

# The future plans for RGS-IBG research and scientific expeditions

## Summary

How effective has the Society's new grants programme been, and how can the Society best support important geographical research and discovery at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? These were the questions the Research Programmes Review Group considered during its recently-completed six-month enquiry. We looked at the approach taken by the RGS-IBG over recent years, at external opportunities and challenges, at what is relevant and achievable for the future, and at sister geographical and scientific bodies; and solicited views from a wide range of Fellows and other interested parties.

A substantial amount of information was collected to help us devise the strategy for the next ten years, and we have taken on board many of the ideas and suggestions offered to us during the consultation process. All views have been carefully considered. The Review Group was unanimous in its recommendations to the Council, and those recommendations received the full support of the Council. The recommendations reflect both the majority view of those Fellows who provided input, which is to continue and enhance the existing grants programme, and the preferences of some Fellows for the Society's greater involvement in, or organising of, larger field projects.

We propose a new series of initiatives - **the RGS-IBG Research Partnership Initiatives** - to accompany a **strengthened Research Grants Programme**. We believe these new partnerships and the grants programme will provide an excellent blend of research and discovery in the field that builds on the strengths of the Society today. We also propose to do more to capitalise on the outcomes of both, raising awareness of achievements and sharing them with members, schools, and the wider world.

We plan to deliver five new **Research Partnership Initiatives** over the next ten years:

- Building links with other national geographical societies or academies overseas in order to enhance capacity and develop collaborative research links and programmes. We see this initiative leading to one joint field programme in that time focused on an issue of international significance.
- Bringing groups of experts together as the catalyst to develop applications for field and other research projects on innovative geographical topics, such as themes identified by the Research Councils.
- Working with one or more of the 700+ field centres around the world to support high quality studies on important geographical topics integral to their research programmes. We will support with advice, expertise and with funding for small field centre projects on a key theme.
- Supporting outreach and education activities as a partner in large projects organised by other groups, bringing the Society's considerable expertise in involving wider communities in research and disseminating results to schools, the general public and policy makers.
- Funding research by selected participants in large projects organised by other groups, through the Society's grants programme.

The **Research Grants Programme** will continue with its current style and approach of supporting high quality research and scientific expeditions through open competitive grants. And the Council has agreed that it should be strengthened by:

- Fundraising for one further annual grant to support established researchers working on a European/UK-based project with a human geography focus.
- Refocusing the directed strand of grant-giving to fund research on important geographical topics at one or more of the 700+ field centres around the world (as above).

Delivering on both the Partnership Initiatives and the expanded Grants Programme will be challenging for the Society, requiring additional fundraising and careful management in order to ensure successful implementation and to minimise risk. It will not be possible to implement all our proposals straight away; some can only occur once every five or ten years, and all will take careful planning. The precise numbers of different partnerships will be decided as part of the Society's strategic planning later this year / early 2011.

**To ensure that we make more of the Society's commitment** to research and discovery through fieldwork, we propose the following:

- Improve the visibility of the RGS-IBG's role in all its funded research, including scientific expeditions, for example in terms of how the Society and grant recipients refer to, profile and publicise the studies.
- Provide added value, for example, developing educational resources to share the findings of selected Society-supported projects with teachers and pupils and the public.
- Develop the RGS-IBG's role in encouraging 'informed travel and fieldwork' and providing opportunities for members and Fellows to share expertise.

The background to these decisions:

An evaluation of the current grants funding

- The Society has fully implemented the recommendations of the 2001/2004 reviews through an expanded grants programme that now gives >£170,000 p.a. and a new approach to research programmes that provided pump-priming support to projects under a single broad theme.
- The grants programme has been effectively fundraised for, developed and implemented. The activity, outputs and outcomes all have exceeded expectations.
- While the research programme pump-priming grants have supported high quality research and international collaborations, there is general agreement the theme selected was too broad.

