the level of risk associated with the work, and to document the risk mitigation measures/controls required to reduce risk to an acceptable level. Where work is planned in areas outside UQ ownership or management, the risk assessment process must incorporate consideration of the local policies and procedures of these areas, and be guided by consultation with the workplace provider.

Section 3 - Controls

Risk Assessment

(7) A risk assessment in UQSafe must be conducted where a foreseeable risk to health and safety exists. More information about how to conduct a risk assessment and implement risk mitigation measures are available on the UQSafe home page.

(8) The risk assessment should consider all elements relating to the conduct of the work, including:

   a. assessed risk levels;
   b. temporal and spatial isolation;
   c. the type of work, including potential for exposure to other hazards;
   d. foreseeable emergency requirements and local emergency response plan;
   e. the types and details of mitigation controls;
   f. worker experience, fitness for work and completion of relevant training;
   g. level and type of supervision required;
   h. communication plan, including 'buddy';
   i. personal security: secure workplace, duress alarms, secure and safe access to transport; and
   j. minimum number of people required.

(9) If, after consideration of the identified hazards and the necessary mitigation measures, analysis of the risk matrix in the UQSafe document indicates that the managed risk level is high or extreme, tasks should not be undertaken. High or extreme risk levels indicate a need for a careful and thorough task redesign or the implementation of further controls until the managed risk is at an acceptable level.

(10) All risk mitigation controls documented in the assessment must be implemented and available, and subject to continuous review and modification where necessary to ensure they remain effective. Work must not commence until the supervisor has reviewed the document, verified that the controls are available, and formally approved the risk assessment. Additional training and instruction may be required before work commences.

High-risk Locations

(11) When planning work, workers and supervisors should review the types of activities and determine whether they may fall into the inherently high risk category under the relevant Australian Standard (see Appendix, clauses 26-27). Work in high-risk locations should not be performed in isolation. A competent 'buddy' should be arranged to provide support and help manage emergency responses prior to scheduling work in high-risk locations, which may include some laboratories, workshops, and off-campus in locations such as remote sites, or when conducting home visits alone.

Worker Competency and Capability

(12) The manager or supervisor must ensure that the worker is competent to perform the specific tasks required and capable of responding appropriately to an emergency before allowing them to undertake the work. This can be assessed during equipment and task training, the preparation of risk assessments and by the completion of other relevant documentation such as online safety module completions and technical certifications. Records of this induction and training should be made and securely stored.

(13) For areas where the direct supervisor has no direct oversight or management role, such as dedicated service facilities or animal houses (for example), the supervisor should arrange with the local facility manager to provide a site

induction and orientation for workers as well as any training on facility-specific equipment. Records of this induction and training should be made and securely stored. The person authorised to manage the space and equipment may be able to assist in determining competency of the worker and, with direct approval from the supervisor, assist in issuing approval for working in isolation.

(14) UQ workers with known health conditions that may impact on their own health, safety or wellness, or that of others when performing remote or isolated work in research environments, must be fit to undertake the work, and if required, have a medical management plan from their treating medical practitioner, ensure they have any necessary personal medications with them, and advise their manager or supervisor of this plan.

(15) Any medical or personal information supplied to the supervisor as evidence of fitness to work (or otherwise) must be confidentially managed by the supervisor in accordance with the Privacy Management Policy and Procedure.

Communications and Emergency Plan

(16) UQ workers planning to work remotely or in isolation, should develop a Communications and Emergency Plan in consultation with their supervisor, and where appropriate, the local specialist facilities manager. The plan should document appropriate responses to foreseeable task-related emergencies. The emergency plan should be based on a risk assessment of the workplace and account for external hazards that may impact worker safety. A copy of the Communication and Emergency Plan should be attached to the risk assessment in UQSafe and also be shared with the supervisor.

(17) The smartphone app SafeZone is the preferred UQ corporate system to be used as a communication means, enabling workers to check in and check out, make emergency calls to UQ Security, and send location in case of emergency. The app defaults to 000 outside UQ sites. More information can be found on the UQ website: Security SafeZone.

Section 4 - Roles and Responsibilities

(18) All UQ personnel have certain specific obligations to plan and perform work safely. These are specified in the Health and Safety Responsibilities Procedure. Remote and isolated work often presents additional hazards and there are further considerations to be made for supervisors and workers planning to conduct remote or isolated research work.

Managers, Supervisors and Academic Advisors

(19) Supervisors approving UQ workers to perform remote and isolated work should:

a. manage work scheduling to minimise the need for UQ workers to perform remote and isolated work whenever possible. Many hazards associated with remote and isolated work may be avoided by rescheduling;

b. avoid conduct of high-risk work remotely or in isolation whenever possible;

c. ensure UQ workers are inducted to the area and are competent to conduct the work safely, and capable of responding appropriately to emergencies. Review, and when appropriate, approve risk assessments relating to the proposed remote or isolated work, ensuring that risk controls are appropriate for the tasks to be completed;

d. determine if the work requires special safety precautions and make them available, such as having two people present, direct supervision, or specific additional training for staff;

e. communicate emergency plans with relevant parties, including emergency response teams, lab users, lab managers and, where relevant, UQ Security and emergency services have access to the Communication and Emergency Plan for the UQ worker undertaking the remote or isolated work; and

f. implement 'after actions review' post-emergencies.

