

RGS-IBG Consultation Response

Call for evidence A standard for teachers' professional development

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is the UK learned society and professional body for geography and geographers.

The Society maintains a strong overview of the discipline: its standing and practice in schools, higher education, and the workplace - including professional accreditation. We advise on, and support the advancement of, geography; the dissemination of geographical knowledge to the public, policy makers and other specialist audiences including teachers, scholars, and those involved in expeditions and fieldwork; and training and professional development for practising geographers, including teachers. We have 16,000 members and Fellows and, as a charity, our work currently reaches more than three million people per year.

The Society regularly provides advice about school geography to the Department for Education, Ofqual and other key stakeholders.

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The Society's role in the provision of subject specific CPD

The Society welcomes the call for evidence into teacher's professional development, and the need for a 'Standard for Teachers' Professional Development' in England.

In working across schools, Higher Education and the professions the Society is uniquely placed to identify, help shape and respond to key changes in the discipline of geography. This context provides significant added value to the Society's work in providing professional development for over 1000 teachers annually, addressing their current and future needs. So, too, does the fact that the Society is a well-established community of geographers, with a depth of activities that both add to and complement our CPD offering. Our work specifically addresses Ofsted's regular commentary on the continuing need for schools to provide professional, subject-specialist, development support for geography (2005, 2008 and 2011). We focus our support for teaching and learning into those areas of knowledge and skills, relevant to the curriculum, where we believe there to be the greatest need for CPD. As a charity, we aim for a mix of free and affordable provision.

The CPD is provided through a popular programme of twilight sessions, one day courses, residential fieldwork courses, 'TeachMeets', and a programme of locally delivered events and activities built around local networks of teachers. These activities are run by a combination of the Society's own educational staff; expert teachers – particularly Chartered Geographer (Teachers); Academy chains and Teaching Schools; colleagues from Higher Education and key partners including the Ordnance Survey, Field Studies Council and Esri UK (a GIS provider). The majority of our support is provided to subject specialist, secondary geographers, and we are also increasingly working with non-specialist primary colleagues.

The Society's current interventions in professional development for teachers address the following areas:

1. **Promoting good quality fieldwork**, particularly in schools which face significant challenges in this provision

External recognition of the Society's CPD activities

The positive impact of the Society's professional development for teachers has been recognised in the following ways:

- One of the key findings of an external review of the Society's Rediscovering London's Geography programme (2013-15) was that *"The most notable improvement in teacher subject knowledge has been for teachers in local (CPD) networks who are not subject specialists and (who) now feel well prepared to teach the new curriculum."*
- From 2006-2011 the Society stepped up its CPD programme, into a genuinely national programme, as part of our work within the DfE-funded 'Action Plan for Geography'. The Ofsted subject report (2011) identified that, *"the best geography was usually seen in schools which were participating in the professional development programme offered through the Action Plan for Geography, in specialist humanities schools or where schools shared good practice with local partners."* This programme offered sustained support for teachers over a period of years, through a combination of face-to-face CPD and complementary online provision.
- In feedback from teachers involved, and through their continuing professional engagement with the Society.

Additional support

The Society recognises that professional development cannot be addressed simply through CPD events, rather teachers need to be encouraged and sustained through active engagement with their professional communities. Over and above the direct CPD work described above, the Society marries this with additional support for teachers including:

- use of our online educational resources (which receive c. 1 million page views annually)
- attendance at the Society's lecture programme in London and ten regional branches; access to lectures online; and access to the Society's Ambassador programme and events for their students
- access to our publications that include four learned journals and the 'news-stand' *Geographical* magazine
- the additional benefits that derive from being part of the Society's active fellowship of 16,000+ geographers, at the heart of the geographical community.

Our experience demonstrates

1. **The central importance of subject specific professional support and development.**
In the Society's experience there is often a tension in schools between the professional development the leadership team is prepared to support and that which teachers themselves would prefer to do. In particular, opportunities for subject-based CPD are often either not allowed or restricted to attending courses provided by Awarding Bodies. While the latter may be a short term benefit, it ignores the medium term need for good teachers to continue to be engaged and stimulated by their subject and cognisant of developments in it that are curriculum-relevant.
2. **The need to provide teachers with opportunities to build on, and implement what they have learnt in CPD through additional support,** such as access to online educational resources, lectures, journals and collaborative networks.
3. The central role of subject specialist learned societies and subject associations in providing carefully-targeted programmes of **quality assured professional development** and the means through which teachers can become engaged in a **community of expert subject specialists** and can have a sustained involvement with a national community of expertise and/or a local network.
4. That **professional development should contribute towards 'markers of esteem'** for teachers. For example, involvement within the Society's professional development programmes can underpin a teacher's successful application to become a Fellow or, for those who qualify, as a Chartered Geographer (Teacher).
5. That an **ongoing commitment to professional development can be further encouraged through the requirements of existing professional accreditations, particularly subject specialist Chartered programmes.** For example, Chartered Geographer (Teacher) requires an annual submission which identifies a teacher's involvement with professional development activities related to subject knowledge and pedagogy, in order for them to retain this professional accreditation.



The new standard should

- Set the clear expectation that a teachers' ongoing professional development, including the essential enhancement of their subject specialist knowledge and skills, is a necessary part of an individual's career progression.
- Welcome the opportunities for teachers to have sustained professional development externally recognised and validated through existing subject-specialist accreditations; and encourage them to be reflective of the 'impact' of CPD on their teaching and student outcomes.
- Recognise the range of high-quality CPD provision and wider, complementary support provided by subject specialist bodies, including learned societies and subject associations.
- Strongly encourage teachers to become active members of their respective subject specialist learned society or association and to take up the opportunities for professional development, accreditation and other, community-centred, support that they provide.