



Geography Curriculum Consultation

Full Report

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Find the consultation documents at

www.geography.org.uk/getinvolved/geographycurriculumconsultation

The Geography Curriculum Consultation

The 2010 White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* and its re-emphasis on the knowledge contents of subjects was broadly welcomed by the Geographical Association (GA). In response, the Association set out its rationale and proposals for geography¹. This took the form of a curriculum framework, key stage expectations and a set of principles guiding a statutory geography subject component in the National Curriculum for ages 5 to 16.

The GA put forward its proposals for web-based consultation and asked teachers to respond to several perceived weaknesses in modern school geography. Between August and October 2011 the consultation received 7200 page views. The GA's rationale and proposals had 1840 downloads. (In addition, the Standish proposals had 1460 downloads²). The consultation stimulated 57 (often lengthy and very thoughtful) public comments and generated nearly 200 questionnaire responses³ (many of which were the results of group discussions in GA Branch meetings and such like).

The comments confirm strong support to create a rigorous geography curriculum that will inform and educate the nation's pupils about the world we live in today. Drawing from its close involvement with earlier national curriculum debates, as well as the present consultation, the GA is clear that a line-by-line, detailed list of geography's contents is not the best way to draw a positive response from teachers. The contents of geography are highly dynamic and a tight centralised specification may impede the development of the curriculum in meaningful ways. On the other hand, although we live in a rapidly changing world, making the tight specification of the geographical contexts to be studied in schools hazardous, there is strong support for the national curriculum achieving greater clarity over the core and essential knowledge contents of geography.

Key findings from the consultation: executive summary

- It is helpful to distinguish between three forms of geographical knowledge: factual 'core' knowledge (Kn1), conceptual content knowledge (Kn2) and applied practical knowledge⁴ (Kn3)
- These forms of knowledge should not be taught in isolation and it would be helpful to illustrate how they interrelate with some practical examples.
- The GA's definition of 'core knowledge' is understood and supported as a means to express locational and world knowledge and geographical context.
- The distinction made between context and content is understood and found to be helpful, as is the analogy of core knowledge as the 'vocabulary' of the subject, and geographical concepts as the 'grammar'.

¹ http://www.geography.org.uk/download/GA_GIGCCCurriculumProposals.pdf

² Alex Standish was invited by the Schools Minister to devise some proposals and, with his and the DfE's permission, these were also posted on the GA's consultation website for comment

³ The questionnaire responses are shown in the Appendix

⁴ In the consultation this was referred to as 'procedural knowledge' and includes elements of enquiry, exploration and fieldwork

- There is widespread recognition of the significance of place and location in geography, but a negative response to alternative proposals⁵ for a return to a traditional regional geography.
- There is strong agreement that geography teaching should aim for deep learning and conceptual understanding; that geography is learned through enquiry; and that geography takes account of both physical and human factors and the links between local phenomena and wider global processes.
- Teachers wholeheartedly support that the National Curriculum Framework should be flexible and enabling, and that at the level of the classroom they are the 'curriculum makers'⁶, devising geography lessons with contemporary content which motivate in pupils a 'need to know'
- There is strong support that a key way to justify 'why geography' to the profession and to the public is in terms of the capabilities⁷ it develops in pupils based on the acquisition and development of powerful geographical knowledge.
- There is strong agreement that the level of detail proposed in the GA's geography curriculum framework, and that the form that it takes, is appropriate to guide localised curriculum making.
- A majority support a core knowledge sequence in geography, particularly if this were to be set out on a key stage rather than year-by-year basis, although there is a clear divergence of views in this matter.
- There is broad agreement that the suggested outcomes for age 11 and 14 are appropriate, although fine tuning on the detail of the curriculum is needed.
- There is strong endorsement for a statutory primary component to the school curriculum although a divergence of opinion over the volume of geography that should be covered in the primary phase.

⁵ http://www.geography.org.uk/download/GA_GICurricConsultationStandish.pdf

⁶ Defined as the practical implementation of the curriculum, combining subject expertise, pedagogic skills and deep concern for student progress

⁷ Defined as the knowledgeable application of intellectual and practical skills

Section 1 Main Findings

Towards a Revised National Curriculum for Geography

1.1 The Geographical Association's curriculum consultation was based on a set of principles drawn from the GA's manifesto, *A Different View*, first published in 2009⁸. The consultation shows a high level of support for what the GA has put forward, perhaps fuelled by the contrast with the heavily criticised proposals provided by Alex Standish (see Section 3).

The consultation provides an evidence base for the next stage in the process of reviewing the national curriculum for geography - to produce a revised national curriculum framework and to submit this to the Department for Education early in 2012.

In this section we open up three important issues revealed by the consultation exercise. We then set out a number of principles that should guide the national curriculum framework for geography.

1.2 Significant issues

Three issues of substance have emerged from this consultation. There is evidence to suggest that although these issues do not lend themselves to easy resolution (and indeed are not in themselves novel) it is helpful for teachers to engage with them, to help them prioritise their work.

A. Distinguishing curriculum from pedagogy.

To what extent is there a clear sense of what a national curriculum document is for? And what such an instrument can and cannot do? Many of the comments, not least about the Standish curriculum, may be unreasonable in that they fail to distinguish adequately the national curriculum from classroom pedagogy. One comment from a primary teacher anxious to emphasise the importance of relevance and children's day-to-day experiences, seemed to say that the curriculum should be wary of extending beyond 'the limits of children's imaginations' – a rather bleak view of geography's purpose some others might say. A curriculum in itself does not have the role of 'engaging pupils', and nor can it be judged according to its 'fun' nor even whether it is 'relevant to pupils' lived experience'.

Teachers, on the other hand, need to be engaging and sometimes fun. Teachers deploy pedagogic techniques which will frequently seek to start with 'relevance to everyday life' but then, guided by the curriculum, will seek to take pupils beyond this. Teachers will help young people make new meanings – which can be challenging, counter-intuitive, surprising and hopefully worthwhile and significant. A national curriculum document merely has to identify such worthwhile knowledge in order to guide the teacher's curriculum making.

There is very strong endorsement in the consultation of the GA's idea of 'curriculum making' in teachers' work. It expresses where curriculum and pedagogy come together. But there may need to be additional clarity made between this and how it relates to a national curriculum document.

B. Defining the school subject.

It has long been acknowledged that geography has an identity problem, which was not resolved by the introduction of a national curriculum in 1991. Indeed the problem of defining the school subject has probably grown rather than diminished

⁸ www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview

since then. This is because of the uneasy relationship geography, as a school subject, has with:

- The wider discipline as advanced by university departments of geography.
- Geography as a facilitating subject for generic skills, and cross cutting themes such as citizenship and sustainable development.
- Geography in the popular imagination (and pub quizzes) – which often is rejected by school teachers as being low level and trivial.
- The notion of 'everyday geographies' – which although obviously appealing pedagogically, can remain on a fairly superficial level if not developed with care⁹.

