



Developing the case for geography

Geography is a strong subject in the school curriculum. It is one of the most popular of the optional subjects for 14-19 year olds, with consistently high entries in recent years for GCSE and A level. Geography is also strong in higher education; according to recent figures (Hill, 2002) geographers are amongst the most employable of all graduates. The Geographical Association and the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) are campaigning to promote geography more widely, and this leaflet is designed to help teachers promote and secure the status of geography within their institutions. It has been prepared by the Secondary Education Section Committee of the Geographical Association, supported by the research findings of colleagues in the GeoVisions Best Practice Research scheme. We hope it will help you develop the case for geography in your own institution, and would be delighted to receive any feedback via GA headquarters.

To make a strong, confident case for geography, you need a clear understanding of both its intrinsic value and its contribution to the wider curriculum.

The unique value of geography is articulated in the Geographical Association's Position Statement (GA 2002), which is a clear expression of our understanding of the outcomes of an effective geographical education. This Position Statement is being sent to all GA members; if you would like information about membership please contact us.

Geography's contribution to the wider curriculum is set out in this leaflet.

Why make the case for geography?

Individuals confident of their place, both in terms of its physical location and its relationship to other places, with an understanding of the physical and human processes that form them, will develop into informed and active global citizens. The challenge for geography teachers is to help pupils develop this confidence, by offering them opportunities for:

- increasing locational knowledge - where places are and how they are interconnected
- building on their experiences and perceptions of places and processes
- understanding places sensitively, through first or second hand experiences
- developing spatial expertise
- seeing the complexity of each place, the different views and feelings related to that place
- developing an understanding of scale, from the personal through to the global
- appreciating global scale, the global dimension and global interconnectivity
- time within the curriculum to think about and to develop their understanding of geographical concepts
- a sense of awe, wonder and enjoyment of places
- developing the ability to synthesise



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Geography's role

Inclusive learning in geography

One of the reasons for the popularity of geography is that it can support many different learning styles. According to Howard Gardner (Gardner, 1993), individual learning preferences, or 'intelligences', include:

linguistic ★ *mathematical/logical* ★ *visual/spatial* ★ *interpersonal* ★ *bodily-kinaesthetic*

and in geography lessons pupils are likely to have the opportunity to learn in most of these ways on a regular basis.

Learning is enhanced when both the left and right hemispheres of the brain are engaged. The two hemispheres do, however operate in very different ways: the *left brain* processes information logically; the *right brain*, meanwhile, sees the 'big picture', working randomly and responding to pictures, colour and spatial information. The trick is to *connect* them, and geography is uniquely well qualified to do this. For example, ask students to:

- *describe (left)* a route on a map or a pattern on a graph (*right*)
- convert *text (left)* into a concept or mind map (*right*)
- *visualise (right)* the place they are studying and then write a description (*left*)

Dyslexics, for instance, may have weak left/right brain integration and are often right brain dominant (visual/kinaesthetic). Geography's visual and 'hands on' learning approaches enable such pupils to access the curriculum more readily, making it a more 'inclusive' subject.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork is a statutory part of geographical education for all pupils at key stages 1-4. All GCSE specifications include coursework based on fieldwork or the collection of primary data, comprising 20-25% of the total mark.

Fieldwork hooks pupils' interest and provides a relevant 'real life' stimulus for geographical questions, setting up a sequence of investigation, collecting, recording, presenting, analysing and evaluating evidence as part of geographical enquiry. It can therefore act as an intervention for promoting higher

order thinking skills. Similarly it is a useful vehicle for developing decision-making skills based on real places and issues and for appreciating other people's values and attitudes.

Fieldwork can be vital to pupils with visual-spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and naturalist learning preferences. Geography teachers will recognise the phenomenon of pupils who consistently fail to achieve in the classroom but ask high level questions in the field and recall information long after the fieldtrip has passed.

