

Department for Education Sustainable Development Goal 4 voluntary national review

Submission from the Geographical Association (GA) March 2019

As part of the UK's first review of progress towards the [17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development](#), the Department for Education led on [Goal 4](#): *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*

Targets relevant to the work of the GA.

- 4.1 - By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes
- 4.3 - By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
- 4.4 - By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
- 4.5 - By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
- 4.7 - By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development
- 4.c - By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

Action taken to deliver progress towards Goal 4.

The Geographical Association (GA) is an international community of practice for teachers of geography. It is a professional subject teaching organisation and charity based in the UK, with the charitable objective of 'furthering geographical knowledge and understanding through education'. Founded in 1893, it now has several thousand members in around 60 countries, the majority of these being teachers of geography in primary and secondary schools.

The GA supports geography education, education for sustainable development and global learning by providing a specialist community of practice for teachers to share ideas with one another. In UK schools, geography represents the key 'curriculum route' for teaching about



the SDGs (including their social, environmental, economic and global governance dimensions) and the GA's support for geography education in the UK is therefore of particular relevance. The GA promotes detailed, accurate and relevant knowledge and understanding of the world, its people, cultures and environments through printed and online journals and publications, through training courses, conferences, website materials, social media activity and a variety of local and national and international network activities, including face-to-face and virtual networking. It also 'kite marks' schools able to provide sufficient evidence that they are providing quality geography education to their learners. A significant number of GA activities, products and services are provided free of charge or at very low cost. Details of this charitable activity can be found at <https://www.geography.org.uk/About-the-GA>.

The Association typically brings over 2000 teachers from over 25 countries around the world into face-to-face contact each year through centrally-organised events. It supports over 200 additional local network events annually, largely but not exclusively in the UK. Its website teaching materials are accessed each year by over a quarter of a million unique visitors worldwide and the support for geography education it provides through social media attracts over 25,000 followers. Over 7,000 publications are sold annually, supporting teachers with high quality geography education resources and advice. In 2018, these publications reached teachers in 33 countries. The GA's Geography Quality Marks reward and promote high quality geography in primary and secondary schools. They celebrate high standards in geographical and global learning, are highly valued by school leaders nationally and internationally and are used by the GA to disseminate evidence of inclusive and effective educational practice and outcomes. Over 1000 schools have earned this award since its launch in 2007.

The GA represents the views of geography teachers and plays a leading role in public debate relating to geography education and to education for sustainable development. Its [*Manifesto for geography*](#) sets out a rationale for quality geographical education for all. It is freely available as a resource to help teachers and others advocate for and secure equitable, high quality primary and secondary geographical education. Through its direct work with the UK government and the devolved national education authorities the GA exerts a profound influence on the position, aims, scope and content of geography within the school curriculum. As a key stakeholder in curriculum reform, the GA provides expert advice to the Department for Education (DfE) in England, for example regarding its reform of the 2014 geography national curriculum and reformed GCSE and A level geography qualifications from 2016. During this recent reform process, the GA successfully advocated for the inclusion of key skills such as criticality and key concepts such as climate change, global citizenship, global governance and economic development within geography curricula and qualifications in England. The Association is at present actively engaged with the curriculum reform process underway in Wales.



The GA also has significant involvement in geography education policy and practice outside the UK. Through its membership of the International Geographical Union Commission on Geographical Education (IGU-CGE) the GA works in partnership with professional colleagues from countries and cultures globally, working together to produce landmark policy documents such as the International Charter on Geographic Education. It has provided expert curriculum advice in various national contexts, most recently by working with the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and the World Bank to help launch a new national curriculum for [Vietnam](#) and improve the effectiveness of teacher instruction there. At time of writing, it is providing expert training to assist wholesale curriculum reform in Croatia, helping teachers there develop problem solving and related participatory pedagogies.

The Association supports the transition of young people from school to tertiary education by promoting and supporting the further study of geography and by providing advice and information about careers for geography graduates. It sustains a healthy, ongoing dialogue between geography as a school subject and the academic discipline of geography by bringing academics together with hundreds of teachers and thousands of secondary students every year, helping to update subject knowledge and better prepare students for tertiary study. It advises academics on the content of the school curriculum to further aid the transition of young people from secondary to tertiary level education.

