

## A level Geography: the verdict

By geography students at Bancroft's School

Four Year 13 students at Bancroft's School look back on the highs and lows of their course (Edexcel). They compare notes on what they've learned, how this differs from their initial expectations and what they feel the legacy of the course will be, both in terms of (i) specialist knowledge and (ii) transferable capabilities. Hannah, Aditi and Claudia all intend to take the subject further at university. Dan will be studying medicine which may make his comments especially interesting to practitioners of geography. All are high achievers.

*Looking back what, if anything has been different about the A level course compared with your initial expectations?*

**Aditi** Honestly, I thought the A level course would mean memorising more textbook case studies but instead I found myself immersed in newspapers reading up on current affairs.

**Dan** On the whole, the course has not been different to my initial expectation. But it has been much more interesting and enjoyable than I first thought.

**Claudia** It involved a lot more independent research than expected, particularly Unit 4 [*the research report based on individual study*]. The course incorporates so many contemporary issues (superpowers), encouraging us to read more around our subject.

**Hannah** There hasn't been much different, the two things would be the increased independent studying that is required throughout both the units, but I don't think that is a negative aspect. Also, the jump from GCSE was larger than expected, but that was the same throughout my subjects and I think is inevitable.

*Which topics have you **enjoyed** most/least and why?*

**Aditi** My favourite topic is globalisation; I felt grounded realising how small I am within such a big busy world. Energy security also appealed to me greatly as I enjoy geopolitics and was fascinated to learn how countries can exploit their natural resources as a 'weapon'.

**Dan** I enjoyed the whole course but if I had to choose one topic then I would choose the cultural geography research topic.

**Claudia** The most: globalisation, tectonics, superpowers. The least: extreme weather.

**Hannah** I most enjoyed learning about culture and globalisation, whereas I didn't particularly like the topic of climate change at AS because it was a very broad topic, with a lot of detail in each section which made it difficult to fully grasp.

*Which topics do you think have been most/least **useful** to learn about and why?*

**Aditi** Gaining a preliminary understanding in extreme weather/climate change was extremely useful given the extreme weather that UK is facing today. Personally I found the key concepts encompassed in the development gap topic highly applicable to my economics Unit 4 paper on the global economy.

**Dan** The research topic has been useful especially with the style of the problem-based learning at medical school. Also learning about different cultures and how dynamic it is giving me an idea of some issues I may encounter as a medical student and doctor.

**Claudia** All the Edexcel Unit 3 topics are extremely relevant to global issues today, which are very useful to be aware of.

**Hannah** I feel as if the energy topic was particularly useful, particularly in regards to the current Russia/Ukraine issue and in this aspect superpowers as well, as they seem most current throughout everyday news stories. However, I feel as if some aspects of development and biodiversity were less useful as we had learnt about them to a large extent at GCSE level.

*Has the course, and the assessments used, helped you develop skills and capabilities that you see as having lasting value, and what are they?*

**Aditi** Unit 4 in particular has aided my preparations for higher education as it was the first time in any subject that I had to work independently, conduct research and acquire skills such as referencing. I am a waffle, so more than anything the examination has taught me how imperative it is to be concise and direct when conveying my opinions.

**Dan** I have been able to develop skills associated with getting relevant information from newspapers and different textbooks which will be relevant for university and continued learning in medicine.

**Claudia** Particularly, A2 has taught me to work far more independently. When reading around my subject, the course has taught me to effectively collate case study information and summarise that in my work. The skills gained from evaluation are also very useful.

**Hannah** I think it has helped me develop skills, particularly in terms of Unit 4 as I think the assessment style and the independent learning aspect be valuable for when I go onto further study at university.

*What, if any, improvements in the course and assessments used, might future generations benefit from?*

**Aditi** I think students would benefit from having to research elements of other units independently, purely in order to prepare them for the extensive research required for Unit 4.

**Dan** It was a good course and I cannot think of any improvements.

**Claudia** Particularly, A2 has taught me to work far more independently and when reading around my subject, the course has taught me to effectively collate case study information and summarise that in my work. The skills gained from evaluation are also very useful.

**Hannah** I think it has helped me develop skills, particularly in terms of Unit 4 as I think the assessment style and the independent learning aspect be valuable for when I go onto further study at university.

**Well done! Many thanks to Aditi, Dan, Claudia and Hannah for sharing their views. Ed.**