The consultation responses show strong support for giving school geography a clearer definition, even extending to the notion of providing a core knowledge sequence. Although it shows that there is some uncertainty about the relationships listed above, there is support for Kn1, Kn2 and Kn3 possibly because it provides a way of reconciling some of the tensions.

C. Getting the level of detail right.

There was a greater divergence of views about the appropriate content of geography in the primary phase compared to the secondary phase. This probably reflects that greater sense of uncertainty about geography in the primary curriculum (possibly resulting from the lack of specialist geographical training in teacher preparation). There is therefore some sympathy for the view that geography needs specifying in the primary phase, including aspects of core knowledge coverage – not least to help prepare children for the secondary phase.

However there is also a view, commonly expressed that too much specification impedes 'creativity' and 'innovation'. In the most extreme case, one respondent even suggested that the GA's curriculum framework (occupying just 3 pages) was 'too prescriptive'. Our judgment following this consultation is that such an extreme view is unjustifiable: school geography defined only by what an individual teacher decides to teach is unacceptable – the ultimate expression of 'geography is what geographers do'. There is a need to define the geographical knowledge to which children and young people need to be exposed, and to help teachers sequence this through the compulsory years.

And yet, there is near universal condemnation of the approach set out by Alex Standish. An overfull curriculum at a national level risks repeating the mistake made by the original national curriculum specification in 1991, when 'coverage' was key. Evidence has shown that in some schools geography became fragmented and a superficial experience of 'one thing after another' – with lots of repetition – as teachers attempted to cover all that was required in the statutory order.

1.3 Main principles endorsed by the consultation process

The consultation has endorsed a number of principles which should guide the revision of the national curriculum in geography and its subsequent implementation in schools. We have organised these under three headings: geography the subject; the geography curriculum; the teaching of geography.

⁹ See for example the primary level 'Young Geographers' www.geography.org.uk/projects/younggeographers or the secondary Young Peoples Geography Project www.geography.org.uk/projects/youngpeoplesgeographies/

A. On Geography

- i. Geography makes a foundational contribution to the school curriculum and without it children's education is severely diminished.
- ii. Geography is concerned with understanding the interacting systems comprising all humanity and its natural environment on the surface of the Earth. It is an integrating subject. It encourages synthesis and the understanding of relationships. It both broadens and deepens our conversations about being at home on planet earth.
- iii. Geography has 'core knowledge'. This is linked closely with the popular idea of geography accumulating factual knowledge of places, patterns and distributions, and of earth features and phenomena. Developing and expanding core knowledge of the world is only one aspect of learning geography.
- iv. The main 'content knowledge' of school geography is to develop ideas, concepts and generalisations which enable students to make sense of people-environmental relationships. Thus a key emphasis of school geography is on understanding patterns, distributions and relationships in the world.
- v. School geography also develops 'procedural knowledge' which is concerned with disciplined exploration and enquiry, the processing and communication of geographical data and the development of relational understanding and perspectives. This is applied practical knowledge
- vi. Fieldwork is one unique aspect of geography's procedural knowledge, when children can be positioned to encounter to experience and learn directly from the 'real world'
- vii. Geography is an integrating and applied subject and is a particularly effective way of keeping options open for young people post 14 years. It is a highly effective subject for developing a wide range of intellectual and practical skills valued by employers.

B. On the Geography Curriculum

- i. The curriculum, which is a statement of what should be taught, consists of three separate layers or levels: the national, whole school and classroom. It is a mistake for the national level to attempt to prescribe too closely what is taught at the classroom level. Such attempts necessarily become too detailed and inflexible for teachers to work with intelligently and to be responsive, for example to changing contexts.
- ii. At the national level the curriculum should be clear about the broad aims and purposes of geography and set out an overarching framework of knowledge and ideas to be taught. It can also indicate in broad terms how geographical knowledge is expected to develop over the years of compulsory schooling in an indicative rather than prescriptive manner.
- iii. The GA has an open mind about the possible role and purpose of a 'core knowledge sequence'. It may be helpful, but the GA is also mindful of the dangers in stipulating 'context' (as distinct from 'content') at the national level.

C. On Teaching Geography

- i. The GA sees teachers as the 'curriculum makers' vested with the responsibility to make appropriate choices regarding subject content, and especially the selection of contexts for study and the organisation of teaching.
- ii. The process of curriculum making is neither self-evident nor straight-forward. It requires specialist knowledge and training. As developments continually take place in the subject matter and in pedagogy, teachers need regular access to specialist CPD opportunities.
- iii. The best geography teaching is based on stimulating the curiosity of children and young people in order to ask questions and to generate a 'need to know' about the wider world.
- iv. Geography teachers have a duty to keep up-to-date with, for example, place names, groupings of countries, statistical data and other information about the world and particular places. It also involves updating knowledge of geographical ways of thinking,

theories and concepts informed by developments in the wider discipline. It also requires incorporating modern technology, including geographic information systems (GIS).

- v. Teachers of geography in primary schools typically have very limited geography in their training. More specialist geography teachers in primary schools, or a programme of specialist in service training, could help teachers clarify the educational aims and purposes of the subject.
- vi. As many as a third of KS3 geography lessons may be taught by non-specialists. It is important to maintain or increase the number of secondary geography teachers being trained and to encourage the take up of subject-focussed CPD. Non-specialist teachers of geography in secondary schools, including those redeployed within schools, should have access to appropriate specialist CPD.

1.3 Afterword

International perspectives need always to be treated with caution as Tim Oates¹⁰ has shown. But it is recommended that an overview of current curriculum change in geography is undertaken internationally. Different approaches may be illuminating, although we assume all jurisdictions are pursuing broadly the same goal, as expressed by Tim Oates:

" A well defined national curriculum – based on concepts, principles, fundamental operations and key knowledge – can lead to learning processes which are more focused on deep learning (fewer topics pursued to greater depth) ... " (Oates, 2010, p 17).

¹⁰ Oates T 2010 *Could Do Better: using international comparisons to refine the National Curriculum in England*, Cambridge: Cambridge Assessment

Section 2 Analysis of Responses

The knowledge base of geography in the national curriculum

2.1 The GA's proposal begins by distinguishing three forms of geographical knowledge: factual 'core' knowledge (Kn1), conceptual content knowledge (Kn2) and procedural knowledge (Kn3). Almost 90% of respondents to the consultation agreed with this distinction; it was thought to make sense and be helpful and enabling. As one explained:

It indicates clearly that there is a need to equip students with the right types of knowledge to enable them to consider issues, interpret information, answer questions or make decisions from a geographical point of view. Ultimately, if the curriculum empowers students to go beyond the classroom and use these competences in day-to-day life, then it should be considered a success.¹¹

Another picks up the theme of powerful knowledge¹²:

This is what a better geography should be. This is the powerful knowledge that will mark my pupils as educated individuals, leading them on to University and the chance to be masters of their own fate. This knowledge will also profoundly shape the horizons of my pupils; showing them the possibilities that exist beyond their daily lives in an urban jungle. By being able to instil powerful knowledge into my pupils, I feel I have the opportunity to help combat the moral outrage that exists in the UK. This injustice is fundamentally created by low expectations. The White Paper called this the 'soft bigotry of low expectations'.

