



National  
Guidance

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## Field Studies

In this document Field Studies means those visits whose purpose is to investigate an area of study in an outdoor environment. Other documents address various built environments that may be used.

Field Studies are powerful learning experiences and for many young people can bring an academic subject to life.

While Field Studies may be traditionally associated with subjects such as natural sciences or history it is not sensible to restrict the benefits in this way – teachers in all areas of study are advised to consider how they might utilise the power of the real world environment to enhance learning.

Field Studies in a school context are subject to the same charging regulations as any other school activity. See document 3.2c “Charging for school activities”.

While Field Studies should be considered as a normal part of delivery within specialist subject areas they must **not** be treated as a special case that sits outside the guidance for offsite activities. Leaders must follow their employer’s policy and guidance. The starting point for effective delivery is to ensure that the leadership team is competent.

There are some generic issues relevant to most types of Field Studies. These include:

- Forecast weather before and prevailing weather during the programme.
- Time of year, including consequences for weather, underfoot conditions and available daylight.
- Clothing requirements (e.g. boots? waterproofs? gloves? warm hat? sun hat?).
- Specialist training for staff and participants.
- 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 the need for leaders with the confidence and competence to both teach and supervise groups safely in the chosen terrain.

The number of leaders should be determined by risk benefit assessment to ensure effective supervision: see document 4.3b “Ratios and Effective Supervision”.

Any programme involving remote supervision (as when students operate in small sub-groups without direct supervision) requires appropriate control measures that include behavioural expectations and emergency procedures. See document 4.2a “Group Management and Supervision”.

First aid provision should be appropriate to the nature and remoteness of the environment. See document 4.4b "First Aid".

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.
- 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 the effect of the tide in the area and the likely effect of tide and weather on sea state and access to escape routes.
- River Studies. Planning should take into account likely water levels and the possibility of rapid changes in those levels, including flash flooding. Leaders should also consider flow rates, depth, 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 document 7i "Group Safety at Water Margins".
- Upland areas of moorland and mountain. Group leaders should hold an appropriate national governing body leadership award (e.g. Walking Group Leader or Mountain Leader) or be approved as competent by a technical adviser. As a rule of thumb, if such an award would be expected when leading a recreational or sporting activity in the chosen environment, then it should be expected when leading Field Studies. See document 3.2d "Approval of Leaders".
- 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 document 7g "Farm Visits".
- 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 should reflect the serious nature of the undertaking.

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

