

University of Sheffield Department of Geography Policy on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for field classes

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Purpose

Field-based teaching forms an important part of BSc/BA degree courses in Human Geography, Physical Geography, Environmental Science and taught postgraduate courses. The aim of this policy is to ensure that all students and teaching staff are able, and feel safe, to participate fully in compulsory and optional field classes offered by the Department of Geography.

Scope

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy for field classes is developed in a transparent manner with the opportunity for input from all staff and students in the Department irrespective of their current/past/future involvement in teaching of field classes. This policy applies to all compulsory and optional field classes organised by the Department of Geography, including those involving undergraduate or postgraduate taught students that are not associated with a degree course (e.g. summer schools, organised as part of a conference hosted by the department).

Guiding principles and consequences of non-compliance

Field classes are designed to take into account the locations that provide the best learning outcomes, that are familiar to the teaching staff, are within budget of the Department and/or student, and that are suitable for fieldwork at the time of year that the visit will take place. These considerations are important, and in addition, field class design and teaching should consider how to make the field class inclusive to all students and teaching staff. This inclusive approach offers an advantage to the Department because (1) students who are safe and confident in their environment are likely to have better learning outcomes and engagement with their student cohort, and (2) as field courses are often used as a recruitment offer it is counterproductive to design classes that exclude students based on non-academic criteria.

The University of Sheffield has an EDI policy for students. The aim of the policy is to ensure that all students and prospective students are treated equally, irrespective of 'Protected Characteristics' as defined by the Equality Act 2010; race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marital (including civil partnerships) or parental status, pregnancy and maternity, age, disability, religion and belief or socio-economic class or spent criminal convictions. (<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/equality-and-diversity/policy>)

Document control

The EDI policy for fieldwork is owned by the Head of Department and approved by the Department of Geography Executive Committee on 15th June 2021, to be implemented from 1st September 2021 onwards.

Key points

1. Fieldwork is an important part of teaching in Geography that can add value to a student's career progression. Making field classes as accessible as possible by taking an enabling rather than responsive approach helps to promote the wider progression of a diverse cohort of geographers (Chiarella and Vurro, 2020; Giles et al., 2020).
2. Geographical fieldwork is part of a colonial tradition that is by its nature exclusionary (Tooth and Viles, 2020). The stereotype of a person involved in geographical fieldwork is a white male visiting remote locations, as often featured in course marketing materials, which is discouraging to students from minority backgrounds who have traditionally been excluded from working in the field (Dowey et al., 2021; Prior-Jones et al., 2020).
3. Issues around personal safety and comfort in the field do not affect everyone equally. Students and staff from minority groups are less safe in many environments (Demery and Pipkin, 2020). Risks to particular groups will vary depending on the location (Prior-Jones et al., 2020).
4. Fieldwork can be particularly challenging for students with physical disabilities or who are not neurotypical (John and Khan, 2018; Kingsbury et al., 2020). Placing a student in an unfamiliar environment may cause or exacerbate poor mental health.
5. Not all disabilities are visible and students may not wish to disclose their protected characteristics. Field classes may impose different levels of disclosure of personal protected characteristics by students or teaching staff than would be necessary on campus. For example, a person may be comfortable disclosing a protected characteristic to some but not all of these groups; the student cohort, teaching staff, support staff at the field class location, research subjects from the local population.
6. The cost of field courses (e.g. student contribution to costs) and equipment (e.g. clothing, personal equipment) may be difficult for students to meet, particularly if they are not involved in similar outdoor activities and already have access to suitable equipment. Residential field courses may conflict with paid employment and caring responsibilities, requiring additional paid care while the student is away in the field (Abeyta et al., 2021).
7. Making field classes accessible to a diverse group of teaching staff enables better student support and greater staff capacity to address specific EDI concerns.
8. While desk-based studies can be used as alternative assessments in place of field classes, our aim is that no student should be required to choose such an assessment because the available field classes do not meet EDI requirements.

1. Guidelines for planning field classes

The RGS have a useful resource Principles for Undergraduate Field Courses (<https://www.rgs.org/research/higher-education-resources/fieldprinciples/>). Principle 4: Accessible Fieldwork is relevant here.

Location and timing of the field class

Note that these considerations should be checked each year to account for changes in conditions at the field class location.

