

The Pilot

Welcome!

Hopefully everyone will have had a refreshing half term and be looking ahead to the changes on the horizon with respect to the specification changes for 2009. Until then however there is still much to do with our students to ensure that they enjoy their course and continue to achieve the best result. This issue of *The Pilot* is focusing on setting the scene for the coming changes, but also to remind ourselves why the pilot has been so successful.

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GCSE Specification update

In recent weeks the GA has received many requests from non-pilot centres seeking to introduce the pilot GCSE as their syllabus for the coming academic months. This highlights how positive the specification has been received by yourselves, students and the influence that the syllabus is having on the wider geography community. Certainly there have been many positive comments regarding pilot centres in recent OFSTED reports. This momentum is crucial if the successes of the pilot are to filter into the new specifications as they are currently being developed.

Many pilot centres are now beginning to look towards what they will be able to offer their students from 2009 and while there are no clear pictures as yet, hopefully this brief synopsis will help and assure teachers that we will continue to do our up most to keep you informed of the changes taking place.

Reasons for the specification changes:

- Update the content of the GCSEs
- Encourage innovative teaching, learning and assessment
- Incorporate key elements of 14-19 curriculum developments
- Ensure standards are maintained

The subject and qualifications criteria will be finalised on 31 October 2007 and the final versions of each subject criteria will be available on the QCA website week commencing 5 November 2007. www.qca.org.uk

It would also be wise to keep an eye on all the awarding body websites over the coming months as they begin to share some of their thinking and develop support materials.

Young People's Geographies Project

Di Swift

Over the last year, seven schools, including two Pilot GCSE centres have been engaged in developing the Young People's Geographies Project (YPG). This work has been funded by both the Action Plan for Geography (www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk) and the Academy for Sustainable Communities (www.ascskills.org.uk)

This report is to share some of the achievements of the YPG project in its first year. It also considers issues and challenges that might inform future project developments. The project aims are ambitious, and include:

- Exploring ways in which geography teachers can use the lived experiences of young people to inform the process of 'curriculum making' in schools. (For more about this, visit <http://www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk/curriculum-making/introduction>)
- Developing pedagogies through which young people can use their lived experience to develop their geographical understanding.
- Establishing conversations between young people, academic geographers, geography teachers and geography teacher educators that will inform a dynamic process of curriculum making in schools.

Young people participate in their own lived geographies. On a day-to-day basis they are part of different social groups, they interact simultaneously with others at both a local level (friends, family) and at a global level (via the internet), they navigate very complex networks of participation from informal social groups (friends, school groups, shared social activities) to more organised social activities (such as clubs, sport and music) and formalised group activities especially in school.

In addition their access to spaces and places are enabled and/or hindered by a range of factors and influences such as parents, financial considerations, age group, feelings of safety, identification with different groups, personal interests etc. The aim of this project is to begin to consider how to utilise pupils' lived geographies to give them access to a relevant and more 'owned' experience in school geography

The project to date has brought together teachers, pupils (four from each participating school) teacher educators and academics. Together they have engaged in thinking and activities that have supported them in exploring how young people's everyday experiences can be used to enhance the geography curriculum in school.

The evaluation report suggests that the YPG project has indeed helped teachers consider teaching about, from and through students' perspectives rather than solely from curriculum or specification requirements. The project also helped teachers access and understand the lived experiences of young people, laying the foundations for a pedagogy based on listening.

Some students commented that geography offered them a way of looking at places, and that what they learn in the classroom transfers easily to other contexts and places that they encounter. When pressed for details they often referred to noticing building and parks (the environment), where things are (location), what things are near each other (spatial distribution) and seeing connections to their own and other places (patterns, variation).

One student (Year 12) felt that geography "got in the way of raw emotions" about a place. Although she believed that geography directed her attention to some things she might not otherwise notice, she found it "hard to let go of the geography behind it." This demonstrates how rigid some young people's conceptions of geography can be – she thought that the emotional side of place was important, but couldn't find what she considered a geographical language to describe it, and so thought that her understandings were outside the boundaries of geography. This is perhaps a timely reminder for us. As geography teachers we may be confident in developing a geographical imagination, but some students will find this challenging. Indeed some students commented, "Most pupils think geography is about maps and stuff. But I know it's about how you live and how you affect other people and stuff. This has changed my view of geography." Another said, "I've learned to look at things differently, now I see that geography is all around, it affects us all. Me, I am geography."

