

a different view

a manifesto from the Geographical Association



Geographical
Association



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Front cover: **Energy flows**

Go to www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview to find out more and for teaching ideas

What is a different view?

A *different view* is a statement of beliefs and priorities. In it, we make a case for geography in education that is forward looking and compelling: there are few things more fundamental than learning about ‘the earth as our home’.

What is it for?

A *different view* is a re-affirmation of geography’s place in the curriculum. But the world changes, and so does the curriculum. This document, and its supporting materials and website, are designed to be used in **any context where geography needs to be explained, encouraged or promoted.**

It will:

- demonstrate the power of Living Geography
- inspire teachers to make the curriculum come alive
- remind us that growing up is about discovering the world
- value children’s and young people’s experiences and curiosity
- argue for learning outside the classroom, in the real, untidy world
- help us understand alternative futures
- celebrate geography as one of humanity’s big ideas.

Have a look at

www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview

Here you will find the images used in this document, with additional families of images and supporting activities for practical classroom use; there are also direct links to the geography projects and other websites referred to here.

‘... we may need to throw out crusty old favourites ... in favour of stronger links with other subjects and lessons that challenge students to make geographical sense of their own lives



and experiences’
Professor David Lambert,
Chief Executive,
Geographical Association



Vanishing points

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1 Geography: a curriculum resource *par excellence*

Geography underpins a lifelong ‘conversation’ about the earth as the home of humankind. Geography therefore contributes to a balanced education for all young people in schools, colleges and other settings.

Geography is not a narrow academic subject for the few. It is fundamental for everyone. It starts very early, when a young child encounters and begins to *discover the world*. Geography can nourish and enrich a whole lifetime of learning.

Geography fascinates and inspires: the beauty of the earth, the terrible power of earth-shaping forces – these things can take us out of ourselves. Geographical investigation both satisfies and nourishes *curiosity*.

Geography *deepens understanding*: many contemporary challenges – climate change, food security, energy choices – cannot be understood without a geographical perspective.

Geography serves vital educational goals: thinking and decision making with geography helps us to live our lives as knowledgeable *citizens*, aware of our own local communities in a global setting.

Geographers are skilful: using maps and mediated images of people and place, numerical data and graphical modes of communication and getting to grips with the geographic information systems that underpin our lives, make geographers *skilful and employable*.





'The study of the earth as home to humankind.'

Ron Johnston, Professor of Geography, 1985

'Geography is a fundamental fascination. It is also a core component of a good education. ... [and] one of humanity's big ideas ... Its ambition is absurdly vast. But we



know it would be more absurd to abandon it.'

Alastair Bonnett, Professor of Geography

'I thought of geography and history as the twinset of the world knowledge wardrobe. Add to these a simple string of pearls of wisdom and you'd



be intellectually dressed for any occasion.'

Sandi Toksvig, Broadcaster

'I got home the other evening after two weeks away in the US. Even as I stepped from the door of the aircraft onto the gantry I felt as if I was home ...'



Will Self, novelist, from his *Independent* column 'Psychogeography' Saturday, 7 June 2008

'Geography's cool. I'm going to tell all my friends about it'



Anton, Year 10 student from the Young People's Geography Project. He achieved an A in his geography GCSE.

'Geography presents young people with real issues, globally and locally, giving them voice and reason to speak up. This subject never stays still, constantly remoulding itself to reflect



changes in the world. This is why teachers and students love it so much!'

Dee Saran, geography teacher



Producers and consumers

Go to www.geography.org.uk/adiffere/entview to find out more and for teaching ideas

2 Thinking geographically

An essential educational outcome of learning geography is to be able to apply knowledge and conceptual understanding to new settings: that is, to ‘think geographically’ about the changing world.

Here’s a challenge:

‘What we need, it seems to me, is a global sense of the local, a global sense of place.’



Professor Doreen Massey

And here’s a response:

‘Thinking geographically is a uniquely powerful way of seeing the world. While it does not provide a blueprint ... thinking geographically does provide a language – a set of concepts and ideas – that can help us see the connections between places and scales that others frequently miss. That is why we should focus on geography’s grammar as well as on its endless vocabulary. That is



the power of thinking geographically.’

