

The Geography National Curriculum GA Curriculum Proposals and Rationale

This is a Geographical Association consultation document focusing on the development of geographical knowledge from age 5 to 16.

It responds to two main questions:

- What geography should be taught in schools?
- What is a better school geography?

What are the aims of the consultation?

- To clarify the GA's position regarding the national curriculum review following the 2010 White Paper, in relation to:
 - Forms of geographical knowledge: content and context; concepts and skills
 - The relationship between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.
- To influence the government in its deliberations and policy regarding the design and specification of geography in the national curriculum.
- To stimulate teachers and promote positive debate about the new curriculum.
- To establish a groundswell of expertise to enable high quality support to successfully implement the new curriculum.

When will the consultation take place?

Friday 15 July to Monday 31 October 2011

What happens next?

After reading this document you are invited to respond to a series of questions on the GA website:
www.geography.org.uk/geographycurriculumconsultation

1 The geography national curriculum

1.1 Selecting the geographical knowledge to teach

1.1.1 The central aim of the geography curriculum is to guide teachers in the selection of what to teach. This should be worthwhile, suitably challenging and above all motivating and interesting to pupils.

1.1.2 It is helpful to distinguish three forms of geographical knowledge. In selecting what to teach all three are important. Moreover, they intersect and are mutually dependent: they cannot be taught in isolation of each other, but all should be taught.

- "Core knowledge" [Kn1]: This refers to the subject as it resides in the popular imagination: if geography is the 'world subject'¹ its core knowledge is gleaned and created from the information communicated in globes and atlases. Much of this amounts to geographical context, and in this sense can be distinguished from the main content of the curriculum. It is not low level or trivial material but it can become so if taught badly, e.g. as an end in itself. The GA, in its 2009 manifesto, likens learning geography to learning a 'language'. Using this metaphor, the idea of 'vocabulary' captures the role of 'core knowledge'. It may be thought of as extensive world knowledge, in itself fairly superficial yet enabling.
- "Content knowledge" [Kn2]: Sometimes referred to as concepts or generalisations, and the key to developing understanding. This may be seen as the main content of the geography curriculum. Key concepts and generalisations in geography show how geography contributes to pupils' acquisition and development of 'powerful knowledge'². Using the GA's language metaphor, the concepts of geography are like its 'grammar'. It may also be thought of as more intensive world knowledge, taking in the realm of processes, different perspectives and of values.
- "Procedural knowledge" [Kn3]: Thinking geographically is a distinctive procedure – it is not the same as thinking historically or scientifically or mathematically (etc.). The teacher can model this by example, but it is also learned through exposure to, and direct experience of, high quality geographical enquiry which might include decision making or problem solving scenarios. There are two characteristics of geographical approaches, or a geographic orientation, to making sense of the world that are particularly striking to note:

(a) The recognition of the significance of place and unique context.

¹ See Bonnett, A. (2008) What is Geography?. London: Sage.

² According to Michael Young to acquire powerful knowledge is the main point of going to school: It 'provides a reliable basis for moving beyond particulars and therefore beyond one's own experience'. Young, M. (2008) Bringing Knowledge Back In. London: Routledge.

(b) The adoption of a relational (or sometimes, 'holistic') approach to enquiries (e.g. taking account of both physical and human factors; or the links between local phenomena and wider global processes).

Learning geography requires pupils to engage mentally with questions about people, society, environment and the planet. This means they identify, assimilate, analyse and communicate data of various kinds, and learn the skills to do so productively. This will often entail using information technology – manipulating maps, diagrams, graphs and images (sometimes referred to collectively as 'graphicacy') – structured talk and debate and writing for a variety of audiences.

1.2 Teaching for understanding: the importance of reasoning and making meaning

1.2.1 Geo-geography (literally, 'earth-writing') is the ancient but never-ending task of describing and making sense of the world. Doing geography in school inducts young people into this process. A vast quantity of information about the world is available at our fingertips through television and the internet, but making sense of this geographically requires disciplined application and a balance between Kn1, Kn2 and Kn3.

