Enhancing Fieldwork Learning Showcase 2026

Bridging the Divide

At the University of Southampton (Highfield Campus and City Campus)

Tuesday 8th and Wednesday 9th September 2025

Book of Abstracts

University of Southampton

School of Geography and Environmental Science

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Enhancing Fieldwork Learning Showcase Programme

University of Southampton

Day One – Tuesday 8th September 2026 **Hartley Suite (Building 38, Highfield Campus)**	
Time	***Description***
10:30 to 11:00	*Registration / tea and coffee*
11:00 to 11:10	*Welcome: Derek France & Kate Parks*
11:10 to 11:40	*Session 1 Chair: Brian Whalley* *Keynote 1 Nick Worsfold - Field-based learning and AI in education: bridging the divide between past, present and future*
11:40 to 12:40	Session 1 - Bridging digital divides (4 x 10 min talks then 20 min Q&A)
	Yinka Adeniji - Bridging AI and Real-World Field Learning Through Passive Acoustic Monitoring in Ecology
	Addy Pope and Kiaran Ratcliffe - GeoAI for the field ready students of today
	Phil Wheeler, Julia Cooke, Kadmiel Maseyk, Sarah Davies, Trevor Collins, Kate Bradshaw, Ben Hawkridge - 'Equivalent', not 'Alternative': bridging the divide between online and in-person student experience in fieldwork.
	Catherine Mottram, Dylan Stevenson and Trevor Collins - Bridging the Fieldwork Divide: Inclusive and hybrid approaches to geology fieldwork in the NW Highlands
	Questions & Discussion
12:40 to 13:40	*LUNCH*
13:40 to 14:30	Session 2 - Bridging geographical and geopolitical divides (3 x 10 mins; 20 min Q&A) Chair: Julian Park
	Hooman Foroughmand Araabi (UWE) & Eman Nasr (GCET) - NEW EYES: A Report on Student Cultural Exchange Field Trips – GCET/UWE 2026
	Richard Billington - Bringing Positive Impact to Fieldwork

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	Questions & Discussion
	Digital posters & resources
14:30 to 14:45	*Coffee break*
14:45 to 15:45	Interactive session • SoGES team - *Field sensing equipment* • Hiran Vegad - *Demonstration of ASD FieldSpec 4* • Cameron McAuliffe - *Demonstration of immersive technologies*
15:45 to 16:00	*Wrap up - Day one review*

Note: Dinner in Southampton City Centre at Papillon, 61 Commercial Rd, Southampton SO15 1GG (https://papillon-southampton.co.uk). Meet at the restaurant at 7:00pm for 7:30pm meal.

Day Two – Wednesday 9th September 2026 **Seminar Rooms 135/2063 and 2065 (Sir James Matthews Building at City Campus)**	
Time	***Description***
09:00 to 09:30	*Session Chair: Trevor Collins* *Keynote 2. Alan Parkinson - You should get out more…*
09:30 to 10:30	Session 3 talks - Bridging to HE and beyond (4 x 10 mins; 20 min Q&A)
	Geoff Main - From the Mountains to the Oceans: Bridging the ‘field’work “divide”
	Martin Barker, Michael Stratigos and Lesley Lancaster - Running a field course across the disciplines
	Liz Hamilton and Lesley Batty - Field Skills to Future Employability: Bridging Academic Skills and Real-World Practice
	Andy Wakefield - Learner-generated audio trails: nature connection
	Questions & Discussion
10:30 to 10:45	*Coffee Break*

