

Robert Moffat, a geography teacher at Bury Grammar School, talks us through how geography fieldwork is made interesting and accessible for all its age groups.



Robert Moffat

Fieldwork throughout school life



Year 7 students sat at the foot of Mam Tor with a view of Castleton, examining land uses. (Photo: Robert Moffat)

I am sure that most geography teachers will agree that fieldwork is one of the subject's greatest assets. At Bury Grammar School, in the summer term alone, students from years 7 to 12 have taken part in a wide range of fieldwork experiences that give tangible meaning to the geography being taught in the classroom. These opportunities contribute to building geography's exciting profile across the school, creating a real buzz around the subject.

Fieldwork plays a crucial role in preparing A level students for the independent investigation element of the qualification. In April, Y12 students took part in a four-day residential at the Cranedale Centre in Malton, North Yorkshire. During their stay, they

developed both physical and human fieldwork techniques and trialled methods to implement in their own non-exam assessments.

Students examined infiltration rates and carbon content in a local woodland, and visited the Holderness coastline to investigate rates of erosion and evaluate coastal defences. This not only developed accuracy in their data collection, but gave them a valuable insight into their case study of a coastal environment at a local scale. The group also spent time in Scarborough, where they trialled a range of qualitative techniques, including the 'great place wheel' and emotional mapping. These techniques helped them investigate different place perceptions of a traditional British seaside town.

Fieldwork also plays a crucial part in the key stage 3 curriculum at Bury Grammar School. Year 7 visited Castleton in the Peak District to support their learning on tourism. Beginning at the foot of Mam Tor, pupils considered both the advantages tourism brings to National Parks and the potential for conflict between different stakeholders. Next, our students visited Treak Cliff Cavern, where they explored the Blue John mines and learned about cave formation processes. In Castleton village, students collected data to assess the impact of tourism on a honeypot site. They used a mix of traditional techniques, such as land-use and environmental quality surveys, alongside creative methods like sensory mapping of sounds and smells.

Year 9 students learning about flood defences on the River Mersey at Sale Water Park. (Photo: Robert Moffat)





Year 12 students by a sea arch at Flamborough Head. (Photo: Robert Moffat)

This fieldwork introduced students to practical geographical enquiry, encouraging them to observe the world more critically and develop the analytical skills to understand key issues.

Year 9 geographers carried out a physical enquiry along the River Bollin in Wilmslow, measuring width, depth and velocity to investigate changes in river channel characteristics. The trip also included a visit to Sale Water Park, where students observed a range of flood defences along the River Mersey. Seeing flood management strategies in a real location was an excellent opportunity to evaluate the impact of hard engineering within a real river catchment. While off-site visits have provided valuable opportunities to study unfamiliar and exciting environments, the value of local fieldwork should not be overlooked. Year 8 students conducted two enquiries on the school site. As part of their work on environmental issues, they assessed the environmental quality at different sites around our school grounds.

A second enquiry focussed on adaptation to climate change. Students collected data on temperature and light intensity around the site to consider how different parts of the school environment might be affected by heatwaves. They then researched and suggested adaptations that could help mitigate these effects. Although small-scale, these fieldwork opportunities familiarise students with the enquiry process and build skills needed for more complex investigations later in their geography careers.

There are always barriers to getting out and conducting fieldwork, but these local investigations demonstrate that fieldwork does not always require

travel, or indeed time off the timetable. With clear aims and relevant methods, students can develop a clear understanding of the enquiry process in familiar surroundings and build data collection, presentation and analysis skills. Often, the results of this hyper-local fieldwork are more personally meaningful and relatable.

Bury Grammar School is proud to hold the GA Geography Quality Mark and is recognised as a Fieldwork Centre of Excellence. These accolades reflect the department's commitment to high-quality teaching and learning and its belief in the power of fieldwork to develop students' understanding of the world.

Beyond the curriculum, Bury Grammar School also runs international 'awe and wonder' expeditions. Recent trips have included destinations such as the Bay of Naples, Iceland and Norway. These trips offer students the chance to experience the excitement of geography beyond the UK, giving them the chance to witness glaciers, tectonic landscapes and coastal environments.

The varied experiences outlined here show that fieldwork can be unfamiliar and exciting, but can equally be inexpensive and time efficient. Whether through a residential visit or an investigation on our school site, students benefit from seeing geography in context. It helps to consolidate classroom learning, build confidence in the process of geographical enquiry and encourages students to engage critically with the world around them. Fieldwork continues to be a valuable and integral part of geographical education at Bury Grammar School.