

Lone Working Guidance



Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy

Faculty of Health and Social Sciences

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The purpose of this document.

Following questions from practice and from students we have decided to compile this document to try to answer the frequently asked questions about lone working by occupational therapy (OT) and physiotherapy (PT) students during their practice placements. Lone working is an area which is a serious consideration for staff and client safety in all settings throughout health, social care, private organisations and charity settings. For OT and PT students there are additional things that need to be considered in order for the best decision to be made about the work that the student might be safely expected to carry out.



This document is designed for general guidance only as it is imperative that students read and clearly understand the local lone working policy for the area in which they are on placement as this will give specific details about local procedures. These local procedures must be given as part of the student's induction (and where ever possible also made available on the Placement Environment Profile, commonly referred to as PEP) and they need to demonstrate that they have read and understood these policies.

If a department does not have an up to date lone working policy then the Practice Placement Educator (PPE) will need to discuss this with their manager. If students have concerns about the lone working policy or that they are being asked to do things that are unsafe they must raise this with their PPE and the University so that these concerns can be addressed.

What do we mean when we say 'lone worker'?

"Lone Worker" can be defined as:

- Lone workers are people who work by themselves without close or direct supervision from members of staff / members of the wider team. They may be the only person working on the premises; may be working separately from other members of staff; may be working outside of normal working hours where their isolation is increased with fewer colleagues working nearby.
- OT and PT students carry out placements in a wide variety of settings and may carry out work which would require them to work independently of their PPE (or other members of the team) and therefore they would be considered 'lone workers' at these times. Some of the areas in which this situation may arise are (this is not an exhaustive list);
 - residential / nursing home, day care, patient / client / service user home visits.

- Hospital (acute / community)
 - Schools
 - Pre-schools
 - Further Ed Colleges
 - Charity settings
 - Commercial / council buildings eg: banks / shops / libraries
- It is recognised that any member of staff may spend a limited amount of their time 'alone', this should be acknowledged via the local risk assessment process.

Often the issue of students driving during their placement arise as part of the questions around lone working. So what do we mean by 'driving for work':

"Driving for work" means either:

- Driving an employer-owned vehicle, such as a minibus or;
- Driving your own vehicle for your employer's business – i.e. for journeys where you would file a travel claim.

Commuting to your normal place of work is therefore not included.

(Somerset County Council – Driving for work: A guide for employees and volunteers)

Guidance:

What should I be considering as the PPE?

During the student's placement their PPE (or another colleague supporting that student) has vicarious liability – a duty of care to ensure that the student is able to carry out what is being asked of them safely and as competently as possible. This is not a phrase designed to worry PPEs or mean that they don't let the student out of their sight!



You may wonder why we don't take vicarious liability from us as the student's university tutor – however this would be impossible as we do not know what the student is up to day to day on their placement, we do not know the policies and procedures in detail for each setting and the methods of working and we are not in possession of all the facts to be able to make the judgements required about whether the student is able to carry something out safely in the setting they are in.

When thinking about the 'vicarious liability' in light of the lone working challenge this means that the PPE (or colleague) needs to consider some of the following points and make a judgement as to whether:

1. Is the student safe to see someone independently? Often PPEs will ask if they should wait until the student is in their third year before even considering lone working. We do not stipulate this as a first year student may be assessed as being safe, competent and willing to carry out an

independent piece of work. It is down to the PPE's assessment of each individual student – after all you could have a third year who you don't want to send out independently and a first year who is an ex- OT /PT assistant who you feel is well equipped to work alone with a chosen service user!

2. Is the student competent to see someone and carry out the work they are being asked to do independently?
3. Is the student fully aware of the lone working policy for the setting and knows what to do in an emergency?
4. Is the service user happy to work with the student independently?
5. Is the service user known to the PPE (and / or colleagues) and as far as possible is deemed to be 'safe' for a student to visit independently (this may mean taking into consideration pets and possible relatives or friends of the service user who could pose a risk even if the service user does not)?
6. Has the situation been appropriately risk assessed?
7. Can the student contact you?
 - a. Have they got a mobile for emergencies only?
 - b. Can they borrow a mobile?
 - c. Do they have a hands free kit is this acceptable to use in your setting (some areas' policies do not allow hands free / Bluetooth to be used whilst driving for work)?
 - d. What is the phone signal like in the area they are going to (some rural areas may have particularly poor signal)?
 - e. If you aren't going to be available does the student have another person they know they can contact?
8. If you have a student who you have assessed as suitable, ready and safe to do independent working ensure that you are still having enough opportunities to fully assess the student's work and progress; if they are working on their own all the time they might feel anxious that you are not seeing what they are achieving and you will want to feel confident that you are giving them a fair assessment and that you can give regular and accurate feedback on their performance.
9. Briefing and de-briefing sessions – whilst many people who work in the community may carry out a visit on their way into work or on their way home we would not advise this for a student. If they are doing a visit in the morning you (or a colleague) might want to talk through things with them briefly before they go to ensure they have the right things with them (eg:



paperwork / equipment). This also gives the student an opportunity to raise any concerns – it can be daunting doing visits on your own especially for the first time!