The GA undertakes significant activity to develop global citizenship, build appreciation of cultural diversity and raise awareness of different approaches to sustainable development. Its [International Special Interest Group](#) arranges an annual international study tour, enabling UK-based geography educators to visit overseas and engage with the education and culture of the host country. The [GA Initiatives Fund](#), a charitable fund for geography educators, supports overseas geography educators to visit the UK and build links with the teaching community here. From 2012-18, the GA was a lead partner in the *Global Learning Programme* in England and Wales, funded by the Department for International Development (DfID). It led programme activity on school accreditation and transition between primary and secondary schools, made a major contribution towards practitioner training and the production of curriculum resources in England and led curriculum and resource development in Wales. These activities helped to build better teacher and learner understanding of the SDGs and global themes such as international trade (including Fair Trade). In England, the programme supported global learning in nearly 8,000 schools and reached 40,000 teachers, with programme resources reaching 500,000 learners. More than half of schools in Wales received programme support. Under the *Connecting Classrooms II* programme (2015-18), funded by DfID and the British Council (BC), the GA delivered critical thinking and problem-solving 'core global skills' training to over 1000 teachers in England. It moderated and supported International Learning Community online forums as part of the same programme. In 2018, it published a National Research Report [Geography and global](#)

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learning, drawing together evidence of global learning in schools and making evidenced-based recommendations for teachers and policy makers.

The GA both [monitors and promotes](#) the supply of suitably-qualified teachers of geography in England. Its publication, in 2015, of a National Research Report [Geography Initial Teacher Education and teacher supply in England](#) provided an early warning of a widening gap between supply and demand for teachers of the subject and made recommendations which were widely shared with policy makers. It works directly with government and its agencies to promote teaching geography as a career and provides authoritative [advice and guidance](#) to those considering this career option.

Further action the GA will be taking towards Goal 4 between now and 2030.

Within England, the GA is currently working with the Department for Education to deliver its [Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund](#). This fund and this work are intended to raise the quality of education in schools serving socially and economically deprived communities and those in priority need. The GA's responsibility is to provide support to teachers and school leaders under the curriculum strand of TLIF. Between now and 2020, the TLIF will be a significant component of the GA's work to provide an equitable education for all.

The Association is also helping deliver [Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning](#). Between now and 2021, this programme, supported by DfID and the BC, will enable the GA to further develop its contributions to international school linking and global learning in both England and Wales. Beyond 2021, the Association remains committed to ensuring that global learning is underpinned by rigorous knowledge and understanding of other countries and cultures and by better understanding of global processes, such as climate change.

In 2019, the GA began working directly with the BC to explore the relationship between established subjects in the school curriculum and global learning approaches in schools, building on its National Research Report [Geography and global learning](#). Over coming years, we hope to be in a position to assist other school subjects to develop a productive relationship between these different 'curriculum traditions'.

In 2018, a local GA Branch was established in Kampala, Uganda – a partnership between local teachers supported by UK geography educators and the national Association. This local Branch activity enables local teachers to network and exchange ideas and resources, but also brings them into contact with UK-based geographers. We hope that this approach provides a model for further local networks to be supported elsewhere internationally.

The GA's charitable fund for geography educators, the [GA Initiatives Fund](#), was also expanded and re-launched in 2018. In coming years, we plan to expand the support from this fund to so that teachers in challenging economic circumstances gain opportunities to further geographical knowledge and understanding they would not otherwise have, for example by funding visits by overseas geography educators to the UK to build links with the teaching community here.

Strategically, the GA will continue to play its role as a member of the International Geographical Union Commission on Geographical Education (IGU-CGE), supporting this international organisation in its work to build better geographical knowledge globally. It will continue to support national governments and geographical organisations outside the UK according to need.

The key challenges to delivering the targets under Goal 4.