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10:45 to 11:45	*Workshop 1 Julie Peacock, Liam Taylor, Myfanwy Howarth, Johanna Fenton, Keeley McCabe - Bridging Gaps in Geography Fieldwork: Prior Experience, Hidden Curriculum and Inclusive Support*
11:45 to 12:45	Session 4 talks - Bridging expectation gaps (4 x 10 mins; 20 min Q&A)
	Chair: Julia Cooke
	Alan Marvell and David Simm - Bridging the divide between pedagogy and students' experiences
	Moya Burns, Ishwaq Ali, Scarlett Asher, Stuart Desjardins, Diljot Gill, Hannah Harrison, Ceri Jones, Sandra Lee, Adam Tester - Bridging the accessibility divide in field-based learning using place-based approaches
	Jonathan Wessell - Examining Experiential Learning Practices at Three Universities across the UK
	Tory Milner - Increasing student employability & technical skill development through fieldwork: hydrology in action!
12:45 to 13:00	*Wrap up - Day two review / closing and next steps*

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Session 1. Bridging the digital divides

Chair: Brian Whalley

Keynote 1. Field-based learning and AI in education: bridging the divide between past, present and future

Nick Worsfold, Brunel University (nicholas.worsfold@brunel.ac.uk)

Abstract

The emergence of AI challenges us to rethink our field-based teaching. At the same time, we must ask ourselves: how does our knowledge of field-based teaching and learning inform our wider response to the impact of generative AI on education? Here, I present a framework for incorporating different forms of AI – and none – into our field courses and broader academic programmes. I will then explore the role that field-based activities might play in ensuring assessment validity and security in an equitable way and argue that the emergence of generative AI has made the field course more vital than ever – but in a way that presents educators with some difficult questions.

Bridging AI and Real-World Field Learning Through Passive Acoustic Monitoring in Ecology

Yinka Adeniji, Imperial College London (y.adeniji25@imperial.ac.uk)

Keywords

Passive acoustic monitoring; bioacoustics; machine learning; field ecology; student supervision

Abstract

Field-based learning remains central to ecology education, yet a persistent divide exists between traditional field teaching and the data-driven, technology-enabled approaches now shaping ecological research. This presentation draws on direct experience supervising postgraduate students through passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) field deployments and AI-assisted bioacoustic analysis workflows, to explore how this divide can be meaningfully closed.

Working across remote UK island breeding colonies including Skomer, Lundy, Rum, Scilly and the Copeland Islands, students have engaged with the full ecological research pipeline: deploying autonomous AudioMoth and SongMeter Micro recorders, navigating the realities of imperfect detection and environmental noise, performing manual annotation of complex multi-syllable calls, and applying machine learning tools such as BirdNET for large-scale sound classification. Alongside these AI-assisted approaches, students engage with industry-standard acoustic analysis software including Raven Pro, Kaleidoscope Pro, and R packages such as warbleR, seewave, and ohun for signal detection, feature extraction, and statistical modelling. This multi-tool environment

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reflects the genuine complexity of professional bioacoustic practice, where no single platform solves every problem.

The presentation reflects on how PAM-based workflows offer a compelling bridge between observational field ecology and contemporary digital practice, and how supervising students through genuine research challenges rather than simulated ones transforms both their technical skills and ecological thinking. Practical considerations around equipment access, field logistics, and analytical scaffolding will also be discussed.

This work contributes to a growing conversation about how ecology field education can evolve to better reflect the interdisciplinary, technology-rich realities of modern conservation science.

GeoAI for the field ready students of today

Addy Pope and Kiaran Ratcliffe

Contact: Addy Pope, Esri UK (apope@esriuk.com)

Keywords

AI; GeoAI; ArcGIS; fieldwork

Abstract

AI is everywhere and will impact both teaching and learning. We cannot ignore it and should be able to use it to enhance our teaching and our students' learning experience. In this session we will focus specifically on how we can use AI in field data collection. Survey 123 has AI embedded in it to help users collect better information, quicker. We will show you:

1. Survey design assistant The Survey123 Assistant uses AI to help you build surveys from scratch. Or to improve your 1st draft, suggesting where you might want to choose a different data format.
2. AI-powered data capture This is the most interesting area for fieldwork. Three capabilities were added in late 2025:
    - Image analysis - allows the AI to identify objects, read text, or analyse patterns in images captured during data collection, so field workers don't have to manually type descriptions or select categories after taking a photo.
    - Text analysis - extracts information from text using a prompt, useful for processing open-ended responses or pulling structured data from typed notes.
    - Audio transcription - transcribes audio recordings into text, letting surveyors speak their observations rather than type them.

