

**Comments on 'A sustainable future for geography?' by John Westaway
*Geography, 94, 1, pp.4-12***

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As a practising geography teacher I can only comment on my area and experience of Norfolk schools, but in this area I would not totally agree with the view of OFSTED. Certainly the evidence from our feeder schools is that the level of teaching at KS 1 & 2 is more non-existent rather than poor. Where geography is taught it is often of a reasonable standard although more frequently it appears as an adjunct to a cross curricular theme and as such it is fragmented, misunderstood and not recognised as geography. However at KS3 I have found the teaching to be very good. We are a training school and the standard of PGCE and GTP students that we have had has been excellent. The students are using a wide variety of lively teaching techniques and frequently utilise the internet and ICT techniques in a stimulating way. They are always willing to learn and indeed, we have learnt a lot from them. In our last two 'light touch' inspections the Geography Department has been ignored by OFSTED and I wonder if this is the case elsewhere.

The biggest problem we have is the competing on a far from level playing field when it comes to KS4 option choices. Our school is a catholic, language specialist school. That means that our students have to do GCSE Religious Education and a language. Recently another option choice was reduced when extra time was given to the core (English, Maths & ICT) to improve the 5 A-C GCSE scores once English and Maths were included. That means our students had only 2 option choices from non-core subjects which now include a variety of Young Apprenticeships and Diploma choices. We had many students who wanted to take geography but were unable to do so. We have only been able to compete because the OCR Pilot Geography GCSE allowed us to enter two fast-track Year 9 groups for GCSE. At the end of the year those who dropped geography had a Short Course qualification, and many decided to continue to complete their GCSE by the end of Year 10. We have then trialled this group with the new Extended Project KS5 qualification in Year 11, which is proving very popular and raising the profile of the department. However the Pilot scheme is ending and there is only one of the new GCSE specifications which will allow us to continue this scheme (because the short course units can count towards the final GCSE). This is not the specification we would have chosen, but we feel it would have a disastrous effect on our KS4 numbers were we to abandon the fast track entry which is allowing us to compete in a very restrictive options set-up.

Too much choice and too much in the core are the major problems we have to face despite innovative teaching and the subject being of major relevance. I think we need to stress that an understanding of sustainable planetary issues is vital for our species existence and that is best delivered via Geography.