

● Written Evidence to the Select Committee for Children, Schools and Families: Learning Outside the Classroom.

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is the learned and professional body for geography working across schools and universities, with the public and policy makers. It is a charity, whose activities reach out to, and include, several million people each year, and which also draws on the expertise of its 15,000 Fellows and members. It promotes geographical knowledge and understanding about the world's people, places and environments and the interactions between them at the local, national and global scales.

Each year the Society provides continuous professional development (CPD) training for 1,200+ teachers and face-to-face presentations to 25,000 geography pupils, alongside fieldwork summer schools for students and fieldwork master classes for teachers. It has developed a wide range of award winning online educational resources and has c.1,000 school members. The Society leads the Fieldwork area of the DCSF supported Action Plan for Geography (2008-2011)¹ and has created extensive online fieldwork resources and training, as well as face to face CPD, please see www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk/fieldwork

The Society has an established reputation, over many decades, in supporting schools to undertake fieldwork and expeditions which might take place in the local area, further afield in the UK or overseas. The Society's Geography Outdoors centre trains teachers as EVCs and provides the Off-Site Safety Management course. The Society was instrumental in the instigation and development of the British Standard 8848. This specification is for the "provision of visits, fieldwork, expeditions, and adventurous activities outside the UK" and is relevant to local education department and other school employers, and travel and tour operators.

Geography and Learning Outside the Classroom

Geographical fieldwork is a statutory requirement of the National Curriculum and high quality and safely run fieldwork, alongside other LOTC, should be part of every pupil's education. It is through this that pupils can set their learning in a wider context and undertake first hand investigations of their world. We welcome Ofsted's comments that, "when planned and implemented well, LOTC contributed significantly to raising standards & improving pupils' personal, social & emotional development."²

There is a continued appetite for the Society's support for fieldwork. Of particular value is our work supporting teachers' subject knowledge, the use of fieldwork techniques, understanding of the policy framework and building their confidence to undertake off-site activities. We provide this through:

- The fieldwork section, developed by the Society, for the Action Plan for Geography www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk/fieldwork, which has been viewed 328,000 times.
- The Society's popular CPD provision³, over the last 12 months 250+ teachers attended CPD relevant to geographical fieldwork.
- A specific programme focused on selected schools where geography faces significant challenges⁴ through a series of residential fieldwork CPD courses for teachers.

¹ The APG is jointly led by the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) and the GA.

² Learning Outside the Classroom: How far should you go? Ofsted 2008

³ Courses for Educational Visitors Coordinators, Overseas Expeditions, Off-Site Safety Management and curriculum based geographical fieldwork courses.

⁴ E.g. low uptake at GCSE or A Level, inexperienced staff &/or minimal provision of fieldwork.

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The Society provides the following submission to the Select Committee:

A. 'Rarely Cover' and teachers' access to fieldwork-based CPD

Although we hold no quantitative data about the possible impact of 'Rarely Cover' on teachers access to CPD, we have received *anecdotal* feedback from some teachers that attending CPD during school hours has become difficult e.g. '*weekend (CPD) is better due to rarely cover*' and '*my school would not let me do weekdays*'. We cannot draw substantive conclusions from such feedback. However, we note comments about the impact of 'Rarely Cover' on a decline in mathematics and Science CPD⁵.

B. 'Rarely Cover' and the provision of fieldwork

The Society welcomed the joint DCSF/LOTG statement on fieldwork/LOTG and its identification that the provisions of 'Rarely Cover' "would only be relevant if the person timetabled to take the class or group is unforeseeably absent". We have disseminated this statement to geography teachers⁶. We would welcome further work to ensure that school senior management teams understand this situation and that it is applied equally across core and foundation subjects.

C. Whether the removal of A Level course work, and introduction of controlled assessment at GCSE, have impacted on geographical fieldwork

Prior to the introduction of these changes, fieldwork was the key way most GCSE and A Level students collected and analysed geographical data necessary for their course work. Schools continue to provide geographical fieldwork at GCSE and A Level, but anecdotally from teachers we hear that the perception of the importance of fieldwork (and hence financial and timetabling support for it) in the eyes of some school senior management teams has been downgraded. However, there has been no systematic research to understand whether the changes to the assessment framework have impacted on the support of the school decision-makers for fieldwork, and on the range, type and duration of fieldwork that is offered. The Society suggests that such research be undertaken as a matter of urgency and would be pleased to carry out such a study if modest funds to do so were available.

D. School budgets and fieldwork

This point is linked to C above. In a climate of tightening school budgets, the Society is concerned that some schools may view geographical fieldwork as a 'discretionary item' rather than a statutory requirement. There should be ongoing monitoring of the provision of fieldwork.

E. Awareness of Quality badges

Our work with teachers indicates their awareness of the Quality Badges is very low.

We welcome this opportunity to provide evidence to the Select Committee. The Society also recently responded to the **DCSF consultation on Health and Safety for Learning Outside the Classroom** and this consultation has also been included for your information. Of particular interest may be our comments about HASLOC's 'downplaying' of teacher led activities; BS 8848 relevance; and the Society's view that the suggestion of LOTG 'Champions' is an unnecessary additional burden on schools. Please do contact us if you have any queries or would like any further information about the Society.

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⁵ TES 19.02.10

⁶ Please see <http://www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk/about-the-apg/news/rarely-cover-and-fieldwork-learning-outside-the-classroom>.