The current context of support and costs for research and scientific expeditions

- The Society's current programme of support significantly exceeds that of any other learned geographical society internationally, with funds raised annually to support it.
- Most large-scale field research led by UK researchers now takes place from universities or national research institutes. Project budgets often reach into multiple million pounds.
- Current larger-scale scientific expeditions, whether led by science; a combination of education, science and the media; or purely adventure, mostly involve partnerships for funding, delivery or both. Budgets usually exceed £1m.

The views of the Fellowship and key interest groups

- 318 Fellows responded to the questionnaire; the majority of respondents were from across the breadth of the Society's general Fellowship. Two focus group meetings and nine meetings with key interest groups were also held.
- There is agreement that the Society should be active in supporting research and scientific expeditions; and on the value of the grants programme.
- Of those who gave views on what the Society should do in the next ten years, 71% expressed a preference for grants, 23% preferred expeditions/field programmes and 6% had other suggestions.

The following principles

- Recognition of the Society's history of fieldwork, international research and collaboration, breadth of geographical discovery; and of its role in communicating and engaging people with research and scientific expeditions
- The Society's reputation should be enhanced and should not be put at risk
- The Society should manage its fundraising internally and not outsource fundraising
- Beyond what it currently does in approving scientific expeditions through geographical fieldwork grants, it should not franchise its brand to others
- The approach adopted should not make demands for new resources that lead to a loss of breadth and balance across the Society

Approved by the Council March 2010

Here details of the work of the Review Group, its findings, and the recommendations unanimously supported by Council are reported.

#### **A. The Terms of Reference of the Review**

1. The review took place in the context of:
  - The planned evaluation after five years of the introduction of new practices in 2004; and the two independent reviews in 2001 that informed those recommendations, chaired by Ron Cooke (2001) and Ray Hudson (2004), respectively President and Vice-President of the Society.
  - The May 2009 SGM, one outcome of which has been a more substantial five-year review and greater provision of opportunities for Fellows and members to contribute their thoughts.
2. The terms of reference for the Review Group were approved by the Council in April 2009; membership of the Review Group was approved by the Council in June 2009. The Review Group was charged with:
  - An evaluation of the current approach which has been fully operational for the last five years (2005-2009).
  - Considered and justified recommendations for how the Society should directly support the generation of new knowledge in the coming ten years
3. The Review Group was jointly chaired by the Vice-Presidents for the Expeditions and Fieldwork and Research committees, Heather Viles and David Livingstone, respectively. Additional members were Roy Wood (Expeditions and Fieldwork committee), Michael Bradshaw (Research committee), and three members nominated by Council: John Shears, Paul Rose and Andrew Goudie. Rita Gardner and Catherine Souch (secretary to the group) served as ex-officio members. Across its membership the Review Group included individuals with expertise in research and scientific expeditions, exploration and travel, with members drawn from military, academic and government research and expeditionary backgrounds, and leaders of former research programmes.

#### **B. Evaluation of the current approach (fully operational for the last five years, 2005-2009)**

4. The Review Group unanimously concluded that the Society has fully implemented the recommendations of the 2001/2004 reviews, approved by the Council, as to how the Society should advance knowledge through research and scientific expeditions.

This was first and foremost to create and fund a grants programme to support high quality projects led by established researchers without restriction as to the geographical nature of the research, the location of the research, the career stage or background of the researchers, or the numbers of participants involved. Second, the Society has funded and trialled a new approach to research programmes that provides pump-priming support to projects under a single broad theme, which was chosen as 'Geographical Perspectives on Global Change'.

Over and above these objectives, the Society also created some new grants for independent travellers in recent years - such as the 'Go Beyond' bursary, Journey of a Lifetime and The Shulman Challenge Award. These were included in the review as part of the new expanded grants programme.

5. The Review Group concluded that the grants programme has been very effectively developed and the activity, outputs and outcomes have exceeded expectations.