- ❑ Consider carefully the location chosen for fieldwork in line with EDI principles as well as teaching targets. The risks to particular groups will vary depending on the field site and should be researched in the design stage of a new field class. Existing field classes should be reviewed in line with this point by module staff and any issues raised with the Director of Teaching and Learning and then the Department Executive Committee. Consider local laws on sexual orientation (Fig. 1), race, gender and marital status (e.g. local culture, national politics, different social boundaries away from home) and accessibility for students with disabilities. Seek advice from the Students' Union, relevant networks (e.g the [Network of Women Doing Fieldwork](#)) and local colleagues about specific cultural issues.
- ❑ Be aware that working in physically challenging environments can limit an individual's ability to function effectively and that students may spend a considerable amount of mental energy on coping with such an environment that could limit their ability to learn (John and Khan, 2018).
- ❑ Take into account the timing of school holidays as this may cause a barrier to students and teaching staff who are parents.
- ❑ Check the timing of religious holidays and requirements for fasting.
- ❑ Evaluate the cost of field classes and ensure that at least one class option in that year available to a student does not impose an additional cost to the student.
- ❑ Provide essential clothing and non-standard equipment (e.g. waterproof trousers) to all students from Department supplies to avoid requiring students to identify their economic status. The Department, led by the Head of Department (HoD) and the Department Manager, will seek to secure a fieldwork equipment budget.
- ❑ Consult with current and previous students and teaching staff during field class design to allow the opportunity for anyone to raise concerns about the planned class before it is implemented.

Figure 1. The ILGA map of sexual orientation laws in the world can be used as a guide to select field locations (<https://ilga.org/maps-sexual-orientation-laws>) Bear in mind that local customs may be at odds with the law indicated in this map and that laws and customs may vary by region within a country.

The following are suggestions to be considered by module staff, but joint responsibility for ensuring this structure and planning to be held by Director of Teaching and Learning (DTL) and the Department Executive Committee, with support from the fieldclass officer. Staff should ask for help, support and advice in implementing these suggestions, and do not need to do this on their own.

Daily schedule during the field class (to be implemented by DTL and Fieldclass Officer)

- ❑ Recognize that field classes can be intense, emotional and tiring for students and teaching staff.
- ❑ Allow an initial day with a more relaxed schedule at the field class location to allow students and teaching staff to adapt to the environment and develop plans to self-manage any issues that could affect their participation.
- ❑ Organise each day to include regular breaks with a private location available for rest, prayer, attending to menstruation, taking medication, breastfeeding or other self-care.

Inform students and teaching staff in advance of the timing of these breaks to allow them to self-manage their requirements. An emergency shelter/toilet tent can be used to provide privacy in remote locations. An excellent resource for best practice in daily scheduling is Greene et al. (2020).

- Plan accommodation to provide facilities for privacy and self-care for all students and teaching staff each day before and after the teaching programme.
- Make provision for religious observances including fasting and dietary restrictions.

Promotion of field classes to students (to be implemented by Director of Student Recruitment and Fieldclass Officer)

- Address potential barriers to fieldwork on the Department webpage, at open days and during induction events for new students, as students may avoid studying Geography due to concerns about their ability to take part in fieldwork (Chiarella and Vurro, 2020).
- Information about how to manage self-care during field classes should be provided in the Student Handbook. At the moment this contains field class risk assessment information (Section 8) describing what the students need to tell staff before the field class and restrictions on their behaviour during field classes. The Handbook should also explain what staff will do to allow students to feel safe and comfortable during the field class.
- It may not be possible to implement the standard teaching adaptations that some students rely on to learn in the field. Indicate to students prior to the field class where adaptations will be reduced and offer alternatives. These alternatives are to be led by the DTL in discussion with module leader.

2. Actions to take before, during and after field classes

- Field class leaders and teaching staff should self-educate about the risks of fieldwork rather than ask students or teaching staff to describe potentially traumatic events. Allow time in the planning stage for students and teaching staff to raise concerns before fieldwork takes place and to feedback afterwards (Clancy et al., 2014).
- Teaching staff should be briefed on their responsibilities in delivering field classes and the code of conduct that is required of them by the HoD, DTL and Fieldclass Officer.
- Clarify to students and teaching staff the requirements of the University Code of conduct, and any cultural or age restrictions (e.g. for the purchase of alcohol) that they need to obey in the field class.
- Personal protective equipment (e.g. waders, safety helmets) is often designed primarily for men and may not comfortably fit women. Take a range of sizes. PPE including climbing harnesses is available for pregnant women for example.
- Provide information about the daily schedule and catering well in advance so that students and teaching staff with specific requirements can plan what they need to bring.
- Include in the risk assessment actions to take in the case of a student or member of teaching staff becoming the target of either legal or extra-legal discriminatory behaviour, even if it is not a known issue in the country being visited.
- Provide a safe mechanism for students and teaching staff to report concerns (anonymously) with alternative reporting mechanisms to avoid a barrier caused by the

involvement of a particular member of staff or another student. Be aware that students may be hesitant in reporting their concerns and feel that this will be to their detriment either in terms of assessment or their subsequent treatment by peers and teaching staff.

- ❑ All trips should include a qualified Mental Health First Aider (in addition to physical health first aiders). If a student has a diagnosis or is currently being investigated for a specific diagnosis a plan should be made and discussed before the trip to enable them to be supported. This should be the case whether or not a student is registered with DDSS.

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