

# Making an impact

*GA President 2014–2015 Mark Higginbottom reflects on his presidential theme and the GA's support for young people, focusing on the work of Worldwide.*



Accompanying online materials

All of us in education are very aware of the weight of expectation on young people, and our need to measure their progress and attainment against targets set at both national and local levels. Schools and HEIs are increasingly data-rich, with often highly complex methods and approaches to data collection at their disposal. Some take into account the ways in which young people learn, develop their understanding of concepts, processes and skills and use their newly acquired knowledge. Other approaches suggest that if learning, or rather attainment is not an ever upward, linear trajectory, the young person is not making expected, or indeed better than expected progress.

We also know that geography is rich in ways of preparing young people for life in the real world, but that many of these ways are hard to measure. Simply because they cannot be input to a spreadsheet does not mean they are less important than more easily quantified aspects of the subject. However, as I work with schools to emphasise the value of these intangible riches, I do sometimes ponder on whether we really know what impact geography has on shaping our young people as 'well-rounded' human beings.

'Making an impact', the theme for my Presidential year, has provided an opportunity to reflect on the ways geography affects our young people, whether at EYFS, primary, secondary, post-16 or HEI level, and whatever

their ethnicity or socio-economic background. What has challenged and engaged them? What relevance does geography have to their everyday lives and experiences? We have to be careful to avoid 'relevance ... to everyday lives' being interpreted as, for instance, 'glaciation and tropical storms are irrelevant for people who live in urban areas'. They are hardly irrelevant for the 1.3 billion people living in the Himalayan drainage basin who rely on glacial melt water and monsoonal waters for their very survival (UNEP, 2012). Climate change may well be having a direct impact on both glaciation and tropical storms, as well as on the circulation of the jet stream and our seasonal weather. It is our professional duty to inspire and address students' curiosity about the Earth and offer visions beyond their immediate horizons. Whatever aspect of geography we teach, we must ensure it brings with it awe, wonder and ultimately the desire to experience it first-hand, now, or in the future.

This year the GA's strategy includes a specific emphasis on developing direct and inspirational support for young people. As the leading subject association for all teachers of geography we must seek the views of young people and respond to them. Merely passing on knowledge, without an understanding of how the subject, and how we teach it, affects young people is to ignore the part geography can play in making them 'well-rounded' individuals. So it is excellent that a group has been set up to work towards developing a direct offer to young people of different ages in a coherent package.

**Figure 1:** Goredale Scar is a dramatic limestone ravine 1.5 km north-east of Malham, North Yorkshire. It contains two waterfalls and has overhanging limestone cliffs over 100 metres high. The gorge is at the northern end of Craven Fault, a 22-mile geological fault line which runs from the borders of Cumbria into the Yorkshire Dales. It was created during the Ice ages; melt water creating a cavern that eventually collapsed to create the waterfall and gorge. Whatever aspect of geography we teach, we must ensure it brings with it awe, wonder and ultimately the desire to experience it first-hand, now, or in the future.

**Photo:** Mark Higginbottom.



## Worldwise

The GA provides substantial direct and indirect support to young people in over 35 ways. Here I will focus on one of these, in which I have been involved for fifteen years. 'Worldwise' has grown, from its origins in the Worldwide Quiz and Geography Action Week, into a broader offer with its own dedicated website (<http://worldwise.geography.org.uk>). Worldwise has two clear key aims:

- to engage geography teachers and young people with geography across a range of ways to develop a secure understanding of the world. It develops young people's geographical vocabularies, their geographical imaginations of the world around them at a variety of scales and it stimulates their personal geographies
- to provide directly to teachers and young people opportunities that stimulate a passion through their understanding of geographical concepts, constructing meaning, deeper thinking and understanding of interconnectedness, interdependency and processes in a world of change.

Worldwise stimulates young people's interest in geography as more than just a school subject, encouraging them to challenge their own thinking and perceptions, and those of others, both within and beyond the classroom environment.

Worldwise activities are often seen as knowledge-based, offering a simplistic view of the world and geography. Local and online quizzes and the Worldwise app certainly do test knowledge recall but also provide 'enabling knowledge', encouraging young people to create a knowledge framework which enables them to explore concepts and 'think geographically'. Worldwise activities also challenge teachers and young people to identify and reflect on their personal geographies and geographical imaginations.