Information drawn from Society records, reports submitted to the Society by grant recipients (as part of standard reporting required of recipients) and responses to a questionnaire sent to all awardees as part of the review were compiled. The results show that:

- For a total expenditure in the grants programme of some £560,000 over five years, the research outputs and outcomes are substantial, the value for money is excellent, and the quality is high not least because the projects are independently reviewed and competitively selected by the Society.
- Many projects selected for funding are multi-disciplinary in nature and almost all involve field-based research, with researchers spending significant periods in the field.
- While many are international, a number are UK/EU based.
- The topics studied range across the breadth of geography.
- The disciplines of those involved include geography, anthropology, biology, conservation biology, demography, development studies, economics, ecology, engineering, epidemiology, geology, geomatics, glaciology, horticulture, meteorology, oceanography, politics and tourism studies.
- New knowledge has been created; quality papers, training resources and educational materials published; and new understanding has been disseminated more widely with direct impact on policy and raising public awareness.
- Those involved have benefited personally and professionally; capacity building for the researchers and in-country collaborators have been integral.

Full information on the projects supported, with examples of outputs and outcomes, are provided on the grants pages of the Society's web sites. Specific examples are presented in Society publications (the bulletin, annual review<sup>1</sup>, Geographical Magazine and the three scholarly journals).

The Review Group also noted that the grant programme has a distinct niche – as also pointed out by several of the interest groups that they met with – filling an important gap and need for the wider geographical research community. It has, and is, contributing to the health of the discipline and cognate subject areas.

In addition to the £560,000 grant-giving under review; an additional £220,000 was awarded over the same period to largely undergraduate teams (GFG grants) and £30,000 awarded in grants (Shell funded) to support international leadership and capacity building in field research skills relevant to the millennium development goals and offering opportunities for early career researchers from less developed nations. These were not included in any detail in the review as they predate the new grants programme and are to continue unaffected by this review. Total research / field study support through grant giving over the five years thus amounted to some £800,000.

6. Between 2005 and 2010 through its Research Programme pump-priming activity the Society supported six projects under the broad theme of 'Geographical Perspectives on Global Change'. The first three were field based: in Mexico on climate change and water; in Myanmar on rivers and the carbon cycle; and for a study across the EU on sustainable land use programmes. The second set supported networks to focus on: advancing understanding of sand seas and dunes; international migration, specifically focused on children; and changing eastern European cities. The networks aimed to bring groups of researchers from different institutions together to develop research ideas, run workshops and develop proposals for further funding. All of the projects involve high quality research and top level researchers; all are cross disciplinary with geography taking the lead; all involve multiple institutions; and all integrate, though to varying degrees, the social and physical aspects of geographical science. Five of the six projects have involved significant numbers of international collaborators.

These six pump-priming grants under the single broad theme, while all delivering a number of outputs (workshops, papers, proposals for further funding), have not as yet succeeded in meeting

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<sup>1</sup> Annual Reviews provide the most complete summary: [www.rgs.org/AnnualReview](http://www.rgs.org/AnnualReview)

the original objective of priming larger projects funded at the order of £250,000 (externally funded by the principal investigators). Whereas some of the projects funded under the grants programme have indeed done that (e.g. the recent £3.5 m consortium grant from NERC for FENNEC which was developed, in part, out of a research project supported by the Society). Four of the pump-priming grants submitted proposals for significant funding (to AHRC, ESRC, NERC, Leverhulme and DEFRA). One has received more modest funding (from NERC), but a number of proposals are still pending. All have demonstrated a clear commitment to search for follow-on funding.

It is the assessment of the Review Group that while there is great value in the pump-priming approach, to seed research and support funding bids with the Society directly involved, the theme selected was too broad. However, it is, as yet, too early to fully evaluate the relative success of this approach. It should also be noted that there other sources of funding for networks, such as the research councils and EU initiatives, have developed during this time.

7. The Society continues to fundraise successfully to enable it to develop and implement its grants programme. (a) Some £1.5 million was raised as part of the 2001-2004 appeal, the investment return on which contributes annually to grant giving. Historical trust funds also support the long-running geographical fieldwork grants. (b) The Society also successfully fundraises from donors on an annual basis and for multiple (5-10 year) grants programmes. Over the last five years, approximately 50% of the value of the grants awarded have been fundraised for in this way. There remains an ongoing fundraising demand to sustain the grants programme.

