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Dr Mark Allan

Teacher of Geography and Physics

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**Royal
Geographical
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning



Job title: Teacher of Geography and Physics

Organisation: Whitburn Church of England Academy

Location: Whitburn, Sunderland, UK

How did you get to where you are now?

Prior to teaching, I completed a Bachelor's degree in geography and a Master's degree in Polar and Alpine Change. Following this, I was fortunate enough to secure a scholarship to complete my PhD which focussed on landslides occurring above and around glaciers in the European Alps. Following the completion of my PhD, I trained to become a teacher and qualified in 2018. I am now nearing the end of my NQT year and have just been offered a permanent contract as a teacher of geography and physics. I was one of the first cohort of RGS-IBG scholars for teacher training and without this, and the fantastic CPD opportunities that came with it, I truly believe that I wouldn't have been as successful through my training and early career as I have been.

What do you do as part of your role?

I'm a newly qualified teacher of geography and physics at Whitburn Church of England Academy

W: www.rgs.org/geographyprofessionals

in Sunderland. In a typical week, I deliver lessons to pupils ranging in age from 11 to 18 across Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 including subjects from across the geography spectrum; from slum conditions in Mumbai to animal and plant adaptations in the Amazon Rainforest, statistical data skills to cartographic techniques and GIS.

As well as this, I am a form tutor for a group of Year 7 pupils; a pastoral role which involves a wide variety of responsibilities including personal development and individual mentoring, as well as a contact point with home to discuss achievements and concerns.

What do you enjoy most about your job?


Geography is hugely important to what I do, and I try my best to convey my passion for the subject in every lesson I create and deliver. The most enjoyable aspect of the job is when you can share that passion and enthusiasm with children in the classroom. Hearing that a pupil is opting to pursue geography in their education beyond Key Stage 3 is an immensely satisfying feeling and following them through that journey across GCSE and even onto A Level is an opportunity I'm very thankful for.

Do you get to travel for your role?

Opportunity for travel is limited with the current funding situation in schools; however, we strive to include an element of fieldwork in every year for our geography pupils. We're fortunate enough to be very close to the beach, so fieldwork with a focus on coastal processes and landforms is very accessible for us and the pupils always enjoy an opportunity to learn away from the classroom.

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

There are a number of opportunities for career progression within teaching and I hope to adopt a



leadership role as soon as possible after my year as an NQT. Typically, teachers could pursue pastoral roles such as head of year or academic positions such as subject leads or heads of discipline. I hope to pursue the latter and feel my background in academia will make me a suitable candidate.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to go into this career?

Not many teachers have completed a Masters and/or a PhD before commencing their training but those who have spent a little longer after their degrees either within academia or working elsewhere, and reap the benefits of the skill sets they develop whilst doing so. I have found that coming to teacher training after my PhD has placed me at a significant advantage, and I would encourage students to strongly consider this as a route.

It's really important that you are capable of managing your time whilst teaching as it's all too easy to allow yourself to be overwhelmed by the workload. Don't be put off by the intensity of the job, and understand that if you have a true passion for geography, working with children and disseminating knowledge, then it is an eternally rewarding career to pursue.

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

I chose geography, not because I had a specific career in mind, but because it was a topic that interested me most, and I think that's really important. I'm now fortunate enough to work in a profession where I have an opportunity to share my knowledge, passion and enthusiasm of geography to the next generation day-in day-out. Now, more than ever, geography is of great importance as the global population faces new opportunities and challenges. If our next generation of leaders are going to tackle these, then they require a solid education in which they learn about physical processes and human interactions.