



Department  
for Education

**Consultation Response Form**

**Consultation closing date: 16 April 2013**  
**Your comments must reach us by that date.**

**Reform of the National Curriculum in England:**

**Consultation Response Form**



**Geographical  
Association**

**1 Do you have any comments on the proposed aims for the National Curriculum as a whole as set out in the framework document?**

Comments:

a) "The National Curriculum provides pupils with an introduction to the core knowledge that they need to be educated citizens."

In our 2011 curriculum consultation proposals

([www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/geographycurriculumconsultation2011/](http://www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/geographycurriculumconsultation2011/)) the GA stated that the central aim of the national curriculum is *to guide teachers in the selection of what to teach*. We also pointed out that this should be worthwhile and suitably challenging, motivating and interesting to pupils. In this sense, the GA supports the statement within the national curriculum aims that "The National Curriculum provides pupils with an introduction to ... core knowledge".

Our 2012 paper 'Thinking geographically' (<http://www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/ncconsultation/>) set out the distinctive nature of geographical knowledge and understanding. The GA suggests that it is helpful to distinguish three forms of knowledge. In selecting what to teach we argue that all three are important, intersect and are mutually dependent: they cannot be taught in isolation of each other, but all should be taught.

*Extensive world knowledge* in geography is gleaned and created from the information communicated in globes and atlases. It can be thought of as, in itself, fairly superficial, yet it is also enabling since it provides geographical context.

*Knowledge of geographical concepts or generalisations* in geography show how geography contributes to pupils' acquisition and development of 'powerful knowledge'. The concepts of geography may be thought of as more intensive world knowledge, taking in the realm of processes, different perspectives and of values.

*Procedural knowledge* is necessary because geography requires pupils to identify, assimilate, analyse and communicate data of various kinds, and learn the skills to do so productively. This often entails manipulating maps, diagrams, graphs and images (sometimes referred to collectively as 'graphicacy'), as well as structured talk, debate and writing for a variety of audiences.

In our 2011 proposals, we suggested it may be helpful to express geography in terms of the 'capabilities' it develops in pupils. Capability implies a mix of knowledge, understanding, skills and dispositions. 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 (from local to global). This way of thinking about the curriculum takes us well beyond the more limited aim of introducing pupils to knowledge -

core or otherwise.

The GA therefore concludes that the first statement within the national curriculum aims is inadequate because, unlike the GA's capabilities approach, it fails to address the question posed by the Nuffield Review (Pring et al 2009), 'What counts as an educated young person in this day and age?' ***We therefore recommend that the aims be amended to distinguish the different types of knowledge we want pupils to acquire, and to recognise that pupils need more than knowledge in order to function as educated citizens.***

b) "It introduces pupils to the best that has been thought and said; and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement."

The GA strongly endorses the view that disciplinary knowledge is essential to a good education. In our 2011 proposals, we argued that subject disciplines represent distinctive ways of seeing. The Association has also developed the notion of *curriculum making*, which proposes that effective teaching arises when the teacher keeps three essential resources- subject, pedagogy and learners - in mind and in balance. In other words, no matter how skilful the teacher is or how relevant the learning to the students' experiences, worthwhile educational goals must be derived at least partly from a subject discipline, which resides beyond the experience of the students.

Just as student experiences cannot, by themselves, constitute the totality of an educational experience, nor can subjects (or indeed knowledge itself) be thought of as inert, fixed or as 'given'. Instead, the GA regards national curriculum requirements as an opportunity for students to engage with the discipline in a critical way, in order that the possibility of new knowledge creation be held open. We therefore regard the use of the phrase 'the best that has been thought and said' as problematic. This is not an appropriate aim for a national curriculum, since an appreciation of human creativity and achievement arises from critical debate about what has been thought and said, not merely an introduction which pre-judges what is 'best'.

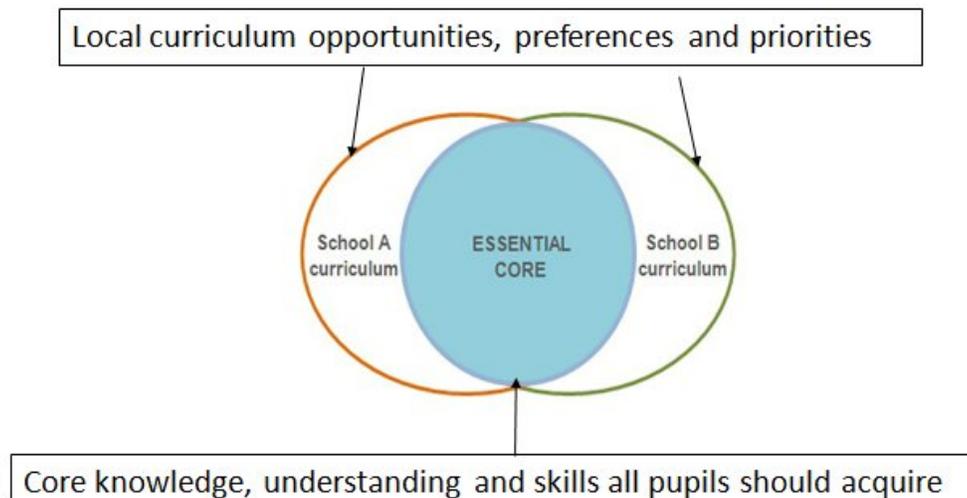
For this reason, the GA regards this statement as an inadequate curriculum aim. ***We recommend that the statement be re-worded to signal the need for critical engagement with disciplinary content.***

c) "The National Curriculum is just one element in the education of every child. There is time and space in the school day and in each week, term and year to range beyond the National Curriculum specifications. The National Curriculum provides an outline of core knowledge around which teachers can develop exciting and stimulating lessons."