Peter Jackson,
Professor of Human Geography



How does school geography teach children to ‘think geographically’?

One way of understanding geography is as a *language* that provides a way of thinking about the world: looking at it, investigating it, perhaps even understanding it in new ways.

Languages have *vocabulary*. You need vocabulary to speak the language, but it is not enough. Languages also have *grammar*: rules, concepts and procedures which allow you to construct meanings.

The *grammar* of geography is its ‘big ideas’, which help us organise and attach significance to the *vocabulary* (geographical information). These big ideas have been expressed in various ways, from Early Years to Post-16. For example, at the GA’s 2006 Annual Conference, Professor Peter Jackson suggested the following framework:

- space and place (e.g. the ways space is used and humanised to create meaningful places)
- scale and connection (e.g. the ways in which people and places are connected, from the local to the global)
- proximity and distance (e.g. how technology has in some ways eroded the friction of distance – literally, shrinking distances)
- relational thinking (e.g. how we see the world depends on our perspective).

For example, the key stage 3 National Curriculum programme of study for geography talks about quite similar ‘key concepts’:

- place
- space
- scale
- interdependence
- physical and human processes
- environmental interaction and sustainable development
- cultural understanding and diversity.

Thinking geographically – using the big ideas to organise the information – enables children and young people to develop an understanding of:

- **The physical world:** the land, water, air and ecological system; landscapes; and the processes that bring them about and change them.
 - **Human environments:** societies, communities and the human processes involved in understanding work, home, consumption and leisure – and how places are made.
 - **Interdependence:** crucially, linking the physical world and human environments and understanding the concept of sustainable development.
 - **Place and space:** recognising similarities and differences across the world and developing knowledge and understanding of location, interconnectedness and spatial patterns.
- **Scale:** the ‘zoom lens’ through which the subject matter is ‘seen’, and the significance of local, regional, national, international and global perspectives.
 - **Young people’s lives:** using their own images, experiences, meanings and questions; ‘reaching out’ to children and young people as active agents in their learning.

The strength of ‘thinking geographically’ is that it brings school geography alive – children and young people ask questions about and investigate their own world. This is what we call ‘Living Geography’ (see over).



Moving stories

Go to www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview to find out more and for teaching ideas

3 Living Geography

Geography in schools, colleges and other educational settings is concerned with perceptive and deep description of the real world. It seeks explanations about how the world works and helps us think about alternative futures; it is 'Living Geography'.

Whether it is organised by subject, themes or topics, Living Geography brings contemporary context and real world enquiry to the curriculum. Thus Living Geography is a strong 'brand' for school geography as a twenty-first century subject.

Living Geography:

- is directly relevant to people's lives and the world of work
- is about change – recognises that the past helps explain the present, but is current and futures oriented
- has a scale 'zoom lens', so that the local is always set in a global context
- is 'deeply observant' – it looks beneath the surface to identify the mechanisms that change environments and societies
- encourages a critical understanding of big ideas like 'sustainable development', 'interdependence' and 'globalisation'.

viewpoints

'Geography prepares young people with the knowledge, skills and understanding to make sense of their world and to face the challenges that will shape our societies and



environments at the local, national and global scales.'

Dr Rita Gardner,
Director, RGS-IBG

'What is exciting about geography today is that it is the first curriculum subject in the UK to take seriously the need for critical and creative thinking about the future.'



David Hicks,
Professor of Education

Living Geography sounds ambitious. It is ambitious, and worth striving for.



Running free

Go to www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview to find out more and for teaching ideas

