

Consultation Response from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

- **All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) Africa Inquiry: Africa and its diaspora in UK School Curricula**

1. Introduction

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) welcomes the opportunity to provide the following evidence to the [All Party Parliamentary Group \(APPG\) Inquiry on Africa and its diaspora in the UK School Curricula](#). The following is made as a public response.

Geography has a unique role in schools in educating young people about the contemporary world covering its people, places and environments, and the interactions between them, at the local, national and global scales.

Geography makes a distinctive and important contribution to learning about Africa and its diaspora in relation to teaching pupils about the contemporary and geographically diverse nature of Africa and its diaspora; addressing misconceptions and prejudicial understandings that may be held by pupils; and revealing the ongoing connections, interdependencies and influences between Africa, Britain and the wider world.

2. The Society

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is the 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. We advise on and support the advancement of geography; the dissemination of geographical knowledge to teachers, policy makers and the public; and training and professional development for geographers. We work closely with the Department for Education, Ofqual, Ofsted, the examination board, and geography teachers to support good practice in teaching and learning in geographical education across primary and secondary schools. Over 2020-21, our CPD programme reached over 2,500 teachers and our award-winning online [educational resources](#) are available online.

The Society recognises that it has a long, contested and complicated history. Founded in 1830, our status as a leading UK-institution emerged from the structures of imperialism and colonialism. These perspectives are particularly reflected in the Society's [Collections](#), which hold unique materials of national and international significance. The Collections contain over two million documents, maps, photographs, paintings, periodicals, artefacts and books, and span 500 years of geographical research, travel, encounter and exploration. They are available for use by the public, researchers and schools.

The Society's Collections are of relevance to the inquiry given its coverage of:

- cartographic representations of Africa dating from the 15th Century
- some of the earliest photographic images (1860) of Africa and its people
- archives documenting 19th Century encounters between British and African people
- unique early 20th Century photographic collections of the Caribbean
- further materials that document the wider African diaspora.

The Society recognises that these materials were collected during, and underpinned by, Britain's imperial and colonial period. Indeed, they were often used to both construct and reinforce negative perceptions of Africa and its people. For example, [the first volume of the Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society](#) records such views held in relation to British peoples' encounters with the people of the Quorra (Niger) River who were described as being "poor, despised and abused, but industrious and hard-working" and the decline of the Moroccan town of Sala being attributed to the "results of ignorance, despotism and Mohammedanism". However, it is not that other voices, including those of African descent cannot be found in the Collections. For example, the Society holds works by James Africanus Horton of Sierra Leone and Edward Blyden of Liberia, both being 19th century critics of European stereotypes of African culture. Their criticisms of the ignorance of European explorers concerning African societies merits re-reading today and are a prescient foretelling of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's [presentation about the danger of a 'single story'](#).

In making its Collections publicly accessible in the 21st century, the Society is working to reevaluate their use for scholarly and educational purposes. This approach has been developed in partnership with diaspora communities and was recognised within the Society's receipt of Designated Status by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. The Society's designation citation noted "the wider cultural significance of the collection is fully demonstrated ... and offer a unique access point to the understanding of cultural exchange and encounters around the world".

Today, the Society is a very different organisation to the Society of 1830. It has an organisational commitment to addressing equality, diversity and inclusion which recognises its responsibilities within its own work, and its support for the subject and the wider community of geographers. For example, the Society has sought to raise the profile of past and present geographers who have African and diaspora heritage through the [profiles of Black geographers](#) and developed a range of relevant educational support which is outlined in Section 7.

3. What pupils learn about Africa and its diaspora in geography: its curriculum and examinations¹

Geography is a statutory National Curriculum subject for pupils aged 5-14 and a popular examination choice at GCSE and A Level.

The numbers of pupils studying geography at GCSE have increased by over 50% since 2010 with 268,000 GCSE pupils taking this subject² in 2021. In addition, entries for A Level geography rose by 16% in 2021 with over 31,000 students taking this subject.