The GA welcomes the distinction between the national (statutory) curriculum and the school curriculum as experienced by students. Indeed, we would argue that these draft Orders do not really constitute a curriculum, since they do not arrange or sequence content, nor indeed specify the level of detail teachers are expected to provide. ***We suggest an alternative title be explored, such as 'National***

**Framework', in order to encourage schools and teachers to understand the need to develop a localised curriculum which incorporates statutory requirements.**

This diagram helps to represent our view of the relationship between the two:



We know that many schools have their own local, national and international links and benefit from the experience and knowledge of both staff and students. In geography, these can be drawn upon to make the subject “come to life” and generate meaningful and deeper understanding for pupils. Curriculum flexibility allows geography teachers to pick up on opportunities to study local issues as they arise – for example planning applications for major new building etc. Geography teaching benefits from opportunities to develop a curriculum which fits local needs and experiences.

The Association’s own public consultation exercise, conducted in the autumn of 2012 (and already shared with department officials) demonstrated very clearly the risks associated with prescribing a slimmed-down ‘essentials’ curriculum. Teachers reported to us the danger that school senior leaders would treat minimum requirements as a minimal entitlement for students, and react by cutting provision in subjects where curriculum detail was limited. For this reason, the imbalance in detail between maths, English and science and non-core subjects such as geography is a concern.

In many primary schools and in those secondary schools where geography and history are taught in an integrated way, the relative length and detail in the history and geography requirements are likewise significant and may influence the amount of curriculum time given to these subjects by curriculum managers. Since the Secretary of State does not have powers to direct curriculum time, **the GA recommends that guidance and training is provided in order to help school leaders understand the distinction between a core and local curriculum. We suggest that guidance is supported by school inspection** to challenge schools which fail to use the “time and space in the school day and in each week, term and year” to develop geographical and other forms of learning beyond the minimum

National Curriculum specification.

Overall, therefore, the Association feels that the draft National curriculum aims are *insufficiently ambitious*, since they do not set out the broader capabilities that pupils might acquire. Nor do we feel that the proposals contain or outline *the necessary measures* (such as guidance for senior leaders on the time to be spent 'ranging beyond' the core) to ensure the aims will be realised.

2 Do you agree that instead of detailed subject-level aims we should free teachers to shape their own curriculum aims based on the content in the programmes of study?

Disagree

Comments:

In our 2011 Curriculum proposals and rationale the GA stated that 'The central aim of the geography curriculum is to guide teachers in the selection of *what to teach*.' For this reason, any curriculum document can be considered incomplete without a clear and convincing set of aims, which help to set out and contextualise the prescribed content, *as well as give teachers guidance on their own content selections*.

This position was greatly strengthened through our more detailed curriculum proposals and consultation in 2012. The first key finding of the subsequent consultation report concluded that: 'A national curriculum needs clear aims and outcomes statements to support planning and make the rationale for geography clear.' Our feedback, from 195 responses, found that 'Many respondents welcomed the way in which our curriculum proposal aims expressed the purpose(s) of studying the subject' ([www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/ncconsultation/](http://www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/ncconsultation/)). Teachers told us that this helped them understand the purpose of what they were being asked to teach, but also helped them to convey a sense of this to their students, plan effectively and consider student achievement against a clear picture of the subject.

As with any national requirements, subject-level aims (of the kind included in the draft Programmes of Study) do not preclude teachers from localising or contextualising these to their own situation. Indeed, the GA feels that national aims are likely to encourage this process, if an appropriate mechanism of support is put in place. ***We recommend that resources are allocated to support this process, to include professional development for teachers to engage with subject aims and to learn how to incorporate national requirements alongside their school context*** – acknowledging the importance of local factors, student voice etc. Such support could help to unlock the imagination and enthusiasm of the many excellent geography teachers around the country and could lead to some very imaginative approaches to delivering the subject. This approach would also allow teachers to deliver more than statutory core

knowledge and to provide interesting approaches to the delivery of content.

The GA therefore broadly supports the inclusion of 'Purpose of study' and 'Aims' sections in the draft geography programmes of study. Our comments on the details of each can be found below.

