Fieldwork Audit Tool

Introduction

➢ The fieldwork audit tool is aimed at staff involved in the provision of fieldwork activities in Higher Education.

➢ It is designed to allow you to examine and develop your current practice by highlighting strengths and weaknesses.

➢ By working through the questions, scoring the answers and discussing the outcome with colleagues it should allow you to reflect on aspects of good practice and identify where change might be needed.

➢ This audit can be used in relation to one specific fieldwork event or to the provision of fieldwork experiences across a whole module.

➢ This audit is quite wide-ranging, so work through relevant questions only OR select a subsection of interest.

Scoring

➢ Work through the relevant questions and score each answer on the following scale:
   o Score 0 if the audit point has not been seriously considered at all.
   o Score 1-4 if the audit point has been considered but reflection indicates that it is poorly (1), partially (2), adequately (3) or optimally (4) satisfied.

➢ To gain most from the use of the audit tool you need to think clearly about each question, and in some cases consider the question from the student perspective as well.

On completion of the audit

➢ Review those aspects which scored 2 or lower.

➢ Is it realistic to aim to increase the score in these areas?

➢ Are there potential quick wins? Is there anything that could be done very easily that is not costly in terms of resources or time but which would improve fieldwork provision to students.

➢ Are there any changes needed that require long-term planning?

➢ Formulate an action plan to instigate any required changes.

➢ It may be useful to repeat the audit in 12-24 months to review the effects of any changes made to your fieldwork provision.

Finally, this tool is for you to use in whichever way suits you best. We hope it helps you to enhance fieldwork learning for your students.

At the programme/course[1] level (i.e overall BSc or MSc) – do you:

	Score
Ensure the fieldwork elements map clearly onto the desired programme outcomes?	
Explain to students at the start of the programme how fieldwork is integrated into the overall programme?	
Make students are aware of any additional costs related to fieldwork that may be incurred during their studies?	
Ensure that relevant benchmark statements, professional accreditation and guidance from learned societies are consulted and taken into account?	
Ensure that all colleagues involved in elements of the fieldwork provision are aware of the aims of the overall fieldwork programme?	
Regularly review the relevance and modernity of the fieldwork elements within the programme?	
Ensure field work and field site is accessible for students; including, where reasonable, students with disabilities and learning support needs?	
Refer to latest pedagogic literature for ideas on how to enhance student learning on fieldwork?	
Take into account feedback from previous students on their fieldwork experience and how it could be potentially improved?	
Explain which elements of the fieldwork are compulsory and which elements are optional	
Explain which elements, if any, that students will have to pay extra for?	
Consider a review of equal opportunities for fieldwork including issues of gender, race/culture, age, domestic arrangements, sexuality, finance and degree of physical fitness?	
Ensure the field programme and supporting documents align with your institutional accessibility guidance	
Ensure the field programme and supporting documents align with your institutional policy in the context of sustainability	
Consider the carbon footprint and other related costs of overseas fieldtrips? Are there any local sites that could provide the same learning outcomes?	
Consider how the costs of fieldwork (both financial and time) could be reduced/optimised?	

Before or at the start of the unit/module[2] – do you:

	Score
Explain to the students the fieldwork elements to be undertaken during the module and the expected learning outcomes?	
Make sure all relevant material is collated in a logical manner for instance on the Institutional VLE	
Consider the future employment potential of the students when devising the skill set to be developed during fieldwork?	
Explain to the students how the fieldwork relates to other elements of the module or to elements in other modules?	

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[1] Meaning a programme of study; for instance a complete BSc or MSc or any substantive lesser qualification.
[2] Meaning a block of credit bearing study within a given programme or course.

