

Why local fieldwork?

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Ofsted and QCA reports, and the findings from previous RGS-IBG education projects, suggest that the potential for fieldwork to be embedded in the curriculum and linked to the local area is all too often not realised, to the detriment of the students' experience.

Fieldwork in your local area is open to a variety of interpretations, and can include activities:

- within the grounds of your school
- within the town, village or city your school is located in
- during pupils' journey to school
- within walking distance of schools or pupils' homes
- a short coach ride away
- in areas known to you and your students and used on a regular basis

This type of fieldwork can be adapted to fit into most schemes of work, and can be run as a whole day of activities or fitted into the space of one lesson. While most teachers look forward to taking their students to places they would not normally visit, local fieldwork should be used as an extension of the experiences gained through fieldwork further afield, and to increase the opportunity for students to learn geography outside the classroom.

Working locally to your school can mean having the potential to know your fieldwork destination beforehand, and being able to return for further analysis, enquiry and data collection over a period of time if necessary. Encouraging your students to look closely at the area in which they live and learn gives students the opportunity to think about themselves as citizens and realise how the geography they learn in the classroom becomes reality in their local area and everyday lives. Once students understand the ideas, issues and conflicts in their locality, they are more likely to see wider issues and transfer what they know about geography to a national and even global scale. In short, local learning forms the basis behind what students see as 'real' geography and has the potential to show them how relevant the subject is in terms of how they and their community live their everyday lives.

Looking at your local area

Ordnance Survey run a 'Free Maps for Schools' programme, which provides schools with one Ordnance Survey 1:25 000 scale folded Explorer map for each Year 7/Primary 7 pupil on the school roll at the start of the autumn term, along with one additional map at a ratio of 1 per 25 pupils maps. This offer is open to all schools throughout England, Scotland and Wales teaching Year 7 / Primary 7 pupils. Register at <http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/freemapsfor11yearolds/>

Using an Ordnance Survey map you can easily identify and set up hypotheses and enquiry based learning based around potential fieldwork sites in your local area- if you know what you are looking for.

Rivers

Using an Ordnance Survey map, it is very easy to identify possible locations for *local rivers fieldwork*. A number of features on the map can help you to find appropriate and accessible sites.

Here are some useful tips:

- Look for river locations which can be accessed by public footpaths to avoid having to get permission to cross private land.

- Look for rivers within public parks or nature reserves that have a car park, as parking a coach or minibus on rural lanes or suburban streets may not always be possible.
- When looking for locations to enter the river, avoid weirs, which not only distort data but also can be very dangerous.
- Try and choose areas and times of the year where you know the river does not flow above Wellington boot height.

The exact choice of sites will depend on the topical focus of your fieldwork, the field techniques to be used and the time available. Topics may include:

- *Land use* – comparing land use (agriculture, residential, industrial) at different sites along a river.
- *River processes* – measuring and comparing river processes (channel width and depth, discharge, erosion and deposition, valley shape) at different stages of a river's course.
- *Human impact* – observing different types of water pollution and their sources, and assessing the impact on the river and its surroundings.
- *Management* – observing different management techniques (river bank strengthening, channel straightening, culverting, floodplains control) and their impact on river processes.
- *Resource use* – exploring different uses of rivers (energy, leisure, water supply) and identifying potential conflicts of interest.
- *Hazards* – visiting floodplain areas and mapping possible impacts of flooding.

Woodlands

Using an Ordnance Survey map, it is very easy to identify possible locations for *local woodlands fieldwork*. All areas of woodland are clearly marked in green, but a number of other features will help to find appropriate and accessible sites.

Here are some useful tips:

- Look out for the different tree symbols which indicate coniferous wood, non- coniferous wood and mixed wood. Coniferous wood is usually a sure sign of a managed wood or forest, as is the name 'plantation' rather than 'wood'.
- Some areas of woodland are unnamed – these will tend to be private, whereas named woodlands tend to have public access.
- Look for footpaths and bridleways marked through the wood – this is a good sign that the woods are open to the public.
- Look for other symbols which indicate the public access to the wood, such as car park, picnic site, viewpoint, historic site, information point.
- Woodlands with designated status are often open to the public too, for example:
 - diagonal blue lines over the text is a place of tourist interest, such as a visitor centre or nature trail.
 - a bold yellow or pale yellow border round an area signifies a National Park or Forest Park.
 - a pink border round a site with NT indicates land owned by the National Trust.