### 3 Do you have any comments on the content set out in the draft programmes of study?

Comments:

In relation to the draft programmes of study for **geography**:

**The GA applauds the decision to include explicit requirements for all students to study geography at each key stage 5-14 years (Key Stages 1-3).**

We feel this decision is vindicated by the evidence. In relation to the views of key stakeholders, such as young people and employers, we cite the following:

In February 2009 the GA commissioned Ipsos MORI to investigate which issues students think are important and whether they feel they are learning about them. The research explored:

- The wider world issues that pupils think are important
- Whether or not they have learnt about/discussed them at school
- The lessons in which they have learnt about/discussed them
- The importance they attach to learning about these issues

This research revealed that the vast majority (93%) of 11-14 year olds think it is at least 'fairly important' to learn about issues affecting peoples' lives in different parts of the world, with half believing this is 'very important'. Over 90% think it is important to learn about where things like food, energy and water come from, and to learn about how their world may change in the future. Unsurprisingly, pupils identified geography as the main subject for learning about these things. Yet the same research found that two-thirds of them think not enough time in school is spent learning about the wider world. We conclude that young people are quite clear about the need to include geography in the national curriculum.

A CBI survey of board and director-level executives and CEOs in 2011, reported in *Building for growth* [www.cbi.org.uk/media/1051530/cbi\\_edi\\_education\\_skills\\_survey\\_2011.pdf](http://www.cbi.org.uk/media/1051530/cbi_edi_education_skills_survey_2011.pdf) found that:

- 75% think that "we are in danger of being left behind by emerging countries unless young people learn to think more globally"
- 73% are worried that many young people's horizons are not broad enough to operate in a globalised and multicultural economy

- 79% rated 'knowledge and awareness of the wider world' as important or very important for recruitment of new employees (compared to 98% for literacy and numeracy, 68% A level results and 40% the ability to speak at least one other language).

The GA has also made clear and persuasive arguments for the inclusion of geography within the curriculum. Our manifesto for geography '*A different view*' sets out our view of the subject as being fundamental for everyone ([www.geography.org.uk/download/GA\\_ADVBookletFULL.pdf](http://www.geography.org.uk/download/GA_ADVBookletFULL.pdf)). Our 2011 paper '*Learning to be human and the English Baccalaureate - Geography and History*' argues that 'geography is a world subject, which helps students develop knowledge and understanding of the world, our place in it, and what it means to be a human being. Through studying geography we develop knowledge, understanding and skills that enable us to understand and illuminate our common humanity and our relationships – not only with each other but with the environmental resources on which life depends. By thinking geographically ... we are better equipped to imagine our possible futures.' ([www.geography.org.uk/download/GA\\_AUEBacSelectCommitteeEvidence.pdf](http://www.geography.org.uk/download/GA_AUEBacSelectCommitteeEvidence.pdf))

So the GA supports the renewed focus on subject rigour expressed by the draft National Curriculum. By setting out clearly the core knowledge and understanding that all students are expected to acquire, the GA hopes that a new national curriculum will help to define high standards in geography, whilst permitting schools and teachers to identify local curriculum opportunities, preferences and priorities, as well as select their own methods for teaching the content.

We note with great interest the comments of Chris Hamnett, Professor of Geography at King's College, who praises three aspects of the draft programmes in particular:

- improved locational knowledge e.g. where countries, climatic zones and vegetation belts are;
- better balance between physical and human geography, supporting better environmental understanding;
- sound understanding of the how and why of geography - the social, economic and environmental processes that help explain why environments, places and societies are different and how they are changing.

We support Hamnet's argument that the draft puts "understanding of processes back into the context of countries, linking thematic processes and places together. Well taught, this can provide a much-needed and sound basis for later study". ([www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/feb/12/round-table-draft-national-curriculum?CMP=tw\\_t\\_gu](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/feb/12/round-table-draft-national-curriculum?CMP=tw_t_gu))

In addition, the GA welcomes the explicit inclusion of fieldwork in each key stage. This is an essential aspect of good geographical education for children and young people in every key stage.

The GA also has *concerns and reservations* about the draft programme of study, and would like to offer to improve further the draft before the final version is agreed. We would like to highlight the following

problems and deficiencies with the draft:

## 1. General issues:

### Application:

Since current policy is to apply the proposed curriculum only to maintained schools (not Academies or Free Schools), the GA questions whether the draft can be considered 'national'. Given our concerns over the amount of curriculum time devoted by some schools to subjects such as geography, the GA recommends that the final Orders be applied to Academies and Free Schools as well as maintained schools. Our view is that this would provide an equal safeguard of entitlement, whilst permitting such schools to adapt their curriculum to local circumstances.