#### **C. Understanding the context for the future of cost and support for research and scientific expeditions**

8. Data were gathered on the approaches adopted by non-government funded learned societies and other charitable organisations in the UK and overseas; core government funded national academies; and core government funded research institutes. These data show that the Society's annual contributions to supporting research and scientific expeditions significantly outweigh the contributions made by any other sister learned geographical society anywhere in the world. The same applies when comparisons are made with sister learned societies in other single disciplines in the UK, with the exception of the British Ecological Society who award £400,000 per annum in a broadly similar grants programme. A shared feature between the RGS-IBG and all these societies is that they receive no core government funding, nor any government funding specifically to support research or grants programmes. The giving of small grants is the mechanism that they all use to support research and field studies.

Even the Royal Society and British Academy, with significant government funding, chose to support research by giving grants and, in addition, supporting postdoctoral scholars. The Royal Society continues one long-running field programme in the Danum Valley, because the longevity of this rainforest data set is unique.

9. The majority of large-scale field research led by established UK researchers takes place from the universities or national research institutes, and is typically funded by the research councils or one of the few big research grant giving trusts and foundations. Project budgets often reach into multiple millions. These include the full economic costs of researchers' time and for the use of university facilities and infrastructure. This is a major change in the cost of fieldwork since the time of the Society's former field programmes. It often includes not just staff time but also cost of laboratory/equipment, estates and indirect costs. The three research councils that support geographical and other life, earth and social science research (NERC, ESRC, AHRC) currently award some £365 m per year. It is all awarded on a competitive basis in the form of individual research grants from an 'open' programme or through grant support for themed research programmes and centres. A similar approach, with a national research council(s), applies in most western nations.

10. An analysis of a selection of current larger-scale or ambitious expeditions and their funding models reveals that these can be categorised into three broad groups. These are: (1) science-driven; (2) those that combine education, science and the media, often with an adventure element too, with varying emphases and audiences in mind; and (3) purely adventure expeditions. Examples of the science-driven expeditions range from the NERC-funded £7m British Antarctic Survey (and university partners) subglacial Lake Ellsworth Programme to partnership projects between five or six scholars such as the Royal Holloway, British Museum, and University of Huamanga Peru project funded by AHRC). The middle group includes, for example the Catlin project, the Cape Farewell project and various media-led documentaries, such as those by the BBC and National Geographic. Most, regardless of type, usually involve partnerships of either funding partners, delivery partners or both and most have budgets exceeding £1m.
11. A survey of a sample of significant city companies asking about their attitude to funding expeditions revealed that while 50% might consider supporting an expedition, none currently do so, and they would only do so if there were direct business or education benefits. Those responding indicated that they would only consider support at a modest level.
12. To understand more fully how the current environment in universities will affect the ability of researchers to participate in overseas field projects and the institutions' attitudes to costs and charging, data were collected from a number of university departments. The results are variable, from institutions that would charge for the academics time at the cost of teaching replacement, to those that require full salaries and overheads (i.e full economic costs). No difference in approach was reported for senior or junior staff. The average cost for a PhD student (3 years, fees and stipend) is ca £50k. The responses show variability between institutions in the exact amount charged, with, in general, the research led universities charging more and also, in addition, charging for use of laboratory facilities and other equipment.
13. Another important feature of the current environment affecting research and scientific expeditions, highlighted by a number the Review Group spoke to, is the role of internet, and multiple forms of online communication, which today greatly enhance the ease with which international collaborative partnerships can be developed and the logistics of field programmes organised.