4 Geography and young people

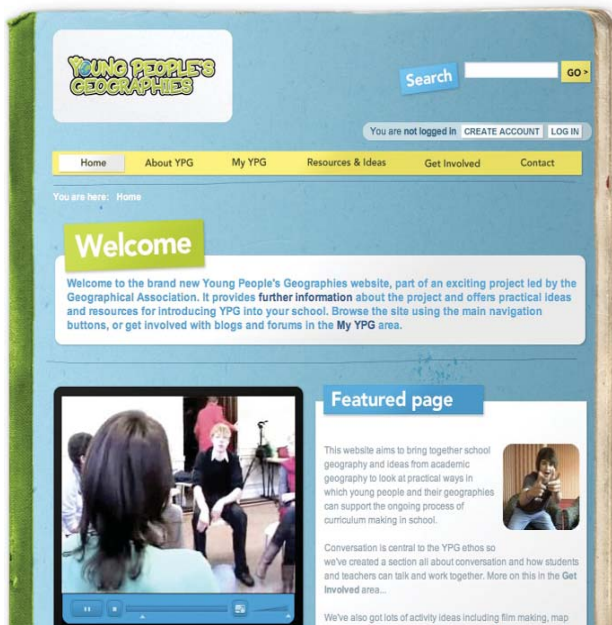
Young people themselves, working with their teachers and drawing from their own experiences and curiosity, should be encouraged to help shape the geography curriculum.

Usually, teachers decide what young people get in their lessons. But what do children and young people make of the geography they get? The Young People's Geography (YPG) project explored practical ways for young people's interests, experiences, aspirations and curiosity to influence the geography curriculum. A YPG curriculum results when teachers are responsive to what students *make of* what they get in geography lessons.

To use two metaphors commonplace in education, a YPG curriculum is less about 'coverage' and more about 'conversation'. It is characterised by:

- a *variety* of conversations: between teachers, young people, teacher educators and academic geographers
- *pedagogies* that encourage communication and exchange, such as argumentation, debate and decision making
- young people's *everyday experiences*, as reported by themselves and from *research* in geography
- extending young people's involvement in, and influence on, *curriculum making*.

We want students to realise that geography can be 'about them', growing up in the world, and we want teachers to build on this idea. We should try to catch young people's interest, but also find ways to challenge and excite them with content that might be beyond their immediate horizon.





viewpoints

'There is a relationship between young people and the discipline which needs to be a two-way process, through which they are challenged to review



and reconsider their existing understandings'

Mary Biddulph, teacher trainer and YPG project leader

'Geography has always been well represented [in our school] as it is a subject that impacts upon every aspect of the children's lives and helps build more caring and understanding



citizens of tomorrow'

Elizabeth Pateman, subject leader, Thurnham C of E Infants School, Kent

*'I have learnt that geography is all around us and geography, you know, affects us all, affects us all. **Me, I'm geography.** The building is part of geography. Everything is geography. It's not only about Jamaica is there, Africa is there, Britain there. It's about us as a community and I have learnt that. I think geography is more enjoyable now and I'm going to tell my friends about it'*



Anton, Year 10 student from the Young People's Geography Project. He achieved an A in his geography GCSE.



To the ends of the earth

Go to www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview to find out more and for teaching ideas

5 Investigating and exploring geography

The GA believes in geographical enquiry: that is, in students as active participants and investigators, not just the passive recipients of knowledge.

Geography is quintessentially a ‘discovery subject’. There was a time when it was *all* about exploration, describing and assembling information about the world: literally, geography was ‘writing the world’. It is still about exploration and discovery, but using the media and digital technologies as well as first-hand experience. Today, geography can embrace many forms of enquiry and exploration, using imagination and creativity to think critically about what we see.

Geography’s heritage is not an innocent one. For example, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, textbooks often encouraged British schoolchildren to look at the world in ways we can now see are racist. Contemporary school geography questions received ideas and conventional wisdom, and plays an important role in challenging the prejudices that sometimes limit our understanding of ourselves and others.

This is a highly significant aspect of geography’s contribution to education. It enables us to ‘travel with a different view’¹.



Discovering the world using GIS

‘Who we are, and what we can achieve, depends on how we see ourselves against the enormous pressure of how others see us.’



Judy Ling Wong, UK Director of BEN (Black Environment Network)



Geography can engage young people's fundamental curiosity and questions:

Identity: Who am I? Where do I come from? Who is my family? What is my 'story'? Who are the people around me? Where do they come from? What is their 'story'?

Place in the world: Where do I live? How does it look? How do I feel about it? How is it changing? How do I want it to change? Can I influence this?

The physical world: What is the world (and this place) made of? Why do things move? What becomes of things?