These tools will help students collect data more efficiently and are also ideal for students who may have difficulty collection data in more traditional way. We can cover anything else that may have been released since we wrote this too!

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'Equivalent', not 'Alternative': bridging the divide between online and in-person student experience in fieldwork

Philip Wheeler, Julia Cooke, Kadmiel Maseyk, Sarah Davies, Trevor Collins, Kate Bradshaw and Ben Hawkridge

Contact: Philip Wheeler, The Open University (philip.wheeler@open.ac.uk)

Keywords

Online; distance learning

Abstract

Online or virtual fieldwork has been used to provide alternative fieldwork learning for students who are unable to access field sites in person. These activities usually aim to either replicate aspects of the in-person experience or provide a separate learning experience. Often this results in a distinct or different experience for students studying online.

The Open University offers distance learning programmes where the primary mode of delivery is online, with a small number of, usually optional, in-person learning events. Cohorts on modules are typically in the mid to high hundreds of students. Students studying stage 2 Environmental Science are required to take a field course: around one quarter choose a residential option, while three quarters choose an online option.

We set out to design and deliver a multi-day Environmental Science field course that would provide equivalent (rather than alternative) experiences for students studying either online or in-person. Building on a review and reflection of several years' experience of delivering online and in-person fieldwork to OU Environmental Science students, we designed a course model that mapped across both modes of delivery right from the start. We introduce this model, the way it was implemented in in-person and online settings and discuss its first presentation, alongside identifying existing challenges to be addressed with future work.

Bridging the Fieldwork Divide: Inclusive and hybrid approaches to geology fieldwork in the NW Highlands

Catherine Mottram, Dylan Stevenson, University of Portsmouth and

Trevor Collins, The Open University

Contact: Catherine Mottram, University of Portsmouth (catherine.mottram@port.ac.uk)

Abstract

Fieldwork is central to undergraduate geoscience education, yet it can also present significant barriers to participation for students with diverse physical, neurodivergent and mental health needs. This presentation explores approaches to "bridging the divide" between accessibility and authentic field experiences through a first-year geology field course based in the Northwest Highlands of Scotland.

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The field area provides an iconic setting for introducing students to key concepts in Earth history and tectonics, including the ~3 Ga Lewisian gneiss, the unconformable relationships with the overlying Torridonian and Cambro–Ordovician successions, and later deformation during the Caledonian orogeny. However, the remoteness and rugged terrain that make this location geologically exceptional can also limit student access.

We present a suite of inclusive and flexible teaching strategies designed to widen participation and support student success. These include the: development of a Google Earth–based virtual fieldtrip integrating outcrop-scale video, datasets, and interpretative guidance; use of live-streaming technologies to enable real-time remote participation in field activities; and deployment of off-road, rugged wheelchairs to facilitate physical access to key sites. These approaches have been implemented to support students with physical disabilities, autism spectrum conditions, and mental health challenges within the cohort.

Drawing on student feedback and staff experience, we evaluate the strengths and limitations of in-person, hybrid, and fully online fieldwork models. We highlight how combining digital tools with targeted in-field adaptations can enhance inclusivity without compromising disciplinary authenticity. The session will reflect on practical challenges, resource implications and opportunities to embed accessible fieldwork practices more widely across geoscience curricula.

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Session 2. Bridging geographical and geopolitical divides

Chair: Julian Park

NEW EYES: A Report on Student Cultural Exchange Field Trips – GCET/UWE 2026

Hooman Foroughmand Araabi, University of the West of England and

Eman Nasr, Global College of Engineering and Technology, Oman

Contact: Hooman Foroughmand Araabi, University of the West of England, UK (hooman.foroughmandaraabi@uwe.ac.uk)

Keywords

Cultural exchange; fieldtrip; Oman; site visit

Abstract

Academic field trips in built environment studies remain an essential component of education. Nevertheless, concerns around environmental impact, tourism, host community effects, travel costs, safety risks, and student inclusivity make it necessary to continually assess the cost–benefit of such activities.

