

Geography Ambassadors

RSGS Pilot Scheme – FAQs for Ambassadors

Organising Visits

Q: When organising an Ambassador visit, what do we say to teachers, and what information do we need to attach?

A: Schools' staffing changes regularly, so do not assume that the teacher you are dealing with knows how it works, even if the school has had a visit before. It is really important to make sure that you attach the three documents as listed below at the start of any communication with a teacher, regardless of whether you have initiated the visit or the teacher has requested it. You will receive these documents in the post-training email, and they are also available on the RSGS website.

When in contact with a teacher:

- the documents that you need to send are 'Introduction for Teachers', 'FAQs for Teachers' and the 'Code of Conduct';
- make sure that they know that the scheme is free of charge; this will encourage them to invite you in to deliver a session!
- you do not need to be very formal, but it is always better to start communications with more of a formal tone and adjust to the tone of the response; if you know the name of the teacher you are emailing then starting with 'Hi' or 'Dear' is fine, but for an unknown person 'Dear Sir/Madam' is preferable;
- with the rest of the email, just make sure that it is clear and informative.

Here is an example email template that you can adapt:

Dear *[insert name]*

My name is *[insert name]* and I have recently trained to be part of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society's Geography Ambassadors Pilot Scheme, which is delivered in partnership with the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) and Esri UK.

This is a free nationwide scheme in which undergraduates, postgraduates and graduates work with school pupils to promote Geography past the compulsory stages, its relevance to the pupils themselves and the wider world, and above all how fun it is. I attend *[insert name of university]*, and I would be really interested in coming in to help to promote the subject to your pupils, if you would like your school to be involved in the scheme.

I have attached more information about the scheme and our roles as Ambassadors to this email, and have copied in the scheme's volunteer project co-ordinators, Rachel Hay and Addy Pope, in case you would like to get in touch with them.

Many thanks and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes/Kind regards,
[insert your name]

Q: What do I do if a teacher does not reply?

A: Do not be afraid to (politely!) pester. Teachers are very busy and often, though not deliberately, arranging an Ambassador visit may fall down their priority list. Send a reminder email if it has been a couple of weeks since you contacted them. They won't be annoyed – if anything, they will thank you for the reminder!

Q: How many pupils should be in a session?

A: Anywhere between five and 35 pupils is appropriate. The scheme does not usually support assembly-style sessions. However, if a teacher especially wants a session for a larger group (eg, 60 pupils) it is possible to do this with the appropriate time/space/number of Ambassadors and activities. Generally though, working with up to 35 pupils is preferable because it encourages interactivity and questions from the pupils and this becomes more challenging with larger groups.

Q: How long are the sessions?

A: An average session time is about 45-60 minutes, but it is up to you and the teacher to decide on an appropriate length of time in relation to the specific session and age and stage of pupils. For example, if you are going into an S5/S6 class to discuss university courses, you may only want 45 minutes or so, whereas in a more active lesson with S2/S3 pupils a full hour may be more beneficial. Be aware that schools have different timetables and their lessons may be different lengths. You may have to fit your session in to a single period, or be given longer, eg a double period.

Q: Is it ok to do a visit on my own?

A: It is completely up to you. Most Ambassadors on the RGS-IBG scheme in England and Wales prefer to team up for a lot of visits, and some do a mixture of individual visits or visits in pairs. Often, Ambassadors will go back to their old schools on their own, but it is really just personal preference. If you need help for a visit you have organised yourself, please contact the project co-ordinators who can try to find someone to team up with you.

Q: How far in advance should I request a visit pack?

A: As soon as you have confirmed the date of your visit to a school, email the project co-ordinators (ambassadors@rsgs.org) and they can send everything out to you in good time. Sometimes things will be last-minute, but the earlier you email the better. It is worth remembering that Rachel and Addy are volunteering to co-ordinate the scheme and have full-time work commitments Monday to Friday, so please be patient if you do not receive an immediate response.

Q: It is one week before the visit; what things should I check before I go into the school?

A: Phone the teacher to confirm everything and ask any questions that you may have. You will need to ensure that:

- you know where to go on the day, what time you need to arrive, and who to ask for at the school's reception;
- you will not be left alone at any point on your visit to the school – explain that you are not PVG checked;
- you and the teacher are happy with the session content and how best to run it with the pupil;
- everything you need will be provided, eg computer, projector, speakers, and that the seating arrangement will be appropriate for the session;
- other Ambassadors are still able to come (if applicable).

Feedback

Q: Do I have to fill out a feedback form after every visit?

A: Yes – it is important for the project co-ordinators to see how the visit went, what you enjoyed about the sessions and what could be improved upon. It also allows the RSGS to keep a record of the number of sessions delivered and number of pupils involved. This feedback is also important for your personal development record as a volunteer on the scheme.

Q: Does the teacher have to fill out a feedback form for each Ambassador?

A: Yes – this is preferable. However, if the teacher would prefer to make joint comments about the sessions, then as long as the names of the Ambassadors who attended are on the form, this is fine.

Q: Do I give the feedback form to the teacher with whom I organised the visit, even if they were not present at the session?

A: Please give the feedback form to the teacher who was present at the session. If multiple sessions were delivered and different teachers were present at each, please give feedback forms to each of the teachers.

Expenses

Q: What travel expenses are covered by the scheme?