#### **D. Understanding different perspectives**

14. In order to gather the views of the Society's Fellows and members a consultation document was sent by post to 14,209 Fellows and members. The vast majority of Fellows and members received the consultation in both hard copy and electronic form. Independently, Fellows and members were encouraged to respond through the President's letter accompanying the bulletin, e-updates, and announcements in the Society's publications. The response period was extended from just before Christmas 2009 to the New Year and all requests for extensions were granted. All responses were recorded regardless of when received and comments on this topic sent in writing at the time of the SGM were also included.
15. Of the 14,209 questionnaires sent out, 318 responses were received, with a further eight letters with views directly related to the issue. In terms of those who responded, there were approximately equal numbers of Fellows who had been members for >20 years, 10-20 years, and less than 10 years. Overall, respondents were 80% male and 20% female, with an average age of 59. There was no significant clustering of responses in relation to age of Fellow, length of Fellowship, home address, or gender. The responses are therefore a 'small but broadly based' sample.
16. Focus groups of randomly selected Fellows from two geographic regions were convened and professionally facilitated in an attempt to ensure the views of the general membership were heard, in case there were few questionnaire responses from the wider Fellowship (which was in fact not the case). One hundred people were invited and eleven people attended one of two focus groups

meetings in London. A variety of reasons were cited by those who did not attend – ranging from being out of the country/travelling; infirm; not feeling qualified to comment, to no reason given. A further 150 people from other geographical regions were also selected randomly and specifically asked to fill in the questionnaire, for the same reason. 14 responses were received from this group.

17. A further nine stakeholder meetings were held where groups with a particular interest (former leaders of the Society's field research programmes; the Beagle campaign group; Heads of Geography Departments; the Society's research groups; the Expeditions and Fieldwork, Research and Education committees; and the Society's senior and middle managers) were invited to set out their views in person to a sub-group of the Review Committee. The comments made were fully documented.
18. The respondents to the questionnaire to Fellows and members were a genuine cross-section of the Society's membership and not skewed to any special interest groups.
19. The respondents were asked to identify themselves in terms of whether they are active researchers (116: 39% indicated yes); recipients of a Society grant (36: 12% indicated yes, many as undergraduates); and a participant on a former field programme (22: 7% indicated yes). The active researchers encompass independent researchers such as writers of books, media researchers, professionals running expeditions, as well as university based researchers.
20. Some of the key views that emerge from the responses are:
  - The respondents as a whole more or less unanimously believed that the Society should be active in supporting research and scientific expeditions in principle, in one way or another.
  - Of those who expressed a view on what the Society should do in the next ten years, 71% expressed a preference for grants, 23% preferred expeditions/field programmes, and 6% had other suggestions.
  - Of those favouring grants, some 40% suggested additional flexibility, seeing a place for the Society working in partnership with other organisations, or occasional field projects taking place. A number of other suggestions around capacity building were also forthcoming.
  - Of those that responded on the question of a themed pump-priming grants programme, a small majority favoured continuation, though suggesting it be a more highly focused theme. Others, however, were of the opinion that there was value in not restricting the scope of the proposed theme not least since few other funding bodies provided such flexibility.
  - Support was also expressed for the Society enabling networks, supporting capacity building among researchers overseas, and fostering collaboration in bids for major grants from research councils, for example.
  - Educational activities, whether linked to expeditions or grants, are highly valued by virtually all respondents.
  - A number of respondents identified their wish for the Society to be inclusive across all of its membership and balanced in its support.

#### In addition

- The academic community (44 responses) strongly support the grants-based approach, recommending it continue largely as at present, with a continued focus on supporting those at fairly early career stages. Particular strengths of the grants programme cited include the diversity of projects funded; the niche (early career where funding can make a difference with a chance to get research started and document the value of an idea), and the number of awards given.
- Views amongst those strongly advocating expeditions differ as to the style of expeditions / field research preferred - some favour field programmes based on existing field centres; some favour the former style of Society research programmes; some favour PR-led, high profile projects; while others did not express a specific view.

A number of respondents took the opportunity to provide comments about other unrelated aspects of the Society's work as well. These comments will help the Society inform other future developments.