Geography and literacy

The key stage 3 literacy strategy is about entitlement, and geography is about offering a relevant context for it. Geography departments deliver many objectives outlined in the *Framework for Teaching English* (DfES, 2001). Graphicacy, geography's unique method of communication, is increasingly important in an information-rich society, in which 80% of information in the public domain is spatially based (RGS-IBG/GA, 1998).

Geography lessons can deliver all the main categories of non-fiction writing as outlined in the English National Curriculum (En1/1a-1e and En3/1) (DfEE/QCA, 1999). These writing styles, including instruction, recounting, explanation, information, persuasion, discursive, analysis and evaluation, are intrinsic to many geography activities. Good extended writing, and the ability to communicate knowledge, understanding, values and attitudes in a developed and coherent manner, raises many pupils to the highest levels of attainment at key stages 3, 4 and A level.

Speaking and listening skills are a particular feature of most geography lessons, especially during group-based activities. Pupils are given the opportunity to articulate, share, refine, test, explain, justify, defend, predict, hypothesise and evaluate (Gg1d) their ideas in a subject which addresses issues with different viewpoints (Gg1e) such as environmental change and sustainable development (Gg5a). Many of these processes are fundamental to the enquiry learning process, reinforced in the 2001 geography Order (Gg1). Pupils often undertake interview and questionnaire surveys; role play and simulations offer further opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills.

in the curriculum

Geography and numeracy

Enquiry based learning is at the heart of both geography (Gg1a-d) and mathematics (Ma4/1a, 3a, 3b, 5a-5c). 'Enquiry skills enable pupils to ask questions, define questions for enquiry, plan research, predict outcomes, anticipate consequences, and draw conclusions' (DfES, 2001). Pupils can practise enquiry skills in cross-curricular statistical surveys: for example, by examining possible indicators for economic development and deciding which of them are likely to highlight differences between countries most clearly; exploring and comparing lifestyles by using a wide range of measurements and rates of change to analyse population data.

The association between numeracy and geography is clear and purposeful. Using maps (Gg2c, e) involves using 'co-ordinates, directions, distance and scale' also angle, position and ratio (Ma3/3d,3e). Geography provides unequivocal real life contexts for numeracy, and numeracy enhances geographical understanding.

Thinking skills

Geography pioneered the teaching of thinking skills, and the resulting wealth of strategies and resources (e.g. Mysteries, Living Graphs, Maps from Memory) support the development of pupils' conceptual understanding. There is also geography-specific research about how pupils learn to think. Geographical contexts offer pupils regular opportunities to apply creative thinking skills - suggesting hypotheses, generating and extending ideas.

To demonstrate understanding of places and to describe and explain geographical patterns and processes pupils must first be able to process information (e.g. classify, sequence). They then use reasoning skills to explain opinions or actions and to make judgments and decisions informed by evidence.

The national curriculum for England states that pupils should 'learn, practise, combine, develop and refine thinking skills' in their work across all subjects. These thinking skills are classified as information-processing skills, reasoning skills, enquiry skills, creative thinking skills, or evaluation skills. In addition, the *National Strategy for Key Stage 3* (DfES, 2001) incorporates the teaching of thinking skills into all five of its strands: English, mathematics, science, ICT and Teaching and Learning in the Foundation Subjects (TLF).

The specified enquiry and evaluation thinking skills form a statutory component of the geography Order and are explicitly taught (Gg1a-f) and assessed at all key stages. Effectively planned, their teaching allows progression in the use and development of thinking skills strategies, and can support pupils in the transfer of concepts such as 'cause and effect', 'systems' and 'location' to other contexts, both across the curriculum and in life.

ICT skills

Geography provides an excellent context for many of the requirements of the ICT National Curriculum programme of study, including specific examples in the key stage 3 ICT Scheme of Work (QCA, 2000). This includes most aspects of information research, data handling, communicating, presenting and modelling. The subject also provides valuable opportunities for contributing to ICT Key Skills.