### Support needs:

Unless significant resources are made available to schools to support its introduction (including training resources to schools as teacher initial education is shifted to a school-based model), the GA identifies a significant risk that weaker schools and practitioners will struggle to convert this core curriculum into "exciting and stimulating lessons". We are inclined to sympathise with the teacher who wrote "geography teachers are being presented with the bones of an idea and being left to flesh it out ourselves with limited time and resources" ([www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/ncconsultation/](http://www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/ncconsultation/)) and **recommend that the DfE works with the GA to identify the scale and nature of the support needs in schools.**

### The status and detail of 'core' and 'non-core' subjects:

The GA is concerned that the draft programmes maintain an unhelpful distinction between 'core' and 'non-core' subjects. The level of detail and prescription in these documents signals to schools that these subjects should be the focus of their attention to such an extent that vital aspects of learning become neglected. In *'Learning to be human'* we argued strongly for a rebalancing of the school curriculum. We identified the 'relentless focus on literacy and numeracy at all key stages, the impact of which has been magnified in recent years through the inspection regime and league tables' and suggested that this results in 'rigid curriculum hierarchies in schools' ([www.geography.org.uk/download/GA\\_AUEBacSelectCommitteeEvidence.pdf](http://www.geography.org.uk/download/GA_AUEBacSelectCommitteeEvidence.pdf)). The draft programmes do nothing to help in this necessary rebalancing.

## 2. Specific comments and suggested changes:

### Purpose of study:

The draft purpose statement underplays the importance of understanding different *perspectives*. Geography helps young people understand different perspectives on the challenges and issues of living

in the world, locally, regionally and on a global scale, but this is not acknowledged.

The draft statement's final sentence limits its scope to understanding the Earth's features, rather than the full range of geographical phenomena of interest and relevance, including *variations in human welfare*. This is another significant omission and ***the GA recommends that perspectives and human welfare considerations are acknowledged with the purpose statement.***

### Aims

1. The reference to 'places of global significance' is potentially limiting. Geographers often study places which might not be considered of 'global' significance, but which are of great interest to students and rewarding to study. We also note that 'significance' is a contentious concept. For example, significance depends on the factors one chooses to take into account, such as whether a 'place' covers a large proportion of the Earth's surface, contains a large population, is economically or politically dominant, competitive, and so on. Significance also depends on one's perspective, and is subject to change over time. Given that each key stage already contains a selection of globally significant environments and countries, ***the GA recommends that this aim be amended, to read, "... location of places, including places of global significance, their defining physical and human characteristics, the importance of their location and how they relate to one another..."***.

2. The aims appear insufficiently ambitious, in that they do not make reference to the need for all students to develop the relevant skills in enquiry. The draft limits its ambition for students to 'collect, analyse and communicate' etc. This signals an insufficient level of demand, since it ignores the need for students to pose their own questions, frame their own approaches to investigation and reach independent conclusions. The GA notes with interest the requirement at GCSE to identify relevant geographical questions and issues and to initiate an enquiry sequence. ***We recommend that this aspect of geography is included in the PoS aims, so that pupils are sufficiently prepared by the end of KS3 for further study.***

### Key stage 1

1. The third bullet point requires pupils to contrast the geography of a 'small area' of the UK with a non-European country. This significant imbalance in scale is potentially problematic. ***We recommend that pupils contrast a small area of the UK with an area within a non-European country, and use this to understand the physical and human geography of both countries.***

2. The lists of basic vocabulary need further attention.

- At present, the lists contain only one type of word – landscape vocabulary. Elsewhere in the key stage content, reference is made to positional and directional language. One category of geographical language is therefore excluded – data-collecting vocabulary which recognises processes and 'things on the move' e.g. 'wind speed', 'rainfall' etc. and ***we recommend that examples of this type of vocabulary be added.***
- Features relevant to a child's experience such as school, park or hospital are absent from the

vocabulary list and ***we recommend that examples of this type of vocabulary be added.***

- The list is uneven in terms of the level of abstraction (and therefore challenge). For example, 'vegetation' is a category of landscape or land use, not a feature. ***We recommend that abstract categories be removed.***

3. The final bullet requires pupils to 'study the geography of their school'. ***We recommend greater precision here.*** The 'geography' of a school might, from a non-specialist perspective, be limited to its layout. Others might interpret this requirement quite differently, to include what happens around the school, environmental considerations, how the site is used, and by whom, how it is changing or even what people think of it. Such variation will lead to uneven levels of demand/standards and arises because this part of the programme fails to meet the essential challenge – to define precisely what is required in 'geography' at each key stage.

4. We note with regret that there is no reference to the use of digital technologies to enhance geographical learning in KS1, in contrast to KS2 and 3. Since even the youngest pupils can benefit from making use of digital technologies in geography, ***we recommend that this aspect is added.***

#### Key Stage 2

1. The identification of Europe and the Americas as areas of special interest is, potentially, a useful curriculum device. However, the wording of the draft gives the impression that study should be *limited* to these regions, which it should not. ***We recommend that the opening sentence makes this absolutely clear*** (it currently reads "to include Europe, North and South America"). The first bullet point attempts perhaps to redress this error, by requiring students to be taught to "locate the world's countries, using maps to focus on". But here, the message is also confusing. Should students locate all the world's countries (an unreasonable expectation) or only those in the specified regions (a limiting expectation)? Greater care is needed in the redrafting to convey the intended requirement.

2. Including a reference in KS2 to some KS1 content (by specifying that the region or area studied must be different) is problematic in national curriculum terms. There are significant numbers of infant and junior schools, where we cannot expect that close liaison over geography curricular takes place. ***The GA recommends that the reference to 'area' be removed from the KS2 statement.*** The change in scale – from small area to region – between the key stages should then suffice to ensure curricular breadth and progression.