Drawing on students' and staff's feedback and reflections, this presentation shares findings and future plans from two 2026 field trips within the Transnational Education Learning & Teaching (L&T) partnership between the University of the West of England (UWE) and the Global College of Engineering and Technology (GCET), Oman. Framed as a week-long cultural exchange, they involved 24 UWE students travelling to Oman and 15 GCET students travelling to the UK.

Inspired by Marcel Proust's observation that ""The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes"", we argue that such exchanges represent, arguably, the most significant moments of learning, dislocation, and expanded perspective available to students in geographically and geopolitically distinct contexts. Peer-to-peer connections and integrations forged through these exchanges suggest that collaborative encounters have the potential to challenge and dismantle the divisions imposed by geographical, institutional, and political boundaries.

Bringing Positive Impact to Fieldwork

Richard Billington, Hartpury University (richard.billington@hartpury.ac.uk)

Keywords

Sustainability; carbon offset; mitigation of tourist impacts; social sustainability; positive impact

Abstract

Field work provides so much more than just academic credits, but an overseas field course always hangs under questions of cost and sustainability in the current climate. By

engaging with the destination community and degree-relevant local projects, we feel that we have managed to significantly enhance the learning experience and address questions of sustainability and value in the bigger senses of those words. This approach allowed opening meaningful conversations about sustainability in a tangible sense for learners.

On a field course to the Azores, we used an ethos of positive impact, getting learners involved in local, degree-relevant, projects to address learning outcomes and our footprint as well as providing unique learning experiences and helping the local environment. Students collected and prepared seeds for seed bank storage or planting in local reforestation projects and spent half a day removing invasive plants alongside local government workers. All students felt that they were contributing something tangibly important to the local environment and offsetting their own footprint in a more useful way than that offered by airlines with a nominal payment (and who knows where that goes?).

We removed 1.8 tonnes of invasive plants and provided seeds of endemic species for many years to come. Working with local organisations in a formal sense gave the students an introduction to the realities of conservation work abroad. Similar initiatives can be incorporated into all types of field work, and I will discuss ideas around the concept of positive impact.

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Interactive session

- SoGES team - *Field sensing equipment*
- Hiran Vegad - *Demonstration of ASD FieldSpec 4*
- Cameron McAuliffe - *Demonstration of immersive technologies*

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Session 3. Bridging to higher education and beyond

Chair: Trevor Collins

Keynote 2. You should get out more...

Alan Parkinson, King's Ely Prep / Royal Geographical Society (a.parkinson@gmail.com)

Abstract

How well do the fieldwork experiences that students have while at school prepare them for the fieldwork they may experience at undergraduate level? What sorts of fieldwork experiences do they have at different key stages?

Fieldwork is changing in all sectors. The lingering impacts of COVID, financial pressures and a lack of experience amongst recently qualified teachers are reducing the breadth of opportunity that used to exist. The changing nature of the student body means that undergraduate fieldwork has changed from when I spent many weeks in the field with Tim Burt in the early 1980s at Huddersfield Polytechnic.

I will draw on my experiences working with the Geographical Association and as a teacher of students from KS2-5 and an author of fieldwork books, research carried out by Becky Kitchen of the GA in 2025, and recent research carried out by the Royal Geographical Society into fieldwork in HE. I hope to provide a broad overview of school fieldwork and suggestions for how teachers can (and are) adapting to ensure it remains accessible to all.

The uncertainty over fieldwork's place in the renewed curriculum - and assessed in an age of AI - mean there is a need to keep pushing for it to remain an entitlement for all students as an essential part of a geography education.