1.2.2 The place of 'core knowledge' in school geography has perplexed generations of geography teachers. Responding to the past, geography teachers wanted to shrug off a poor image in which bored pupils had to reel off list after list of place names, products and what we might call today trivia (this is inert information 'learned' simply because it appears on the list).

1.2.3 However, core knowledge is not trivial. For information to become knowledge we have to give it meaning. In geography this very often comes from the links and relationships we make between individual bits of information. When 'core knowledge' is built up this way it is enabling. It enables us to make links and comparison and to develop and refine our inner geographical imaginations.

1.2.4 We can take this argument even further. Maybe there is nothing intrinsically geographical about place names or rivers or mountains. It is how we study these – geographically – that gives them geographical and explanatory meaning. For instance, using the question sequence: What? Where? Why there? How?

1.2.5 Developing procedural knowledge [Kn3] is key to making geographical meaning because it entails a growing realisation of the disciplinary practices that create, interpret and use geographical knowledge. In schools we have, over the years, come to refer to this as 'enquiry learning'. Though this

approach has acquired varied forms, at its heart lies the deceptively simple idea that pupils identify, gather and process data in order to draw conclusions³ which may be open to challenge and debate.

1.3 Geography and pedagogic choice

1.3.1 Enquiry learning requires appropriate pedagogies. On some occasions this will be consciously 'dialogic', with lots of classroom talk, possibly structured to develop argumentation skills. Sometimes this will resemble scientific investigation with hypothesis testing. Almost always effective enquiry requires good questions and data (pictures, maps, text, numbers etc.) for pupils to work with. Usually it also depends on episodes of teacher exposition, not least to set up the context and opportunity to develop the appropriate 'core knowledge'.

1.3.2 The choice of pedagogy should be governed by the purposes of teaching a particular theme, issue or place study. These choices are for teachers to make, understanding the need to hold in balance a range of competing priorities including, for example, pupils' prior experiences, the need to use activity based learning techniques and the quality and accuracy of the geography. This is why the GA describes teachers as the 'curriculum makers'⁴.

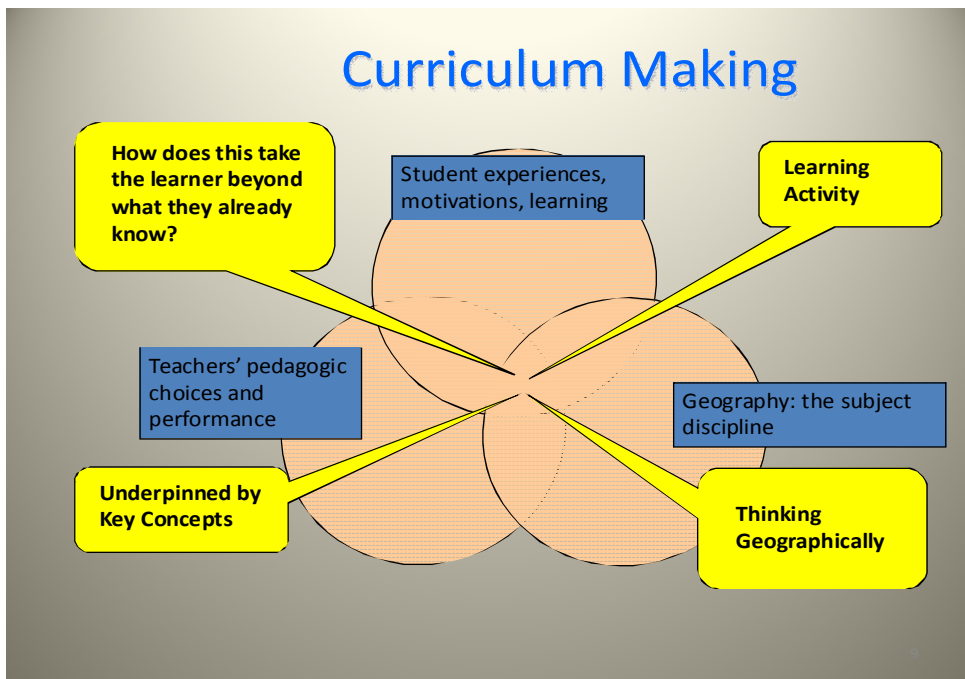


Figure 1 Curriculum Making⁵

³ An excellent resource for developing this idea in practice is Roberts, M. (2003) Learning Through Enquiry. Sheffield: Geographical Association.

