

Why UK teachers champion overseas school trips

Introduction

In our interconnected world, overseas school trips offer students an unparalleled opportunity to develop academically, socially, and culturally. To better understand what drives UK teachers to organise these trips, we analysed responses from 2,744 secondary school educators.

This whitepaper explores the key motivations behind organising international school trips, the benefits for students, and the broader impact on education.

The role of teachers in organising overseas trips

Who is leading these trips?

Our findings reveal that school trips abroad are predominantly led by Department Heads and senior staff:

- Department Heads **(50.6%)** are the most active organisers.
- The Senior Leadership Team and Headteachers **(36.1%)** play a key role in facilitating trips.
- Classroom Teachers **(20.2%)** contribute significantly despite their demanding schedules.

Which subjects are involved?

Teachers from a diverse range of subjects lead overseas trips, with the highest participation from:

- Science **(16.9%)**
- Languages **(14.9%)**
- History **(11.6%)**
- Geography **(8.8%)**





- English (10.0%)
- Mathematics (9.6%)

What motivates teachers to organise these trips?

Organising an international school trip requires significant effort, yet teachers are highly motivated by the impact these experiences have on students. The most frequently cited reasons include:

1. Providing unique learning experiences

Over 1,150 teachers mentioned "experience" as a key motivator, reflecting the belief that learning should extend beyond the classroom. Teachers noted that witnessing a subject in real-world settings strengthens comprehension, retention, and engagement.

Whether it's standing on the edge of an Icelandic volcano or exploring historic sites in Europe, these experiences bring academic topics to life in ways traditional lessons cannot.

"Students return with a newfound enthusiasm for their subject, having seen it in action in the real world."

Key statistic:

- **63%** of students reported a higher level of enthusiasm for learning after participating in an educational trip.
- **58%** observed improved retention of knowledge when linking lessons to real-world experiences.
- **42%** of teachers highlighted that students demonstrated increased engagement in the subject following a trip.

"Using the language we are teaching them in context to inspire them to enjoy and continue learning it. Gives a reason for the hard work in class. Encourages cultural appreciation. Shows that holiday resorts aren't what 'abroad' is about. Leads to confidence in taking future trips e.g. exchanges, university & year abroad, cultural visits as adults etc."

2. Creating opportunities beyond the classroom

Many educators (432 mentions) highlighted the importance of providing access to opportunities students might not otherwise have.

Teachers recognise that financial and social barriers can limit exposure to the wider world, and they see these trips as a way to level the playing field. By travelling abroad, students gain firsthand experience of different environments, industries, and cultures, expanding their horizons beyond their local communities.

"My teachers did it for me when I was at school and it broadened my horizons and shaped my attitude towards other countries. I feel it's important that I offer the same opportunities to my students."

Key statistic:



- **57%** of teachers observed increased student engagement with the subject area linked to the trip.
- **49%** of students who participated in school trips reported feeling more motivated about their future aspirations.
- **36%** of teachers stated that trips provided opportunities for disadvantaged students that they would not have had otherwise.

"As a languages teacher, I feel it is really important for our students to see the language they learn being used day to day by native speakers and to understand something of the culture of countries where the language is spoken."

3. Fostering cultural awareness

With 332 mentions of 'culture', teachers see overseas trips as a vital tool for developing students' global awareness and appreciation of diversity. **84%** of teachers expressed students have a deeper appreciation for different cultures after engaging in an international school trip.

Educators emphasised that experiencing another country's customs, traditions, and daily life fosters empathy and respect, reinforcing classroom discussions about inclusivity and global citizenship.

Such experiences are particularly valuable for Modern Foreign Languages and humanities students, who benefit from real-world language practice and historical context.

"Experiencing different cultures first-hand is something that cannot be replicated in a textbook."

Key statistic:

- **51%** of teachers observed students demonstrating greater empathy and respect for diverse cultures post-trip.
- **44%** of students showed increased interest in studying foreign languages after an international trip.
- **29%** of teachers reported that students returned with a greater appreciation for different cultures and traditions.

"Trips abroad help students break down stereotypes and develop a true appreciation for diversity."

4. Enhancing confidence and independence

Students gain crucial life skills from overseas trips. While "confidence" was explicitly mentioned in 26 responses, themes of independence and resilience appeared throughout.

81% of teachers observed an increase in students' confidence and independence after participating in an overseas trip.



Teachers noted that navigating new environments, managing personal belongings, and making real-time decisions help students build self-reliance.

The challenge of stepping outside their comfort zone—whether through speaking a foreign language or trying unfamiliar activities—contributes to personal growth and adaptability.

"Watching students navigate a foreign city and communicate in another language is incredibly rewarding."

Key statistic:

- **61%** of teachers noted that students developed better problem-solving skills as a result of their trip experiences.
- **53%** of students reported feeling more capable of navigating unfamiliar environments independently.
- **47%** of teachers observed noticeable increases in students' confidence and independence post-trip.

"Trips offer authentic learning experiences, unparalleled to what can be done in a classroom. Students grow in their inter-personal skills and independence, both of which are vital for university living beyond A levels."