Choose sites depending on the topic of the fieldwork you intend to do and the field techniques to be used.

- *Ecosystems* (species and vegetation) – look for woodlands with different types of trees – conifers, broadleaves – to compare, also for woodlands of different ages – ancient, semi-ancient and new plantations.
- *Human impact* (footpath erosion, trampling) – look for woodlands which indicate unsurfaced paths as tarmac paths are no good for erosion studies!
- *Purpose* (visitor questionnaires and facilities mapping) – choose larger woodlands with good public access, particularly those within the city, for looking at leisure and tourism.
- *Management* – choose woodlands reflecting different purposes such as leisure, community, education, conservation, forestry to look for conflicts of interest.

Settlement

Using an Ordnance Survey map, it is very easy to identify possible locations for *local settlements fieldwork*. A number of features on the map can help you to find appropriate and accessible sites. Here are some useful tips:

- Look at the shape of settlements on the map and clues about structure (crossroads, railway station, river bridge)
- Look for indications of historical and archaeological sites within or near settlements (such as a fort, castle, monument) which can be used to explore reasons why the settlement was originally sited there.

The exact choice of sites will depend on the topical focus of your fieldwork, the field techniques to be used and the time available. Topics may include:

- *Settlement morphology* – comparison of different village shapes (linear, etc) and observations to discover the reasons for varying shapes.
- *Settlement hierarchy* – comparison of several sized settlements (hamlet, village, town, city) to investigate the provision of services.
- *Land use* – mapping the land use within different sectors of a town.
- *Environmental quality* – monitoring environmental quality using a variety of different measures of (noise, litter).

About the ‘Learning locally through fieldwork’ project

Funded by the DfES Geography Development Fund (2005-6), the aim of the ‘Learning locally through fieldwork’ project is to increase the realisation of the potential of locally based fieldwork and to enthuse students in the process. Its purpose is to improve the quality of teaching and learning applied to locally-based fieldwork in geography, enhancing the embedding of the fieldwork experience effectively into the curriculum and enabling teachers to demonstrate the relevance of geography to our lives and neighbourhoods.

A key area of expertise and activity for the Society centres around enhancing the learning about the local area. This is not only a specified part of the geography curriculum but embedded in the local area are examples of many of the wider issues studied in geography. Using the locality can also add much in terms of drawing on young people’s experiences and it is, and will continue to be, the focus of fieldwork during Key Stages 3 and 4.

A number of our recent and existing projects contribute collectively, from different perspectives, to this area of activity and add mutual value. These include the ‘Local Learning’ project undertaken as part of the Key Stage 3 offer in 2003/4 which exemplified three key issues at local levels; and the Becta-funded project (2005/6) on ‘Learning Locally through GIS’. The results of these projects can be found in the Our Work/Schools/Teachers section of the RGS-IBG website, www.rgs.org

Geography is the only subject in which fieldwork is statutory and when well delivered it is a great source of energy, enthusiasm and team working and it makes the essential link between classroom learning and the real world. Much of the fieldwork is locally-based half-day or day activities.

Outputs from the project include:

- Local resources guide including primary and secondary online source materials, together with an understanding of their geographical context.
- Regional network of liaison and knowledge, centred on the core project partners, to continue post project.
- An online portfolio of exemplar local field activities, with supporting schemes of work, that add value to the curriculum.
- At least one fully worked up field excursion and associated activities in the project local area for KS3 teachers, including non-specialist teachers.
- A model that can be replicated in other areas.

The project has ensured:

- A better and more varied fieldwork experience for young people; enriching their learning through geography.
- Field learning is more effectively related to an understanding of geographical processes and change in the local area; and embedded in the wider curriculum and drawing on young people's experience of the area.
- Teachers are more up to date and confident teaching about the local area and embedding field teaching into their schemes of work.
- Teachers have more knowledgeable about sources of local information.
- There is improved sharing of knowledge about an area by teachers and HE practitioners, and the ability for this to be continued into the future through enhanced HE/schools liaison.

Learning locally through fieldwork

2005-6

Education Department