

# Ecology & biospheres: establishing sustainability in school

A researcher's perspective



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Research Council: **ESRC**  
Placement School: **St Julian's School**

## About Researchers in Residence (RinR)

Researchers in Residence benefits researchers, young people and teachers via UK-wide school placements across social, physical, life and earth sciences and the humanities subjects.

### Researchers:

- Work with some of the most challenging and inquisitive minds
- Renew your enthusiasm for research and develop communication and teaching skills

### Schools:

- Access valuable classroom support
- Interact with researchers to motivate, inspire and maximise student learning
- Enhance learning experiences and realise improved grades

## What was the aim of your placement?

"I set up an after-school eco-club. The aim was for the school to achieve its first green flag, which it did!

During the eco-club, students had to conduct surveys of the school grounds, collect information on waste, energy and water use for example. Students used digital cameras around school grounds to assess and document their surrounding environment. One session focused on examining the contents of the school's waste bins, looking at what gets recycled and what doesn't. The session was photographed, allowing students to document what they found and present the findings back to the rest of the school in an assembly."

## What did you hope to get out of the placement?

"Better communication skills and a heightened awareness of how eco-schools incorporate sustainability – which is useful not only for me and my research but also for the centre I work in, BRASS<sup>1</sup>."

## How did you allocate your time to the school?

"The eco-club was every Thursday afternoon 3.30pm – 4.30pm, over the course of seven weeks. The club was targeted at Key-Stage 3 so it was open to year 7-9 pupils."

## Did you have any apprehensions prior to beginning the placement?

"Not really. I've done work with other schools in the past through the EBP<sup>2</sup> in Mid Glamorgan so I already felt comfortable being in a school environment."

1. Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society Centre  
2. Education Business Partnership

### How was this different from the reality?

"I was at first, a bit surprised by the level of involvement by some teachers. To enthuse the students about the class, one of the teachers was emphasising the interactivity of the club and the kinds of 'hands on' practical things the kids would be doing.

Hearing how the teacher was 'selling' the club to the kids was a bit strange because I had seen it differently in my head. This made me consider the fact that the kids would have to be excited about the project to actually participate in it. It was good to have experienced that because I had not considered the children may not be prepared to sit and be talked at."

### Highlight of the project?

"It would have to be the Green Flag award the school received after the placement, as a direct result of the eco-club. The teachers were really grateful for my input - it was very rewarding to have that happen and be thanked."

### Best thing about being a Researcher in Residence?

"I think learning about how the school approached the issue of sustainability and finding out what I could do, as a researcher, to help."

### What did you learn/get out of the experience?

"I learned things on different levels. There is the sustainability aspect of the work - doing the placement gave

**"It's useful if you are able to explain your research to a younger audience. If you can break it down and simplify it into a clear message for them, it helps clarify the focus for yourself as well.."**

me a better understanding of how the eco-schools scheme functions. It also helped, in terms of informing ideas at the research centre where I work, when it comes to developing education packs and resources aimed at schools."

### Life after RinR, what have you been up to since finishing your placement?

"At the moment, I'm in the middle of writing a book chapter on communicating sustainability to young people. Although not solely about the placement, some of my discussion will be based on my RinR experience. Since doing the placement I've been involved in a number of other knowledge exchange and community outreach projects."

### Would you recommend RinR to a fellow researcher?

"Definitely. As a researcher, it's useful to be reflexive. I think researchers who are open to being flexible and to testing their research or findings with an unconventional audience would find it worthwhile."

### Eligibility

RinR is open to all PhD and post doctoral researchers funded directly or indirectly by one of the seven UK Research Councils or the Wellcome Trust.

### Training

Participating researchers attend a one-day training session covering effective communication and pupil engagement and the do's and don'ts in the classroom. Advice on activities past researchers have used to engage young people is given and you'll find out more about the kind of situations you may encounter during your placement.

### How to apply

Complete the online application form at:  
[researchersinresidence.ac.uk](http://researchersinresidence.ac.uk)  
our RinR co-ordinators will then match you with a suitable school and contact you.

