

Alumni Newsletter

Spring 2025



Welcome to the Durham Geography alumni newsletter. I am delighted to take this opportunity to tell you about our exciting research, educational developments, and how the Department continues to transform lives. We also continue to enjoy hearing from many of you about how being at Durham Geography has helped shape your careers.

This newsletter comes at a time when Durham University and the wider UK HEI sector is facing significant financial challenges. Despite these challenges our fundamental mission in the Geography department remains unchanged.

Our mission is the delivery of excellent education and excellent research, and our efforts over the last twelve months centre on achieving that. Our research in physical and human geography continues to push at the frontiers of knowledge, is global in its focus and tackles key questions of socio-economic and scientific importance from climate change and sustainability to urbanism.

Our undergraduate and postgraduate students are the life-blood of the department and are central to what we do. We want them to thrive in their time with us and we seek to achieve that in a supportive and inclusive way. We are excited about the new initiatives that we continue to develop to engage with our international students, LGBTQ+ students and their allies, and students who are first in their family to go to university. Our field kit bursaries are helping students from low-income households purchase essential items for fieldwork such as coats, footwear, and rucksacks. We are also continuing to ensure that our fieldtrips, research, and other activities are environmentally sustainable.

We greatly appreciate the growing number of you who are supporting us in our work with fascinating and insightful employment talks to our undergraduates, with online profiles to give our current and future students a feel for the amazing things a Durham Geography degree makes possible, and with all of the other forms of help that you contribute. Many thanks to all of you for continuing to make Durham Geography a wonderful community.

With very best wishes,

Professor Colm O'Cofaigh
Head of Department



The year ahead

Greetings from Durham!

It has been another busy and exciting year in the Department. Keeping up with our changing world, academic staff continue to conduct cutting-edge research and to bring their findings and ideas into the classroom. In the past two years, we have hired experts on platform economies, food systems, and international urban geographies, who have designed new modules and brought their expertise to students. Student satisfaction (as per the National Student Survey, NSS) remains outstanding, as our students continue to appreciate the small-group contact, the one-to-one dissertation supervision, and the field trip programme that are all key parts of a Durham Geography degree. We are proud that Durham Geography continues to be a dynamic place to study and gain valuable knowledge, skills, and experience.

Field Trips

Field trips continue to be a key part of the undergraduate experience for our BA and BSc students. Unfortunately, this is the second year that it has not been possible to travel to Jerusalem, but students are still having a rich learning experience in the Jerusalem module and we do hope to be taking students there again next year. Now more than ever, we are attending to the environmental impacts of our field trips and bringing our offerings into line with our values, without sacrificing the learning and fun of getting into the field.

Placement years

Placement continues to be a strong option for many of our students who appreciate the experiences and skills gained from taking a year to work or intern between second and third levels. If you might have any such opportunities to offer a Durham Geography BA or BSc, please get in touch with us!

Alumni Events

This has been a great year for alumni careers talks. These events give our current students the chance to hear from, and chat with, a range of alumni speakers. At one event, we heard from alumni of the BSc programme involved in flood risk modelling, science advising for government, podcasting, and working for the BBC. We also were thrilled to host Richard Walker, BA alumni and Managing Director of Iceland Foods, for a talk in the department. These events, as always, were inspiring to our current students, who learned about diverse career paths and got to hear first-hand about how the skills they are learning at Durham transfer into workplaces (yes, even gro up work!). If you have not yet had a chance to speak to our current students about your career, but are interested, please do get in touch!

Masters

It has been a good year for our Risk Masters taught postgraduate programme, which we expanded to include a choice of four different degrees: Risk and Environmental Hazards (as MA or MSc); Climate, Risk, and Society (as MA or MSc); Risk, Security, and Politics (MA); and Risk and Data Science (MSc). With this new diversity, we recruited a strong group of students, many of whom are international. We are not stopping there though. We have a new suite of Masters under development that we think will make the most of our strong research and teaching staff to bring critical ideas and skills to an ever-growing cohort of taught post-graduates at Durham.

We always love to hear from you, and you can get in touch with us either through the website or by emailing gg-alumni@durham.ac.uk. Many thanks as always for all of your contributions to the Department!



Professor Anna Secor
Deputy Head of Department and Alumni Lead

Field Trip Bursaries

For many of you, field trips were one of the most memorable parts of your time at Durham – a chance to see a new part of the world, to grapple with real-world problems, and to get to know staff and fellow students outside of the usual university setting. For some students, however, field trips are a source of stress and anxiety, especially around the additional (and often unanticipated) costs of securing adequate field kit. Even a waterproof jacket and boots – minimum essential equipment for a week in Skye in March – are beyond the means of some of our students. As a result, some students avoid field trip modules altogether, and give up altogether on the idea of a field-based dissertation, because they simply cannot afford the equipment.