Encourage students to disclose [in confidence] any mental or physical disabilities in advance of the fieldwork and arrange the provision of any support they require while on fieldwork?	
Explain the documentation the students are required to complete before undertaking fieldwork?	
Provide guidance on statistical methods and research processes that are likely to be used?	
Provide handouts, kit list and suggest additional texts to enable the students to prepare?	
Provide a hardship fund for students to attend compulsory fieldtrips?	
Consider issues related to sustainability; i.e material use and transport?	
Ensure the residential accommodation and cooking arrangements are suitable for all students and give students the opportunity to raise any anxieties they may have?	
Ensure students are aware of the learning outcomes for the module?	
Ensure students are aware of the assessment for the module?	
Arrange pre-trip meetings to allow students to get to know one another?	
Ask permission from the landowner to conduct fieldwork at each site?	
Ensure that access rights and site regulations are adhered to?	
Complete a full risk assessment and ask the students to consider the safety aspects of the fieldwork?	
Provide sufficient time and help for students to plan their work, develop their research ideas and form hypotheses?	
Ask students to submit a field plan in advance of setting off for the field?	
Consider the most appropriate staffing team (a mixture of post-graduates, post-docs, academic staff, technicians and study centre staff)?	

During fieldwork – do you:

	Score
Help establish social connections between the students, for example, using small group exercises or 'ice-breakers'?	
Encourage the development of a range of both subject-specific and generic/transferrable skills?	
Check whether any students are not engaging with their peers or appear to be isolated when undertaking group activity	
Ensure there is adequate down time	
Create a novel learning space by exploiting the unique characteristics of the field environment?	
Ensure that there are sufficient numbers of staff trained in first aid?	
Review and adapt the risk assessment during fieldwork?	
Ensure students know where to go for advice and guidance?	
Ensure students are aware of access to facilities such as shops and toilets?	
Ensure students are aware of emergency procedures?	
Maintain the appropriate student:staff ratio?	
Consider the impact of the fieldwork (especially biological sampling) on the local environment?	
Consider whether there are any ethical or sustainability issues involved in the fieldwork?	

Using technology in fieldwork - do you:

	Score
Provide guidance on the use of hi-tech field equipment and/or arrange for students to practice beforehand?	
Suggest that the students start a social networking site or fieldwork blog to allow them interact?	
Consider ways that information technology, virtual field trips and other specialist technologies could enhance fieldwork learning?	
Provide personal digital equipment for the students to collate their data?	
Encourage the use of technologies (i.e. information sharing and social networking facilities) to assist communication and sharing of data between students?	
Provide field instrumentation (that may/may not interface with computers) for students to learn how to use to collect data?	
Provide electronic field guides or iPhone applications for identification purposes?	
Incorporate GPS capabilities into field equipment?	

Assessment and feedback – do you:

	Score
Provide a clear set of assessment criteria to the students?	
Ensure the learning outcomes and assessment are aligned?	
Use a suitable and fair method for assessing group work?	
Use a variety of assessment methods both during and after the field activity?	
Use a mixture of formative and summative assessment?	
Provide informal feedback during field activities?	
Ensure assessment is completed and returned with feedback in a timely manner?	

Post-fieldwork – do you:

	Score
Provide ways for the students to reflect on their learning and/or apply the learning gained from their field experience?	
Encourage students to feedback their opinions on their fieldwork experience?	
Personally reflect on the experience and student evaluation and make changes to future fieldwork where appropriate?	
Thank land owners and others for the running of the field event?	
Discuss and share your ideas on how to provide a good quality field learning experience with colleagues?	

This audit tool was developed by the Enhancing Fieldwork learning team and it is an output from the Higher Education Academy NFTS funded project 'Enhancing Fieldwork Learning' www.enhancingfieldwork.org.uk.

The audit draws on previous audit tools (Feedback audit tool, University of Reading, Work Placement Audit tool, UK Centre for Biosciences & the Induction Audit tool, University of Ulster) and several published works:

Clark, K. , Welsh, K. , Mauchline, A. , France, D. , Whalley, W. , Park, J. (2021) Do educators realise the value of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) in fieldwork learning?. Journal of Geography in Higher Education , 45 (2). pp. 255-278. ISSN: 1466-1845 | doi: https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2020.1808880

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