From the Mountains to the Oceans: Bridging the 'field'work "divide"

Geoff Main, University of Exeter (g.main@exeter.ac.uk)

Keywords

Fieldwork; interdisciplinary; geography; oceanography; environment

Abstract

Our disciplines are driven by their interest in the 'field'. From Key Stage 1 (ages 5-7 years), fieldwork is a core requirement in the study of our natural and human world. However, concerns have been raised about the loss of field opportunities from schools into higher education with challenges associated with cost, time, and expertise.

In this context, how can our disciplines bridge the divide between school, further education, and higher education especially in contexts where students may not possess pre-existing disciplinary or practical knowledge and where programmes are, at their heart, interdisciplinary?

This presentation will share reflections and insights from fieldwork delivery across the Geography, Environmental Science, and Oceanography degrees at the University of Exeter.

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It will consider the ‘bridges’ between education levels and into employment, different pedagogies, and the human vs. physical and including the challenges and opportunities therein.

Running a field course across the disciplines

Martin Barker, Michael Stratigos and Lesley Lancaster

Contact: Martin Barker, University of Aberdeen (m.barker@abdn.ac.uk)

Keywords

Archaeology; biology; conservation; ecology; human culture; interdisciplinary

Abstract

Field courses are often taught within a single discipline. Time constraints and a focus on technical field skills can reinforce a siloed approaches to field teaching. Yet, field courses with interdisciplinary connections can offer improved student outcomes. In an innovative field course, The Living Landscape, at the University of Aberdeen, we have constructed an interdisciplinary outdoor learning experience that combines field ecology and landscape archaeology. The overall objectives of the course are to foster critical thinking around interdisciplinary hypothesis testing in nature and to support the development of skills in observation, recording, and interpretation.

We have found that new insights become possible when students and staff work across disciplines, without sacrificing key learning skills. For example, biology students were able to appreciate deep time change through 3000+ years of peat formation, and the human cultural elements of peat use, when working alongside archaeologists. Similarly, archaeologists gained a new appreciation of 19th century crofts when working with conservation biologists and plant scientists, looking at how the floral legacy of sites shaped contemporary plant diversity distributions.

Student feedback on The Living Landscape course has indicated that exposure to different disciplines helps a better understanding and appreciation for the landscape. To aid students (and academics) in thinking beyond their discipline, we encourage them to structure their investigation around HELP! scores, which encompass five criteria: Human and Ecological dimensions, Logistics, and Participation. The ‘unexpected’ is represented by ! and is also a valuable part of the student and staff experience.

Field Skills to Future Employability: Bridging Academic Skills and Real-World Practice

Liz Hamilton and Lesley Batty

Contact: Liz Hamilton, University of Birmingham (l.hamilton.1@bham.ac.uk)

Keywords

Responsible fieldwork; reciprocity; embedded employability; collaborative fieldwork

Abstract

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In this talk, we present the planning-stage development of a new undergraduate field course in the Cairngorms, designed explicitly to bridge gaps between academic field skills, responsible fieldwork practices, and employability and professional competencies. While traditional field courses often assume that these connections emerge implicitly, this project takes a principles-led approach to intentionally integrate them from the outset.

At the core of the design is a commitment to British Geological Survey (BGS) fieldwork principles, particularly inclusivity, accessibility, and ethical engagement. The course is being developed around the premise that academic field skills such as data collection, observation, and analysis must be taught alongside, and through, responsible field practices that recognise environmental ethics, community perspectives, and the ecological impacts of field activity. This requires moving beyond extractive models of fieldwork towards reciprocal, place-based engagement.

A key focus in the planning process is how to embed employability and professional skills in authentic ways. The course proposes partnerships with local organisations and community groups, where students have opportunities to contribute through structured volunteering and collaborative projects. These experiences are intended to foreground skills such as stakeholder communication, teamwork, adaptability, and project management, while developing a sense of professional identity and responsibility.