3. We note that 'distribution of natural resources' appears somewhat anomalous within a list of 'human geography' themes. Instead, energy, food, minerals and water supplies could be more usefully dealt with under a people-environment theme, such as the human use of natural resources. ***We recommend that a third 'thematic' bullet for this key stage be included, entitled 'the human use of physical resources'.***

4. As noted previously, we welcome the requirement, expressed in KS3, to teach thematic knowledge

through place-based examples. **We therefore recommend that an equivalent wording is added to the lists of 'key aspects' of geographical themes.** This will also ensure consistency of approach.

### Key Stage 3

1. The meaning of the first bullet ("extend their locational knowledge and deepen their spatial awareness") is unclear and will lead to a variety of interpretations. We question the exclusion of South-East Asia as a region and **recommend that a straightforward reference is made to 'Asia'**. The GA also notes that climate zones are referenced in KS2 and we therefore question the need to specify polar and hot deserts under the 'environmental regions' part of this statement. **We recommend greater precision here, perhaps by focusing on the requirement to extend locational knowledge and to ensure that this builds on KS1 and 2 knowledge to include regions and countries in Africa and Asia.**

2. We note that the second bullet limits its demand to understanding similarities and differences, as with the KS1 and 2 statements. Yet the current Orders ask more challenging questions of KS3 students, such as how places are connected, interdependent etc. **We therefore recommend that pupils are required to understand links as well as similarities and differences by KS3.**

3. The GA regards the list of human and physical themes as overloaded. Taken together, the sheer breadth of themes will lend itself to rapid curriculum coverage and superficial study. **We recommend that the emerging criteria for KS4 be compared with these lists and that curriculum overlap is kept to a minimum.**

4. We also find the list of geographical key processes to be insufficiently precise and we note how this compares unfavourably with the level of precision in relation to, for example, map skills. The key processes relating to each of these themes are many and varied (for example, what *are* the processes in glaciation?). The imprecision will lead to very varied interpretation and therefore variations in standards and demand. We also question the wording of some of these themes. For example, does the requirement to 'understand key processes in ... geological timescales' mean that geological timescales should be taught, or the 'key processes in' change over geological time? The meaning is unclear and this section of the Programmes therefore fails to outline the core knowledge pupils should be taught. **The GA recommends that, once the list of themes is further reduced, greater clarity and precision be given to the wording of this list.**

5. The bullet on interaction of human and physical processes is not sufficiently clear or precise. The human use of natural resources and the way in which human activity alters natural systems is a valid area for KS3 study. We note that the paragraph at the top of the KS3 content sets out the ambition that students will 'become aware of increasingly complex geographical systems' but that there are no instances where this ambition is actually realised within the key stage content. Human-environment interactions provide an ideal opportunity for this level of challenge. In order to take advantage of this opportunity, **the GA recommends that pupils be required to understand how human activity, including**

***how the human use of natural resources (currently listed as a human 'process') can impact upon natural systems at a range of scales (including the global scale e.g. climate change).***

6. As noted under the aims section, the GA regards the level of challenge expressed under the final three bullet points as insufficient for KS3, and ***recommends that a reference be included to the need for students to frame the terms of their own investigations.***

### **3. The primary programmes more generally:**

The GA recognises that geography works in an interdependent way in the primary phase with other subject areas and non-statutory aspects of the curriculum. We would therefore make these observations about the draft primary curriculum for 2014.

1. We are pleased that there is evidence that many subject associations have been listened to and count ourselves amongst that group. There is much in the curriculum that we can work with.
2. We look forward to working with subject associations to develop a coherent framework of guidance that will add value to this core curriculum and bring learning to life. We see essential aspects of such guidance encompassing recommendations for teachers to:
  - Respect and take account of wider education contexts e.g. the Millennium Development Goals; the value of global learning, and the UN directives that education for sustainable development be built into government curricula
  - Draw on real life, relevant contexts for learning, including children's own experiences
  - Develop questioning and enquiry skills that will enable knowledge to be applied and further developed
  - Promote creative and critical thinking
  - Enable and support use of spoken English across the curriculum as an aid to learning
  - Integrate relevant ICT across the curriculum
  - Enable the development of subject specific ways of thinking e.g. explaining what it means to think scientifically (already in situ); to think geographically, etc.
  - Recognise and make connections where appropriate across the curriculum to strengthen learning.

4 Does the content set out in the draft programmes of study represent a sufficiently ambitious level of challenge for pupils at each key stage?



Not sufficiently ambitious

Comments in relation to the draft programmes of study for geography:

The GA argues that it is important to acknowledge that **curriculum, attainment and progress** are related. The process of defining a curriculum is inevitably underpinned by our **expectations** of the students who will study it, in terms of the standards we expect them to reach and the progress we expect they will make. In this sense, curriculum content can signal the 'level of challenge' to some extent. For example, the selection of topics within the curriculum and the way in which these are expressed serve to 'pitch' the content at a particular level. We can therefore think about a 'demanding' curriculum as being one which sets out challenging themes, complex ideas and technical skills.