⁴ See for example: www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk/curriculum-making/introduction/

⁵ See <http://www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk/online-cpd/course/curriculum-making-cpd-unit/> See also Lambert, D. and Morgan, J. (2010) Teaching Geography 11–18: A conceptual approach. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

1.3.3 It is helpful to distinguish curriculum making from the more technically precise matter of planning individual lessons on the one hand and the more abstract or general matter of planning the whole curriculum (at school level) or even the national curriculum (at national policy level). Curriculum making lies in between these levels of practice. It is a professional thought process that is conscious of the ways in which teaching geography is justified educationally, in practice.

1.4 Learning geography and making progress

1.4.1 Richard Daugherty⁶ wrote 'if we did not hope that pupils should progress we would have no foundation on which to construct a curriculum or embark on the act of teaching'.

1.4.2 Progression is a complicated matter, especially when linked to the technical processes of assessment. Assessing progress is particularly challenging in a subject like geography which is not learned in a cumulative or linear sequence. Excellent guidance on assessment exists⁷, but in this document we do not tackle the technical processes of assessing these proposals. The curriculum comes first.

1.4.3 However, we do make a broad statement on how children and young people make progress in geography. This responds to Daugherty's crucial point in 1.4.1 above. Through learning geography we expect pupils to progress by:

- Moving 'outwards' from the familiar to the less familiar (this includes encountering difference and diversity in a spirit of open-mindedness and also coming to understand the world as a whole).
- Working with increasingly complex and/or abstract ideas and data and increasingly being able to make and apply generalisations about patterns, distributions and relationships in the context of people, society and environments.
- Becoming more able and confident to communicate with precision and to make worthwhile distinctions in describing and making sense of the world.
- Deepening understanding of key concepts such as interdependence e.g. (in the relationships between people and the environment and between the local and the global) and becoming increasingly able to communicate this using a variety of technologies.
- Being able to draw from an increasing breadth of 'core knowledge', including locational knowledge and a range of contexts.

⁶ Daugherty, R. (1996) 'Defining and measuring progression in geography' in Daugherty, R. and Rawling, E. (eds) *Geography into the Twenty First Century*. London: John Wiley and Sons.

⁷ For example: Weeden, P. and Butt, G. (2008) *Assessing Progress in your KS3 Geography Curriculum*. Sheffield: GA.

1.5 So, why teach geography?

1.5.1 In the present day and age in which there are intense pressures on the school curriculum – both from the proliferation of different subject specialisms and from those who would disband subjects altogether and focus on general competences, soft skills and learning to learn – it is necessary to be clear about the purpose of geography in school, not as an undisputed 'end' in itself but in terms of how it contributes to the education of young people: that is, as a means to an end. The end point is the educated person.

1.5.2 It may be helpful, therefore, to express geography in terms of the 'capabilities'⁸ it develops in pupils. Capability implies a mix of knowledge, understanding, skills and dispositions. Insofar as geography contributes in particular ways to capability, any young person without geography as part of their general education could be considered to be uneducated in a significant way. They would lack knowledge and the capacity to make meaning geographically.

1.5.3 The argument is that a lack of geographical knowledge impairs an individual's capability. By capability we mean human agency. The 'macro objective' of teaching geography – the reason we do it – is because it serves the educational goal of improving young people's capability. This includes building enabling knowledge and the capacity to think creatively and critically in society and environments (and entering the conversation about 'being at home on planet earth', in a spirit of 'confident uncertainty').

1.5.4 Drawing from how geography is set out in Section 1.1 above (i.e. Kn1–3), we can say capability is enhanced through:

- Expanding core geographical knowledge (mainly Kn1).
- Deepening conceptual understanding of people and environments on a variety of scales (mainly Kn2, but enabled by Kn1).
- Application of geographical information and thought to understand how places and environments are made and how they may develop or change (this emphasises the importance of Kn3).

⁸ See Lambert, D. (2011) 'Reframing school geography' in Butt, G. *Geography, Education and the Future*. London: Continuum Press.

