

Making Fieldwork Valuable: Designing fieldwork programmes to meet the needs of young geologists

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This work presents the culmination of many years' in designing and operating field courses for students studying Geology at post-16 level in the context of the British schooling system. Provided is a toolkit, and accompanying rationale, for the educators use when building a sustainable and manageable programme of fieldwork for young geologists. Many educators, particularly under the confines of new regulations have found the promise of increased paper work and accountability challenging and consequently field courses often play a peripheral, even non-existent role in the scheme of work for a large number of young geologists.

The process of designing a suitable programme of field study must take account of the relevant stakeholders, chief among these are the views of students and staff but also those of parents, potential destination universities, exam boards and qualification accrediting groups. An audit of desired characteristics a programme of fieldwork would contain was completed using information gained through first hand research with students as well as in conversation with local universities. The results of this audit highlighted several confining factors ranging from the potential cost implications for school and parents, the extent to which content would support learning in class, and the feasibility of achieving all characteristics given limitations on staff and time.

Student perceptions of the value of fieldwork were gauged through various means; group interviews were conducted during a number of academic years, field course evaluations were completed following excursions, and questionnaires were distributed at the close of the 2014-2015 academic year. Findings demonstrated that student perceptions of the benefits offered by fieldwork were several fold; chiefly students felt the inclusion of fieldwork was a very important motivator in their decision to study the subject and maintain curiosity in their studies, the belief that fieldwork acts as a consolidator to abstract ideas in class and the importance of its role in team building exercises were also broadly held views. The strength of opinion demonstrated by students reinforces the importance of decisions made regarding fieldwork.

Following the initial auditing stage potential field sites were then investigated by staff and assessed for their potential to meet the desired characteristics, where promise was shown these localities were then developed into individual courses where discrete skills could be developed. By assembling together the range of learning outcomes from each individual field trip a narrative 'learning journey' was developed with a clear end goal.

Having been through this process and seeing the positive effects on student progress this work presents a toolkit to educators to provide assistance and framework in the development of further programmes of field study through equally considered design.