

The specialist role of the Geographical Association

The Geographical Association (GA) has pursued its mission 'to further geographical knowledge and understanding through education' for more than 120 years. During this time it has acquired the highest level of expertise in:

- geography teaching and learning
- the geography curriculum throughout all stages of schooling
- professional standards for geography teaching
- progression in and assessment of geographical understanding
- initial teacher education
- the development of new entrants to the profession
- the continuing professional development of teachers throughout their professional career.

Our experience and critical analysis in each of these areas shows us that geography education *matters*.

Our distinct role

The GA bridges theory, research and teaching practice in order to support a more knowledgeable and skilled geography teaching workforce. Our collective knowledge of established and emergent theories of knowledge, curriculum, teaching and learning creates an unrivalled perspective about how these apply to the practice of geography education. We routinely dig 'below the surface' and uncover the links between the practices of geography teachers and the geographical knowledge and understanding that children and young people acquire. Much of the GA's exemplification work (such as that found in journals, projects and Quality Marks) serves this purpose.

The GA is unique in ascribing significant weight and importance to all stages of learning in geography, from the early years through to initial teacher education, and to the continuing professional development of teachers, with each phase being supported by the academic discipline. Our substantial membership of practitioners and professionals in each of these sectors is driven by a belief that geographical education enriches the lives of all children and young people.

These features lend the GA considerable weight and authority. This gives the geography teaching community, through the GA, the capability to wield significant influence in pedagogic debates and developments, including at the national policy level. This is what makes the GA the 'trusted voice' for teachers of geography.

Defining the expert knowledge needed to teach geography

The GA supports its clearly articulated view of the value of a geographical education for all children and young people by carefully examining the nature of the content they can and should learn at various stages in their schooling. We understand the significance of disciplinary knowledge to the teaching of geography, but regard disciplinary knowledge alone as insufficient for teaching. Effective teachers of geography possess a unique combination of professional qualities which they deploy in an ethical manner for the benefit of the education of children and young people, namely:

- rigorous subject knowledge, which draws from the discipline but which is re-contextualised as knowledge used in the education of children and young people
- pedagogical knowledge, which includes a rationale for approaches to classroom practice that are appropriate to subject teaching and learning
- knowledge of how the subject is learned by children and young people and the challenges they encounter in doing so.

The GA considers that geography teachers possess the capacity to bring together three curriculum-making resources:

- the experiences of children and young people
- teachers' specialist disciplinary knowledge
- teachers' pedagogical decision-making.

We support teachers to do this through our professional publications and journals, website, courses and annual Conference, Quality Marks and networks. Through these activities, the GA has become a respected source of advice and guidance.

Providing a community of practice

The GA has a significant reach across the geography education community. We have an unrivalled scale of engagement with teachers, with thousands of school and teacher memberships, social media followers, newsletter subscribers, delegates to CPD courses and network events, participants in online networks and website visitors. The GA comprises overlapping local, regional, national and international networks – real and virtual, formal and informal – which have evolved over time. Its many specialist committees, Trustees, Branches, consultants and contributors (to journals, CPD events, publications, website, networks, etc.) provide myriad ways for teachers to associate with one another and develop their collective intelligence with regard to teaching geography, managing curriculum change and supporting children and young people's understanding of geographical ideas.

Many teachers develop their professional voice through engagement with the GA: we provide a means for teachers of geography at all levels to articulate their thinking and develop their practice, as well as taking on leadership roles and responsibilities. It is this breadth of engagement which permits us to represent geography teachers on the national stage and lends the GA its legitimacy.

The scope of the GA's activities

The GA concentrates its activities within formal educational settings, especially schools. We enjoy close relationships with university colleagues from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that enable us to access geography disciplinary expertise and educational research so that this knowledge can be contextualised for and by teachers. Our charitable mission allows additional means, beyond formal schooling, to be explored, either independently or in partnership with other organisations.

