

Rocks & fossils: tracking the history of climate change

A researcher's perspective



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Research Council: **AHRC**
Placement School: **Brine Leas High 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?

"The school was keen for me to cover topics students could easily relate to their curriculum work. After being matched with Brine Leas High School, I found that another researcher was also working with the school on a geological project.

The other researcher planned to work with students examining geology thousands of years ago. After talking, we came up with the idea of doing a joint project examining the effects of climate change on the planet, from the dawn of time versus present day, using archaeological techniques and evidence to draw conclusions. The project linked in well with the curriculum, as climate change was a topic students were already learning about in class. We did several presentations, organised a fossil quiz and even set up a timeline in the playground that students could

get involved with; physically charting changes to the planet over the ages."

What made you decide to apply?

"I had been contemplating doing a PGCE teaching course after my current PhD."

How did you allocate your time to the school?

"A link teacher worked with us and the school to co-ordinate our placement. The placement was spread over three days in the same week, working across different year groups (years 7 - 10)."

Did you have any apprehensions prior to beginning the placement?

"I was a bit worried about how I would cope in a school full of teenagers. I was concerned about maintaining discipline in sessions with students."

How was this different from the reality?

"The teachers were always present during our group sessions and on hand to step in if there were any disruptions. Thankfully, the students were well behaved, so they never actually had to!"

Highlights of the project?

"Seeing the kids getting involved with the project, giving feedback on the work we covered and putting their hands up to answer questions. We found that some of the students knew a lot about archaeology already, through watching programmes like Time Team on TV. Some even knew what the different archeological tools were for. One boy could correctly name the different kinds of fossils we looked at in class! It was great to know the students were engaging with the project and thinking about the work.

Working with another researcher was also brilliant; it was nice to gain a different perspective on things. I think it also made me less nervous about the placement itself, knowing there was someone there to support me."

Best thing about being a Researcher in Residence?

"Being able to share your research with a wider audience. It was great having the opportunity to broaden my research topic, learning how to tone down the technical side and simplify things."

It's (RinR is) a really good experience, especially if you're doing a course that requires you take part in an outreach programme. There are many programmes researchers can sign up to for extra credits, but RinR is definitely one of the more enjoyable ones.

What did you learn/get out of the experience?

"Before doing the placement I had considered doing a PGCE teacher qualification. Doing the placement gave me a taster of what working in a school would be like."

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

"Technically, I'm on my second degree at the moment as I've already completed an MPhil in Archeology Heritage Management. I've got another three years before I finish my Irish Studies PhD."

Would you recommend RinR to a fellow researcher?

"Absolutely, I wouldn't hesitate. In fact, I have done since completing my placement. It's a really good experience, especially if you're doing a course that requires you take part in an outreach programme. There are many programmes researchers can sign up to for extra credits, but RinR is definitely one of the more enjoyable ones."

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
our RinR co-ordinators will then match you with a suitable school and contact you.

