Policy for Sustainability and Environmental Awareness

The United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) have established an internationally agreed agenda for sustainability and environmental awareness for the period 2015-2030. The overall aim is to set in place policies which seek to address poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all over the next fifteen years. There are 17 goals, each with specific targets to be achieved. If these goals are to be reached, everyone from governments to individuals will need to help implement them. Whilst all the goals are relevant to the work of the Geographical Association, goal 4 is especially pertinent as it aims to ‘ensure inclusive and quality education and promote life-long learning for all’ and is thus singled out in this policy. Further information about the SDGs can be found at http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/.

Sustainability in geography education
As the ‘trusted voice’ of the geography teaching community, the GA recognises that it has a responsibility to take a leadership role in developing sustainability thinking and environmental awareness. It also believes that geography education is one of the ways to build the capabilities and capacities that will help young people in an increasingly uncertain future and which will guide them to make balanced judgements and wise decisions in the years ahead. The GA’s contribution to sustainability in geography education includes:

- helping to build sustainability literacy in young people, especially through fieldwork, investigations and participatory and collaborative learning
- working directly with teachers through courses, CPD programmes and training events
- working indirectly with teachers and pupils through producing publications and teaching resources
- disseminating examples of good practice through the GA website, journals, newsletters and Annual Conference
- developing a community of committed practitioners and educationalists to create a forum where issues to do with sustainability and the environment can be raised and discussed from multiple perspectives in a politically neutral, critical and creative environment.

We believe that these activities contribute both individually and collectively to the vitality of geography as a discipline and to the wider well-being of education in and beyond the UK.

Guiding principles
Many individual GA members are deeply committed to sustainability and explore it in multiple and innovative ways. Furthermore, we are aware that sustainability issues play out in an ever-changing and evolving landscape which means that it is inappropriate to make specific policy recommendations which might turn out to be limiting or restrictive in specific circumstances. However, as a general principle, the GA is committed to:

- acting in an environmentally and socially responsible manner
- using its resources and estate efficiently and sustainably
- taking a leadership role in adopting, applying and developing principles of sustainable development
• promoting sustainability perspectives in its journals, website, CPD and other activities
• collaborating on joint projects with other groups and organisations which have a similar commitment to sustainability principles
• encouraging action from its members and staff to improve the environment, especially in matters relating to ecological sustainability and community welfare
• following an ethical policy to which this sustainability policy contributes significantly


The extent to which these principles are applied and promoted will be one way of evidencing the success of this policy. The GA governing body, education group, phase committees and special interest groups all have a part to play in this process. The engagement of GA staff and volunteers is equally important.

It is intended that this policy will be reviewed at regular intervals as part of a continual updating and evaluating process when it will also be aligned with other policies with which it overlaps.

Approved by the Governing Body: 24 June 2017