We reflect on key design questions, including how to align learning outcomes, field activities, and assessment with these integrated aims. By sharing this work in progress, we seek to open wider discussion on how field courses can be intentionally designed to bridge the divide between academic learning, responsible practice, and graduate futures.

Learner-generated audio trails: nature connection

Andy Wakefield, University of Bristol (andy.wakefield@bristol.ac.uk)

Keywords

Biodiversity; teamwork; technology-enhanced learning

Abstract

There are multiple benefits of spending time in the natural world, yet adolescents and young adults are known to suffer a dip in their connection with nature (Richardson et al. 2019). Some point the finger of blame at technology and specifically social media, but could technology bridge the gap between screen time and green time? I set teams of students the task of creating an engaging audio trail experience in the heart of Bristol. They were asked to use storytelling and the power of sound to augment reality and connect their audience with urban biodiversity. Each team created their own walkable audio journey and identified several ‘stops’ (GPS locations tied to an audio clip) along their short route.

Some key aims were for students to: explore their campus; connect with local biodiversity; consider new perspectives; and to develop their skills in digital literacy, communication and teamwork. They were also given free reign with using AI. In this presentation I will share

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preliminary results exploring whether this technology-enhanced field-work task led to any enhancement in the students' nature connectedness scores together with other key skills takeaways.

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Session 4. Bridging expectation gaps

Chair: Julia Cooke

Bridging Gaps in Geography Fieldwork: Prior Experience, Hidden Curriculum and Inclusive Support

Julie Peacock, Liam Taylor, Myfanwy Howarth, Johanna Fenton and Keeley McCabe

Contact: Julie Peacock, University of Leeds (j.peacock@leeds.ac.uk)

Keywords

Hidden-curriculum; prior-experience; belonging

Abstract

Students appear increasingly underprepared for field-based learning. This lack of preparedness can result in disengagement, reduced confidence in key skills, and feelings of isolation that undermine students' sense of belonging. We hypothesise that declining engagement with fieldwork is partly driven by reduced prior exposure to both fieldwork and outdoor learning, with around 40% of UK schools reported to have reduced or cut fieldwork opportunities since 2020 (Kitchen, 2025).

This funded, two-year research project investigates how students' prior experiences shape their engagement with fieldwork and explores the hidden curriculum of fieldwork in order to better support increasingly diverse student cohorts. The project addresses five research questions:

1. What prior fieldwork experiences do students bring to a Geography degree?
2. What other outdoor experiences shape preparedness for fieldwork?
3. What constitutes the hidden curriculum of fieldwork?
4. How do prior experiences and the hidden curriculum intersect? and
5. How can fieldwork be designed to support broad cohorts of students in light of these insights?

This interactive workshop focuses on unpacking the hidden curriculum by exploring staff expectations of students attending fieldwork. Complementing parallel work with students, the results from the session will enable us to examine where staff and student expectations may misalign and highlight unconscious assumptions embedded within fieldwork practice. By making these assumptions explicit, we aim to inform the development of an inclusive, practical toolkit to support all students on fieldwork. We are also recruiting those willing to share a student survey with their student cohorts.

Bridging the divide between pedagogy and students' experiences

Alan Marvell and David Simm

Contact: Alan Marvell, University of Gloucestershire (amarvell@glos.ac.uk)

Keywords

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Pedagogy; fieldwork; pedagogic literature; student experience; reflective learning

Abstract

This paper examines the perceived divide between pedagogic theory and students lived experiences of fieldwork, questioning how, and whether, this gap can be meaningfully bridged within higher education. While pedagogy is typically understood by educators as a body of research-informed teaching practices, evidence suggests that students often interpret it more narrowly, as the immediate methods, instructions, and assessments that shape their learning environment. Consequently, pedagogic literature remains largely invisible to students, who rarely engage directly with scholarly discussions about teaching and learning.