Human environment: Who decides who gets what, where and why? What is fair? Who decides? How do we handle differences of opinion?²

Enquiry and investigation lie at the heart of geographical thinking. The disciplined geographical mind is well placed to respond to these fundamental questions.

viewpoints

'You can travel the seas, poles and deserts and see nothing. To really understand the world you need to get under the skin of the people and places. In other words, learn about geography. I can't imagine a subject



more relevant in schools. We'd all be lost without it.'
Michael Palin,
actor, writer, traveller

'The best thing about geography is that it gives you the ability to gain an insight into the workings of our planet and all its abundant natural wonders ... geography and geology give you this kind of long-term perspective on what happened in the past, to



influence our decision making in the future'

Iain Stewart,
broadcaster and academic



Between heaven and earth

Go to www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview to find out more and for teaching ideas

6 Geography and the 'real world'

Fieldwork – that is, learning directly in the untidy real world outside the classroom – is an essential component of geography education.

There is no substitute for 'real world learning' – at least for some of the time. In geography this is manifest in a special way: we call it fieldwork, although it is not always conducted in fields!

Research³ shows us exactly why fieldwork matters, but many teachers do not need research to tell them.

viewpoint

'Is it all worthwhile you may ask? ... I can vouch for the hard work, but also the rewards of hearing what the pupils really enjoyed – the night walk in the woods, the high bridge crossing the River Wye, the peregrines on Symond's Yat, the hand operated ferry ... and so on. Peregrines you say, where on earth are they in the National Curriculum? I can tell you, they are in the little pieces of magic those youngsters will carry with them for the rest of their lives. Long live fieldwork!'



Paula Richardson,
teacher and teacher educator



Ofsted is perfectly clear about the value of fieldwork in geography: 'Schools should recognise the value of fieldwork for improving standards and achievement in geography' (Ofsted, 2008). The government has also endorsed fieldwork and invested in the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto: 'We believe that every young person should experience the world beyond the classroom as an essential part of learning and personal development, whatever their age, ability or circumstances ... We will keep safety management practical and proportionate, which includes keeping safety-related paperwork to the necessary minimum' (LOtC, 2008).

Children and young people often find fieldwork highly motivating, and can extend themselves beyond what they thought possible.

viewpoints

'We were working from the moment we got up until lights out at 10.00



p.m.! I didn't know I had it in me!

Year 10 student on her residential fieldwork in Derbyshire

'I was a pretty hopeless student, but was saved from certain disaster by my geography teacher. He stepped away from the classroom, and all the horrors that it held for me, and took the class to the Brecon Beacons. Those first big climbs and walks ... were a defining period for me'



Paul Rose,
BBC TV science broadcaster



Appearances can deceive

Go to www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview to find out more and for teaching ideas

7 Curriculum making with geography

The GA believes that teachers should be accountable, but also that they are autonomous professionals driven by educational goals and purposes: that is, they are the curriculum makers and the subject leaders.

When teachers with a passion for their subject are inspired by a clear sense of the subject's educational benefits they can devise surprising, challenging, engaging and 'living' geography with their students. This is what we mean by 'curriculum making' – teachers balancing the three sources of energy in the classroom:

- the teacher's own practical skills and expertise
- the interests and needs of the students
- what the dynamic, changing subject discipline has to offer.

Designing a curriculum is not just a technical matter, specifying objectives and a course of study to meet them. It is a moral concern, and should reflect what we think we should be teaching. This is why we believe the curriculum should be deeply influenced by confident, autonomous teachers.

The government agrees:

'... we have to support teachers to be the very best that they can be – to fulfil their own potential, so that pupils can fulfil theirs.'



Jim Knight, Schools Minister, at the 2008 Geographical Association Annual Conference.



Curriculum making brings these three sources of energy together to produce successful learning

The moral concern for teachers of geography is to help young people develop the ability to think critically: to make worthwhile distinctions, and detect inadequacies in evidence and argument. As curriculum makers, geography teachers face three particular challenges.