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UQ Workers

(20) UQ workers should take reasonable steps for their health and safety when working remotely or in isolation and follow this Guideline. They need to:

    a. complete appropriate induction training for each workplace they use, including familiarisation with site-specific emergency procedures;

    b. ensure that their supervisor is made aware of any concerns they may have or discomfort about their capacity to work remotely or in isolation;

    c. ensure that their workplace is secured against unauthorised entry;

    d. ensure they are appropriately competent and capable to perform any tasks required – if not yet competent, to delay work until additional support and training;

    e. assist with establishment of the Communications plan and the risk assessments;

    f. have their supervisor's authorisation for remote and isolated work activity, as determined by their organisational unit;

    g. have provided the supervisor with any relevant medical management plan;

    h. not perform high-risk activities alone;

    i. arrange for a buddy to be present or immediately contactable;

    j. use UQ SafeZone app and its automatic check-in function (check-in timer is encouraged - electronic buddy);

    k. notify local Security staff of their location and expected work duration if not using SafeZone and auto check-in;

    l. carry UQ ID with them at all times, evacuate buildings immediately on Alert tone and remain at the evacuation assembly point until Security and the Emergency Services arrive, to pass on relevant information;

    m. contribute to 'after actions review' post-emergencies if required; and

    n. report emergencies immediately to UQ Security and also report the incident in UQSafe, as soon as practicable.

Section 5 - Monitoring, Review and Assurance

(21) The Health, Safety and Wellness Division (HSW Division) will review this Guideline periodically to ensure relevance and currency and apply any changes in legislation or local practices.

(22) Advisors, supervisors, and managers will monitor their workers' readiness and ability to work unsupervised, or with reduced supervision.

Section 6 - Recording and Reporting

(23) Any incidents or hazards arising while working remotely or in isolation must be reported as incidents in [UQSafe](), as soon as practicable. Where the location is not a UQ-managed site, the local UQ safety contact should ensure that the local site management is notified of the event and invited to assist in the incident reporting and corrective action planning.

(24) Where an incident might be deemed Notifiable to the Regulator, the local safety manager must contact the HSW Division for advice and support

(25) As part of the incident reporting and response process, a post-incident investigation review of the emergency response and plans should be completed.

Section 7 - Appendix

Definitions

Term	Definition
Buddy	Competent person that maintains communication, as per plan, for another person doing remote or isolated work and will activate the emergency response if needed.
Hours of work	Refer to the [University of Queensland Enterprise Agreement 2021-2026](#) (or as amended or replaced).
Designated high risk procedures	Work procedures for tasks presenting a substantially greater than normal risk. This is determined in accordance with the hazard identification and risk assessment process.
Fitness for work	Is when an individual is in a suitable physical and psychological state to perform tasks assigned to them competently and in a manner which does not compromise the safety and health or wellness of themselves or others.
Remote or isolated work	Is defined as work that is without the assistance of other persons due to location, time, or the nature of work, which includes work at any time of the day, weekends and public holidays.
Risk Group 3	(high individual risk, low community risk) - a pathogen that usually causes serious human or animal disease but does not ordinarily spread from one infected individual to another. Effective treatment and preventive measures are available.
Supervisor/Academic Advisor	For staff – the supervisor in [Workday](#). For higher degree by research (HDR) students, the staff member responsible for directing, monitoring, and supervising the student's conduct in the laboratory or workshop.
UQ workers	For the purposes of this Guideline, includes: - staff - continuing, fixed-term, research (contingent funded) and casual staff; - visiting academics and researchers - academic title holders, emeritus professors, adjunct and honorary titleholders, industry fellows and conjoint appointments; - higher degree by research (HDR) students.

[AS/NZS 2243.1:2021 Safety in Laboratories](#)

(26) This standard states that activities risk assessed as high-risk must not be conducted alone. Such activities include:

a. using equipment or machinery that can cause serious injury
b. handling venomous animals or large animals
c. working with toxic, corrosive substances or nanomaterials
d. using apparatus that can cause explosions, implosions or the release of hazardous material
e. climbing towers or high ladders
f. working with high-voltage electrical or electronic systems
g. working with microorganisms of Risk Group 3 and higher or radionuclides
h. operating lasers of Class 3 and above (see the [Laser Safety Guideline](#) for details of these laser classes)
i. working in environments not at atmospheric pressure
j. working in remote, isolated or hazardous locations.

(27) Other activities that could take place at UQ or for UQ which may pose increased risks include:

a. working in public-accessible office settings
b. interacting with students or the public

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c. working in locations with limited transport options

d. noisy locations where evacuation tones may not be heard.

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