

● Going places with geography - Where could geography take me?

As featured in the Summer 2011 Bulletin

As students across the country weigh the cost of their studies against the value of their university education in shaping their careers, there has never been a more important time for the Society to provide support to the next generation of geographers by showcasing the skills, opportunities and knowledge that are making geographers indispensable across government, business and industry.

From financial risk assessor to flood defence manager; aid worker to advertising executive, geographers develop skills at degree level that are highly sought after by employers. By nature, geographers see the world, and therefore its challenges, from a broad and integrating perspective – ideal skills for businesses searching for strategic solutions in a challenging environment.

A recent survey conducted by geographic information systems (GIS) specialists Esri UK showed that business leaders wanted more geography graduates because their skills, knowledge and understanding are not only proving essential in tackling critical issues facing society in the 21st century, but are also highly relevant to a broad range of careers.

Nick Austin, for example, is a senior transport planner for consultants Steer Davies Gleeve. He graduated with a MSc in GIS after completing his first degree in geography and oceanography and volunteers for the Society's Geography Ambassador programme visiting schools to talk about his studies and career. "Britain needs geographers that are able to process, articulate and share information – something that's even more important in the current economic crisis," he said.

Geographer Alison Gardner, also an Ambassador, uses her skills at Investec Bank plc and manages the company's sustainable social investment. "Geographers leave university with the transferable skills they need to go into a whole range of careers

– banking, teaching, the not-for-profit sector – it's the outward-looking approach, natural curiosity about the world and invaluable enquiry skills that set them apart from other graduates," she said. There are more than 90 higher education institutions across the UK where geography is studied and some of these rank in the best geography departments in the world. With some 25,000 undergraduates studying at any one time, students come from a wide variety of backgrounds and qualifications and study both full-time, and part-time.




Images:

Above left: Geography Ambassadors, from universities and the workplace, inspire thousands of students every year to study geography by visiting schools across England.

Above right: Geography graduate Alison at work with a team of volunteers from Investec creating an eco garden at Ben Jonson Primary School, London.

Director of the Society, Dr Rita Gardner, said geography graduates had shown resilience in difficult economic times. "Competition for employment is higher than ever before and fortunately we have seen unemployment among geographers remain below the national average," she said. "In a world where much of our information is increasingly location-based, GIS has also grown rapidly to become an essential tool in business and



government which will mean even more opportunities for geographers in the future.”

While students and parents look closely at employment opportunities post-university, geography remains a good choice as it opens the door to a wide range of well-paid careers. Some jobs will use specific geographical knowledge and skills while many will draw on the unusually wide range of ‘transferable’ skills that good young geographers acquire through their courses – from team work to research, data analysis to spatial IT skills.

* The Esri UK research was conducted amongst 200 business leaders by Vanson Bourne in October 2010

** Employment figures for graduates were published by the Higher Education Careers Services Unit in November 2010

Help from the Society

Choose a degree

Our ‘Study Geography’ web resource provides information about all the UK’s geography university courses. Students can find guidance on choosing a course and advice on writing a strong application.

www.rgs.org/StudyGeography

Choose a career

Case studies in the web resource ‘Going Places with Geography’ demonstrate professional geographers in action in a range of careers, with details of how they got their jobs and how they apply their geographical skills. It also gives advice on preparing CVs and applying for jobs.

www.rgs.org/GoingPlaces

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