Others commented that the division of 'core' 'content' and 'procedural' knowledge:

- would aid structure in my lesson planning.
- shows how geographical knowledge will be developed and progressed in schools. If taught correctly, extensive core knowledge can act as the essential basis to Kn2 and Kn3
- gives others an explanation for geography that as a discipline it is so frequently accused of lacking
- highlights that core knowledge is often not seen to be as important, or is overshadowed by, the other two.

The proposals emphasise that the three forms of knowledge should not be taught in isolation; they intersect and are mutually dependent. Many expressed the view that content and procedural knowledge cannot be obtained without some core knowledge. Some expressed caution that the clear expression of "three knowledges" could be misunderstood and there is a danger they will be approached in isolation and ticked off as the pupils learn them. As few as 10% thought that the distinction oversimplified geography which is a complex subject and such a division was reductive and adds nothing.

2.2 The notion of core knowledge is promoted strongly in the government's National Curriculum review, although it is expressed in a simplified form. One teacher noted

¹¹ Italics indicate direct verbatim quotations from the on-line responses. Note that a small number of these have been edited, but only to aid clarity

¹² Derived from Michael Young (2007) *Bringing Knowledge Back In*, London: Routledge

If the government has already fixed a view of what it means by 'core knowledge' or even if it has not, it would do well to read the GA's proposal carefully. This might lead to the understanding that one cannot sum up what is essential about a subject by listing a few choice core 'facts' that have been selected against unclear criteria. It should raise questions about whether it is right that a revised set of orders should restrict itself to only one kind of knowledge. It may even raise questions about how creating a list of what is 'core' can be done in a slimmed down document.

Another commented:

I think one of the reasons why geography is a valued subject and was included as an option in the English Baccalaureate is because, as Margaret Thatcher once said, 'geography is a good general knowledge subject'. With the emphasis on core knowledge and a better understanding between types of knowledge, it would be even more so.

Another emphasized that the Government's definition of core knowledge is crucial and oversimplification could be problematic:

If, as feared, the definition signals a return to geography as the coverage of content, the Government is indeed setting low expectations for mainstream pupils. It is preventing them from developing the powerful knowledge they need to make progress and succeed. Powerful knowledge will be retained where it has always been; with the privileged few. And so the gap will widen.

By contrast geographical knowledge as set out in the GA's proposals could have a very positive impact on children's lives because it:

.. gives my pupils the right to develop skills, access world knowledge, think geographically and broaden their outlook on life. It enables them to compete, succeed and excel; hallmarks of a subject that is an indispensable part of my pupils' education.

One response pointed out that Ofsted¹³ when reporting in 2011 on how well "core knowledge" is taught in schools today commented that:

'Core knowledge for the majority of the students surveyed, but especially for those in the weaker schools, was poor. All but the best students interviewed were spatially naïve. The mental images they held of the world were often confused and they were not able to locate countries, key mountain ranges or other features with any degree of confidence. For example, they understood about development issues in Kenya but had little or no idea of where Kenya was in Africa. Many of them had studied Amazonia and could talk with some conviction about the exploitation of resources and environmental degradation but they knew nothing about the rest of South America. Their study of geography was isolated and not set within a context that they could identify with.'

The GA proposals recognise the importance of 'core knowledge' but point out that its place in school geography has perplexed generations of geography teachers who wanted to shrug off a poor image in which bored pupils had to reel off list after list of place names, products and what we might call today trivia. The comments recognised this problem and why it is important to resolve:

¹³ Ofsted 2011 Learning to Make a World of Difference
<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/geography-learning-make-world-of-difference>

- The GA proposal promotes a 'core knowledge', which the public deems geography to lack, but it also adds colour and vitality to this.
- The ignorance of others (and I include policy makers in that) as to what our subject is, is our downfall.
- Fundamentally we need to ensure that the profession, parents, pupils and the public at large agree that the subject is worthy of inclusion in every child's curriculum experience to enable them to think geographically, differently to other ways of thinking, as well as acquiring essential knowledge and understanding of the world of which they are citizens.

It was agreed by 83% of respondents that the idea of 'core knowledge' in geography (Kn1) was a useful way of expressing the place of geography in the popular imagination. One commented:

This has previously been our Achilles heel and led to many negative stereotypes. This is now recognised as the building blocks of our work.

However, a minority expressed the view that:

This is clearly a response to changing government expectations and not necessarily a response to current thinking amongst the wider geographical community.

The GA likens learning geography to learning a 'language'. Teachers responded well to this idea; as one wrote I love the analogy of these concepts being the grammar and core knowledge is the vocabulary. Core knowledge may be thought of as extensive world knowledge, in itself fairly superficial yet enabling. Much of this is gleaned and created from the information communicated in globes and atlases and amounts to the geographical context which can be distinguished from the main content of the curriculum. This distinction between content and context was seen in 92% of questionnaire responses to be useful for the teaching of geography.

For 91% of respondents, the idea of 'core knowledge' in geography (Kn1) was recognised as a useful way of expressing 'factual' geography. As the proposals explain, this is not low level or trivial material although it can become so if taught badly; that is, as an end in itself. For information to become knowledge we have to give it meaning. In geography this very often comes from the links and relationships we make between individual bits of information. When 'core knowledge' is built up this way it is enabling. It enables us to make links and comparison and to develop and refine our inner geographical imagination. One teacher welcomed this approach because:

- Core knowledge is a vital part of geography, and although it may be thought of as too many facts, or too 'pub quiz', the idea of 'rigour' and traditional knowledge being injected back into the curriculum can only be a good thing, as long as we as teachers find a way to make it fun and relevant to young people.
- I am also in total support of the idea of core knowledge. Children in schools should be taught capital cities, river names If children have a strong core knowledge then it will allow concepts to be explored with more depth and a greater understanding of the subject.

One eloquently sets out both the pros and cons of teaching core knowledge:

On one hand,core geographical knowledge builds cultural literacy; it connects young people to democracy and the dynamism of a 21st Century world. It is also vital to creating the foundations for more intensive knowledge and understanding on which to develop educated

young people. Core knowledge is therefore a single isolated sphere of geography. It is essential but in isolation it merely creates young people rich in facts but wanderers; lost in the blur of 21st Century life.

Another gives a timely reminder of the folly of teaching factual information without relevance:

..... geography must have a relevance, purpose and context or it is meaningless. A glacier for example is a magnificent, awe-inspiring landform. Taught solely within the realm of core 'factual' or process knowledge to an inner-city pupil who has never set foot beyond his/her local area, a glacier is void of meaning or life. Yet, when the same pupil is allowed to use his/her geographical imagination to experience the awe and fear of a glacier, the experience can be empowering.