2 National Curriculum proposals for geography

2.1 Rationale: Geography, the school subject

2.1.1 'The goal of geography is nothing less than an understanding of the vast interacting system comprising all humanity and its natural environment on the surface of the Earth'⁹ or as the Geographical Association says in its 2009 manifesto¹⁰, school geography should aim to encourage and underpin 'a lifelong conversation about Earth as the home of humankind'. The manifesto asserts that school geography needs to be 'living geography'¹¹ providing lasting and worthwhile significance for pupils embarking on adult life.

2.1.2 The 'surface' of the Earth includes its crust, the landscape, vegetation, the atmosphere, the oceans, people, human cultural and economic activities, the built environment and political territories. In modern times, the subject has evolved as a science and as a social science and is also frequently considered to be part of the humanities.

2.1.3 The role of school geography teachers is to develop systematic knowledge that helps children understand how physical and human phenomena are arranged and related. This makes geography distinctive, as a national curriculum subject that bridges the sciences and the humanities. In describing and seeking explanations for the interaction of people with their varied environments, geography has a particular interest in spatial distributions, movements, patterns and in the way places are made.

2.1.4 Geography has a number of foundational concepts which are of enduring use such as place (territories and regions), space (location and links) and environment (human and physical interaction). It is concerned with the context of where phenomena are found, how they are related and the processes that explain why change happens. It thus links past, present and possible future patterns of human occupation of Earth.

2.1.5 Globes, atlases and maps (in print and electronic forms) are central to geography as they provide data and help communicate and analyse spatially located phenomena at various scales. They may be thought of as the sources of information from which we develop our 'core' geographic knowledge.

2.1.6 Fieldwork, through which pupils experience real world educational encounters, is also an important component of the geography curriculum. Fieldwork also resonates directly with the history of geography, with its heritage of exploration and concern with discovery.

⁹ Edward Ackerman, prominent US geographer of the mid twentieth-century

¹⁰ www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview

¹¹ See also Mitchell, D. (ed) (2009) Living Geography: Exciting futures for teachers and pupils. London: Optimus Education.

2.2 Geography in the school curriculum

2.2.1 Many children begin to build their geographical experience and comprehension in the Foundation Stage, particularly through the area of learning designated as 'knowledge and understanding of the world' in the early years curriculum.

2.2.2 Pupils should begin to learn geography more formally in Key Stage 1. They should learn about and investigate their surroundings, the natural and human environment and where they live – in their locality and their country. Opportunities should be taken to put this in a wider international context (e.g. relating to holidays, relatives, sporting events etc.). Curiosity should be encouraged and nurtured. They should be taught to recognise features such as rivers, hills, parks, different shops, hospitals and schools. They should observe daily patterns of weather and be introduced to spatial terms of reference including: directions, next to, closer than/further than, above/below, near/far, around, inside/outside, etc.

2.2.3 By Key Stage 2 pupils should learn to construct and use basic maps of the school and the community and use atlases and globes. They should learn about and investigate the natural and human environment of the local area and contrasting localities, identifying links between places. They should explore two to three different countries, examining their contrasting cultures and landscapes and wider continental settings. They should begin to recognise patterns and regularities of land use or jobs through topics such as shopping or leisure for example, as well as some cause and effect relationships such as relief rainfall in the British Isles. They should begin to build up knowledge of some of the key features of the Earth's surface and some significant places.

2.2.4 Thus, by age 11, children should know about:

- 'My own place'/community – an in-depth study
- 'My country' – an overview of the UK: basic understanding of the shape and character of the countries, main regions, main physical features and rivers, important cities and transport routes and significant sites such as national parks.
- 'The wider world' – locational knowledge and overview of the continents, oceans, an exploration of two to three nations and major features such as hot/cold climates, hazard regions etc.
- The physical landscape – description and some explanation of change in the physical world including time scales (e.g. 'geological' time). Study to include something at a broad scale like a climate region/ecosystem and something at a small scale like a study of a local landform or river/coast features.
- Human geography – investigations of human distributions, including at least one topic at a broad scale (like an overview of the leisure industry in Britain) and at least one enquiry at small scale (like a study of a town).

