



## **Debate: Is the Anthropocene an issue of physical geography or popular culture?**

Summary by Duncan Hawley (Chair)

This session was well attended with over 50 people present. Starter questions encouraged participants to consider their current understanding of 'The Anthropocene' within a teaching context. Prof. Mark Williams suggested how humans are now a force of fundamental change to the Earth and illustrated some ways human activity will likely leave a signal in the geological record. As such we can now define a new stratigraphical epoch: 'The Anthropocene'. Dr Alex Standish responded by asserting the Anthropocene is predominantly a political and cultural idea rather than a concept that could be scientifically evidenced as distinct from The Holocene epoch. Both speakers recognised 'the acceleration' of human impact but gave different perspectives on investment in the idea of 'The Anthropocene'; which have attendant implications for teaching. A series of questions were posed to stimulate thinking about how the implications might impact on curriculum, teaching and students' understanding. Discussion revealed the majority of participants considered the concept should be included in the geography curriculum, although a few urged thoughtful caution and balanced consideration of the (geographical) knowledge to be established warning that otherwise 'The Anthropocene' could unwittingly become a proxy for 'alarmist' teaching and/or the latest environmental (ideological?) 'good cause' espoused by geography. This stimulating debate ran out of time but its success was measured by people continuing in hot discussion as they left the room.