The GA proposals noted that there is nothing intrinsically geographical about place names or rivers or mountains. It is how we study these – geographically – that gives them geographical and explanatory meaning. For instance, using the question sequence: What? Where? Why there? How?

2.3 The content knowledge set out in the GA's proposal is the concepts or generalisations; these are the key to developing understanding. This proposal likens this to geography's 'grammar'. Content knowledge is also thought of as more intensive world knowledge, taking in the realm of processes, different perspectives and of values. Many teachers concurred with these ideas, as one explained:

The 'grammar and vocabulary' approach that the GA has adopted seems to provide a good balance between concepts and content, and leave room for teachers to be creative in the ways that they engage their students.

They also emphasised the importance of the integration of content knowledge, as one explained:

The current curriculum is overly concerned with too many key concepts which disrupts the way teachers can effectively teach them in the classroom. For example many of the current curriculum key concepts such as scale and interdependence should be explored through other themes and investigations rather than focusing on them specifically. The new curriculum allows a streamlined approach to Geography and will enable teachers to plan more creative lessons as there seems to be less control over what children learn.

This comment may indicate the difficulty some teachers have in understanding quite how to use the relatively abstract 'key concepts' to plan the curriculum, as opposed to the more substantive concepts that may more successfully indicate the main contents of the geography curriculum. However, a few commented on the absence of 'key concepts' and asked what is wrong with the current National Curriculum concepts?¹⁴

2.4 Thinking geographically is a distinctive procedure and the GA proposals refer to this as procedural knowledge. This can be modelled by the teacher but it is also learned through exposure to, and direct experience of, high quality geographical enquiry. A key characteristic identified in the proposals is the recognition of the significance of place and unique context.

¹⁴ These are: place, space, scale, interdependence, human and physical processes, environmental interaction and sustainable development and cultural diversity. To some teachers expressing the curriculum in these terms is liberating. To others, as we see, they are difficult to use in planning as they lack specificity.

Comments were positive about place study, by comparison with the negative response to Alex Standish's proposal for the return of regional geography (see later). One response points out the importance of rigorous place study as distinct from the case study:

My vision of a powerful geographical knowledge fully embraces the GA's realignment of place. Place is ultimately at the heart of geography; as the physical Earth and its human occupation is arranged in the human mind-set as a vast, dynamic and contrasting series of places. The organisation of the current curriculum by issues and themes paints a bleak view of the world. It mistakes places for 'case studies'. Case studies are merely banks of largely factual knowledge. They promote places as lifeless, static illustrations. This loss of exploration of the uniqueness, vibrancy and natural 'awe' of places is a sad loss to geography. It is vital to reinforce the world as a complex mosaic rather than a static layer that responds only to newsworthy events. I fear a 'core knowledge' of fragmented issues and case studies.

Another says with regards to place:

I think that yes it is crucial that we teach about globally 'significant' places such as the USA or China but I firmly believe that students should be involved in the dialogue about what makes a place significant. They should be given the chance to study places that are significant to them. This will allow them to apply their understanding of the core concepts of Geography to a place that matters to them and will begin to get them looking at the world as a 'geographer'.

The GA proposals see the adoption of a 'relational' approach to enquiries as essential to making sense of the world. This is taking account of both physical and human factors and the links between local phenomena and wider global processes. This was widely welcomed in the comments made:

- One of the greatest positives I saw was the reference to the 'holistic' approach to enquiries which is such a clear and near unique marker of good geography.
- I also value the strong links it makes between the human and physical worlds, as I feel the current geography curriculum reinforces the binary between the two, which fails to show students how geography connects the living and non-living environments together.

Learning geography requires pupils to engage mentally with questions about people, society, environment and the planet. Responses from 97% agreed that Geography is about 'making meaning' (i.e. geography is learned through enquiry). An overwhelming 63% expressed their strong agreement with this statement and welcomed the references in the proposals, as one teacher comments:

I especially like the emphasis laid on 'Enquiry learning', and the inclusion of Geographical enquiry 'tools', such as GIS, GPS, and Electronic Atlases. I think these will enable students to gain a variety of skills and to become and feel like real geographers themselves. I think encouraging pupils to understanding the interdependence and similarities across the world, helps broaden their geographical knowledge, and will give 'meaning' to geography, which cannot be gained only through the acquisition of core knowledge.

2.5 The GA proposal makes a strong case for teachers to be the "curriculum makers"¹⁵ and there was overwhelming support for this, with 96% of the responses in agreement. These comments sum up why:

¹⁵ Curriculum Making is a term coined in the GA's 'manifesto' A Different View. See: http://www.geography.org.uk/download/GA_ADV-7_curriculummaking.pdf

- The GA's description of teachers as 'curriculum makers' is welcomed. This will ensure that the geography in the classroom shall be more than 'text book learning'. Teachers will make the balance between pedagogic choices, the subject and the students themselves to ensure that the learning is relevant and current for those that they teach.
- it is the interlinking of the teaching, the subject and the student experiences and the balance of these influences that can lead to effective teaching of subjects such as geography.
- Let the teachers be the judge of what methods to use for they know the students best. Let the teachers use their personal experiences to add insight to lessons.
- it stops the de-skilling of the geography educators, by allowing them to become the curriculum makers. If you want to inspire students with geography, you need to allow the teachers to work to their full potential and enthusiasm; not within a straight jacketed approach. With ownership of the subject can come passion and pride.
- ... this new curriculum allows teachers to be actively involved with the subject and the curriculum; this 'activist' notion is crucial for teachers today as we are the ones with the subject knowledge.
- ... it supports Sachs' idea of an 'activist profession'¹⁶, where teachers can take responsibility for the curriculum and mobilise it in order to re-establish trust with students, communities, parents and various other groups. It ultimately provides teachers with the autonomy they have been longing for.
- The pedagogic approach is a positive step as it allows teachers to become true 'curriculum makers'. This is important for the subject's survival in schools, as the geography teachers are, I believe, the best resource for helping create a curriculum that will have a maximum positive impact on schools across the nation

The following comments set out how the design of the GA's curriculum framework encourages curriculum making to happen:

- The 'grammar and vocabulary' provide a good balance between concepts and content, and leave room for teachers to be creative in the ways that they engage their students.
- I believe the proposed curriculum provides an umbrella, which promotes creativity and put teachers in the driving seat by allowing them to choose what to teach.
- The guidelines are there for teachers to follow Yet at the same time, there is space for improvisation and freedom for the teacher. This is a vital element for any proposed curriculum as Geography is a constantly changing and topical subject. An overly defined and strict curriculum would have a negative effect on the teaching of the subject.
- In a time when geography's significance is increasing and its relevance could not be more prominent, I consider the GA's Geography Curriculum proposal to be a much needed positive step in the right direction. Too often have geography teachers argued that the

¹⁶ Sachs J (2003) *The Activist Teaching Profession*, Buckingham: Open University Press

current geography curriculum has constrained them, and prevented them from incorporating their strengths in the discipline into their lessons. ... it forced them to become curriculum deliverers rather than makers. It fails to include essential factual core knowledge and restricts teachers to teaching certain case studies, some of which are not helpful or relevant to geography students.