To keep our field trips open for as many students as possible, the department recently agreed to arrange a field kit bursary for our most needy students. This provides a one-off payment of £200 to help cover the costs of basic field equipment for all of our students with a household income of less than £25,000 per year. At the moment, we have sufficient departmental funds to cover the costs of the bursary scheme for the foreseeable future. To make this sustainable in the longer term, however, we need your help.



If you have fond memories of Durham Geography field trips and want to ensure that future students can take similar advantage of those opportunities, please consider donating to help us continue the scheme by visiting:

<https://www.dunelm.org.uk/donations/geography>.

Even a small amount helps, and all donations will be used in full to support our most needy students.

Many thanks in advance for any help that you can provide!



Vocational partners needed for postgraduate dissertations

The department are looking for potential vocational partners that our taught postgraduate students on the Risk programmes could work with on a vocational dissertation project.

The vocational dissertation normally runs from February (500 word research proposal written by student), with the main period of work from May until late August, with students producing a 10,000 word consultancy report and 5000 word reflexive diary at the end of the process.

The vocational dissertation takes the form of a partner-framed question, leading to a student-framed project.

We have students looking for vocational projects on five inter-linked Masters programmes:

- Climate, risk and society (MA and MSc)
- Environmental Hazards and Risk (MA and MSc)
- Risk, Security and Politics (MA)

If you think your organisation might be able to help or would like to find out more, please do get in touch by emailing: gg-alumni@durham.ac.uk

Department Achievements 2024

Congratulations to **Professor Dave Evans** as the recipient of the 2024 W.A. Johnston Award, which is the highest honour given by the Canadian Quaternary Association (CANQUA) and recognizes outstanding professional achievement in Quaternary Science. The award is in honour of Dave's many contributions to glacial geomorphology and Quaternary Science, including his publications on subjects of direct relevance to Canada, the time he has spent studying in and undertaking fieldwork in Canada, as well as his training of graduate students who themselves have gone on to hold important posts in academia, government, and the private sector. The Johnston Award has never previously been awarded to a non-Canadian, which makes this honour even more significant.

Professor Harriet Bulkeley has received an OBE in The King's Birthday Honours list. Harriet's honour was awarded to her for services to geography and environmental governance. Not only is this fully deserved recognition of Harriet's leadership of world-leading and path-breaking research into climate change, but it is also timely recognition of the significance of Geography in understanding and responding to some of the biggest challenges facing the world today. Congratulations to Harriet.



Professor Dave Evans



Professor Harriet Bulkeley



Dr Rachel Oien



Dr Andres Luque-Ayala



Professor Nick Cox

Further congratulations to **Professor Harriet Bulkeley** who has been elected to the Academia Europaea. The object of Academia Europaea is the advancement and propagation of excellence in scholarship for the public benefit and for the advancement of education. The aim of the Academy is to promote European research, advise governments and international organisations in scientific matters, and further interdisciplinary and international research. The award is another fitting accolade in recognition of Harriet's interdisciplinary and international research on climate governance, and her wider contribution in this area.

Congratulations to **Rachel Oien** who has been shortlisted as one of six final candidates for the Learning and Teaching award for Academic Tutor of the Year.

Congratulations to **Andres Luque-Ayala** who has been shortlisted as one of six final candidates for the Learning and Teaching award for UG Supervisor of the Year.

Many congratulations to **Professor Nick Cox** on being ranked #1 in the world for two consecutive months on the Statistical Software Components (SSC) Archive's author listing! This is a notable achievement, a marker of Nick's standing within the Stata community, and worthy of celebration. The SSC Archive is but one of three places whereby Nick's work is used. The other two are: using Stata directly and specifically the commands Nick wrote that are built into Stata; and downloading from the Stata Journal website.

We are delighted to share the wonderful news that the Department's Athena Silver Award application has been successful. The Silver Award is conferred by the Equality Charters Team of Advance HE in recognition of our continued progress towards gender equality and wider inclusion. It is valid until 2029.