Equally it is very important to talk through the visit with the student once it is completed. Even if a visit has gone really well and there are no concerns it gives the student a chance to share this straight away and will help you to get a fuller picture of how they are performing. If of course there are problems they can also be addressed immediately. It is also an ideal opportunity to check notes, sign them off and ensure everything is returned to the office and filed securely.

10. It is of course possible for students to be working on their own with a service user where other health care workers may be in the working environment but the student is still unsupervised eg: carrying out a 1:1 assessment in a care home / different department within a hospital etc . The above recommendations all apply to this scenario too, whilst the student may have people more immediately around to call on for help or contact in an emergency the student, service user and environment need to be risk assessed and the student needs to know what to do if things do not go as planned.

11. If personal alarm systems are used within the setting the student needs to be shown fully how to use this appropriately and then demonstrate that they know how to use it. Panic can make these things more difficult to use successfully.



But what if I'm still nervous about letting the student out?

Consider:

1. A really nice way to bridge the gap between sitting beside the student whilst they carry something out and 'letting them loose' is to send them with a colleague so they can be 'The OT / PT' during the visit but have the reassurance of another professional alongside – this also enables you to gain feedback about a student's performance and can really boost a student's confidence when they are seen as a colleague by another professional.
2. What is it that's making you nervous about letting the student work independently? If in doubt do some more work accompanying the student with the student taking the lead.
3. There are clearly some settings where it is not appropriate for the student to work on their own, don't feel this is something you 'have' to do if you don't judge it to be suitable. Some client groups always require two members of staff to be present.



4. There may be some students who won't be ready to go out on their own on during the placement (this might be due to ability / lack of previous experience within a setting etc), don't feel this is something you 'have' to do if you don't judge it to be suitable

The student needs a car for placement but what is reasonable for me to expect of them and their driving?

1. Students who need cars for placements are told that they must have business insurance in order to be on the placement. They are also told that their PPE / Placement setting may ask for a copy of their insurance / MOT certificate and licence at the start of the placement.



2. If the student does not have business insurance they will only be able to drive to and from work at the beginning and end of the day (unless their insurance has any additional clauses that states that this is not covered either).

3. If this is a problem please contact the University to discuss.

4. Mileage – some students can claim back mileage if they receive an NHS bursary, however, many cannot claim their mileage back and even if they can they still need to pay for the petrol 'up front'. If this can be kept in mind when allocating caseloads / asking students to make certain visits (e.g.: there's an interesting team to visit to see their work but it's 50 miles away) this would be appreciated.



5. Carrying people in cars! Students should not take patients / clients / carers / service users in their cars. Students should not be put in a position where they feel they have to as this is unreasonable. We acknowledge that in some settings staff will take service users in their vehicles however this is something that they will have been risk assessed for by their trust. It is not suitable or appropriate for students.

6. Carrying inanimate objects in cars: larger equipment tends to be transported less often by therapists in their own cars these days due to health and safety concerns relating to moving and handling. However, we realise that in some settings equipment is carried by therapists. Many trusts and organisations now have strict policies about ensuring equipment is 'secured' in the car and just as employees would have to adhere to these requirements students

should to. This is something that needs to be addressed by individual areas and risk assessed on a case by case basis.

What can I expect of my student when it comes to discussing lone working and / or using their car for their placement?

1. Students should be prepared to show their car related documentation when it is requested.
2. Students should have appropriate insurance if they are using their car on placement.
3. Students need to have an opportunity to voice any concerns prior to a lone working situation and for them to take this opportunity.
4. Students should be involved in risk assessments.
5. Students need to feel confident to stop a visit and return to the department / office if they feel the situation should not continue for some reason and to know what procedure to follow in this situation.
6. Students must take responsibility for reading the lone working policy for the placement and ensuring that they ask questions about anything they do not understand.
7. Students must notify their PPE of any changes to their health that may impact on their ability to drive / work independently.
8. Students must notify their PPE of any difficulties relating to their vehicle.
9. Students need to ensure that their PPE knows where they are, who they are seeing and what they are doing / details of their caseload e.g.: that they understand that their PPE needs to know about all visits not just an initial one. They must adhere to the policy for that setting in terms of where they record where they are going etc.
10. Students should understand that they must not leave notes in a vehicle at any time; they should be filed securely at all times and confidentiality upheld.
11. Students need to use any personal alarm systems appropriately and return them to the setting before leaving the placement (whether this be on a daily basis before leaving the office or at the end of the placement depending on what the local policy requires.)

12. Students should use any mobile phones / pagers loaned by the workplace appropriately and return them to the setting before leaving the placement (whether this be on a daily basis before leaving the office or at the end of the placement depending on what the local policy requires.)
13. Students need to adhere to the UK legal driving requirements (e.g: stick to the speed limit, ensure tyres have the required legal tread depth, not to use mobiles whilst driving etc.)

Conclusion

There are many different things to consider for a PPE and student when thinking about lone working. This guidance has been designed to help support this process rather than 'stifle' any lone working that might be suitably carried out by a student as this work can give great learning opportunities.

Hours of work, days of work and work bases are changing rapidly in the current health and social care sector therefore if there is anything that you feel needs to be added to this document to help continue to reflect the reality of the working world for OTs and PTs then please do not hesitate to contact the teams to discuss. Also, if you have any specific questions relating to lone working for a student who has been placed with you please contact us as soon as possible so we can support you with this.

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