2.6 Not every response saw the opportunities for curriculum innovation and did not recognise the flexibility that was available in the GA's proposals. In addition, there was some difference of opinion as to whether the level of flexibility given to secondary teachers was as appropriate in the primary phase (because of the number of non-specialist teachers). One commented:

I do, however, believe that there needs to be more prescription within primary schools for teachers who are likely not to be specialists in the subject.

Nevertheless many acknowledged how the curriculum proposals may encourage students to become involved:

... it leaves scope for autonomous teacher interpretation, an aspect which I consider to be positive. It gives teachers more ownership in curriculum making; however it also leaves room for students to engage in the curriculum making process. One of the three pillars of curriculum making is engaging with the energy and geographical ideas of pupils and the GA's summary makes this collaboration possible.

A further advantage of flexibility in the curriculum framework was when geography is taught within different forms of curriculum organisation:

The breadth of the proposals also leaves scope for geography to be taught holistically with a cross pollination of disciplines. Although the idea of flexible learning and knowledge as process could be seen to dilute geography, the proposals introduction of the term 'core knowledge' creates an anchoring of geography and the synoptic capacity of teachers can be encouraged. With some schools proposing to combine humanities at KS3, having grounded knowledge in geography could become even more essential.

2.7 The GA proposals articulate the grand, overarching aims of teaching geography in school and the need to be clear about how it contributes to the education of young people. It expresses geography in terms of the capabilities¹⁷ it develops in pupils. 89% of those responding to the questionnaire found the use of 'capabilities' to be a convincing way of justifying 'why geography' in the school curriculum. One teacher comments that the paragraph that argues that a lack of geographical knowledge impairs an individual's capability:

- is possibly my favourite in the whole document. Geography is vital because of its ability to create good human agents. We cannot tell students how to behave but we can teach them how their behaviour affects the world around them and allow them to make educated decisions for themselves. This sentence alone should be enough reason for geography to be on the national curriculum.
- Fundamentally we need to ensure that the profession, parents, pupils and the public at large agree that the subject is worthy of inclusion in every child's curriculum experience

¹⁷ Expressly not defined as 'skills' but based on empowering knowledge and understanding.

to enable them to think geographically, differently to other ways of thinking, as well as acquiring essential knowledge and understanding of the world they are citizens of.

- I think there could even be stronger language in "the case for geography"--all of the relevant issues of the 21st Century have a geographic component -- energy, crime, biodiversity, climate, urbanization, food, health, water, natural hazards, and more. Therefore geography contributes to a general educated person but also is a core component of understanding and making decisions in our 21st Century world.

This final comment contrasts with the comment on page 11 of this report, which observes an issues-based curriculum risks presenting pupils with a 'bleak' view of the world. However, the subject conceived as powerful knowledge need not be pessimistic no matter how pressing are the 'issues', for it is enabling knowledge.

Another teacher reminds us how this 'capability' develops throughout the years of schooling:

The proposed approach of identifying geography in all stages of the curriculum will provide a cumulative approach to the learning of the subject. Regardless of how far individuals decide to take geography ... by including it at all stages they will have the opportunity to develop an understanding of the concepts which will be beneficial in later life. The consultation discusses geography in terms of 'capabilities' which the subject can bring to young people. This can start from a very early age and it is therefore imperative that geography is considered as core learning from the 'early years' of the curriculum. Without the 'capabilities' which the subject can provide, young people may not have the necessary means to understand, enquire and interpret the world that is changing around them.

And from their work with the RGS-IBG Geography Ambassadors scheme, one respondent comments:

... many young people studying geography do not understand the benefits of studying the subject. It is vital that young people understand the benefits as there is so many to gain from studying geography.

The GA's National Curriculum framework for geography

2.8 The consultation especially invited comment on whether a single-page tabulated summary of geography's main contents (see 2.15 below), in conjunction with a rationale, progression sequence and guidance notes, were effective in guiding local decisions about what to teach. There were few adverse comments, although unfortunately little light was shed on its potential efficacy for guiding or influencing local decisions. No specific question was asked regarding, say, a 70/30 percent prescription/free choice curriculum structure.

Two interesting general comments were:

- Although it could be seen as a negative that some concepts or context has been left out of the proposal, the obvious flexibility of it means that you have greater freedom in constructing or 'making' your own curriculum and so you could infer the inclusion of your chosen 'lost' area of geography into any of the proposed headings.
- While the curriculum proposal is slimmer and may allow more freedom for schools to interpret the curriculum individually, I would hope that this program doesn't allow too much flexibility - that could leave teachers teaching the 'old' curriculum by simply putting it under the new headings. The idea is to implement a radical change to ensure that everyone sees that geography is worthy of a statutory place in the national curriculum.

By contrast, one response expressed the opinion that there was little scope for individual planning and there was a need for more flexibility in content. There is a clear message here that any flexibility inherent in a curriculum framework must be made very explicit to teachers.

2.9 In 97% of cases the responses confirmed that the rationale for geography as a school subject was a good one. The reasons that teachers gave for this included:

- .. The rationale talks about the notion of 'living geography', which is very much, a concept which needs to be embedded into lessons. Pupils need to feel engaged in lessons, a way to do this is to make the lesson relevant to their 'living geography', and I believe this will lead to greater understanding of subject knowledge.
- I very much like the Geographical Association's rationale for the geography curriculum, this is because I believe that most of the themes outlined in the scheme of work are suitable for such a contemporary, fast changing society. The GA's proposal deals with many human aspects of geography as well as 'relevant' physical facets such as hazards.

2.10 The GA proposals set out the appropriate learning in geography for each key stage, and additionally tabulated what pupils should know about at 11 and 14. A separate table lists what should be taught in school geography under headings: place, space, environment and geographical enquiry. Eighty-five percent of the questionnaire responses agreed that the level of detail in the curriculum proposal was appropriate for a national curriculum; under 2% strongly disagreed, because they perceived it to be too prescriptive.

2.11 The progression sequence: Geography from KS1 to KS4. Teachers generally made positive comments about the content and layout of the proposals:

- I like how the proposal outlines the progression students should make through the key stages and how it provides examples of what students should be studying. I believe this fits in nicely with the table on what should be taught in school geography.
- The section on what the children should know by certain ages is also useful as it states in an easily understandable way what every child across the country should know in geography by a certain age. This is useful for all teachers but especially non-specialist teachers, as it ensures that all pupils are getting an equal geography education in terms of the knowledge, skills and understanding they gain from the subject.
- The very idea that the proposed curriculum is organised into areas of learning will enable children to make links across the curriculum. It is important that the proposals have emphasised that these types of knowledge cannot be taught in isolation of each other
- The layout of the new curriculum carefully places each theme of Geography into different sections and at the same time also manages to give a broad spectrum to the subject. It is a definite improvement on the current curriculum and will prove to be useful resource in future classrooms

Additionally, one teacher noted that it is desirable in a national curriculum document to avoid specifying curriculum outcomes in too much detail:

The statements included in the document clearly say that they are 'about' the topics listed, thus avoiding the confusion of the Standish attempt.

