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"Access Anglesey": Delivering and Evaluating an Accessible and Inclusive Field Class

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"Access Anglesey" is an accessible and inclusive one week residential field class that ran in September 2018. It was designed and delivered as part of the Embedding and Sustaining Inclusive STEM Practices (IncSTEM) project, funded by the Office for Students (OfS). The IncSTEM project addresses inequalities in higher education by scaling up inclusive educational practices and reducing/removing barriers impeding students with disabilities. Fieldwork, with its multifaceted challenges, from adverse weather conditions to unexpected changes in schedule, is known to present significant difficulties for students with disabilities, which can act as barriers to engagement with learning. Delivering an independent field class specifically designed to be accessible and inclusive provides an opportunity to explore these barriers outside of the constraints and assessment requirements of fieldwork delivered within an undergraduate programme. The Access Anglesey field class had four main aims: 1) to deliver an inclusive fieldwork experience to a mixed cohort of students (i.e. with and without a disclosed disability); 2) to evaluate different approaches to making field teaching inclusive; 3) to investigate the viability of inclusive fieldwork in different types of field locations; and 4) to identify best practice in inclusive field class design which can be further disseminated. To capture the breadth of experiences during the field activity there were four participating groups: students with and without a disclosed disability, attending the field class (n=14); staff, presenting the field class (n=6); project observers, collecting data to investigate participant experiences and evaluate the effectiveness of the fieldwork design and delivery (n=2); and participant observers, staff from other universities who there to observe, participate and learn (n=4). Survey and interview data were collected from participants before, during and after the field trip. Preliminary findings highlight the variability in experience among students with different types of disability, and provide valuable insight into aspects of pedagogic design which contribute to the delivery of accessible and inclusive fieldwork. We also consider the implications for improving access to geoscience fieldwork, and the geosciences more generally.