

# A framework for the school geography curriculum: briefing sheet



The Geographical Association (GA) has produced a framework for the development of the school geography curriculum, which sets out the nature of the school subject, its disciplinary foundations and the significant features of geography that should underlie any geography curriculum or set of curriculum requirements at national level. Its aim is to support the design of high-quality geography curricula. For government departments and curriculum authorities responsible for developing national curricula and qualifications requirements, the framework provides an effective way of deciding what to include in a geography curriculum to achieve consistency, but also identifies the curriculum design responsibilities that can be delegated to awarding organisations, publishers and schools (see 'Levels of geography curriculum development' below).

The framework draws on the knowledge and expertise of a wide range of practitioners, researchers and curriculum thinkers in geography education. It articulates the aims and purposes of geography in the school curriculum and identifies:

- features derived from the discipline that must be represented in the school curriculum to ensure high-quality geography
- the key and organising concepts underpinning the geography curriculum
- the role of substantive knowledge in realising curriculum aims
- geographical practices and how these contribute to the curriculum
- how geographical knowledge can be used and applied.

The framework also considers progression in geography and how this relates to the design of the school geography curriculum.

| The GA's <i>Curriculum framework</i> lies above national level and offers potential at all levels. |                                  |   |  |
|--|----------------------------------|---|--|
|  | Level                            | Who does it?  | What should it provide?  |
| Potential to influence all levels of curriculum development  | 1 National level                 | Currently undertaken by government departments in England (DfE) and Wales, often drawing on subject working group expertise or consultants  | National geography requirements: aims/rationale; framework of big ideas, concepts, practices and applications; minimum knowledge entitlement; curriculum planning criteria; broad expectations or outcomes appropriate to assessment and evaluation strategies<br><br>With expectation of regular review and reconsideration   |
|  | 2 Planning and development level | Those organisations which need to use the national framework to develop and plan courses, schemes of work, examination requirements (e.g. awarding bodies, resource providers, subject associations and publishers) | Examination specifications, professional development guidance, range of publications and support material<br><br>Clarification of thematic and enquiry foci, coverage of knowledge, concepts and development of skills, guidance on scale and progression<br><br>Guidance on preparing schemes of work<br><br>Plans and resources for professional development<br><br>Information about assessment and examinations                        |
|  | 3 Classroom teacher level        | School geography departments and individual geography teachers  | Broad departmental plans for geography in the school; stage plans and year plans, sequences of topics<br><br>Detailed development and interpretation of schemes of work, lesson plans and decisions about resources and experiences to provide (including fieldwork)<br><br>Planning of professional development opportunities<br><br>Plans for implementing the departmental assessment strategy and commitment to review lessons/courses |

Levels of geography curriculum development (adapted from Rawling, 2020<sup>1</sup>)

<sup>1</sup> Rawling, E (2020) 'How and why National Curriculum frameworks are failing geography', *Geography*, 105(2), pp.69–77.

# Using the GA's Curriculum framework

The GA's framework supports curriculum development and planning at all levels, from national to local. All page references are to the full curriculum framework document.

## 1. At all levels of curriculum development and planning

- Read the GA's curriculum framework. Think about what it says about the nature of school geography and the task of developing a national curriculum, which is then further developed at sub-national levels.

## 2. National policy level (level 1)

- The aims in the curriculum framework derive from the discipline; add further purposes and specific objectives as choices of substantive content are made and special emphases are required, e.g. to consolidate learning about the home nation.
- Review the disciplinary knowledge foundations: ensure the key concepts and dimensions (Figure 4; pp. 7–9) work together to highlight ways of thinking. Build in the full range of geographical practices and geographical application (Figure 5; pp. 9–11).
- Prepare criteria for the selection of content: choose content which provides access to place, space, Earth systems and environment; which allows inclusion of a range of time periods and scales; and which promotes opportunities to address diversity, interconnection and interpretation.
- Select a minimum entitlement of substantive content: using the criteria developed, select substantive and disciplinary content for a national-level curriculum, to provide a sound and consistent basis for pupil progression. Leave room for exam boards and publishers to make selections, and for teachers to select content appropriate to their setting.
- Decide on monitoring and assessment strategies: outline broad outcomes for conceptual understanding and skill development (pp. 14–16). If a national assessment system is desired, define a minimum entitlement of content to provide the context for assessment criteria.

## 3. Awarding organisations and publishers (level 2)

- Review the national requirements and check that all disciplinary aspects of geography (key concepts, practice, applications) are apparent and accessible, and that the chosen curriculum content supports this. For example, is there sufficient content about physical geography to back up the Earth Systems concept? Is 'place' represented by opportunities to study places in their own right (e.g. a city, a region, a country)?
- Identify the age range and scope of the qualification or curriculum, and articulate its aims and purposes in light of the GA's framework and national requirements.
- Consider Figures 4 (p. 8) and 5 (p. 10): identify opportunities and gaps in coverage that reflect the aims, purposes and scope of the course/material.
- Find opportunities to address gaps and under-represented aspects of geography. Select areas of content to develop geographical ideas and skills. Provide guidance for fieldwork that can support conceptual understanding and skill development.

## 4. School level curriculum design (level 3)

- Strengthen opportunities for developing conceptual understanding by, for example, refocusing existing units of work or creating new ones (Figure 4, pp. 7–9). Create a blank version of Figure 4 and fill this in with ideas for content you intend to teach.
- Review geographical practice and applications: assess the extent to which the school curriculum pays sufficient attention to all aspects, e.g. classwork and fieldwork, quantitative and qualitative approaches, students applying geography to their own lives as well as studying how geographers apply (Figure 5; pp. 9–11).
- Identify opportunities to bring in new and different substantive content, other than that specified by national and/or exam requirements. Consider how to address contemporary issues and different cultural and individual viewpoints (Figure 6 and pp. 11–14).
- Consider the balance of learning experiences using Figure 6, e.g. in-depth study of place, first-hand observation, studies of systems and change over time.
- Read about the different kinds of progression (p.14). Use Figure 7 as a starter and template to construct hierarchies of topics and concepts that will deepen understanding of Place, Space, Earth systems and Environment.