- The environment – including at least one issue capable of being investigated at a local scale and involving fieldwork and one study looking at a world-scale topic like the conservation of animal species, depletion of fish stocks, environmental hazards and responses.
- Geographical tools – simple maps, plans, atlases (print and electronic) and diagrams; use of photographs, film, internet; directly observing, measuring and interviewing at first hand; geographical vocabulary and geographical writing.

2.2.5 During Key Stage 3 pupils should be introduced to the substantive concepts that help geographers interpret the world: for example, migration, urbanisation, erosion, weathering and so forth. Through these concepts they begin to develop and investigate geographical themes (e.g. agriculture or urbanisation), issues (e.g. energy or development) and places (e.g. China or India). During Key Stage 3, pupils should study the geography of the UK in its European and global setting, identifying links and the interrelationships between places. This should occupy a significant proportion of allocated time, introducing a range of environments, country and regional contexts, and building an extensive core geographical knowledge.

2.2.6 Thus, by age 14, young people should know about:

- The UK in the wider world – greater depth of knowledge and understanding about the physical, economic, social and political geography of the UK within the context of its place in the wider world.
- Significant world places – broad locational knowledge of the world's significant places; in depth knowledge and understanding of at least one major country or region important in the world today e.g. USA, China, Middle East, Southern Africa.
- Understanding interdependence and similarities across the world, including an in-depth study of a distinctive country setting with different cultural, social, economic or environmental characteristics e.g. in India, Afghanistan, Central American country, Central Asian republics.
- Living and working in Europe today – knowledge and understanding about the changing physical, economic, social and political geography of Europe, including a study of one European nation other than UK in greater depth.
- The environment and climate change – including an overview and specific examples of the character and differential impact of global climate change; also a more in-depth study of one physical/environmental issue e.g. local flooding, species decline and/or recovery.
- Changing landscapes in the UK:
 - (a) physical geography and environmental study of the factors affecting the landscape in a region or small area of the UK e.g. coastal region, mountain and moorland area, river valley.
 - (b) urban/built environment study of changing processes and conditions affecting an urban neighbourhood or a city.

- Geographical tools – using a variety of maps, plans, atlases, diagrams etc.; using GIS to analyse spatial patterns and in problem-solving or decision-making scenarios; using photographs and the internet as both a source of information and as a means for communicating geography; using simple descriptive and inferential statistics to describe and analyse numerical data; using opportunities for first-hand fieldwork/out-of-class activity for directly experiencing, observing, measuring and also for interviewing people; using specialist geographical vocabulary (like interdependence, globalisation, sustainability, scale) in more sustained and discursive geographical writing.

2.2.7 At Key Stage 4 pupils should learn to integrate geographical concepts into their exploration of the Earth's surface and its human occupation. Pupils of this age are able to appreciate more complex patterns of politics, culture and economics, as well as climate, landforms and ecosystems. They are more able to apply and test generalisations. They can deal with more abstract ideas and accept hypothetical statements, e.g. 'for the sake of argument'. They should be encouraged to draw from a growing core geographical knowledge and be prepared to handle multivariate 'decision-making' scenarios that may involve conflicting points of view in the study of human agency and the natural environment. Pupils should study a range of regions and countries in depth and be taught the importance of locational context and the usefulness of an extensive world knowledge. They should be taught about the employability of geographical skills and knowledge, for example the applicability of GIS in planning, logistics and a wide range of economic activities.

2.2.8 Summary (5–16 years). The following table shows an overview of the geographical knowledge that should therefore be taught to young people through the compulsory years of school. This is arranged under four headings. The first three show the foundational ideas in geography. The fourth shows the methods and approaches used in geographical study and enquiry.

The consultation is especially interested in whether the summary in Table 1 below, in conjunction with the progression sequence set out above and the guidance provided in Section 1, is effective in guiding local decisions about what to teach.

Table 1 What should be taught in school geography?

