

# Summary report on the findings of the school - community - HE links project

## RGS-IBG BENCHMARK ON NETWORKS/LINKS

This project, funded by the DfES, aims to encourage, support and enable the development of geography-based **school -community-Higher Education** (HE) links and regional networks. While a number of projects exist specifically to develop and encourage cross-sectoral links in other discipline areas, most notably science, there are no such programmes currently for geography. This is despite the fact that the content and ethos of geography lends itself to local links with business, NGOs, and the public sector such as local government.

A first stage in the project was to identify the scope, nature and benefits of existing established links between school geography departments and the wider community and HE as a benchmark of link-based activity in 2004. This was based on a stratified questionnaire survey sent to 1600 Heads of Geography in secondary schools in England and Wales; approximately 10% of whom responded to the questionnaire. A sample of 20% of HE departments was also surveyed for school links.

### Potential benefits of effective links and networks

The report (to be published later in 2005) identified that effective links and networks between geography departments and local business, NGO, public sector and HE communities have the potential in all secondary schools to:

- enhance curriculum development;
- enrich the learning and teaching experiences;
- support the training and professional development of teachers;
- demonstrate the application, relevance and employment opportunities provided by studying geography; and
- encourage and widen applications to geography courses in HE.

### Summary key findings

The following key points arose from the analysis of the questionnaire returns, supplemented by discussion with selected respondents and an earlier survey of HE-schools links undertaken by the RGS-IBG in 2002.

#### General points

- There are some excellent examples of strong links embedded into the curriculum with all sectors – HE, business, NGOs, public sector.
- The majority of links were, however, shallow and not well embedded in the curriculum or used to enhance curriculum development or professional development of the teachers.
- Over 78% of teachers who responded indicated that they would like to develop their external links through geography further.
- The current links were mostly one-to-one, and did not form part of a network; **the exception was some HE departments which worked with a network of schools in the region.**
- There was no statistical difference in the extent of links between different school types. That is, between those that might have been expected to have better developed local links (including community colleges, city academies, specialist schools, independent schools and grammar schools) and other maintained schools.
- Links in general do not seem to be preferentially developed in schools that teach the full range of 11-19 rather than the restricted age range of 11-16. For the 11-16 schools the % of respondents with links varied from 20%-45% varying according to link sector. For those teaching A and AS level the comparable percentages were 22%-58%. The 58% reflects the higher proportions of HE links among the 11-19 schools.

## Links by sector

### Higher Education

- The links between school geography departments and higher education institutions were the best developed. Over 50% of schools who responded had HE links and all the HE Geography Departments sampled had well developed links with local schools.
- The school–HE links also showed signs of greater maturity than links to other sectors in that 47% of the schools had links that had been in existence for over 5 years. It is suggested that this is because school-HE is the traditional form of linking, and that both parties have an interest in developing links as they both benefit directly.
- HE reported links focused on the provision of lectures, master classes and VI form conferences by the HE institutions, and on PGCE student placements in schools, which in both cases contributed to developing subject knowledge among teachers and pupils, and to a lesser extent to raising awareness of studying geography at university and introducing new pedagogy.

### Business Links

- Only 21.2% of respondents reported business links.
- The types of business links focused on local manufacturing and services, for the **educational** purposes of case studies and opportunities for field visits. Their contribution to learning and teaching was thus equally split between experiential learning through fieldwork and a source of learning resources.
- The small number of business links (15%) that were cited as being used for work-related learning linked to geography probably reflects the fact that work-related learning tends to be organised centrally, rather than departmentally, within school.

### NGOs

- 44.5% reported links with local NGOs, however nearly 60% of the links were with international development and fair-trade charities.
- The main cited purposes of NGO/charity links was for access to web-based teaching and learning resources, mostly on national charity websites where the charity also often had local offices or shops (eg Oxfam) or fundraising activities for local charities as part of active citizenship.

### Public Sector

- 26.3% of respondents had links with a public sector body; with 40% having more than one link.
- The local council, planning officers, environmental health and recycling departments and careers services came out most highly as the links of choice, with the contributions to teaching and learning being focused on supporting fieldwork and student project-work, provision of learning resources, and provision of speakers.

## Data summary

### Business links

21.2% of geography departments had business links; of those

37.9% had 1 link

48.3% had 2-5 links

13.8% had > 5 links

66.7 % of the business links occurred between one and three times per year

50% links had existed for between 2 and 5 years

### **NGO and charity links**

44.5 % stated they had links with local charities and NGOs; of those:

58.3% used one link only

36.7% had 2 – 5 links

5.0% had > 5 links

78.8% accessed their most commonly used link less than 3 times per year

64.9% links had been established between 2 and 5 years.

### **Public sector links**

26.3% stated they had links with local public sector bodies; of which

60% had one link

40% had 2 – 5 links

Over 75% accessed their most commonly used link three times or less per year

57.6% links had been established between 2 and 5 years.

### **Higher Education links**

51.1% of those responding had links with HEIs, of which:

53.7% had only one link

43.3 had 2-5 links

3.0% had >5 links

58.1% interacted with their link less than 3 times per year; but 14% interacted over 10 times per year.

46.8% of links had been established over 5 years, and 40.3% between 2 and 5 years.

Royal Geographical Society with IBG

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