

# geography in the uk – placing the discipline as central to society

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Geography as a discipline in schools and universities in the United Kingdom is having to be proactive to ensure its continued importance as a subject. A demographic decline in those of school age, combined with pressures on school curricula and an educational system which increasingly forces schoolchildren to choose between Geography and other disciplines, has led to pressures on the numbers of schoolchildren – and hence university entrants – who take up the discipline. Further pressure is added by public attitudes to knowledge and learning which are increasingly focused on the apparent ‘utility’ of subjects and favour ‘those subjects that lead to a job’. Universities are increasingly encouraged to be responsive to the needs of ‘the market’. And yet, the decline in the numbers of pupils choosing Geography runs counter to much of the current concerns in UK society over issues such as climate change and the environment, citizenship and identity, social change and migration, globalisation, geopolitics and law and order, and urbanisation.

Geography has great potential as the unifying discipline which synthesizes approaches to these and many other contemporary issues, as well as providing explanations for their historical and temporal

variations. In the UK there are a number of initiatives within education that seek to promote the ‘relevance’ of Geography, particularly by stressing Geography’s potential contribution to debates around citizenship, the environment and sustainable development. In short, Geography in the UK as a discipline has to ‘re-brand’ itself as a subject which appeals to school pupils and university students through its focus on key issues of ‘glocal’ (global and local) concern. For anyone who teaches Geography these points are hardly surprising, but it is important to continually emphasize these strengths in the context of what is increasingly a market for education in the UK, including strong competition for attracting pupils and students.

This has been recognised in the UK in a number of initiatives. However, the UK Government, through the Department for Children, Schools and Families, has funded an Action Plan for Geography, implemented by the two key geographical organisations in the UK, the Geographical Association and the Royal Geographical Society-Institute of British Geographers. The two year programme hopes to establish a clear identity for Geography as a relevant subject for the twenty-first century, and to support teachers in encouraging schoolchildren to

do Geography. The distinctiveness of Geography is built around five key core concepts: place, connectedness, scale, process and skills. It includes strengthening CPD (Continuing Professional Development) for teachers and also integrating schools and universities more, for example through the

student ambassadors scheme, where university Geography students are trained to go into schools and enthuse pupils about it as a university subject. Full details of the Action Plan for Geography can be found at: [www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk](http://www.geographyteachingtoday.org.uk)

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Vid Stockholms universitet, Institutionen för naturgeografi och kvartärgeologi ges även andra möjligheter inom ramen för lärarlyftet. Läs mer om deras kurser som speciellt riktar sig till yrkesverksamma lärare på: [www.ink.su.se](http://www.ink.su.se) eller kontakta studievägledaren Maria Damberg, telefon: 08-16 47 98, e-post: [studier@natgeo.su.se](mailto:studier@natgeo.su.se)

