

● Inclusive Expeditions Unit

Geography fieldwork often conjures up an image of strong, athletic young men climbing mountains, scrambling over glacial moraine or wading through torrents of rushing water. In reality the diversity of people who undertake fieldwork are as varied as the research themes they are following. It is the diversity of thought and experience of the individuals that make up a research group who add value through their alternative approaches and creative solutions. As in geography, the value of diversity is also embraced by industry - a team comprised of varied individuals, either of race, gender, disability or just individual educational and social backgrounds, can mean the difference between just delivering or generating a fantastic project.

It is this philosophy that brought about a partnership between the RGS-IBG and Shell to support and encourage Inclusive Fieldwork Practice, under the guidance of Shell secondee Dr Karen Darke, a professional field geologist and wheelchair user with overseas fieldwork experience. The Project aims to:

Communicate and Coordinate: Bridge the interfaces between partners with an interest in inclusive expedition and fieldwork practice

Develop: Encourage the development of a multi-disciplinary strategy by understanding and coordinating the use of current best practice.

Deliver: Share and illustrate examples of best practice by developing and disseminating information and resources.

This will be achieved by:

(1) Research and benchmarking the current best practice amongst a variety of organisations and produce a short guide to the information currently available.

The project will building on earlier work done by members of the Geography Discipline Network to identify the barriers that disabled students face to participating fully in fieldwork and the ways in which institutions, departments and tutors taking field classes can help to reduce or overcome them. This includes five useful guides to a variety of disabilities including those with mobility impairments, the blind or visual impaired, the deaf or hard of hearing, mental health difficulties, or hidden disabilities and Dyslexia.

An outline of what assistance exists to help implement practical changes for the inclusion of disabled students in fieldwork and related activities has been prepared.

A list of disability related education resources has been compiled to support this project.

(2) Using established communication pathways to contact and liase with partners.

(3) Perform a needs analysis through questionnaire and conversations with direct inclusive user groups (universities, schools, expedition organisations, field centres and individuals) to identify needs, concerns and issues.

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If you are working in a Geography Department of a UK Higher Education Institution and would be willing to complete a [short questionnaire](#) to contribute to this survey, please download a form [here](#).

(4) Working closely with these user groups to maintain a user-led focus by ensuring that real feelings and opinions are sourced.

(5) Gathering examples of inclusive fieldwork and expeditions good practice, stories and images.

The University of St Andrews School of Geography and Geosciences, teachability project, has offered to share its strategic plan for creating an Accessible Curriculum in Geoscience.

(6) Developing an inspirational cross-disciplinary, user-friendly web resource illustrating the research findings.

(7) An "Inclusive Fieldwork and Expedition Practice" training day was held at the RGS-IBG on Wednesday, 6th November 2002, and the notes from this event can be requested from the RGS-IBG (*.PDF).

Legislative changes

This project is being driven by legislative requirements surrounding access to education for disabled people. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 addressed issues of discrimination in employment and the provision of goods, facilities and services. It established that disabled people were entitled to equal treatment and adjustments to their working conditions to enable them to participate fully. Initially, education was exempt from this legislation, but with the passing of the Special Education Needs and Disability Rights Act (SENDA) in May 2001, puts greater responsibilities on Higher Educational establishments to provide inclusive opportunities for students. This will be particularly challenging for those subjects where fieldwork is a key component of the curriculum. This legislation defines various phases of implementation, from equality in admissions, student services and physical access in 2002, 2003 and 2005 respectively. An Overview of Disability Related Legislation that effects Education Providers has been prepared as a background to this project.

Financial assistance

The changes that educational bodies are required to make under SENDA will often involve financial expenditure. Financial help is available from various sources. An outline of the financial assistance available to help with inclusive course and fieldwork provision is given on the attached pages.

How you can be involved...

- If you are involved in provision of fieldwork or expeditions and want to share your experiences or learn about positive involvement of disabled people.
- If you are a disabled person either with experience, or wanting to get involved in fieldwork or an expedition.
- If you are a disabled student and considering beginning a course involving a fieldwork element, but would like information or advice.
- If you are involved in the development of opportunities for disabled people.

..... **Then please get in touch by emailing us eac@rgs.org**