

VIPS NEWSLETTER



NO. 3: FEB. 2021

WELCOME

Welcome to the third ViPs newsletter. We're aiming to produce regular newsletters in 2021 so please send us items to include. We would also welcome new ideas about how best to organise the newsletter, the possibility of additional sections and features.

In this newsletter, we have short reports on the December 2020 ViPs meeting and the January 2021 QRA meeting, brief working group reports and an announcement of the next Yorkshire Palaeo Group meeting. Our working groups are currently reviewing their goals for the next year, so we hope to have news of plans to share in the next newsletter.

The Coordinating Group would like to take this opportunity to emphasise that the ViPs group is for everyone involved in teaching the palaeosciences, formally or informally – teaching academics, staff on technical or research contracts who support teaching in different ways, people interested in using virtual resources to support outreach activity, or people interested in contributing resources others can use to support their teaching – we aim to be an open and friendly community.

Simon M Hutchinson, ViPs Newsletter Editor

On behalf of the ViPs Coordinating Group

HOW TO GET INVOLVED IN VIPS:

The ViPs resources spreadsheet is frequently updated and freely available to all. If you wish to contribute resources to the spreadsheet, join the project mailing list or contribute to future newsletters, please use the links below.

Download the spreadsheet of resources [here](#)

Submit resources [here](#)

Join the mailing list [here](#)

The Newsletter Editor would like to encourage you to send any items for future newsletters or comments to help develop its content and layout to ViPsNewsletter@gmail.com or to s.m.hutchinson@salford.ac.uk

WORKING GROUP 1 – COLLATION AND WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

Student placements

We are aware that students undertaking placement/employability modules may struggle to find suitable work experience this year. The ViPs project has the capacity to offer a number of small mini projects that students could undertake. The idea is that the student would engage with a ViPs academic from a different institution thereby working with somebody new. Current ideas for potential mini project include:

- Developing a webpage on a particular proxy or topic.
- Searching for existing resources which may help fill the gaps in the current resource spreadsheet.
- Digitising slides or images for community use
- Creating an image library
- Developing a ViPs blog
- Writing profiles on diverse Quaternary palaeoscientists
- Undertaking a pedagogic placement (e.g. if the student is unable to undertake a school placement).

If you would like to be involved in the development of ViPs placements or have ideas for other mini-projects please get in touch (e-mail Liz: ehurrell@uclan.ac.uk).

WORKING GROUP 2.5 – VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP AND ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES

There are two WG2.5 items to report:

1. Steve Juggins (Newcastle) reports that the eSlide web site has been updated with additional "oven-ready" pollen practicals on human activity associated with crannog occupation developed by Helen Mackay (Durham), vegetation change in Australia following European colonisation developed by Michela Mariani (Nottingham) and Late Glacial to Holocene vegetation change in the UK developed by Anna Bourne and Tom Kelly (QMUL). Link here: <https://www.staff.ncl.ac.uk/stephen.juggins/eSlide/exercises.html>

2. Maarten van Hardenbroek (Newcastle) has created an online poster board for people to share their ongoing virtual teaching projects. It is hoped this will improve communication (especially in highlighting potential project overlap) and promote collaboration. There are just two items at the time of writing. It can be accessed here:

<https://pinup.com/WkRC4nwAO>

Please have a look at these new resources. Feedback and comment welcome.

[Des McDougall, University of Worcester]

WORKING GROUP 4 – EXPERT LECTURES

We have received a set of excellent resources which will be uploaded to the ViPs website.

We will be in touch with other members who have expressed an interest in providing a guest lecture. However, we understand time is very limited, given the ongoing situation, so there will also be an option to give a 2 to 3-minute talk on a specific topic/technique (e.g., dating approaches, what is geomorphology, etc). They will be added to the ViPs and can easily be inserted into any lecture. If you are interested in this option please email Danni danni.pearce@nmbu.no.

If you have already developed short recordings which you think could help ViPs, then feel free to send them over and they can be included in the ViPs resources list.