21. Those who responded to the question about research topics important for future study cited climate change (15%); water resources (6%); biodiversity / ecosystems / conservation (5%); natural hazards (4%) and population growth / migration (4%) most frequently. This reflects a clear emphasis on geographical issues the world faces; and indeed these topics align well with projects supported by current grant giving.
22. In terms of values underpinning the Society's approach 'high quality' was the most highly ranked overall followed by 'benefit to geography', 'benefit to the Society', and 'innovative'. 'Good value for money', 'international collaborators' and 'open to all researchers' also were scored highly. The four values ranked lowest for these groups of respondents were 'PR opportunities', 'benefit to individual', 'about UK/Europe' and 'on a theme chosen by RGS-IBG'. Other attributes that respondents identified (outside of the tick-box list offered to them) focused on the linked attributes of the value of research to society as a whole and studies that inform the public more widely.
23. Just over two thirds of the questionnaire respondents (209) gave a view on leadership (fewer answers than to other questions). The responses demonstrated the value placed in the Society's leadership role in championing and protecting the position of geography as a subject and in disseminating results of geographical research widely (50% combined). 14% view the Society's leadership role as being the selection of projects (from open competitions) for grant funding. 6% see leadership as the Society's work inspiring and enthusing young people. A further 6% believe leadership is provided by the Society running multi-disciplinary expeditions. 5% see leadership in terms of collaborating generally with other organisations.
24. The focus groups, though small, had a wide ranging membership. The views expressed reflected those compositions and mirror very closely the overall responses to the questionnaire.
25. The stakeholder groups presented clear positions in the presentations to members of the Review Group. Former field programme leaders and Beagle campaign members supported field research programmes, spoke passionately about the Society's tradition, and offered ideas with respect to fundraising and projects. The heads of departments and grant recipients spoke strongly in favour of grant giving, presenting reasons as to why this is the appropriate model in the current times.
26. The Society's committees /committee members each held strong views.
  - In the Education Committee strong support was expressed for grant giving, with a request for more of the grant findings to be translated into education resources and for a strand of grant giving to support education research.
  - The Research Committee was strongly in favour of the grants programme. Messages about supporting early career researchers and across a breadth of topics also featured prominently.
  - The Expeditions and Fieldwork committee members also strongly endorsed the grants programme and grant-giving as the way forward with a focus in that on fieldwork and international projects with in-country collaborators.
27. The Society's middle managers expressed a wide range of individual views. The Society's senior managers took a more strategic approach, speaking highly of grants, with the suggestion that the Society should lever more from them.
28. In developing its recommendations, the Review Group was guided by the following principles:
  - Recognition of the Society's history of fieldwork, international research, breadth of geographical discovery and role in communicating and engaging others with the findings from research and scientific expeditions.
  - The Society's reputation should be enhanced and not be put at risk

- The Society should manage its fundraising internally and not outsource fundraising
- Beyond what it currently does in approving scientific expeditions through geographical fieldwork grants, the Society should not franchise its brand to others
- The approach adopted should not make demands for new resources that lead to a loss of breadth and balance across the Society

## E. Recommendations of the Review Group

29. The Review Group reached its recommendations having considered the evidence, having listened to the views of Fellows and members who responded to the consultation, having given thought to the contexts within and beyond the Society, and with knowledge of the Society's current and past practices.

The recommendations, arising from considering a number of options, can be broadly categorised into 'strategic decisions' and 'immediate actions'. None of the recommendations are at odds with the outcomes of the 2001 and 2004 reviews or with the current review of the grants programme, but they do go beyond. The recommendations are consistent with the majority views of the Fellowship for an enhanced grants programme. Beyond that they seek to be inclusive of the breadth of the Fellowship and the good ideas that have come forward in the review, and to be appropriate for the Society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century given the breadth and balance of its work in research, fieldwork and expeditions, education, policy and public engagement.

The recommendations are not mutually exclusive, but the Review Group is firmly of the opinion that not all can go ahead at the same time and careful attention needs to be directed to phasing over the next 10 years and to resources.

30. A new series of initiatives are proposed - **the RGS-IBG Research Partnership Initiatives** - to accompany a **strengthened Research Grants Programme**. These new partnerships and the grants programme have the potential to provide an excellent blend of research and discovery in the field that builds on the strengths of the Society today. The Society will also do more to capitalise on the outcomes of both, raising awareness of achievements and sharing them with members, schools, and the wider world.