There are three parts to Worldwise:

#### Worldwise week

Formerly known as Geography Awareness Week, this is aligned to the year's Presidential theme, is an opportunity to raise the profile of geography in your school. A wide range of activities for all key stages can be downloaded from the Worldwise site. Worldwise Week usually runs during the last complete school week of June each year, but you can use the resources at any time convenient to your school. Find out more at [www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/worldwise/worldwiseweek](http://www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/worldwise/worldwiseweek)

#### Worldwise Challenge

The culmination of Worldwise for secondary schools, and my personal favourite, is the annual Worldwise Challenge. This free residential weekend at a Field Studies Council (FSC) centre makes geography real for young people through direct engagement, and is packed with a broad range of enjoyable and competitive fieldwork activities. Approximately 10 schools are invited, according to the degree and quality of student engagement in the year's Worldwise activities. This joint GA/FSC partnership has brought together young people and teachers from all over Britain at some of the most iconic areas of the UK, including Blencathra in the Lake District, Nettlecombe Court on the edge of Exmoor and Malham Tarn in the Yorkshire Dales – the location of the 2015 Challenge weekend. Over its 11 years more than 500 young people have experienced stimulating and challenging outdoor learning in ways often not possible in the school context. Teachers attending are offered a unique CPD opportunity: quality fieldwork content delivered by experienced professional staff. As well as the

overall title of Worldwise Challenge winners there are a number of other prizes to be won during the weekend.

Geography is not just on the pages of a textbook or on the television on a Sunday evening, it is everything that is happening around us. Being a part of the Challenge weekend is a key part of the Association's approach to capturing and retaining that passion in young people. For an inspiring insight into what the weekend has to offer young people, accompanied by contributions from the students, see Jeremy Krause's article on the 2013 Worldwise Challenge (Krause, 2013).

#### Worldwise competition (Post-16)

The annual post-16 competition allows older students to engage with a current aspect of geography, researching it beyond textbook level, to produce a reflective, evidenced-based view of the issue from different perspectives. The winners represent the UK at the annual International Geography Olympiad (iGeo), which allows Team UK to mix with the best geographers from more than 30 countries all over the world. Recent venues for iGeo have included Krakow, Poland; Kyoto, Japan; Taipei, Taiwan and Brisbane, Australia. In 2015 the iGeo is to be held in Tver Region, Russia, and in 2016, in Beijing, China.

#### Reflections

Geography in education can do an excellent job of helping young people to become 'real-world-ready'. It is timely, though, to reflect on how successfully geography supports different groups of students, e.g. the different age phases, different ethnic and socio-economic groups, groups with disabilities and special educational needs and disabilities. Is geography more popular and meaningful to some of these groups than others? Do we give sufficient consideration to parental perceptions of geography and their impact on our students? Do we always understand and celebrate the role of geography in supporting whole-school improvement, governance and attainment? Widening participation in geography is important. What will ensure geography is relevant to Asian/Bangladeshi students, for example? How should we support teachers to reach out to other ethnicities? How do we support EYFS practitioners to incorporate geography into play? Finally, how do we ensure that every young person's geographical experience includes plenty of the all-important learning outside the classroom? | **TG**

#### References

Krause, J. (2013) 'Reasons to be cheerful' *GA Magazine*, 25, pp. 18–19.

UNEP (2012) Measuring Glacier Change in the Himalayas, United Nations Environment Programme. Available online at [http://na.unep.net/geas/getUNEPPageWithArticleIDScript.php?article\\_id=91](http://na.unep.net/geas/getUNEPPageWithArticleIDScript.php?article_id=91) (last accessed 27 February 2015).

#### Useful weblinks

Worldwise: [www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/worldwise](http://www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/worldwise) and <http://worldwise.geography.org.uk>

Why student fieldtrips make an impact: [www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2014/jan/07/student-fieldtrips-research-impact-ref?CMP=tw\\_t\\_gu](http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2014/jan/07/student-fieldtrips-research-impact-ref?CMP=tw_t_gu)

#### Online resources

Find the Worldwise week resources at [www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/worldwise/worldwiseweek](http://www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/worldwise/worldwiseweek)



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