[Danni Pearce, Norwegian University of Life Sciences NMBU]

WORKING GROUP 5 - PEDAGOGY

WG5 will launch a survey to investigate the move to online teaching and impacts of ViPs soon. The WG continues to meet regularly.

There will be a third in the series of WG5 ‘coffee break events’ in late February. Details of the time and date to follow. These events offer timely insights, by those using and developing on-line resources in their teaching for those about to try to employ similar approaches, as many of us transition from Trimester 1 to 2. The ‘coffee breaks’ run through Teams with a short presentation or demonstration followed by discussion and an informal Q&A. (Bring your own coffee.)

[Karen Bacon, National University of Ireland, Galway]

VIPS MEETINGS AND EVENTS: SUMMARIES

VIPS DECEMBER MEETING: LESSONS LEARNED TEACHING IN BLENDED AND VIRTUAL CONTEXTS IN 2020

We had a successful end to 2020 with our well-attended December meeting. Approximately 30 people attended with five presentations and a lot of useful discussion. The meeting highlighted some of the teaching strategies that had worked successfully, including eSlide (which many attendees were interested in trying), pedagogies of kindness and online practical options.

We heard about some disasters (deathly silent break out rooms, internet connectivity problems and the occasional unclad partner of students caught on camera), got some advice

for the next semester (keep it simple) and had a discussion around content – too much or too little?

One of the key messages from attendees was that online teaching has been exhausting but offers useful options for the future. Easy and rapid student meetings and online tutorials were highlighted as significant advantages while student engagement in larger groups was a constant concern. The other issue that came up several times was content – the drive to keep things simple and clear for students appears to have streamlined content in many cases. Some people were concerned that they were teaching less than previously but, perhaps, more important content with several saying how the move online had made them think about what they were teaching and why – focusing on.

Attendees also highlighted the benefits of learning new teaching tools and increasing their available options for teaching that will be useful post-pandemic but several also highlighted that they missed “corridor” interactions with colleagues and being physically with students.

Overall, the workshop highlighted the great range of adaptations that people have made to teaching in 2020 and generally people were looking forward with more confidence in their ability to teach online – but also with hope of returning to in person teaching at some point in 2021.

[Karen Bacon, National University of Ireland, Galway]

QRA MEETING REPORT

Members of the ViPs community contributed to a QRA Annual Discussion meeting mini-session on virtual teaching and learning. Liz Hurrell, Simon Hutchinson and Jane Bunting started the session providing an overview of the ViPs project, sharing experiences of developing a virtual fieldtrip and disseminating our first lessons from teaching in a crisis. Steve Juggins and Jane Bunting showcased the development of eSlide and Des McGougall provided an overview of VR Glaciers.

Finally, Becky Briant and Annie Ockelford provided an interactive session on the use of Google Jamboard. The session ended with a lively discussion around the resources presented and the continued challenges of teaching remotely.

[Liz Hurrell, University of Central Lancashire]

FUTURE EVENTS AND MEETINGS

YPG SPRING MEETING 2021

The next YPG meeting will be from 2-5 pm on Wednesday 21st April 2021 via MS Teams from the 'other side' of the Pennines!

If you would like to give a presentation (from 10 to 20 min) please contact s.m.hutchinson@salford.ac.uk with a title / topic to facilitate programming. Topics and presenters can hail from anywhere (not necessarily Yorkshire), however, this is the YPS's first (if virtual) visit to North West England so a good local representation would be welcome.

The aim is to provide an interesting afternoon through a range of talks, topics and discussion in an informal setting. Have you got a new paper, idea for a paper or topic for discussion related to recent or planned field work or analysis where comment / feedback would be useful? Postgrads to established researcher welcome.