2.12 The questionnaire asked whether teachers thought there should be a 'core knowledge' sequence in geography, set out for each year group (Y1-Y9). Opinion was very split on this with only 58% agreeing; 10% of the replies strongly disagreed. However, when asked whether a 'core knowledge' sequence should be set out for each key stage (KS1, 2 and 3), 80% were in agreement, with only 4% in strong disagreement.

One view was that:

- It is better to present a 'core knowledge' for each key stage to provide for greater flexibility for teachers as 'curriculum makers'.

While another view expressed was:

- ... the core needs to be widened, it is too prescriptive and will hold back individual curriculum innovation.

Other comments included:

- Even though students may indeed learn core geographical knowledge throughout primary school, I believe that students should be explicitly informed or taught that what they are learning is indeed Geography ...
- Core knowledge needs to be purposeful, have a context and give meaning to enable understanding of people, places, events, phenomena. I think it better to present a 'core knowledge' sequence for each key stage to provide for greater flexibility for teachers as 'curriculum makers'.
- I support the notion that it is possible to teach intellectually robust knowledge to children regardless of their ability.
- My feeling is that there are many non-specialist geographers in the primary sector who would appreciate some greater indication of the appropriate 'core knowledge' to be taught.

2.13 In the primary phase, there were differences of opinion on the amount of geography that should be covered. In some ways, the feedback on primary geography shows the lack of clear consensus about its form and place in the curriculum: there are anxieties about non-specialist teaching, concerns that it should be accessible and relate to everyday experiences, loyalty to tried and tested materials and interest in developing more 'rigour'.

One view was represented by the comments:

- The section outlining what children should know at different ages I feel is somewhat unbalanced. Perhaps more could go into KS1 and 2; however at this stage the main learning objective should be that Geography is an interesting and enjoyable subject to learn.
- ... more could go into KS1 and 2 ... focusing on (physical and human) processes rather than more content (topics). If that can be carried into KS3 then specialists can build on it.

- The existing curriculum I think is too broad for geography to significantly begin in secondary school and much more effort should be taken to ... improve the amount of effectively taught geography in primary schools.

While the opposing view was expressed as follows:

- The guidelines regarding what children should know by the age of 11, I believe is rather excessive
- Primary geography must be manageable for non-specialists.

In relation to the specific proposals for Key Stage One, comments included:

- Care is needed not to be too dogmatic about content ... as some young children are able to grasp ideas readily because they relate to their personal life experiences. Others are (more) limited by their own limited imaginations or limited life experiences.
- The place context of locality (holidays, events, relatives) needs to include the construction of basic maps which appears to be omitted until KS2. Places studied need to be located on maps.
- ... equally would wish to see stories put in location context e.g. Katie Morag.
- I am delighted to note that the global is still recognised as a crucial aspect of what geographers study. I would suggest that such global study needs to begin in KS1 however. Some of the best geography teaching about distant localities such as Tocuaro in Mexico is currently being carried out by 5 year olds in KS1.

And at Key Stage Two

- that reference to weathering and erosion is also appropriate in KS2, perhaps even some elementary stuff in KS1 shouldn't be dismissed. I am not trying to create a massive load for teachers, but feel that when appropriate then some reference should be made to processes, otherwise we diminish the rigour.
- If (clear KS2 outcomes) can be carried into KS3 then specialists can build on it rather than having to deal with the "I can't do geography it's hard" which can often come from Y7 students who have not had a great experience of geography in their primary school.

85% of responses agreed that the outcomes for age 11 in the GA's curriculum proposals were appropriate. However, one response commented:

... quite traditional in the way it is presented. There is a need for inclusion of weather when studying my country and the wider world. In human geography would suggest we need to offer opportunities to study events - Olympics, the football/rugby/cricket world cup are an appropriate way of engaging pupils. These events would increase locational knowledge too.

2.14 In the secondary phase there appears to be more confidence in the feedback although there were divergences in views on the relative balance of regions, themes and issues as the principle curriculum organizers/selectors. In addition, there were some concerns about the balance between knowledge and skills development in KS3:

Should we also be more explicit in relation to skills at KS3? Also, while study of countries at different levels of development is implied, shouldn't this be more explicit too?

However, 88% of responses agreed that the outcomes for age 14 years in the GA's curriculum proposals are appropriate. However, some specific comments were made:

- the regional theme comes through strongly ... it is probably appropriate that pupils study the UK, a European country and world places, but not sure what is suggested by an 'in depth knowledge' of significant places. Would suggest 'living and working' is a good theme to hang these studies on, not just for Europe. Again provides greater flexibility for curriculum making and local community characteristics.
- I would be particularly keen to see that students by the end of KS3 have had the opportunity to study a variety of geographical issues within the context of all the worlds continents/oceans.
- Where are the opportunities for tackling some of the issues of 'fair trade', water shortages, famine, should we suggest the study of some topics such as shopping, fashion, as well as events – eg Olympics
- How do we ensure that we enable pupils to consider, enquire, speculate and wonder?

The GA's proposals consider geography up to and including KS4. Over 90% of respondents agree that the statements about school geography and the development of capabilities at KS4 were appropriate.

More careful consideration of how the NC interlinks with GCSE and A level syllabi will allow for layered learning through the key stages, whilst at the same time incorporating areas from outside of the syllabi will allow opportunities for genuine flair and interest, allowing pupils to explore new environments and empathise with communities far removed from their own.

2.15 Respondents were asked to consider the overall framework, which was presented in a tabulated form under the heading: What should be taught in school geography? Place, Space Environment and Geographical Enquiry. The proposals made it clear that the national curriculum framework was not a statement of everything that should be taught and learned in school geography, but rather a national statement of the stable, enduring contents of the geography curriculum. Nevertheless, there was some difference of opinion with respect to the amount of content as set out.

- It allows for interpretation and gives the teacher scope to include up-to-date issues within the changing nature of geography. This is key to making geography relevant, thus this scope is crucial to have within the new curriculum.
- I am sure this is helpful to the geography specialist (probably!), but less so to the non-specialist as there is little to direct them, especially as there is no sequencing of it for different key stages and what of which should be included at the different key stages. It might be counter-productive and appear at odds with the detail provided for each key stage.
- There remains too much prescription in the proposals as they stand. If teachers are to become the 'curriculum makers' then the choice of what places to study should be left up to them. Also a balance needs to be established in the proposals by including more positive exemplars such as peace as well as conflict.

