



Working with Soil – Soil science in the field

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Working with Soil is the Professional Competency Scheme developed by the British Society of Soil Science's Professional Practice Committee, formerly the Institute of Professional Soil Scientists. Ten competency documents cover the required qualifications, skills and knowledge for different aspects of applied soil science. The Society is currently engaged in a five year plan to translate the competency documents into a comprehensive set of training courses. Foundation skills in field-based science are covered by three separate training courses – Exposing and describing a soil profile (Course 1), Soil classification (Course 2), and Soil survey techniques (Course 3). Course 1 has run successfully twice a year since 2013. The other two courses are under development and are scheduled to start in 2015.

The primary objective of Foundation Skills Course 1 is to develop confidence and familiarity with field soil investigation and description, understanding the soil underfoot and putting soils into a wider landscape context. Delegates excavate a soil profile pit, and describe and sample the exposed soil to standard protocols. Delegates work in teams of 4 or 5 so that an element of shared learning is part of the process. This has been a very positive aspect of the courses we have run to date. The course has attracted professionals from agricultural and environmental consultancies but is also very popular with research students and has formed a part of an Advanced Training Programme in Soil Science for postgraduates. As there is only one soil science degree course remaining in the UK, many students on their admission do not have a background in field-based pedology and lack an understanding of soil in the context of landscape scale soil functions. Feedback to date has been very positive.