In the NC Order for Geography, there are specific references to the use of ICT at KS3 in work on geographical enquiry and skills (KS3 PoS 1d, e, f, g). Other opportunities to use ICT are listed throughout the geography programme of study and the Scheme of Work (QCA, 2000). The use of ICT is also a requirement for all GCSE courses in geography - one of only two subjects with a statutory requirement to assess ICT.

Geography incorporates many powerful applications of ICT, from using generic software for word processors and multimedia to subject-specific applications - in particular the increasing use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), data recording in fieldwork, Global Positioning System (GPS) technology and satellite imagery.

The global nature of ICT also means that pupils can communicate directly with pupils in other countries. As well as developing their geographical understanding, this will deepen their appreciation of global citizenship issues.

Key Skills

Key Skills are signposted throughout the key stage 4 and post-16 curriculum, but they are also separate qualifications in their own right. The key stage 4 GCSE geography specifications suggest opportunities for Key Skills at levels 1 and 2 whereas the AS/A2

specifications suggest Key Skills opportunities at level 3. They do not form a compulsory part of these qualifications but are intended to identify opportunities for meaningful development of Key Skills. Key Skills will usually be taken alongside other qualifications and groups of qualifications and are used to develop, reflect and enhance student performance.

There are three main Key Skills, assessed by portfolio and examination:

- Communication
- Application of Number
- Information Technology

There are three wider Key Skills, certificated on completion of an evidence portfolio:

- Working with Others
- Improving Own Learning and Performance
- Problem Solving

Employers and higher education institutions alike value these skills. Students applying to higher education are awarded UCAS points based on their Key Skills achievements. Schools and colleges should feel able to develop all six key skills, choosing those most useful to meet the needs of their students. The most obvious exemplification of Key Skills in geography arises in fieldwork, where these skills can be demonstrated in practical situations.

Citizenship

From August 2002, schools have a statutory responsibility to teach the programmes of study for citizenship at key stages 3 and 4. (A non-statutory framework for citizenship and PSHE is in place for key stages 1 and 2.) Individual institutions can choose how to include the programme of study for citizenship in their curriculum.

In the section on *Learning across the National Curriculum* (DfEE/QCA, 1999a), the geography National Curriculum gives examples of how geography might play a significant part in promoting citizenship:

- Developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of the institutions and systems that influence their lives and communities, and how to participate in decision making, for example, in relation to a local planning issue
- Providing opportunities for pupils to reflect upon and discuss topical social, environmental, economic and political issues
- Developing pupils' knowledge and understanding about the diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and in the wider world

- Developing pupils' understanding of the world as a global community and the issues and challenges of global interdependence and responsibility

The geography programme of study includes two statements on citizenship:

- 3b to describe the national, international and global contexts of places studied (*for example, on the Pacific Rim, a member of the European Union*)
- 3e to explain how places are independent (*for example through trade, aid, international tourism, acid rain*), and to explore the idea of global citizenship

A non-statutory note accompanies these statements – *These develop pupils' understanding of global citizenship which includes awareness of what it means to be a citizen in the local community and of the United Kingdom, Europe and the wider world.*

Sustainable development education

Sustainable development education enables pupils to develop the knowledge, skills, understanding and values to make responsible decisions, both individually and collectively, at both local and global scales, about the environment. It asks young people to consider how quality of life can be improved without damaging the planet for the future, and it encourages them to take personal actions, however small, to improve and sustain their environment. The whole curriculum, but particularly geography, science, PSHE and citizenship, offers many opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of environmental issues and sustainable development (National Curriculum 'Learning Across the Curriculum' statement on Sustainable Development) (DfEE/QCA, 1999b).

References

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On our website you will find a questionnaire about GA resources; all replies will be entered into a draw for the winner's choice of £50 worth of GA resources. Closing date 30 May 2002.