- The table fails to include key ideas and concepts such as cultural diversity and sustainability, which I feel underpin the discipline.

Specific comments on place included:

- ... under the heading 'Place'. I feel there should be more of an interest into the learning of other cultures and societies in the world. With the movement of people at an all time high, students need to be aware of the different ways of life other people have and to be tolerant of this. Perhaps such an issue may come under other subjects however I feel Geography certainly has a responsibility here.
- What will still need to be avoided is doing USA three times and China never on the way
- Table 1 makes a lot of sense at first glance. However, if we really think about it 'place' seems to be somewhat confused with 'space' here. If they are used to refer to key geographical concepts, then notions of territories and regions need to come under the space banner, being inextricably linked with geopolitics, rather than the cultural politics of meaning and representation: 'place' (delineated through 1970s humanism) refers not to the political production of 'space' that gives rise to territorial cleavages and the like, but to values invested in culturally bound geographical imaginations. In short, then, why have 'imaginative geographies' been dropped?

Specific comments on enquiry included:

- 'Geog Enquiry' in the table, as well as Kn3, seems to forget that geography IS very much a science – both a natural and social science ... Geographical enquiry should involve a well-justified, technically diverse methodology, followed by a series of robust and resounding conclusions, but it should – as mentioned in the proposals – also be able to take these further to have wider social, environmental and political ramifications: school geography should involve activism based on some sound science; it should implore as much as it explores.
- I also feel that the section on geographical enquiry fails to include how students should be encouraged to be evaluative and have the capacity to ask geographical questions, which is essential to getting them to think independently and geographically.

2.16 The consultation invited comments on any professional development implications implied in the proposals. Several people pointed out that the radical change that this curriculum would bring to the curriculum would have considerable implications for teacher preparation and CPD. For example,

- It is imperative that all teachers receive adequate training and indeed support in order to effectively design and complete the new curriculum.
- The knowledge framework will need more explanation for non-specialists. Therefore there will be a massive need for CPD to enable the non-specialist to think geographically so that they can teach geographically, when many gave up the subject at 14. There is also a continued need to update colleagues and to allow 'quality' geography to be taught in the future.

- A 'better' school geography will only be realised when we have teachers able to teach it as geographers. Each NC reform seems a bit like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, using the same resource but arranging it in different patterns and shapes and with slightly different labels, banners and headlines. We need to convince the profession that there are some changes, hopefully greater clarity and identity of the subject. We need to ensure that the non-specialist understands this and is behind the proposals.
- ... I would like to see the development of communities of teachers of geography across the UK. Such small groups would help each other to develop a curriculum that covered the local to the global.

Section 3 Analysis of an alternative proposal

Alex Standish's Curriculum Proposals¹⁸

When the GA launched its curriculum consultation the intention was to open up a debate on what should be taught in schools. The opportunity to add Alex Standish's proposals to this consultation exercise came in relatively late in the process. There were no questions on the questionnaire specifically about the Standish curriculum.

However, it generated enormous interest. What follows is based on open comments uploaded to the GA's website, of which there were 57 at the end of the consultation period (31 October 2011). It is important to record that there is no evidence at all that respondents confused the Standish and GA proposals. In effect, they presented as clear alternative views on the contents of a revised national curriculum.

Alex Standish¹⁹ is an assistant professor of geography at Western Connecticut State University. His curriculum proposals were written in response to an invitation from the Schools Minister as a contribution to the national curriculum review. He identifies four "foundational" concepts of geography – location, place, links and region. His geography curriculum sets out knowledge and skills for each key stage in four sections, with the intention that mapping, human geography and physical geography may be integrated in a regional geography context.

These proposals were posted on the GA's website and members were invited to comment on these - his "personal interpretation of what children should learn in geography at different key stages so that they become capable students of geography."

The response to these detailed curriculum proposals was almost universally negative. Some teachers commented in forthright terms, for example that the proposals were out of date and stagnant and they would be disastrous for geographical education.

Significant concerns were expressed that the proposals represented a long and prescriptive list of topics, as one described,

... that seem to owe their origins to the first NC Orders for geography²⁰, the ones that rapidly proved to be totally unworkable.

Respondents agreed that the topics were uninspiring and took no account of the developments in academic geography and geographical education that have taken place in the last 50 years. They felt that the proposed content would have little relevance to today's young people and agreed that teachers need to work with a curriculum which can show that geography is a dynamic and relevant subject that helps them to learn about our world. The unanimous response was that these proposals did not do that.

¹⁸ Alex Standish was invited by the Schools Minister to devise some proposals and, with his and the DfE's permission, these were also posted on the GA's consultation website for comment

¹⁹ See Standish A 2009 *Global Perspectives in the Geography Curriculum: reviewing the moral case for geography*, Routledge, and Tim Hall's review of this book:

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=406861§ioncode=26>

²⁰ The first national curriculum orders for geography were made statutory in 1991 and their failings have been widely documented: eg Rawling E (2001) *Changing the Subject: the impact of national policy on school geography 1980-2000*, Sheffield GA

The responses articulated many reasons why a return to a dated curriculum would matter. Firstly, school geography would become even more detached from the academic discipline and would not be able to benefit from constructive liaison between academic and school geographers. Secondly, it would become difficult to attract good geography graduates into teaching as they would not want to teach this curriculum. Thirdly, if students find the curriculum irrelevant and boring²¹, it will reduce those studying the subject at GCSE and the proposals could kill off the subject. And finally, as one respondent pointed out:

The respect that many countries have for the English geography curriculum would be lost; geography educators internationally would greet a curriculum based on Standish's ideas with disbelief and ridicule.

The Standish curriculum was seen as based on knowledge and skills with emphasis on the accumulation of knowledge. Respondents have no doubt that many of the topics and themes identified are important elements in geography, but observed that in the curriculum as proposed there was little emphasis on how students will develop their understand of the world they live in. As one teacher pointed out,

Learning facts for the sake of learning facts is not advancing education and is not equipping a person to use what they know in a meaningful way.

Another respondent noted:

Geographical education in England currently goes beyond Standish's description and factor analysis and has developed investigative approaches which enable students to study a wide range of complex issues through the analysis and interpretation of evidence, presented not only on maps, but in statistics, graphs, text, photographs and film.

The curriculum content contained in the proposal is set out in a number of different forms – some are questions, some are statements. One person analysed the secondary curriculum and found an emphasis on factual recall; the words 'what', 'where' and 'how' have 80 references, compared to "why" that had only 11 mentions and asks,

Would such a narrow curriculum develop pupils with an ability to think critically about the outcomes of decisions which impact on all aspects geography?

Respondents did not reject wholesale the notion of teaching core knowledge and acknowledged that this can be neglected as we fast track to the exciting "hands on" parts of our subject. But they feared that Alex Standish was promoting this core as the be all and end all of geography not the essential foundation. One asks,

If students exit school knowing virtually all the features on the globe have they really learnt geographical thinking?

