



National
Guidance

Field Studies

Field studies include a range of academic studies in the field, where the purpose of the visit is to observe features and phenomena in the real world and record data. These are very powerful learning experiences and for many young people bring an academic subject to life.

Field studies are most commonly associated with the following areas of academic study:

- Environmental Studies
- Geography
- Geology
- Biology
- Ecology
- History

While field studies should be considered as part of the norm within specialist subject areas, leaders must follow their employer's policy and guidance for offsite activities. They must **not** be treated as a special case that sits outside the guidance. The starting point for effective delivery is to ensure that the staffing team is competent.

There are some generic issues that impact on most types of field studies. These include:

- prevailing weather before and during the programme.
- time of year, including impact on weather, underfoot conditions and available daylight.
- clothing requirements (e.g. boots? full waterproofs? gloves? warm hat? sun hat?).
- specialist training for staff and group members.
- specialist equipment (e.g. rucksacks? safety helmet? map and compass? scientific equipment?).
- data recording procedures (e.g. written? video? digital?).

In addition to the issues that arise in all types of off-site activity, there are some specific considerations. These include specialist staffing requirements such as the confidence and competence to teach and supervise groups safely in the chosen

terrain. Those staffing the study will require both knowledge and experience of the venue.

Where the environment requires it, the person leading the group should hold a National Governing Body (NGB) leadership award (e.g. Walking Group Leader or Mountain Leader) or be approved as competent by an appropriately qualified technical adviser. As a rule of thumb, if such an award would be expected when leading a recreational or sporting activity in that environment, then it would be expected when leading field studies.

Staff-student ratios should be determined by risk benefit assessment to ensure effective supervision: see the document on Ratios and Effective Supervision in this Guidance.

Any programme involving remote supervision (as when students operate in small sub-groups without direct supervision) will require appropriate control measures that include behavioural expectations and emergency procedures. See the document on Group Management and Supervision in this Guidance.

First aid provision may be required within the group when operating in environments that do not permit easy access for an ambulance. See the document on First Aid in this Guidance.

There are some issues specific to the nature of the study:

- **Urban Studies** are likely to involve interaction with road traffic and with members of the public. Consider road safety and child protection issues.
- **Coastal Studies** are likely to involve hazardous environments such as cliffs, beaches and rock platforms subject to tidal changes and wave action. Leaders must understand local tidal issues, their effect on sea state and access to escape routes.
- **River Studies.** Planning needs to take into account likely water levels and the possibility of rapid changes in those levels e.g. flash flooding. Leaders should consider flow rates, depth, changing levels, water quality and water temperature. There must be sufficient competence within the leadership team to deal with unforeseen emergencies. **Never** underestimate the power of water – see the document “Group Safety at Water Margins” (DFES/CCPR 2005) in this Guidance.
- **Upland areas of moorland and mountain.** The appropriate NGB qualification to confirm leader competence is Mountain Training’s Walking Group Leader or above.
- **Agricultural Environments** may involve safety issues that include ease of access to farm machinery, chemicals and livestock. It is particularly important to manage the risk of infections such as e-coli – see the document on Farm Visits in this Guidance.
- **Remote or extreme environments overseas**, such as rain forest, tundra, boreal forest, alpine environments, desert and glacial terrain pose specific issues, which must be effectively managed. They will require specialist leader competence and possibly a qualification. Group management strategies, equipment and emergency procedures will need to reflect the serious nature of the undertaking.

In all of these examples, Visit Leaders will need to have contingency plans in place to deal with the impact of significant variations in the weather.