Drawing on emerging work in pedagogic research integration, this paper explores whether exposing students to pedagogic texts enhances their understanding of fieldwork as a learning process rather than simply an activity. Findings indicate that although some students initially perceive pedagogic readings as abstract or irrelevant, structured engagement can create greater reflexivity, helping them to contextualise fieldwork design, expectations, and outcomes. However, challenges persist, including issues of accessibility, perceived relevance, and timing within the curriculum.

The paper argues that bridging the pedagogy–experience divide requires not only introducing students to pedagogic discourse but embedding it explicitly within fieldwork preparation and reflection. By making pedagogy visible and dialogic, educators can support students in developing a more critical, informed, and participatory understanding of their own learning experiences.

Bridging the accessibility divide in field-based learning using place-based approaches

Moya Burns, Ishwaq Ali, Scarlett Asher, Stuart Desjardins, Diljot Gill, Hannah Harrison, Ceri Jones, Sandra Lee and Adam Tester, University of Leicester

Contact: Moya Burns, University of Leicester (mlb40@leicester.ac.uk)

Abstract

Field-based learning in higher education faces many challenges, including financial pressures, administrative burdens, and increasing time limitations for both staff and students. These challenges risk intensifying the “extinction of experience”, the progressive loss of direct human engagement with nature, that is already evident among students and the wider public. Residential field courses have historically been the key mechanism through which students have been given the opportunity to engage with nature and develop green skills. However, this approach introduces structural barriers to participation for many students, reinforcing inequities that contribute to the environmental sector remaining one of the least diverse areas of employment. Professional bodies across the green economy have identified these trends as drivers of a widening green skills gap, and a looming capacity shortfall for future environmental and sustainability workforces.

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This presentation shares how embedding place-based learning, authentic assessment and student co-creation within the curriculum can bridge the skills divide between students able to access residential field courses and those unable to do so. We describe how adopting a living laboratory model, linking students with local environmental practitioners to conduct purpose-driven campus-based research, enables the development of green skills within existing teaching structures. We also demonstrate how authentic assessments provide students with sector-relevant competencies without reliance on residential fieldwork. Finally, we show how partnering with students as curriculum consultants can reduce barriers to field-learning experiences for a diverse cohort of students. We conclude by evaluating the emerging impacts of this approach for bridging the experiential divide in student access to field-based learning and for addressing the extinction of experience across the higher education sector.

Examining Experiential Learning Practices at Three Universities across the UK

Jonathan Wessell, University of Nebraska (jonathan.wessell@gmail.com)

Keywords

Experiential learning; fieldwork, active learning

Abstract

In the Fall of 2025, I had the opportunity to travel to three universities in the UK to conduct case study research on the experiential learning activities present in Geography and Outdoor Learning Departments. This research was conducted through interviews of faculty and provided an overview sketch of the practices and feelings about experiential learning at these three universities. An examination of the three cases both individually and combined will be presented. This research was timely as UK universities are facing new mandates on integration of “Active Learning” in their programs.

Increasing student employability & technical skill development through fieldwork: hydrology in action!

Tory Milner, Keele University (v.s.milner@keele.ac.uk)

Keywords

River science; hydrology; surveying channels; physical geography and environmental science students

Abstract

Fieldwork is a key skill in many degree programmes, such as Physical Geography, Environmental Science and Ecology and Conservation. Fieldwork links theoretical concepts into real-world understanding by providing students with practical skills that increase their employability. The key benefits to students undertaking fieldwork include technical skill development, experience of data collection and carrying out research,

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applied learning, improved employability and collaborative learning with peers and academics.

This presentation discusses how fieldwork in hydrology/river science can improve study employability by students learning standard industry techniques that are relevant for careers in the regulatory industry (such as the Environment Agency or local councils), environmental consultancies, and wildlife organisations and conservation charities (e.g., the National Trust). Specifically, this presentation will focus on how to teach students to measure channel cross section, discharge and bed sediment characteristics, and how this data can be useful for hydrologists/river managers to manage, conserve and improve river ecosystems.

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