Using this reasoning, we conclude that the *aims* within the draft Programmes appear insufficiently ambitious, in that they do not make reference to the need for all students to develop the relevant skills of enquiry. The draft limits its ambition for students to 'collect, analyse and communicate'. This signals an insufficient level of demand, since it ignores the need for students to pose their own questions, frame their own approaches to investigation and reach independent conclusions.

Likewise, the GA regards the level of challenge expressed in KS3 as insufficiently ambitious, since there is no reference to the need for students to frame the terms of their own investigations. Nor is the requirement to understand the geographical similarities and differences between places (required in KS1 and 2) extended in a suitable manner by KS3. There is no reference to the need to understand places in a global context, examine the ways in which places are interconnected and interdependent, and so forth.

Far more concerning, however, is the failure of the draft to set clear expectations for what pupils should achieve (see below). For this reason, we can give only a partial answer to the question of challenge – the programmes do not contain a sufficiently clear picture of the intended level of challenge.

## 5 Do you have any comments on the proposed wording of the attainment targets?

Comments in relation to the attainment target for **geography**:

As we argued above, it is vital to distinguish between what we want pupils to study (or be taught) and the standards we wish them to achieve. If we do not do so, we risk undermining the cycle of *teaching, learning, assessing and improving* which underpins genuine progression. In effect, we create a situation where the curriculum defines what we want pupils to know and understand, and the attainment target simply demands that they know and understand what is in the curriculum. This rather avoids the question (which *underpins* curriculum content decisions) of what we mean by attainment and progress in geography. As Richard Daugherty wrote, “if we did not hope that students should progress we would have no foundation on which to construct a curriculum or embark on the act of teaching” (Daugherty R (1996) *Defining and Measuring Progression in Geography* in Daugherty R and Rawling E (Eds.) *Geography into the Twenty first Century*).

Since international comparisons are of interest in the current process of curriculum reform, we note that the National Geography Standards (Second edition) published in 2012 in the US distinguish between what is to be studied and what is to be achieved. Within each Standard, the performance statements are ‘aligned’ to the curriculum content (specifying what the pupil should know and be able to do) and are also ‘scaffolded’ (pitched so that the statements build cumulatively over time). The scaffolding is built around verbs such as identify, describe, analyse, compare, evaluate etc.

***The GA therefore recommends that statements of expected outcomes be included within the Programmes of Study, which outline the standards we wish pupils to attain by the end of each Key Stage.*** These would allow teachers to interpret the standards in the context of the content they have taught, make periodic judgements on pupil attainment and help teachers to give improvement advice to pupils.

The GA’s 2012 curriculum proposals) provided key stage *outcome statements* as well as more contextualised statements for particular themes ([www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/ncconsultation/](http://www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/ncconsultation/)). This approach was widely welcomed in our public consultation exercises. The GA’s proposals give careful attention to the distinction between curriculum content and assessment. Our content exemplars contrast the precise language of assessment with the ‘experiences’ language of its programme of study. So, whilst the programme identifies the contexts in which pupils will ‘study’, ‘learn about’, ‘explore’, ‘develop their understanding’, ‘appreciate’, ‘create’, ‘find out’ etc. the assessment section (the equivalent of the attainment target) specifies where and how pupils will ‘know’, ‘describe’, ‘identify’, ‘understand’, ‘evaluate’ etc. ***We recommend that this approach, applied to the language from the purpose and aims sections of the Programmes, would be helpful in redrafting the attainment target.***

Furthermore, the GA identifies a significant risk that the *current* Attainment Target (expressed as Level Descriptors) will continue to be mis-used by schools in an attempt to measure pupil attainment and track progress. The GA has consistently argued against this mis-use

([www.geography.org.uk/download/GA\\_AULevelAssessmentsInGeography.pdf](http://www.geography.org.uk/download/GA_AULevelAssessmentsInGeography.pdf)) but recognises that, unless a viable alternative form of measuring attainment is proposed, schools are likely to continue with their present systems. Our internal consultation processes over the past two months have provided plentiful evidence that this will be the case. One subject leader wrote to us to say, “The aspect of the new national curriculum that worries me most is assessment. We are currently expected to report ‘currently working at’ and ‘predicted levels’ for students three times a year – these are considered in relation to the students’ target levels. We keep detailed track sheets to monitor progress and put intervention strategies into place if students are not likely to achieve their target level by the end of the key stage. All departments do this. The current NC proposal doesn’t say how the curriculum should be assessed. My school is very confused by this – we are hoping for clarification when the final curriculum documents are published in the summer. If a national system for assessment isn’t put into place it will make life very difficult for us. I suspect we would just continue using the old level descriptions. If we all came up with different ways to measure attainment in our different subject areas it would be very confusing for the students and parents.”

The Association is ready to propose viable models of assessment for geography, if the Secretary of State agrees that the draft Attainment Target is inadequate.