With significant global progress having been made in recent decades on providing school places for children and young people, the focus must now shift to ensuring every learner receives a quality primary and secondary education (see for example <http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018>). As goal 4.7 makes clear, we must ‘ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including ... through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity ...’. The GA’s [Manifesto for geography](#) demonstrates how geography underpins a lifelong ‘conversation’ about the earth as the home of humankind and how many contemporary challenges – climate change, food security, energy choices – cannot be understood without a geographical perspective. As the curriculum subject that brings the physical and human environment together, which considers the relationship between people and nature at all spatial and temporal scales and which provides a strong ‘futures’, it enjoys a unique strength in terms of education for intercultural understanding and for sustainable development.

It must therefore be a cause for concern that, internationally, the position of geography within the curriculum is far from secure. Whilst geography is explicitly mandated within the national curriculum for England (to age 14 years) and is a popular option choice from 14-19, this situation is not the case in many countries around the world. In recent years, threats to the curriculum position or strength of geography have been the subject of high-profile campaigns in the USA, Italy and the Republic of Ireland. Within the UK, curriculum reform in Scotland and Wales has or is intended to subsume geography within ‘the humanities’, diluting its physical processes content and thereby undermining its capacity to examine human-physical systems.

Within England, the key risk to sustaining a high-quality education for all lies in securing a sufficient supply of suitably-qualified specialist teachers in every region and community, but particularly those communities facing the most acute social and economic challenges. This goal is critical to tackling inequality around the country and the [DfE itself acknowledges](#) that ‘the single biggest educational factor that affects social mobility is the quality of the teachers and other professionals working with young people’. As we reported in GA Magazine ([Issue 39](#)), present difficulties with teacher recruitment and retention are of great concern to the



Association. The TES Recruitment Index shows that geography teachers are the third hardest subject to recruit (after science and maths) and the [National Audit Office](#) (NAO) reports that geography has the third lowest proportion of secondary teachers with a post-A-level qualification. Just as concerning is recent [Social Market Foundation research](#), which found that schools serving lower income communities experience higher teacher turnover and employ teachers with less experience, without a relevant degree or without a formal teaching qualification. This ‘gradient’ between the most and least deprived areas is also evident in terms of the proportion of lessons taught by non-specialists. At GCSE, around 20% of geography lessons in the least deprived schools are taught by non-specialists but [this rises to 30% in the most deprived schools](#).

Finally, the educational implications of the UK’s exit from the European Union are unknown and must therefore be classed as a potential risk to Goal 4. In particular, we identify the risk that, post-Brexit, learners in British schools may be taught a more inward-looking curriculum and one which fails to give due regard and appreciation to other countries and cultures. We both hope and intend to work towards the opposite outcome: one in which children and young people learn of and with people from across the world.

Action the GA would you like to see being taken to address these challenges and deliver against Goal 4 to 2030.

Education (curriculum thinking, teacher instruction and expertise) in the UK remains highly respected internationally and has the potential offer significant benefits to countries internationally, should the UK position itself to work in closer partnership with education authorities elsewhere. The international work of organisation like the GA demonstrates this point very effectively. Far more could be done by Government to support the international work of organisations such as the GA.

Domestically, the DfE is (belatedly) drawing together a more coherent strategy to secure an adequate supply of teachers and to ensure these professionals develop their expertise and are retained in the profession. More resources will be required in order to ensure this strategy is a success, for example by supporting high-quality mentoring within the school sector. Greater attention will also need to be paid to the subject knowledge acquired by teachers during their initial training, especially to the quantity and quality of knowledge of geography and sustainability acquired by those preparing to teach in the primary phase.

In order to address the highly unequal education outcomes still apparent across England, the DfE’s Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund (due to end 2020) must be expanded and extended. Further support and research will be needed to act on robust evidence around specific interventions which produce a more equitable, quality education which lead to sustainable lifestyles, human rights, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity.

How partnerships across sectors are improving outcomes or realising new potential for delivering Goal 4.

The *[Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning](#)* programme (2018-21) is a good illustration of the way partnerships across sectors might realise new potential. The inclusion of the DfE in this programme reverses the situation from 2012-18, when the DfE was not an active stakeholder in the DfID-funded Global Learning programme. There is obvious potential for the DfE's curriculum thinking and its work with schools around teacher instruction to be of benefit to such a programme and for schools internationally to collaborate and learn more effectively about the big issues that shape our world as a consequence.