I look forward to expressions of interest and will circulate a draft programme as soon as one takes shape. Any questions / suggestion please contact s.m.hutchinson@salford.ac.uk

[Simon M. Hutchinson, University of Salford]

BES TEACHING AND LEARNING SIG

Join the British Ecological Society's Teaching and Learning SIG as they bring together experts to discuss plant blindness, its implications and how to tackle it. This is an online event on 31st March 2021. Details are available at <https://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/event/tackling-the-roots-of-plant-blindness/>

[Karen Bacon, National University of Ireland, Galway]

VIPS RELATED / RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS

Investigating the applicability of the ThingLink platform as a lab-based virtual learning resource

The project aimed to create interactive laboratory-based learning environments and, so far, comprises two virtual microscopes, a virtual XRF spectrometer, virtual ion chromatography system and an upcoming virtual laser particle sizer application. In each case, these resources allow users to learn the background theory of the technique, the methodology and analytical set-up, and also to analyse virtually a range of samples and collect data.

Moving forward, our intention is to have a fully virtualised laboratory in which users can travel around the lab and interact with each instrument available, as well as access additional information, such as laboratory health and safety. This style of resource also has the benefit of being easily accessible and more inclusive for a wide range of users. Although it is not intended to replace actual laboratory time, it could be highly valuable as a supplementary learning resource.

Our first paper on this subject has now been accepted (<https://doi.org/10.5194/gc-2020-45>), and involved the dissemination of a very simple, virtual microscope to staff and students.

[Adam Jeffery, University of Keele]

Sudden challenges in teaching ecology and aligned disciplines during a global pandemic: Reflections on the rapid move online and perspectives on moving forward.

We asked higher education lecturers and teachers to share their experiences of moving ecology and aligned disciplines online during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ecology faced all of the same problems at many other STEM subjects but also the added difficulty of the cancelation of field work. More field classes were cancelled outright than lectures or lab classes, significantly impacting the teaching and learning experience for students. We considered the experiences of 30 ecology ecology-aligned teaching academics and our own to consider lessons learned and likely ways to move forward.

Bacon & Peacock (2021) Sudden challenges in teaching ecology and aligned disciplines during a global pandemic: Reflections on the rapid move online and perspectives on moving forward. *Ecology & Evolution*.

Paper link: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ece3.7090>

[Karen Bacon, National University of Ireland, Galway]

IN OTHER NEWS

A couple of interesting stories in the Media with relevance for ViPs. If you see any others, please send the link so we can include them in the next issue.

Bog beetles finally reveal their remarkable age

Having spent the last 50 years in the Natural History Museum, two beetles wedged in the grooves of a piece of oak that was dug from a Cambridgeshire bog in the 1970s have been revealed as 4000 years old. The beetles are Oak Capricorns (*Cerambyx*), a species not previously known to have ever existed in Britain.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-55827408>

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED – THE 'TO DO' LIST'

In ViPs meeting a number of suggestions and ideas have been put forward but need one or more ViPs members to adopt and develop them. Please have a look through the list below and consider whether you could step up and get involved in one of these initiatives.

- We'd like to build a creative commons photo gallery of relevant images which we could all freely use. It's a popular idea but needs someone (or small team) to decide on the best platform to use (e.g., Wikimedia commons, Flickr), tags etc. and to encourage/assist submissions.
- A "tool shed" was proposed – a location on the website which would collate recommendations of software for smaller issues (anything other than a specific part of a data collected and analysis technique), collections of tips ("this is what worked for me"), work-arounds ("these are issues we know about with this resource...") and things not to do ("this doesn't work on Macs..."). Does anyone want to plan, set up and coordinate something like this?
- People in Palaeoscience resource:
 - Biographies of diverse palaeoscientists – this was considered especially useful for students and could be shared via a blog on the website.
 - Similarly, it was suggested that collecting some careers related profiles, interviews etc. which people who trained in the palaeosciences and went on to work outside academia would be very useful.
- Sharing of teaching resources (handouts, datasets etc. which don't really fit with the main collation) - a spreadsheet and a box folder was considered a good way to organise this. Is this something you could help organise and promote?

This list features only the most frequently discussed topics, but you might have another (better?) idea!

If you would like to respond to any of the above, or other aspects of this Newsletter (e.g., items to idea, ideas for new features), please get in touch via ViPsNewsletter@gmail.com or to s.m.hutchinson@salford.ac.uk