- 1 The subject matter of geography is constantly evolving. This is not just a case of making sure our facts and figures are 'up to date': the way we see the world changes. The 'vocabulary' and 'grammar' we use to make sense of the world is changing!
- 2 The subject discipline is not always well understood. A synoptic understanding of the subject is not easy, for non-specialist teachers particularly. It might even be difficult for some head teachers to see the real point of geography on the curriculum.
- 3 The subject content – its 'vocabulary' – is potentially infinite, so we need a clear rationale for making selections from it.

But these challenges are also great opportunities, for it is precisely geography's range and dynamism that make it capable of occupying a central role in the curriculum. For example:

- it crosses boundaries: physical and human, scientific and artistic. Strong geography is therefore good for launching and leading inter-disciplinary work

- its vast range of content, manipulated, stored and communicated by technology (indeed, by GIS), can be the source of innovative teaching approaches, both inside and outside the classroom.

The quality of their curriculum making means geography teachers can be excellent advocates for the subject in the school curriculum. They need to have a productive, ongoing relationship with the subject: this gives them the confidence to innovate, to respond to the unexpected and at the same time to maintain high standards of disciplined enquiry.

viewpoints

'A curriculum, to be truly educational, will lead the student to unanticipated, rather than predicted, outcomes'



James McKernan, educationist

'... teachers are central to the success or failure of curriculum change, since they are in a position to influence the interpretation of the innovation and shape it in particular ways'



John Morgan (shown) and Ben Williamson, Futurelab



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summary

The Geographical Association's vision for geography is developed from the following elements:

- Geography underpins a lifelong 'conversation' about the earth as the home of humankind. Geography therefore contributes to a balanced education for all young people in schools, colleges and other settings.
- An essential educational outcome of learning geography is to be able to apply knowledge and conceptual understanding to new settings: that is, to 'think geographically' about the changing world.
- Geography in schools, colleges and other educational settings is concerned with perceptive and deep description of the real world. It seeks explanations about how the world works and helps us think about alternative futures; it is 'Living Geography'.
- Young people themselves, working with their teachers and drawing from their own experiences and curiosity, should be encouraged to help shape the geography curriculum.
- The GA believes in geographical enquiry: that is, students are active participants and investigators, not just the passive recipients of knowledge.
- Fieldwork – that is, learning directly in the untidy real world outside the classroom – is an essential component of geography education.
- The GA believes that teachers should be accountable, but also that they are autonomous professionals driven by educational goals and purposes: they are the curriculum makers and the subject leaders.

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The Geographical Association



The GA is driven by clear goals and purposes within its long standing charitable aim which is 'to further the learning and teaching of geography.'

In 2008 the Trustees renewed the GA's vision of its broad goals and purposes:

- The GA will continue to be the lead subject association for teachers of geography in England and a national voice for geography, promoting its learning and teaching in all sectors of education. The GA will develop and extend partnerships with other subject associations and learned societies, national government and its agencies and all those with an interest in furthering geographical education.
- The GA aims to have membership in every school, college and higher education institution (HEI), and actively seeks members from other countries to create a rich and diverse community of professionals.
- The GA will be a leading provider of subject-focused continuing professional development, engaged in a wide range of curriculum development projects, and will produce high quality curriculum materials disseminated through its publications, journals and website. It will continue to develop a comprehensive range of support and activities for children and young people to stimulate a lifelong interest in geography.
- The GA will remain an organisation that staff and volunteers want to work for: an organisation that is convinced of its worth; that is confident and optimistic; that engages the public, and that has geography for all as an intrinsic value.

Geography Quality Mark

The GA has developed the Quality Mark framework to enable subject leaders to raise the standards of geography in their schools, supporting the teaching of quality geography and promoting leadership and management. According to the growing number of primary and secondary schools engaging in the Quality Mark scheme, its overarching strength lies in its capacity to act as an effective 'lever of change' for the development of geography in school. For more information, visit www.geography.org.uk/pgqm (for primary schools) or www.geography.org.uk/sgqm (for secondary schools).

The Geography Quality Mark scheme is part of the DCSF-funded Action Plan for Geography.



A different view has been funded entirely by the Geographical Association. Please consider joining the GA and help us 'further the learning and teaching of geography' with present and future generations of children and young people. You can join online (www.geography.org.uk/join) or by telephoning the number below:

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