6 Do you agree that the draft programmes of study provide for effective progression between the key stages?

Disagree

Comments in relation to the draft programmes of study for geography:

The GA notes and welcomes some of the progressive features of the draft programmes. For example, we note how the requirement to name, locate and identify characteristics of the UK in KS1 progresses to a greater level of precision and detail for KS2 students.

As noted previously, our chief **concern** is that aspects of progression in this subject are not made explicit in the draft. This is the role of the Attainment Target, where the opportunity to paint a picture of expected outcomes at each key stage has not been taken.

We have also argued (above) against the device of referring to content selections made by teachers in an earlier key stage. The likelihood of all KS2 teachers being in a position to know “the small area of the United Kingdom” their students were taught in KS1 is low, creating a risk of repetition rather than progression.

Nor, given our comments above about the level of demand for some aspects of KS3, can we agree that

effective progression has been achieved by the end of this key stage.

We therefore set out here some thoughts on progression in geography. Describing how progress is made in this subject is not straightforward. For example, in geography, the act of 'describing' can be both subtle and complex: a writer's description of a place can be based on the highest level of literary ability and capture complex ideas relating to culture and perception, whilst some technical statistical procedures (e.g. nearest neighbour analysis) are descriptive in their nature, but rely on abstract models and remain very much the preserve of A level geography. Likewise, very young children are capable of offering explanations and justifications, albeit using age-appropriate contexts. So progression in geography defies a simplistic description or a straightforward scale of measurement. It isn't true to say that pupils progress smoothly from describing patterns in KS2 to explaining processes in KS3 any more than it is sensible to think of pupils acquiring place knowledge *solely* by moving outwards from their own locality.

That said, there is an emerging consensus among researchers and writers in the field over the broad 'dimensions' of progress we expect to see in geography – what it means to 'get better' at the subject:

- Moving from the familiar to the less familiar
- Acquiring greater fluency with 'world knowledge'
- Working with increasingly complex and/or abstract ideas and generalisations
- Using data that becomes more multivariate
- Investigating increasingly complex people-environment relations
- Applying geographical thinking to new contexts and situations
- Becoming more precise (in language, ideas, skills), and making distinctions
- Becoming more comfortable with 'grey areas' where answers are not so clear cut
- Connecting information and ideas, and building (not just receiving) new knowledge
- Drawing on increasing breadth of content and contexts
- Understanding the importance of perspective, recognising a range of values and views

***We recommend that these dimensions are applied in the final re-drafting stages of the review and urge that far greater thought be applied to this crucial aspect of the curriculum.***

**7 Do you agree that we should change the subject information and communication technology to computing, to reflect the content of the new programmes of study?**

Not sure

Comments:

The draft Programmes for Computing and Geography contain far more potential for cross-referencing than has been acknowledged thus far. For example, the requirement that KS1 pupils will 'organise, store, manipulate and retrieve data in a range of digital formats' and at KS2 'use search engines effectively' could be met through their geographical research. At present, references to the use of ICT in geography are limited largely to digital mapping technology.

**8 Does the new National Curriculum embody an expectation of higher standards for all children?**

No

Comments in relation to the draft programmes of study for geography:

In our judgement, the verdict on the draft must be 'not yet'. As noted above, we support the explicit inclusion of geography in each key stage and Hamnett's identification of real potential within the draft, including his assertion that it places "understanding of processes back into the context of countries, linking thematic processes and places together" and indeed that "Well taught, this can provide a much-needed and sound basis for later study".

However, we also noted above that the aims of the draft are insufficiently ambitious. Furthermore, we argue that some of the aims set out in the draft are unlikely to be realised unless the content within each key stage is amended. For example, the first aim includes the idea that students will develop knowledge of the way that places relate to one another. Yet this aim is not expressed within the key stage content. Nor is sufficient attention given to interdependence or systems thinking, although this is alluded to within the opening paragraph for KS3.

Above all, without a clear statement of expected outcomes (a revised Attainment Target) it is difficult to see how the draft content will support an expectation of higher standards. Indeed, we noted above how

the lack of precision in relation to thematic knowledge and the sheer range of themes might promote superficial approaches to learning (and therefore *lower* standards). This is a significant risk and should be addressed within the re-drafting process.

**9 What impact - either positive or negative - will our proposals have on the 'protected characteristic' groups?**

Comments in relation to the draft programmes of study for geography:

The impact on protected characteristic groups might largely depend on the *approach to assessment* which arises in schools once the new curriculum is applied.

If level descriptors are removed and replaced by the Attainment Target in its draft form, there is a risk that teachers (or even commercial organisations) will devise assessments or tests to determine whether pupils “know, apply and understand the matters, skills and processes specified in the ... programme of study”. At its worst, this might lead to a system of ‘pass/fail’ at the end of each unit of work, year or key stage. Under these circumstances, the GA queries what the impact on pupils might be. Would pupils who have ‘failed’ to know, apply and understand be required to undertake the study again? Or would they be left only with the message that they had ‘failed’? The absurdity of either situation helps to underline ***our recommendation that more thought be given to attainment, progress and assessment.***

**10 To what extent will the new National Curriculum make clear to parents what their children should be learning at each stage of their education?**

Comments in relation to the draft programmes of study for **geography**:

Large parts of the draft programmes for geography are expressed in clear language, which should assist parents in understanding what their children should be learning.