A: Although you will be conducting most visits locally, we appreciate that you will need to travel for some. The scheme covers reasonable travel expenses you may incur when delivering sessions. The RSGS can cover the cheapest possible rail fare and other forms of public transport. Public transport is preferred, but petrol costs can be covered at 40p a mile, with prior consent of the project co-ordinators. Remember, for everything other than mileage, we need proof of expenditure – namely, receipts and booking confirmations, along with a claim form in order to refund your expenditure.

Q: Can the RSGS reimburse my expenses prior to the visit?

A: The expenses are done on an evidence-based system, so it is only possible to reimburse them after the visit has taken place. However, if this is a problem, please contact the project co-ordinators.

Q: Can I send expenses forms back electronically?

A: Yes – an expenses claim form can be emailed to you, but the evidence (receipts etc) must be scanned in order for you to be reimbursed. Please keep all receipts and booking confirmations until you receive payment, just in case!

Q: I have been invited on a field trip – can the RSGS pay my expenses?

A: Unfortunately, the RSGS cannot cover the cost of an Ambassador attending a residential field trip (neither in the UK nor beyond) in an Ambassador role. Often schools will cover these expenses themselves if they have invited you along.

Problems

Q: What should I do if the teacher does not have control over the class?

A: Prior to arranging the visit, the teacher should have received from you copies of the 'Introduction for Teachers' and 'FAQs for Teachers'. These contain instructions as to how the teacher should support you in delivering the session. As a result, they should be aware of their obligation to discipline pupils when necessary, thus minimising the likelihood of your session being disrupted. However, if you find yourself in a situation where the pupils are not treating you appropriately or there are discipline issues, speak to the teacher. They will be in the room with you, so just politely ask them (out of earshot of the pupils!) to help control the class, as it is not your role to discipline the pupils. The teacher should then respond to this and the session will continue smoothly. If there are issues, please contact the project co-ordinators afterwards, and write details on the Ambassador feedback form.

Q: What if the teacher is talking over me or is taking over the session?

A: The teacher should understand that you are leading the session, with appropriate support from them. However, if they begin to talk over you or take over, then it might be best to have a polite word with them (out of earshot of the pupils). If you do not feel comfortable with this, please contact the project co-ordinators following the session. As with any issue or problem, it is imperative that you let us know as soon as you can.

Q: What if some of the pupils are not participating?

A: Realistically, you cannot expect to engage every single pupil you see 100% of the time. If it is just one or two pupils and they are not disrupting the session by being noisy, just try to ignore them. However, if the whole class is disengaged, this is an issue for the teacher to address. If they do not, the project co-ordinators need to know as soon as possible.

Q: The teacher has not been in contact much before the visit, and I am unsure of what is happening. What do I do?

A: If you have already tried emailing a couple of times, try calling the teacher at school (lunchtimes and the end of the school day are the best times to do this). If you are still not getting a response, contact the project co-ordinators and they can try to get in touch.

Q: What if the teacher leaves me unaccompanied with the pupils?

A: This is very unlikely to happen as teachers will have been made aware that their presence is important, through the documents they receive. You are not PVG checked as part of the scheme (although you may already have a PVG number) and you may wish to remind teachers of this before your visit. If you do find yourself on your own with pupils, you can immediately deal with it in the following ways:

- if there are multiple Ambassadors in the session, ask one of them to find the teacher to ask them to come back to the session, and explain why;
- if you are alone, carry on and set the pupils an activity, then briefly go to a nearby classroom to ask the staff member there to find the teacher for you, as you should not be left unaccompanied with the pupils.

It is unlikely that you will be put in this situation, but if this happens make sure that you report it to the project co-ordinators, even if you managed to sort the situation out at the time.

General

Q: What resources do I receive from the RSGS for each visit, and what can I ask for?

A: For the teacher there will be:

- a school feedback form and a prepaid return envelope;
- an RSGS leaflet;
- a *World of Opportunity* booklet.

For the Ambassador there will be:

- an Ambassador feedback form;
- an expenses claim form;
- a prepaid envelope.

In order to receive a visit pack, you will need to email ambassadors@rsgs.org to inform the project co-ordinators of the visit date. If there is something else you require, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Q: How often should I be contacting the project co-ordinators, and do they need to be copied in to all emails?

A: You should keep the project co-ordinators informed of all Ambassador visits; the best way to do this is to copy them in to email discussions with the school teacher, and to contact them when you have a finalised date for a visit. We recommend that you request a visit pack at least two weeks prior to your visit to ensure that you receive the materials in time. Be aware that if you are copying the project co-ordinators into emails with teachers, you may not receive a reply from them, as it may not be necessary.

Q: Can you carry on being a Geography Ambassador once you have graduated?

A: Of course you can! Please speak to the project co-ordinators about this.

Q: A teacher is asking me to do a session on a topic I am not sure about. Where can I get help/resources?

A: Above all, we want to make sure that your sessions are based around something you are interested in, and that you do not feel like you are obliged to cover a geographical topic that you have little knowledge of, or experience in. However, if you are up for the challenge of doing something new and have discussed this with the teacher beforehand, there is help available. Firstly, other Ambassadors may have ideas as they may well have delivered a similar session or have expertise in this area, and secondly – ask Rachel and Addy.

Still have a question?

Please contact Rachel Hay and Addy Pope: ambassadors@rsgs.org