

# Geography: The Big Picture

*This article looks at the main developments and initiatives currently underway in the Geographical Association. It relates these to how the GA is actively promoting geography in schools, to the government and the public. The GA's updated website, active Branches and Worldwide programme provide opportunities to access the latest thinking in geography. Finally, developments in the primary curriculum are placed in a broader context.*

I am now about half-way through my year as President of the Geographical Association and I feel very honoured to hold this role. There has been a great deal of ongoing activity at the GA, all of which seeks to support quality geography teaching in schools. The following summarises some of this work.

In April 2009 the GA launched its manifesto, *A different view* (Figure 1). The manifesto is a very public statement to parents, politicians, policy-makers and society at large about the real contribution geographical understanding makes to our lives. Copies of the manifesto have been sent to all secondary schools, and it is supported by high-quality material on its web pages ([www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview](http://www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview)), including guidance on using the manifesto in teaching and with parents, headteachers and others besides.

I have been very impressed with all the hard work that has gone into the GA's responses to the Rose and Alexander reviews of the primary curriculum. While the focus of these reviews may be on primary education, this work is also very important for secondary teachers. The outcomes of the reviews will impact significantly on the primary curriculum, including young children's geographical education and so any changes will have a knock-on effect on the secondary curriculum.

Our Chief Executive, David Lambert, has been working with the Director of the Royal Geographical Society (with the IBG) to raise government awareness of geography as a subject. This work has also been important in assessing how ministers view the subject, should there be a change of government in the coming months.

The GA is well known for its wide range of publishing activities in paper, electronic and web-based formats. Our journals are top-quality publications and a real benefit of membership. All three paper-based journals – *Primary Geographer*, *Teaching Geography* and *Geography* – have recently undergone significant reviews and continue to support our understanding of issues in geography education. These, along with Geog Ed (the GA's online journal), are all available to members via the new GA website, re-launched last autumn.

The new website is designed to support a wide range of professional development activities (see Figure 2). As well as allowing access to past and current copies of the journals, the website is *the* place for browsing and purchasing the high-quality resources published by the GA. It provides important updates on developments in geography education and details of forthcoming events for people in geography education. A real strength of the site is its responsiveness to significant events, such as the earthquake in Indonesia and the tsunami in Samoa: links to a range of information/news sites and high-quality resources appear very quickly. If you've not had chance to browse through it, please do so, as I think you'll be amazed at the many aspects of the Association's activities.

The GA has a network of local Branches. One way you can become involved in the work of the Association is to join one of these – see the website for details of your local Branch ([www.geography.org.uk/branches](http://www.geography.org.uk/branches)). For me, joining my local Lincoln Branch nine years ago was certainly important in making me feel professionally settled when I moved to this part of the world. GA Branches serve to support local networking activities across schools and across age ranges.

**Figure 1:** David Lambert, the GA's Chief Executive, discusses *A different view* with a delegate at the GA's Annual Conference.  
Photo: Bryan Ledgard.



The GA's Worldwide brand provides fun and innovative activities for schools, such as the Worldwide Quiz. I always look forward to meeting the Lincolnshire school teams who take part in our local quiz: it makes for a very pleasant evening being with young people so interested in geography. I had a very enjoyable day last September at the Field Studies Council's Juniper Hall centre, where teams had gathered to take part in the Worldwide Challenge weekend (Figure 3). I recommend it highly as good way to engage your students practically in outdoor activities, and to meet students and staff from across the country.

The GA has many initiatives that support geographical education: it is difficult to pick out particular examples as they all do such important work. The GA and the RGS-IBG have had government funding to develop the Action Plan for Geography (APG). Its purpose is to raise the profile and quality of teaching in geography and to support schools where it has had a low profile. The GA's Quality Mark scheme has been taken up by a large number of schools and allows them to focus on developing the subject. This is summarised by a quote from one participant who said '...Within my department, the SGQM was both a fantastic CPD and self evaluation process. As a team we were able to reflect on and evaluate our current practice...' Another new GA initiative is the Primary Geography Champions scheme. Around the country, Geography Champions have been recruited to work with teachers in the region to develop geography in their schools. You can find out more of what they do on the website and I'm sure your local Geography Champion would appreciate contact with you on their Ning (<http://geographychampions.ning.com>).

Finally, we are entering a very interesting and important time for geography in schools. The new primary curriculum is planned to come into effect in September 2011 and current versions of it show that we will need to be very clear how the significance of geography is made visible to both children and teachers. In addition, the new key stage 3 curriculum has been in schools for just over year and there is a need to consider how this has impacted on secondary



Figure 2: The new-look GA website.

school geography. Whatever form future examinations and diplomas may take, we have to ensure a place for geography, by ensuring that school students have access to high-quality, stimulating and enjoyable geography teaching. All of these factors, put together, may well mean that future geography in schools will look very different from the subject we see today. It is vital for teachers to be at the centre in making decisions about a future geography and for the GA to be focused on doing all that it can to support you.

I have chosen the title 'Geography: the Big Picture' as my Conference theme to continue highlighting the manifesto throughout 2010. This year's Conference will be held at the University of Derby between 8 and 10 April. I do hope to meet many of you at this event to share our enthusiasm for the subject, and to hear your ideas on how the Association can further extend its support to you in school. | TG



Figure 3: John Halocha with some of the students at Juniper Hall Worldwide Challenge weekend.  
Photo: Richard Gill.

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