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**Sarah Bonar**

**Teacher of Geography and International Rugby Player**

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**Royal Geographical Society**  
with IBG

Advancing geography  
and geographical learning



**Job title:** Teacher of Geography and International Rugby Player

**Location:** Loughborough, UK

**How did you get to where you are now?**

I went to Loughborough University to do a geography degree. I really enjoyed geography as it gave me a total escape from sport (I used to row before I became involved with rugby) - I spent so much time training it was nice to have a different focus.

After graduation, I worked for a sports charity and trust, it was a good experience but it wasn't as hands on with young people as I wanted it to be. That was when I realised that teaching would be a good career to go into. So following on from this I did my PGCE and I have almost completed two years as a qualified teacher.

I got into rugby after bumping into a local rugby coach who put me in touch with some clubs and everything went from there. I've stayed in the Loughborough area post-university so that I can still train at a premiership club - and I am quite near to East Midlands airport so that I can fly up to Scotland for camps quite easily. I have tournaments every year including the Six Nations

**W:** [www.rgs.org/iamageographer](http://www.rgs.org/iamageographer)

in February and March. I am really fortunate that my school and Scotland Rugby Union have been able to set up a contract which enables me to have some time off so that I can get in to camp ahead of the game. It can be quite stressful in terms of setting cover and marking, but it's worth it.

**Was there anything particularly useful that helped you get into this role?**

I enjoy working with young people so that was my biggest drive to get into teaching, but I also really enjoy geography – as cheesy as that sounds! I had some really good lecturers at university and teachers at school, which really ignited my passion for the subject and I wanted to share that. I understand that you're not going to get every child enjoying your subject but as long as you can get them taking something away from each lesson, then I have achieved something with my day.

**What do you do as part of your role?**

During rugby season my day-to-day usually involves a weight session in the morning before getting into work around 7.30am. I then prepare and teach my lessons for the day, and then I'll do some marking and lesson planning. After work I'll head to training in the evening, then depending on how busy it is, I will do a little marking before bed as well – so it's a pretty full-on schedule. But when I'm out of season it's not that bad!

**What skills and characteristics do you need for this role, apart from geographical knowledge?**

I think one of the main things you need, which helps with both teaching and international sport, is communication. Communicating with pupils, staff, players and coaches and being able to pitch your ideas at different levels or for different occasions, is a key skill in both aspects of my life.

Time management and organisation are also important to make sure that everything gets done when it needs to.

### **What do you enjoy most about your job?**

Probably the fact that I don't clock watch! I can rarely picture a time where I have ever clock-watched whilst teaching. No day is the same and the funny things that kids come out with definitely keeps you entertained.

### **Do you get to travel for your role?**

Most of my away rugby matches are generally in Europe, so I have travelled to Italy, France and Spain. We have got a tour coming up in September to South Africa, which is super exciting, but most of my travels with rugby up till this point have mainly been in Europe. If we qualify for the World Cup in 2021 we will get to go to New Zealand!

### **What are the opportunities for career progression? Where might you be in five years' time?**

That's a tricky one, as ideally I would like to be playing rugby. But if I was in teaching still, I would quite like to do a Masters in geography and take that back to the classroom. I would probably like to go down the head of year route as I quite like the more pastoral side of teaching.

### **What advice would you give to someone wanting to go in to this career?**

I think to do what you enjoy – again this is super cheesy – but life is too short. You have to do what makes you happy. With everything there will always be testing times but as long as you are in it for the right reasons you are going to progress. With teaching especially, I don't think it's a job that you can go into unless you are 100% behind the idea of it, because it comes with long hours and you can have testing times with pupils or work. You can apply the same to being an athlete, there will be times where you don't feel like training, but you know you need to do it and get it done, and as long as you enjoy it, and remember why you're doing it, you will do a good job.

### **Why did you choose geography? Why should others choose geography?**

I really enjoyed the subject and had really good teachers at secondary school and then college which I think can make a difference. Studying the subject at university opened up a whole different side to geography that you don't really access at school. I remember thinking of geography as just volcanoes and population, but at university we started looking at modules to do with how children interacted with different geographical spaces, feminist geographies and the geographies of sport – and you realise there is so much more to the discipline. It is an important subject because it looks at how humans interact with the world that we live in and it is so apparent with everything going on in current affairs and environmental issues such as climate change. I think it is an important subject for kids to at least have some understanding of.