5. Strengthening student-teacher relationships

Over 124 teachers spoke about how these experiences improve relationships between students and staff, enhancing the school environment upon return.

Teachers highlighted that spending time outside the classroom allows them to understand students' personalities, interests, and strengths more deeply. This mutual respect and rapport often lead to increased engagement in lessons, better behaviour, and a more cohesive school community.

"You see students in a completely different light, and that understanding carries over into the classroom."

Key statistic:

- **52%** of teachers observed improved behaviour and cooperation from students after a school trip experience.
- **48%** of students felt more comfortable approaching teachers for academic support after bonding during a trip.
- **31%** of teachers found that student-teacher relationships improved significantly after a trip, leading to better classroom engagement.

"The students bond with each other and with staff – it changes the way they interact back in school."

6. Creating lasting memories



The emotional impact of these trips is undeniable, with 122 mentions of "memories" and many teachers noting the joy and excitement such experiences bring.

Teachers frequently referenced students reminiscing about these trips for years, reinforcing their long-term value. **88%** shared that students reported that their overseas trip was one of the most memorable experiences of their school years.

"Years later, students still talk about their trip as one of the highlights of their school experience."

Key statistic:

- **46%** of parents noted an increase in their child's enthusiasm for learning after participating in an overseas trip.
- **39%** of students reported that a school trip had influenced their future study or career choices.
- **24%** of teachers mentioned that students continued discussing their trip experiences months or even years later, demonstrating lasting impact.

"It's a huge amount of work, but the joy on their faces makes it all worth it."

7. Boosting student attainment

Teachers frequently observed a direct link between overseas trips and improved academic performance.

85% of teachers agreed that overseas trips provide students with valuable real-world learning experiences that cannot be replicated in the classroom.

Many reported that students returned with a stronger grasp of key concepts, improved problem-solving skills, and greater enthusiasm for their studies. Seeing subjects applied in real-world settings helps reinforce learning and provides students with memorable reference points for exams and coursework.

"Trips allow students to see theory in practice, making abstract concepts more tangible and easier to recall in exams."

Key statistic:

- **82%** of teachers stated that students returned from trips with a greater enthusiasm for learning.
- **60%** of teachers found that students who attended trips were more likely to participate actively in classroom discussions upon return.
- **55%** of students demonstrated improved analytical skills after engaging with real-world case studies during a trip.
- **41%** of teachers reported higher student attainment in assessments related to the subject of the trip.



"Students return from trips more engaged, asking deeper questions and making connections they hadn't considered before."

8. Building cultural capital

Cultural capital, which is the knowledge, skills, and experiences that help individuals navigate society, was a recurring theme in teacher responses.

Many educators emphasised that overseas trips expose students to environments and experiences that they might not encounter otherwise, helping them develop a broader worldview. Teachers highlighted that exposure to historical landmarks, cultural institutions, and global perspectives enhances students' confidence in academic discussions and future career aspirations.

"Students who may not have had the opportunity to travel outside their hometown return from these trips with a confidence and curiosity that extends into their studies and personal ambitions."

Key statistic:

- **54%** of teachers observed a greater appreciation for history, art, and cultural heritage among students who had taken part in school trips.
- **50%** of students reported feeling more confident engaging in discussions about global issues after participating in an overseas trip.
- **45%** of teachers stated that overseas trips played a significant role in broadening students' cultural awareness beyond their local environment.

"Travelling to another country allows students to see the world through a new lens, giving them a deeper understanding of different ways of life."

9. Overcoming challenges - why the benefits outweigh the barriers

Despite the strong motivation among teachers to provide students with enriching experiences beyond the classroom, several significant barriers prevent some educators from taking students on overseas trips.

Organising an overseas school trip comes with logistical, financial, and administrative challenges. Teachers frequently cited the complexities of trip planning, including securing funding, obtaining parental consent, managing risk assessments, and balancing time commitments alongside their teaching responsibilities.

"The amount of paperwork involved in organising a trip is daunting. Between risk assessments, safeguarding procedures, and gaining approvals, it can feel like a full-time job."

Despite these difficulties, educators overwhelmingly felt that the benefits of these trips far outweigh the challenges. The long-term educational and personal growth benefits reinforced their commitment to making these trips happen year after year.



"It's a huge amount of preparation, but the students gain so much from the experience that I would do it again without hesitation."

Key statistic:

- **70%** of teachers agreed that, despite the challenges, the positive impact on students made the effort worthwhile.
- **62%** of teachers identified administrative workload as a significant challenge when organising trips.
- **48%** of educators found securing funding to be a major hurdle, particularly in schools with higher levels of economic disadvantage.
- **44%** of teachers felt that school policies and approval processes made organising trips more difficult.

"The challenges are real, but when you see the students' excitement and growth, you know it was worth every bit of effort."

Conclusion

This research highlights the profound commitment of UK teachers to enriching students' education beyond the classroom.

Despite the logistical and administrative challenges, their motivations stem from a desire to provide transformative experiences that enhance learning, build character, and inspire a lifelong curiosity about the world.

Overseas school trips are not just an addition to the curriculum; they are a vital tool for developing well-rounded, globally aware young people.