We are excited to announce that the Department has been associated with two Geographical Association publishers awards, recognising materials associated with geography in schools and colleges that are considered to make a significant contribution to geographical education and professional development:

- How Is Research in Antarctica Improving Future Sea-level Predictions? was co-funded by NERC/Durham, bringing research from **David Small**'s NERC fellowship into school classrooms and receives a highly commended award. This is in addition to last year's award, received by the previous video in this same series.
- The challenge of decarbonising residential housing, brings outputs from **Sarah Knuth**'s research into school classrooms and receives a highly commended award as part of the 2023 Curious Geographer series

Congratulations to the winners of the first annual DurhamARCTIC Arctic Dissertation Award.

1st place: **Max Whelan** (*Glacial Change on Bylot Island: An Investigation into Glacier Terminus Migration and the Controls Thereon (1985-2020)*)

2nd place: **Francesca Milton-Jones** (*An Updated Assessment of the Status of Mountain Glaciers across the Lyngen Peninsula: Response to 21st-Century Proglacial Lake Expansion and Climatic Forcing*)

3rd place: **Lily Thompson** (*Navigating the Polar Frontier: Exploring the Effects of Sea-Ice Decline on Shipping and Sea Routes in the Arctic*)

For more on each of their dissertations, and on the award in general, please see the news story on the DurhamARCTIC website.

Durham Geography has improved from 5th to 4th place in the Complete University Guide 2025 league table (see <https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings/geography-and-environmental-science>). Our consistent performance over many years in the top 5 is due to the hard work and commitment to excellence of everyone associated with the Department.

In a similar vein, in the Times UK University Rankings 2025, the Geography Department topped the subject league table and the Geography Department achieved a ranking of 16th in the 2024 QS World Subject Ranking. Geography is one of only two departments in the Faculty ranked in the top 20 for their subject.

Geography Alumni Achievements

Tessa Howard

Recently graduated BA student Tessa Howard (University College, 2017-22) was awarded an MBE in the January 2025 King's New Year Honours List for "For services to Inclusive Sportswear for Women and Girls".

In her time in the department, Tessa was a dedicated student and her dissertation on the topic of women's participation in sport won a prize with the RGS-IBG. Tessa also represents Great Britain in hockey.



Condolences

Professor David Rhind

Professor David Rhind (CBE, FRS, FBA) was a Lecturer and Reader in the department from 1973-1981 and passed away in January 2025.

David was a geomorphologist with a PhD from the University of Edinburgh. He had a long and distinguished career which included academic posts at Edinburgh and the Royal College of Art before he moved to Durham and then on to Birkbeck, University of London. He subsequently became Director of the Ordnance Survey where he oversaw completion of the digitisation of its maps. He received honorary doctorates from multiple universities including Durham, Sheffield, Bristol, Loughborough, Royal Holloway and Edinburgh. He was well known for his achievements in GIS, digital mapping and cartography and achieved the impressive distinction of being elected as a Fellow of both the Royal Society (FRS) and the British Academy (FBA). He received a CBE for services to Geographical and Social Sciences in 2000.

Audrey Warner

The Department were saddened to be informed of the passing of Audrey Warner who died at her home in Oakenshaw on 5 November. Audrey was the longest serving and only female Observer of Durham University Observatory, a post she held for 30 years. Together with her family, she took meteorological readings each morning, adding to the University's unbroken climate record dating from 1841 and contributing to Meteorological Office national records. She was recognised with an Honorary Master's Degree from DU in 1999.

Audrey was predeceased by her husband, John 'Jack' Warner of the Biological Sciences Department in 2011. One of her children works in the Anthropology Department, whilst two members of her family are Durham graduates.

Institute of Hazard, Risk and Resilience (IHRR)



The Institute of Hazard, Risk and Resilience (IHRR) is a world-leading research institute in hazard, risk and resilience-based at Durham University. The Institute supports innovative research and training for use in policy and practice, collaborating directly with communities, NGOs and governments. It is committed to working with and learning from the widest possible range of stakeholders living with hazard and risk – empowering people, fostering resilience, and improving lives, both now and in the future.

The IHRR runs a series of seminars which are free to attend for anyone interested and can be attended in person or online.

Online registration is essential, and you can see the full list of events on their website.

<https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/hazard-risk-resilience/>

Taught Postgraduate Programmes in Climate, Hazards, Politics & Risk

Have you ever thought about doing a postgraduate qualification?

This year, we refreshed and launched our new suite of taught masters programmes, expanding from three to six programmes. All of our programmes develop students' skills in evaluating risk, data analysis, critical thinking and governing through uncertainty.

Our **MA and MSc in Climate, Risk and Society** gives students focussed training in social, political and physical processes of climate change. Job offerings in climate-related fields are growing quickly and we train students to make evidence-based decisions in complex situations.