31. We plan to deliver five new **Research Partnership Initiatives** over the next ten years:

- Building links with other national geographical societies or academies overseas in order to enhance capacity and develop collaborative research links and programmes. This initiative will lead to one joint field programme in that time focused on an issue of international significance. *Relatively medium to high cost, depending on scale, requiring substantial planning, relationship building and fundraising. Programme costs to be capped, as appropriate, to between £500,000 and £1m. The most challenging of the five options under partnership. Timing: one sustainable partnership in the ten year period.*
- Bringing groups of experts together as the catalyst to develop applications for field and other research projects on innovative geographical topics, such as themes identified by the Research Councils. *Relatively low cost in the need to meet the costs of networking activities; funding for the Society's project role built into the application if relevant. Timing: Once every two to three years, depending on funding opportunities.*
- Working with one or more of the 700+ field centres around the world to support high quality studies on important geographical topics integral to their research programmes. The Society will support with advice, expertise and with funding for small field centre projects on a key theme. *Relatively low cost: funding delivered as a regular part of the grants programme. Timing: annual award at ca. £5000 pa*

- Supporting outreach and education activities as a partner in large projects organised by other groups, bringing the Society's considerable expertise in involving wider communities in research and disseminating results to schools, the general public and policy makers. *Relatively low cost in formulating proposals; Society resource needs covered within the project funding application. Timing: maximum one ongoing at any one time.*
  - Funding research by selected participants in large projects organised by other groups, through the Society's grants programme. *Relatively low cost; delivered through the Society's grant programme. Timing: responsive to grant applications.*
32. The **Research Grants Programme** will continue with its current style and approach of supporting high quality research and scientific expeditions through open competitive grants. The Council has agreed that it should be strengthened by:
- Fundraising for one further annual grant to support established researchers working on a European/ UK-based project with a human geography focus.
  - Refocusing the directed strand of grant-giving to fund research on important geographical topics at one or more of the 700+ field centres around the world (as above).
33. Delivering on both the Partnership Initiatives and the expanded Grants Programme will be challenging for the Society, requiring additional fundraising and careful management in order to ensure successful implementation and to minimise risk. It will not be possible to implement all our proposals straight away; some can only occur once every five or ten years, and all will take careful planning. The precise numbers of different partnerships will be decided as part of the Society's strategic planning later this year / early 2011.

The **immediate actions** are to **ensure that the Society makes more of its commitment** to research and discovery through fieldwork, specifically to:

- Improve the visibility and presence of the RGS-IBG's role in all its funded research, including scientific expeditions, for example in terms of how the Society and grant recipients refer to, profile and publicise the studies.
- Provide added value, for example, developing educational resources to inspire young people and to share the findings of selected Society-supported projects with teachers and pupils and the public.
- Develop the RGS-IBG's role in encouraging 'informed travel and fieldwork' and providing opportunities for members and Fellows to share expertise.

While these will have resource implications they are (mostly) not large, although it will mean moving some attention away from other activities in order to generate staff time to make these immediate actions happen in a sustained manner. It is the intention that these will be implemented by existing staff.

34. The multiple forms of the partnership model share, to varying degrees, the work load, the risk (providing partners are chosen well) and the funding. They open opportunities for the Society's expertise to be brought to bear, its name to be associated with larger projects, to co-organise one field project in the ten year period; and to be relevant to today's interconnected world and the needs of the international, as well as UK, geographical research communities.

The opportunities offered through a combination of continuing the current grants programme, building on its recent growth and the excellent record of achievement, and developing the Society's geographical partnership role in field research and scientific expeditions in ways that play to the Society's strengths and are relevant to our 21<sup>st</sup> century context, provide an exciting way forward. Furthermore this strategy, if sensibly phased and managed at an appropriate scale, can be supported within a broad and balanced Society as part of the Society's next phase of strategic development.