Respondents made it clear that they believe learning geography should be topical, global and interesting, but above all it should enable students to develop an understanding of the major issues we face in the 21st century: globalisation; climate change; increasing urbanisation; use of water and resources; energy supply; feeding the world's population; national and global

²¹ Readers are reminded of Issue A raised on page 3 of this Report. This is the question of whether criticising a curriculum for being 'boring' is in fact legitimate. More enduring criteria may include worthwhileness, currency or utility. But whether or not a curriculum is boring or interesting depends on what the teacher makes of it!

inequalities; fragile ecosystems and environmental change; local, national and international conflicts. The proposed curriculum does not articulate these.

Respondents noted that the human geography sections took no account of:

Human agency in decision making, conflicting viewpoints on what should be done, the political and economic contexts in which these decisions are made, and of the way places are represented and understood.

The real world is messy and imperfect with misinformation, vested interests, corruption and propaganda. The Standish human geography is one of about hamlets and linear settlements and central place theory, and as one person asked how would knowing these increase students' understanding of UK's urban areas?

The content of the physical geography section was criticised for taking no account of the complex interplay between human action and physical processes; rivers, coasts, hazards are all managed and are influenced by human action. Rainforest deforestation, climate change, eutrophication are omitted. Respondents noted students are expected to absorb but not question or express opinions about environmental issues.

There were no specific references in the responses to the mapping section of the proposed curriculum. But as one teacher wrote, I cannot believe that anyone calling themselves 'a geographer' would omit any mention of fieldwork from a geography curriculum. Clearly the omission of the word does not mean that fieldwork cannot be undertaken, but the curriculum presented gives few opportunities for it.

Respondents readily appreciated that it is essential for students to place their geographical ideas in a coherent framework, as the 2011 Ofsted report commented (see page 7 of this report). But the type of regional geography espoused by the Standish proposals was not thought to be an effective way to do this and the aspect of proposals to be universally rejected was that to re-introduce regional geography. Standish articulates his rationale as follows,

"Regional geography should be taught not by cataloguing facts about different regions, but rather to enable children to understand and interpret the range of cultures and landscapes that exist across the surface of the globe. Regional geography went out of fashion in the UK with the decline of Empire. It is high-time it was re-introduced to the curriculum so that children leave school having been introduced to all the major regions of the world."

UK geography teachers vehemently expressed disagreement with this position and explanation. As one explained,

Teaching about different regional cultures reinforces stereotypes people have about places which can be propagated by the media and people they know.

Moreover, with globalisation, 'different' cultures and ideas continue to spread across the globe, so is there is such thing today as a regional culture? One suggested that cultural regional geography, emphasises difference rather than similarity. Respondents felt strongly that the major concepts that should be driving the geography of today were those of global community, and of interdependence.

Respondents emphasised the importance of taking account of how the subject discipline develops and evolves. They recognise that it can be a challenging subject to teach because the world is continually changing, while the geography offered by Standish appears very static – or as described by one respondent,

For Standish everything is (as) settled and harmonious ...

Another wrote,

Geography should be celebrated for its ability to change ... and move with society, and it should be there to help prepare the children in education today for a world that is also changing on a daily basis, that they are growing up into. Something the stagnant Standish proposal severely lacks.

Respondents also noted that listing detailed curriculum content is fraught with danger, because:

It is out of date as soon as it is written and soon becomes fossilised and dead. A meaningful curriculum needs to be alive, flexible and responsive.

It was also seen to be fundamentally important that geography teachers have

the freedom to follow exciting topics that inspire students.

As one teacher put it:

When I think that I turned to teaching Geography for a love and passion for the subject, I remember the amazing experiences I had whilst at school, being encouraged to discover new things, to explore what I was interested in and to think outside the box. I think back to the fieldwork experiences, and the fact that I didn't quite understand the rapid changes the world was seeing. Geography bought that passion and raw excitement of the world to me. Unfortunately, I cannot see that passion and raw excitement in the new proposal by Alex Standish.

These four quotes have been selected to summarise the widely held unhappiness with the Standish proposals:

- It would seem that nothing has been learnt from the last 20 years with regard to statutory orders that have too much prescriptive detail and that miss the bigger picture of what it means to understand the subject and to think geographically.
- Standish's geography is simplistic, is mainly descriptive and lacks intellectual rigour.
- For the complex demands of the 21st century, we need a geography curriculum which is informed by the latest academic thinking in geography and which excites and engages young people and develops their understanding of the changing and complex world in which they are growing up and in which they will live their adult lives.
- To deliver a Standish curriculum would kill the subject stone dead in many schools. The author (appears to have) no direct experience of a UK secondary classroom. His is a geography for the 1950's. We've been shaping the subject as a wide community under the

auspices of the GA and the RGS very successfully. We have no need for a solitary individual to impose his frankly extreme views on our curriculum.

Alex Standish has offered a personal view on the geography curriculum and has taken the time and the trouble to set this out in detail. It has been enormously helpful to have this view point expressed as it has helped generate a lively discussion about the nature of school geography and the contents of a revised national geography curriculum. He can be thanked for courageously promoting a particular, 'purist' view of the subject. This has certainly helped the GA articulate its principles and formulate the issues outlined at the beginning of this report.

Appendix

<u>Questionnaire Results</u>	<u>Raw Totals</u>	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
The distinction between Kn1, Kn2 and Kn3 is helpful for teachers		63	101	18	3	185
The distinction made between content and context is useful for the teaching of geography		56	113	13	2	186
The idea of 'core knowledge' in geography (Kn1) is a useful way of expressing the place of geography in the popular imagination		60	92	24	7	183
The idea of 'core knowledge' in geography (Kn1) is a useful way of expressing 'factual' geography		63	104	13	4	184
There should be a 'core knowledge' sequence in geography, set out for each year group (Y1-Y9)		43	64	57	20	184
There should be a 'core knowledge' sequence in geography, set out for each key stage (KS1, 2 and 3)		59	88	28	8	183
Geography is about 'making meaning': ie geography is learned through enquiry'		117	61	4	1	183
Geography teachers are the 'curriculum makers' (section 1.3 of the Rationale and Proposals)		111	64	6	1	182
The use of 'capabilities' is a convincing way of justifying 'why geography' in the school curriculum (section 1.5)		55	106	19	1	181
The rationale for geography as a school subject (section 2.1 of the Rationale and Proposals) is a good one		97	81	4	2	184
The level of detail of the curriculum proposal is appropriate for a national curriculum		43	114	24	3	184
The outcomes for age 11 years in the GA's curriculum proposals are appropriate (para 2.2.4)		49	108	21	6	184
The outcomes for age 14 years in the GA's curriculum proposals are appropriate (para 2.2.6)		49	112	16	6	183
The statements about school geography and the development of capabilities at KS4 are appropriate (para 2.2.7)		60	108	10	5	183