Within the geography National Curriculum, and its accompanying examination courses, there are specific elements that require pupils to be taught about Africa and its diaspora. In addition, there are also further opportunities where the teaching about Africa and its diaspora provides an important context to geographical study. Together these lead to pupils studying a range of African themes, case studies and perspectives including:

- its location, environments, physical geography and natural resources

¹ The following is provided in relation to the education system for *English* schools. Comparable opportunities are also provided within the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

² In English schools, there will be further entries for GCSE and A Level geography in Northern Irish and Welsh schools

- its human geography including selected nation's socio-economic and demographic features
- case studies from the neighbourhood scale to mega-cities
- peoples' livelihoods and economic activities
- economic, environmental and social progress, development issues, trade and migrations
- the role of Africa within regional and global geo-political and economic contexts
- the Caribbean and use of Caribbean case studies to exemplify themes and contexts
- how Africa and its people, ideas, resources and cultures – have shaped 21st century UK

The requirements and opportunities within the National Curriculum, GCSE and A Level courses are outlined in detail in Appendix 1.

4. The impact of this: who is studying geography?

The Society is pleased to report the growing popularity of geography as an optional GCSE choice in English schools and that the intake for geography has become much more representative of the wider diversity of the UK's population.

Since 2010, the record growth in the numbers of pupils studying geography has been the result of GCSE entries predominantly from groups who had been previously less likely to take geography. Notably these include: disadvantaged pupils, Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) pupils, those with lower prior attainment or studying in non-selective schools. For example, the proportion of entries of Black/Black British pupils studying GCSE geography has doubled from 2010 to 2018 rising from 18.6% to 37.3% (RGS's research [Geography of Geography 2020](#)).

However, the Society recognises that there is still much more work to be done if geography is to become more representative in relation to students' A Level and degree choices, where BAME students continue to be underrepresented and underserved by the subject. The Society has recently undertaken further research to sample the views of young people, particularly those from BAME backgrounds, about geography. The research's findings will be published in late 2021.

Turning to what geography pupils study, there are specific requirements and opportunities presented by the curriculum and its examination courses. However, there are also longstanding concerns within the subject community about the nature of such lessons. These concerns are exemplified in recent research published in 2020 by Puttick and Murrey (2020 Geography Vol 105) which identified that: *"A piecemeal approach to geographies of race and racism is insufficient for educating students for the 21stC. A more holistic and sustained anti-racist geography curriculum – with attention to Black, Indigenous and decolonial thought within the discipline – will help to ensure that young people have the skills and critical thinking necessary to understand complex and shifting politics of space, place and knowledge at a global scale."*

The Society also understands that Ofsted's forthcoming Geography Research Review³ is likely to draw attention to the importance of teachers being aware of the risks of presenting single stories about case studies and countries that are studied. This builds on Mary Biddulph's work about the need to bring critical reflection to how places are represented and to use geography to accurately represent the world's diversity⁴.

5. The importance of transforming teaching and developing resources that support school curricula about Africa.

In taking forward work to support the importance of teaching about Africa the RGS highlights the distinctive and complementary contribution that geography can make. This contribution sits alongside lessons that pupils will undertake in history, English literature and other lessons.

³ June 2021

⁴ 'Editorial: the danger of a single story', in 'Teaching Geography', Volume 36, Issue 2, 2011, page 45; C Adichie,

Geography has the ability to:

- reveal the contemporary nature of African nations, their people and the wider African diaspora represented within the geography curriculum
- update outdated imagery, data and perceptions
- use current geographical information, concepts and approaches to address misconceptions, stereotypes or prejudices that pupils might hold.
- draw on the lived experiences for how pupils – particularly those with African heritage - might contribute to and better connect with their geography lessons
- advocate for how the study of geography can make a positive impact on young peoples' further study and careers, particularly to those pupils who are underserved by the subject⁵.