One academic offered the following comment through an email interview, "It was fantastic noting how from January through to July the pupils' confidence with discussing geography, conceptual ideas, and a subject specific vocabulary developed and blossomed." Indeed there is strong evidence to suggest that the project supported the development of students' geographical

understanding – an understanding based on their experiences and links to other people and places.

One student commented, “the project was all about young people’s geography, like how what we do affects other people...we have learned to analyse ourselves, what we are doing, and take what we have learned and raise awareness about it.”

The YPG work has helped some students describe and use geography as a tool to think about different features of places, while for others it seemed to help them see and use geography as a way of thinking about themselves in relation to places. In this next year the schools are working together to provide classroom examples that capture this approach. They are also attempting to produce a Young People’s Geographies Framework. This will enable more schools to have a go at a YPG piece of work if they feel that it can enhance their geography curriculum. This framework is developmental, but so far looks like this...

A YPG curriculum will

- Be planned through a variety of conversations. These will include conversations between teachers, young people, teacher educators and academic geographers.
- Draw from young people’s everyday experiences.
- Extend the way that young people are involved in and can influence curriculum making.
- Emphasise dialogic pedagogies.
- Enable young people to use their capacity to think geographically when encountering the world.
- Value geography as a subject discipline and intellectual resource.

We would welcome any feedback on this – please email NReckless@geography.org.uk with any ideas or reactions that you may have.

The project evaluator has made the following recommendations.

The YPG project should:

1. Continue to communicate and build on
 - a. Strong messages regarding the need for geography to be relevant to young people’s lives.
 - b. Effective mechanisms developed for helping students to articulate and teachers understand the nature of young people’s experiences.
 - c. Important work in helping teachers let go... of existing curricula constraints.

And...

2. Reflect on how whether the project might advocate for particular pedagogic approaches.

During this academic year a YPG section of the GA website will be developed to fulfil these two recommendations... so watch this space... and if you have anything to offer we would be delighted to hear from you.

Assessment

In this next section Paul Weeden and John Hopkin share their thoughts and knowledge in relation to the current situation of controlled assessment. For those who attended the Geography 21 conference last July this article will have echoes of their very productive and informative workshop. If you missed the conference hopefully you will find this article a helpful steer for you thinking over the next few months in relation to assessment changes at GCSE.

Controlled assessments

This autumn the Awarding Bodies (ABs) are busy working on their new GCSE specifications, ready for first teaching in September 2009. We know there will be fewer specifications, and the GA is working with the ABs to try to ensure they are geographically fit for the 21st Century. One aspect that will definitely be different is the introduction of controlled assessments, which will replace the coursework part of the examination in non-practical subjects, including geography. This was the focus of a workshop at the Geography 21 conference in July.

Controlled assessments have been introduced by QCA as result of public and media concerns about plagiarism by students – and about the role of teachers. Although the format will differ from traditional coursework, the principles of this form of assessment should be similar. They should:

- Be fit for purpose;
- Match the specification and balance of assessment objectives;
- Provide reliability and validity (including assessment objectives that are difficult to cover in examinations).

QCA's aim is that controlled assessments support good teaching and learning and make assessment more manageable for teachers and students.

In designing these assessments Awarding Bodies will look at three stages:

- How tasks are set;
- How they are taken;
- How they are marked.

ABs can set the level of control for each stage along a continuum from high (controlled by the AB) to low (controlled by the teacher). If the control level were set high for each stage, it would be an external assessment and so unacceptable, whereas controls set consistently low would be open to plagiarism or coaching.

Level of control	Task setting	Task taking	Task marking
High	Set/approved by AB – e.g. task bank	Five key controls : supervision, feedback, time, collaboration resources,	AB marks task
Medium	Teachers design tasks – get approval from AB	AB defines 3 or 4 of the key controls: rest defined by centre	Teachers mark, AB moderates and adjusts
Low	Teachers design tasks – to AB criteria	1 or 2 controls: rest defined by centre	Teachers are trained and mark.

At the task setting stage the key issues are to ensure that tasks are valid and reliable; are assessing processes, skills and knowledge that cannot be assessed well in examinations; avoid formulaic and predictable responses; and support good teaching & learning

Key issues for task taking are to discourage malpractice; ensuring that teachers are confident in authenticating students' work as their own; and that the tasks are manageable for both students and teachers.

At the task marking stage the key issue is to ensure that work is assessed consistently to a high standard. ABs have considerable experience and expertise in developing systems that ensure this occurs.

The result may well be that some aspects of controlled assessment may look similar to the current situation for coursework. For example, a task might be designed by the teacher within AB guidelines and submitted for approval (medium control). It could be marked by teachers, trained and accredited by the AB, with light monitoring of the marks; again, a medium level of control. Both would be acceptable.