PLACE (including territories and regions)	SPACE (location and links)	ENVIRONMENT (physical and human)	GEOG ENQUIRY (procedures and 'tools')
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local place knowledge in community and regional context • Britain/UK knowledge • Broad overview of world including locational knowledge (continents, oceans, countries, significant features) • In-depth studies of places different from their own • Study of places of great significance in and for the world today (China, USA, Europe) • In-depth study of places that are scenes of conflict at different scales (e.g. a local place, Afghanistan) • Exemplar studies of places where physical extremes or hazards dominate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of economic patterns, distributions and change in e.g. industry, leisure, agriculture • Understanding of resource distributions and food, water and energy security on regional, national and international scale • Reasons for and processes behind the location and changing distributions of population • Understanding of flows and movements of people, goods and ideas, with examples on a regional, national and global scale • Understanding of spatial systems, such as climate, through the distribution of energy through ocean currents and wind patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topics and issues which show the interaction of physical and human elements, locally and globally • Approaches to managing and living with changing physical and human environments • How to investigate an environmental issue at first-hand or using primary sources • Processes involved in distribution and patterns of major physical features, including natural regions and ecosystems • Case studies of countries/communities to reveal the links between social, economic and environmental quality • Small scale study of processes leading to landscape change: e.g. weathering and erosion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maps – what they show us, how to use them and how to construct them • How to use and apply geographic information systems (GIS) • How to use other sources – photographs, diagrams, internet, databases, animation and visualisation technologies, electronic atlases, film, libraries, newspapers, magazines and journals etc. • First-hand investigation via fieldwork: photography, GPS, sketching, interviewing, meeting people etc. • Writing descriptively and analytically about places, spaces and environments; constructing and challenging arguments

2.2.9 The national curriculum summary above is not a statement of everything that should be taught and learned in school geography. It is a national statement of the stable, enduring contents of the geography curriculum. Conceptual understanding is deepened and broadened through the key stages. At all levels, teachers, as geography 'curriculum makers', need to address appropriate content (e.g. topics), be mindful to select geographical contexts (e.g. case studies) and systematically build geographical 'core knowledge' with pupils.

2.2.10 Section 2 has so far summarised the main 'content knowledge' of geography from 5 to 16 years. To enable the gradual building of geographic 'core knowledge', a simple context sequence may also be provided. This may help teachers in different key stages to select appropriate contexts for their geography lessons. The overarching aim would be that children are exposed to a range of contexts through their schooling and that in so doing build an extensive 'core knowledge' in geography.

It may be that such a 'core knowledge sequence' is only appropriate for key stages 1 and 2 or 1 to 3. This consultation is particularly interested in seeking views on this from geography teachers at all levels in primary and secondary schools.

Acknowledgements

This document was authored by David Lambert on behalf of the Geographical Association. It has benefited from widespread informal consultations with individuals over a period of three months, with substantial contributions from:

Alan Kinder (Chair, GA Education Committee)

Alan Parkinson (GA Secondary Curriculum Development Leader)

Alex Standish (GA member and author)

Dave Hassell (GA member, formerly of Becta)

David Gardner (GA member, formerly of QCDA)

Doreen Massey (GA Honorary Vice President)

Eleanor Rawling (GA Past President, formerly of QCA and author)

Fran Martin (GA President 2011–12, Primary Geography editorial collective)

Fred Martin (Vice Chair, GA Education Committee)

GEReCo (www.geography.org.uk/gtip/gereco)

John Hopkin (GA President 2010–11)

John Lyon (GA Programmes Manager)

John Morgan (Geography editorial collective)

Margaret Roberts (GA Past President, Chair of COBRIG, geography adviser to the Singapore Ministry of Education)

Mary Biddulph (Editor, Teaching Geography)

Paula Owens (GA Primary Curriculum Development Leader)

Peter Fox (GA Honorary Treasurer and Trustee)

Roger Firth (GA member, Oxford University)

Ruth Totterdell (GA Publications and Journals Manager)

Stephen Scoffham (GA Publications Officer)

Wendy North (GA Primary Curriculum Development Leader)

The proposals have also been discussed formatively by the GA Governing Body and the GA Education Committee (representing ten Special Interest Groups). Various teacher groups have also had an informal input on an ad hoc basis over this period.

Responses from the consultation will be considered at the autumn meetings of the GA's official bodies and a 'final report' will be published by December 2011. Wider debate concerning what we should teach in school geography will continue in all three of the GA's journals: Geography, Teaching Geography and Primary Geography.