We have pointed out, above, some areas where this is unlikely to be the case. In particular:

- KS1 final bullet point mentions ‘the geography of the school’. But it must be the purpose of this document to inform teachers and parents what we mean, in specific key stages, by this term. The word ‘geography’ is open to wide interpretation and requires contextualising within the programme detail.
- KS2 bullet point 1 is imprecise and the implication for what the student will learn is unclear. It is open to wide interpretation and misinterpretation.
- KS3 bullet point 1 is similarly imprecise
- The list of thematic knowledge in KS3 is imprecise and we have argued consistently in this

document for greater precision and clarity in this section.

We must also raise, once again, the notion that parents (as well as teachers, schools and pupils) are interested in 'how well pupils are doing' and 'how they could improve', just as much as what they are learning. The draft Attainment Target does not provide a basis for these questions to be addressed.

#### 11 What key factors will affect schools' ability to implement the new National Curriculum successfully from September 2014?

Comments:

We have previously commented to the department on the following factors:

- Their motivation (are they required to do this? What other initiatives are they tackling?)
- The clarity of communication they receive from DfE
- The level of support from DfE and LAs in terms of face-to-face briefings, money to implement change, purchase resources and CPD
- Subject-specialist training for ITE students and practising teachers
- Availability of subject specialists within school
- Access to subject associations and networks
- Clarity over the expected outcomes and how these relate to school accountability – how will the new curriculum be assessed, inspected? How will the aspiration to raise standards be monitored and measured?

Our internal consultation processes over the past 2 months have been revealing. One subject leader wrote: "KS3 is not a top priority in my school; we are **very** focussed on KS4 and KS5 as we are judged on our exam results. However, in my next line management meeting I have been asked to include a report on how the new national curriculum will affect my subject and what I will be doing to ensure a smooth introduction of the new curriculum ... Few other HoDs are engaged with their subject communities, so have not had the opportunities I have had to engage in debate about the new curriculum. In many other schools the Heads of Geography will be in this situation – with the new curriculum just a list on a website."

Another wrote: "Most HoDs I have spoken to seem keen to change their KS3 curriculum as little as possible. With such a brief geography curriculum which could be interpreted in so many ways it is likely that for most schools it will be 'business as usual'. This is not going to bring about any improvements in geographical education."

**12 Who is best placed to support schools and/or develop resources that schools will need to teach the new National Curriculum?**

Comments:

Given our comments above about the scale of support needs to successfully introduce a new national curriculum, the GA recommends that careful thought be given to a national implementation plan, which would make use of ALL available sources of support. These should include central support funded by DfE as well as support for subject associations (as the bodies best placed to understand the subject-specific needs of teachers and schools).

The GA advises that resources for schools and 'support' should not be equated. Schools and teachers will need information, advice and motivation in order to tackle this challenge – teaching resources alone will not suffice. Commercial providers – who tend to focus on resources for purchase rather than support to develop professional practise – will not provide a comprehensive solution in this instance.

Our recent internal consultation provided some interesting insights from teachers:

“There will be little support in my area from the LA, as we have had no geography advisor for two years. I will do my best to support other schools, but as a full time teacher my time is limited to do this.”

“It is dangerous for one commercial operator to have ... a major role in curriculum provision; for example teachers may rely on a text book series rather than developing a curriculum to build on local links with other countries and local issues, therefore becoming distanced from students' experiences. There is also a danger that real geographical enquiry can be replaced by 'comprehension style' questions in a text book.”

“My own preference is for more resources like the GA Toolkit series, which support teachers in delivering the new curriculum whilst giving them the opportunity to shape the lessons to suit their own contexts.”

**13 Do you agree that we should amend the legislation to disapply the National Curriculum programmes of study, attainment targets and statutory assessment arrangements, as set out in section 12 of the consultation document?**

Not sure

Comments:

Members of the GA have expressed a range of thoughts in relation to this question. We are concerned that, since that the consultation results will not be analysed until summer 2013, with a final sign-off by the SoS late in the summer, disapplication might appear as a last-minute decision to schools. Would this be the correct way to effect a transition towards a new curriculum?

On the other hand, disapplication might allow the Department to select a range of pilot schools to test the effectiveness of the new curriculum and provide case study material and support for other schools in one year's time. Piloting would enable interested schools to look at different ways of planning, delivering and assessing the national curriculum.

**14 Do you have any other comments you would like to make about the proposals in this consultation?**

Comments:

**15 Please let us have your views on responding to this consultation (e.g. the number and type of questions, whether it was easy to find, understand, complete etc.)**

Comments:

Given the nature of the GA as an organisation, this consultation has taken several months, during which we have discussed these questions internally and drawn on a very wide range of practitioners in schools and experts in geographical education.

We therefore feel that the analysis of consultation responses deserves considerable time and effort. We have recommended significant changes to the draft and these will take time to implement. This aspect is at least as important as the structure and nature of the consultation exercise.