The main differences will be evident at the task taking stage. Most coursework involves considerable freedom for individual effort and initiative at this stage – indeed it is rewarded – and considerable amounts of unsupervised time for analysis and preparing the final (usually written) report. Controlled assessments will include a mix of control over supervision, feedback to students, time, access to resources and collaboration. Controls can vary – they could be lower in the early stages, as long as they are high at the stage where students prepare their reports. This is good news for geography and for enquiry – it means there is potentially more room for investigative work in the planning and research phases. By completing the work under teacher supervision and within clear time limits the assessment may also be a more reliable measure of a student's attainments and be less of a burden for them. Our current understanding is that QCA's guidance to ABs will be towards the medium-high end of the spectrum for geography.

Participants at the Geography 21 workshop had a go at sketching out what a controlled assessment might look like (see below). They were keen to ensure teachers had a degree of flexibility in the early stages of task taking to enable good enquiry work, and the ability to be creative about how students might present their work in a variety of media (e.g. oral, visual, ICT based) to improve validity.

Examples from the conference:

Task summary 1 Enquiry based on the location of a new development	Control level
Task setting The Awarding Body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets criteria for extended task and guidelines for research work – collection of primary data (through fieldwork) and secondary data. • Sets timing The Teacher <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines the scope of the enquiry (e.g. wind farm, new fast food outlet, bypass, reservoir, flood alleviation scheme etc.), dependent on what is available in the locality. Defines the expected outcomes (could be range of options for pupils)	Medium
Task taking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students undertake research: fieldwork, Internet etc (4 hrs) • Initial preparation and discussion: options to include role play, group discussion etc (2hrs) • Students complete report/presentation under supervised classroom conditions (4hrs) 	Low Medium High
Task marking Teacher marked with AB monitoring	Medium

Task summary 2: Enquiry into celebrity analysed as a geographical phenomenon and a global business	Control level
Task setting The Awarding Body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets the assessment criteria • To increase control level, requires centre to submit project outline for approval by AB The Teacher <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designs tasks relating to globalisation • Shares objectives and assessment criteria with students 	Medium
Task taking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial planning done in class (3hrs) • Teacher provides a range of stimulus material from which students select (and add to). Students conduct own research from Internet (2hrs) • Final production in class: set time (3hrs) for preparation and report production (e.g. limit of 500 word, 10 slides or 2minute video) 	Medium Low High
Task marking Awarding Body	High

Links: http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_11551.aspx QCA Controlled Assessment website

Free CPD Opportunities

Free geography conferences for GCSE teachers. With the many changes that are taking place in school at the moment it is important to keep as up to date as possible with the new thinking and information and advice from awarding bodies, curriculum planners and HMI. With this in mind the GA are holding two GCSE geography conferences in the coming year. The conferences are completely free of charge and look to address the following themes:

5 February 2008 – Central London Venue

OFSTED funded conference lead by the GA to look at Assessment, good practice and progression in Geography. With input from OFSTED, QCA, RGS-IBG alongside fieldwork and assessment criteria.

Book online at <http://www.geography.org.uk/secondary/freeconference>

10 July 10 2008 – Central Birmingham Venue

This conference hopes to offer support and advice in relation to the new specifications that are being developed with input from the awarding bodies and other speakers. New specifications will hopefully be available to view and discuss with input on other topical issues including controlled assessment and examination techniques.

Book online at <http://www.geography.org.uk/news/actionplanforgeography/coursebooking1>

Geography is changing!

The new *Geography* will be launched in January 2008, and aims to generate challenging, forthright and stimulating conversation between the different groups in our subject community. Geography will remain the GA's flagship academic journal but high on its new agenda are topicality, relevance, challenging assumptions and fostering interaction between schools and HE

The new editorial collective will share the role formally undertaken by a single honorary editor, the members are:

Professor Peter Jackson, University of Sheffield
Professor Stuart Lane, University of Durham
Dr. John Morgan, Institute of Education and Futurelab
Eleanor Rawling, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Oxford and Independent consultant

Let us know what you think of the new *Geography*, and if you do not already subscribe and would like to add it in to your existing membership just contact Membership Services on 0114 2960088 or e-mail membership@geography.org.uk.

Weblinks

Useful websites for more information regarding geography teaching and CPD:

www.geography.org.uk
www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk

Keep up to date with the GCSE specification websites:

www.qca.org.uk
www.aqa.org.uk
www.edexcel.org.uk
www.wjec.co.uk
www.ocr.org.uk