Our **MA and MSc in Environmental Hazards and Risk** offer students technical and analytical skills in risk analysis, hazard prediction and social vulnerability. Environmental consultancy and modelling remain key employers of our graduates and promises to remain a growing field, as well.

Our **MA in Risk, Security and Politics** explores how risky environments and people are governed, strategies for fostering resilience, and implications for vulnerably groups and social inequality. We continue to have high placement rates in consultancy, security, insurance, the public sector and further postgraduate study.

Our **Masters in Research Methods** offers in-depth training in social science methodology and provides an excellent foundation for PhD research and professional research posts.

To find out more, visit: <https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/geography/postgraduate-study/>

Alumni Career Talks

Our Alumni Career Talks allow graduates of the department to come back and speak to current students and show them what they can do with their Geography degree. They also allow our alumni to show students how they have used their experiences at Durham to shape and direct their careers.

We cannot run these talks with you, our alumni, getting involved. They are of huge benefit to our students who get so much direction and positivity from listening to the achievements of our alumni.

Richard Walker OBE visit to Durham

We were delighted to welcome geography alum Richard Walker OBE back to the department in January to talk to students about his work and career since graduating.



Richard, (BA Geography, St Aidan's, 2001) is the Executive Chairman of Iceland Foods. Under his leadership, Iceland has undertaken a range of world-leading sustainability and social impact initiatives that include becoming the first major retailer globally to commit to eliminating single-use plastic packaging from its own label range; taking action against continuing destruction of tropical rainforests as the first major UK supermarket to announcing the removal of palm ingredients from its own label food; leading a national campaign to cut the price and reform the archaic laws on infant formula; and launching a unique interest-free microloan scheme to help struggling families – the Iceland Food Club.

In 2023, Richard took on the incredible challenge of climbing Mount Everest to raise funds for a Rare Dementia Support Centre at UCL. He raised more than £1 million. He chairs the Iceland Foods Charitable Foundation and also continues to chair Bywater Properties – the business he founded before joining Iceland in 2012, which is now a UK leader in low carbon timber construction

It was a pleasure to welcome Richard back to the department and if you would like to take part in one of our talks, please do get in touch with us.

History of the Department

A written history of the department, reflecting the diversity of intellectual themes that we have worked on (and often pioneered) and the range of people who have passed through the Department over the years was created by a team led by Professor Ian Simmons – very well known to many of you, who compiled and gathered not only his own experiences and memories, but those of many other past members or staff and students. We are very grateful for all the contributions made to help create this history.

If you have not already taken the opportunity to look at this work, please do explore the document via the following link:

<https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/geography/alumni/the-department-through-time/department-history/>



Stay in touch

We love hearing from our alumni and there are many ways you can get involved. Please get in touch with our alumni team (gg-alumni@durham.ac.uk) to find out more about how you can continue to be involved in the Department

- **Alumni Careers Talks** – tell us how has your Geography degree helped your career? Come back to the Department (whether in person or virtually) and speak to our students about your experiences.
- **Alumni Lecture Series** – a series of online events giving an opportunity to hear one of our world renowned Durham academics speak about their research.
- **Student Employability Mentoring** – individual mentoring for students who need career advice.



- **Internships and Placements** – make students aware of placements or other opportunities within your organisation.
- **Research and Projects** – get students involved in specific projects to make use of their skills and help them develop new ones.
- **Apprenticeships** – let students know about apprentice places or sponsorship of apprentice places within your organisation.
- **Alumni profiles** – answer a few questions about your time at the Geography Department and where your degree has taken you in your career, and join our other alumni in the profile section of our website. This can be in written form, or why not create a short video of yourself and give us a tour of your work place?
- **Reminiscing** – do you have any old stories or anecdotes and even some old photographs that you would like to share and we can include on our website and social media?

Online Short Courses

If you have ever wanted to learn a little more about international boundaries and boundary dispute resolution, IBRU, the University's Centre for Borders Research based in the Geography Department, have short online courses available for anyone to complete. These courses, which are suitable for people completely new to the topic of boundaries, can be taken online at a time and place that is convenient to you.

Courses currently on offer are:

- **Introduction to International Boundaries: Definition, Delimitation and Dispute Resolution**
- **Asylum, Borders and Human Rights**

Go to the IBRU website for more information: www.durham.ac.uk/ibru

Contact Details

www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/geography/alumni/

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Please ensure we have your up to date contact details and email address so we can stay in touch.
Please let us know if you would prefer not to receive any further mailings from us.