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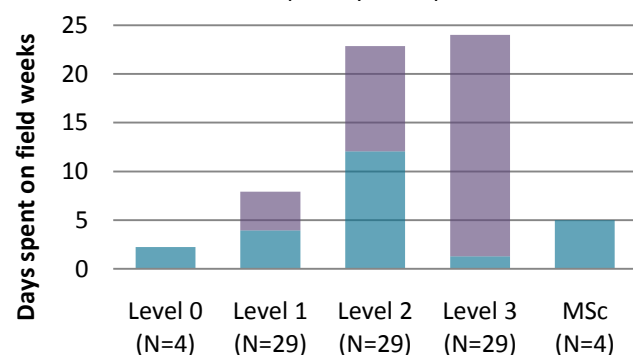
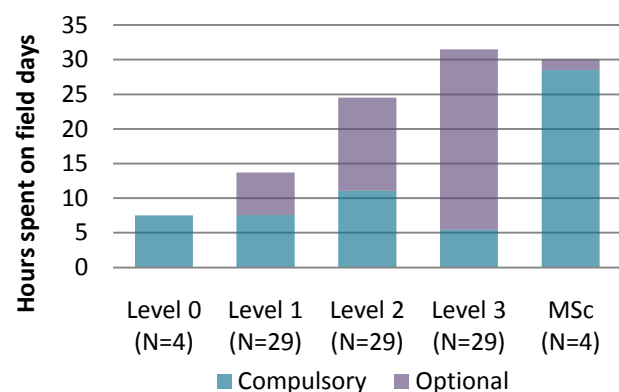
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Introduction Most people involved in fieldwork believe it to be ‘a good thing’; Fuller *et al.*, (2000) showed that it could be an effective and enjoyable part of learning, yet there is also evidence to suggest biology fieldwork is on the decline (e.g. Smith, 2004). This research was undertaken to instigate further debate about the value of fieldwork and to gather information on the current level of HE provision of fieldwork in biological disciplines.

Data collection The questionnaire was completed by 33 academics from 27 different UK institutions regarding undergraduate and MSc degree courses. The respondents were mostly course coordinators with responsibility for organising and teaching the field work element within the degree course. The programmes covered included biology, zoology, biochemistry, conservation and ecology.

Results Time spent in the field

(Level 1 = Scottish 2nd year, 1st year in rest of UK)



Main reasons for retaining fieldwork

1. To experience ‘real’ biology
2. To learn key practical skills
3. To enthuse and motivate students
4. To develop group/social cohesion & learning
5. To develop professional skills

Main skills developed/acquired in the field

1. Monitoring/surveying/field techniques
2. Identification/classification
3. Team working
4. Research/experimental design
5. Observation

Tutors on the MSc courses listed further subject-specific skills including dissection, GPS usage, mapping and describing soil profiles.

Trends in fieldwork provision

Tutors felt that the amount of fieldwork undertaken by students over the last 5 years has; stayed approximately the same (58%), increased (27%) or decreased (15%).

Level of support from colleagues

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Generally lecturing staff in my department are very supportive of the need for fieldwork	59%	19%	22%
Generally those involved in departmental management are very supportive of the need for fieldwork	63%	19%	19%
The senior management at the university are very supportive of the need for fieldwork	50%	31%	19%

Conclusions The data indicate a range of fieldwork activities are still being undertaken at UK universities. The general perception of providers is that the overall level of fieldwork has not decreased in the last 5 years although this may mask important changes in the content of fieldwork courses. The reasons for retaining fieldwork reflected a range of benefits; the motivational and social aspects of learning as well as developing generic and subject-specific skills. However, the primary reason was to experience the unpredictable nature of ‘real’ biology and in doing so provide a unique learning environment.

References Fuller, I., Rawlinson, S. and Bevan, R. (2000) Evaluation of Student Learning Experiences in Physical Geography Fieldwork: Paddling or pedagogy?, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, **24**: 2, 199–215.

Smith, D. (2004) Issues and trends in higher education biology fieldwork. *Journal of Biological Education*, **39**, 6–10.