

Rex Walford Award 2026

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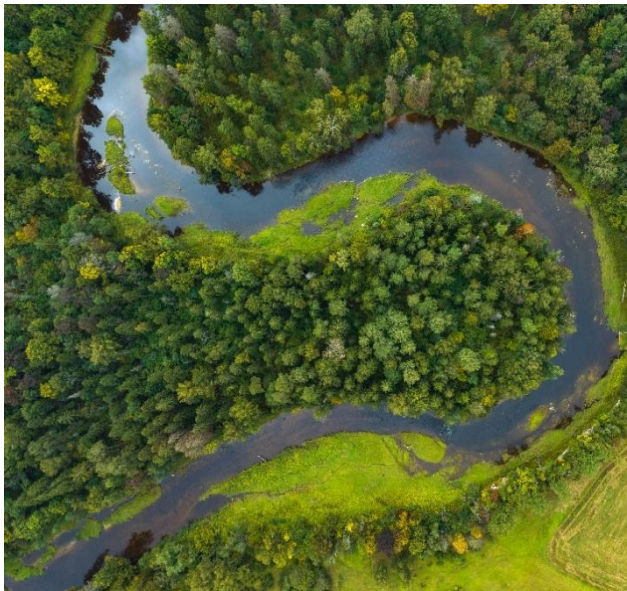
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The theme for the Rex Walford Award 2026 is:

From Source to Sea



Let's explore the world's river systems.

Rivers are the lifeblood of our planet - carrying water, nutrients and energy across vast distances. They sustain communities, support wildlife, and shape the landscapes we depend on to live. From the smallest stream to the widest river, these flowing waters connect mountains to oceans and people to nature. They remind us that a sustainable and thriving environment is not just a resource, but a responsibility that we all share. As we learn more about the world's rivers, we also understand that it is our duty to protect them for future generations.

As they transport freshwater across continents, sustaining ecosystems, wildlife, and the billions of people who rely on them for drinking water, rivers also shape our landscapes through erosion and deposition. Carving valleys, forming striking features, creating fertile floodplains ideal for farming and influencing settlement, rivers provide physical boundaries between places and have also facilitated the growth of many of the urban areas we inhabit today. Rivers play a key role in the global water cycle, carrying rainfall from source to sea and helping to regulate climate. They provide transportation opportunities, trade routes, tourism, recreation and sustain the lives of a wide range of species, supporting fish, birds, mammals, and countless aquatic organisms.

But rivers can also be a source of conflict; where water is a shared commodity 'water wars' can be common. When flood management or hydroelectric power produced by dams happens upstream,

dire consequences can fall on countries located downstream. And who owns this water? Industry and the misuse of rivers can lead to pollution and the degradation of river ecosystems, threatening both wildlife and the communities that depend on rivers to live. Flooding is a big issue, and the management of rivers to predict, mitigate and prevent the impacts of flooding is essential for protecting communities, safeguarding ecosystems, and reducing long-term environmental and economic damage.

Entering the competition

The Rex Walford Award is for trainees or teachers who are in an early career stage (ideally first six years), including students enrolled on a PGCE, SCITT or School Direct programmes, alongside Teach First geographers, ECTs and colleagues at any other early career stage.

For this year's Rex Walford Award, we are asking trainee or early career teachers of geography in their first six years of teaching to create at least two lessons that explore the theme 'From Source to Sea'.

We are interested to see lesson plans and accompanying resources that link directly to the curriculum and encourage students to think about any of the following:

- A range of named rivers, showcasing the processes that shape them, the features they create, and the many ways they are used by both people and nature.
- Curriculum topics such as energy production, conflict, ecosystems, sustainability, trade and more – we want to see how your resources help young people to understand why our rivers are so important.
- Themes across human and physical geography.

The lessons created can be aimed at any Key Stage eligible to enter the Young Geographer of the Year competition (KS2-KS5), and must include:

- At least 2 lesson plans
- Resources to accompany those lessons

We encourage entrants to be creative in their lesson ideas, whilst maintaining strong links to curriculum or specification content.

There is no set format for the lesson plans; please use the format you are used to using in your school.

We **do not** have a preferred style for submissions. We are looking for eye-catching, innovative, informative and accurate submissions which will encourage students to think geographically and explore connections between places.

Entrants may also wish to encourage their students to create their own poster (or Esri StoryMap for KS5) on the theme 'From Source to Sea' and enter it into our Young Geographer of the Year competition 2026.

For reference, the Young Geographer of the Year competition asks students to create:

Key Stage 2 criteria: A poster exploring at least one named river, exploring the processes that shape rivers, the features they create, and the many ways they are used by both people and nature.

Key Stage 3 criteria: A poster exploring at least two named rivers, exploring the processes that shape rivers, the features they create, and the many ways they are used by both people and nature across at least three geographical themes.

Key Stage 4 criteria: A poster exploring at least three named rivers, exploring the processes that shape rivers, the features they create, and the many ways they are used by both people and nature across a range of geographical themes, showcasing the challenges and solutions

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associated with the use of rivers.

Key Stage 5 criteria: A poster or Esri StoryMap exploring multiple named rivers, exploring the processes that shape rivers, the features they create, and the many ways they are used by both people and nature across a range of geographical themes, showcasing the challenges and solutions associated with the use of rivers and demonstrating understanding of connections.

The deadline for receipt of all Rex Walford Award entries is **Friday 2 October 2026 at 5.00pm**. Entries received after this time will not be accepted.

All entries must be emailed to competitions@rgs.org with 'Rex Walford Award' as the email title. Please provide all documents, plus details of your name, address, contact details and where you are teaching or training.

We cannot accept or judge any entries submitted by post.

Due to the volume of entries, we regret that we are unable to contact unsuccessful entrants or provide individual feedback.

The winning entry will be hosted as a resource at www.rgs.org/resources.

Previous entrants materials can be viewed on [our website](#).

Important notice

By taking part in the Rex Walford Award and submitting your entry to the RGS-IBG, you are providing agreement that the RGS-IBG may post your materials on our website and agree to ensure that all images used are copyright free.

Use of AI

AI checks may be used to determine whether the work is the teacher's own and presented 'in the spirit of the competition'. Students applying to university are given the following guidance by UCAS about the use of AI for personal statements. [A guide to using AI and ChatGPT with your personal statement | UCAS](#). Teachers may follow the same guidance when entering this competition. For example, they must not use an AI system to generate all or a large part of the text submitted as their own. Teachers can also consult DfE guidance [Generative artificial intelligence \(AI\) in education - GOV.UK](#). There are age limits associated with the use of AI tools.

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