6. Barriers

There are a significant and interrelated range of barriers including:

- The need to build geography teachers' confidence and capabilities, so that they can better teach about this area of work. For example, through greater inclusion of such perspectives within their initial teacher training, the Early Career Teacher framework, and ongoing professional training
- Providing geography teachers with additional access to relevant high quality and up-to-date resources, accompanying expert scholarship, and training so that they can ensure their lessons are based on representative and current information
- The relative lack of opportunities for joint curriculum development programmes that can bring together geography teachers, Higher Education colleagues, subject bodies and diaspora communities to address this issue
- Concerns about the use of general terminology to analyse, compare and categorise countries and how these can shape young peoples' views. Geography has moved on from the use of previous terms such as Third World or "underdeveloped". However, common terminology includes terms such as Developed or Developing, North or South, Industrialised or Newly Industrialising, High, Middle or Low Income countries and Advanced Economies or Newly Emerging Economies. These can (inadvertently) present a binary separation of the world, which may not fully consider the diversity of African nations and the progress that has been achieved.
- The Society's work with geography teachers from BAME backgrounds indicates that in some schools there is an unhelpful perception that this is an issue that BAME, rather than all, are expected to lead on.

7. Examples of current good practice in collaborative curriculum development about Africa and its diaspora in schools.

In highlighting the following case studies of activities and curriculum development the Society would wish to make the following introductory comments:

- There is a significant body of scholarship developed by Higher Education geographers relevant to these issues, which can be a valuable resource upon which teachers can draw. This is exemplified in the theme of the 2017 RGS-IBG's academic conference which was titled [*Decolonising Geographical Knowledge*](#) and also in the expertise of colleagues from the Higher Education [*Race, Culture and Quality in Geography Research Group*](#)
- Good practice is found in activities and resources that have been developed in partnerships between scholarly research, diaspora communities, geography teachers and subject bodies

⁵ Geography students report some of the highest levels of satisfaction in their undergraduate courses and experience some of the lowest levels of drop out. After graduation geographers experience above average graduate employment and above graduate average salaries. (www.rgs.org/choosegeography)

- It is the Society's experience that there is significant appetite amongst the geography teaching community for more activity in this area of work.
- There is not a 'quick fix' to building teachers confidence and capacities in this area of work. Rather there is the need for considered, sustained and long-term support

The Society's approach is to draw on and combine the Society's resources and subject leadership with higher education scholarship, the expert knowledge of diaspora communities, and the curriculum needs and expertise of geography teachers.

7.1 Revisiting the Society's Collections as an educational resource in the 21st century

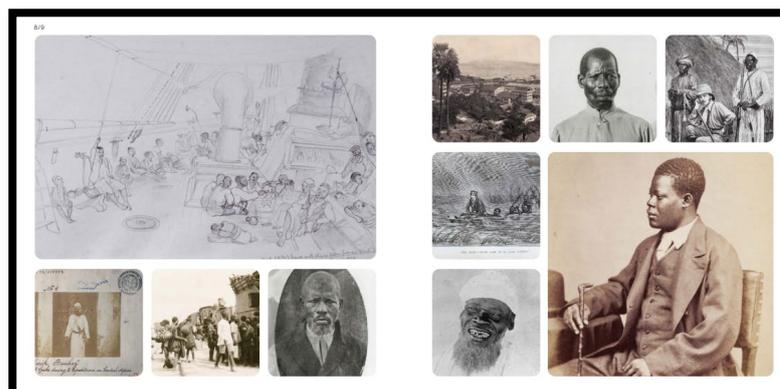
Over the last 15 years the Society has developed a significant program of educational and wider work with BAME communities and researchers to revisit its collections in the 21st century. This includes:

Hidden Histories of Exploration. This online resource and exhibition was developed through a collaborative PhD with Royal Holloway, University of London led by Professor Felix Driver. It reveals the lives of individuals of African, Arctic, Asian and America descent who made significant contributions to the history of exploration and geographical knowledge – and at times their formal recognition through the receipt of awards and honors. Such individuals include Abdullah Susi and James Chuma (below), who both were awarded Society's medals for their work in the 19th Century.



From left to right: Agnes Livingstone, Thomas Livingstone, daughter and son of David Livingstone, Abdullah Susi, James Chuma and Reverend Horace Waller, by R Allen & Sons, 1874

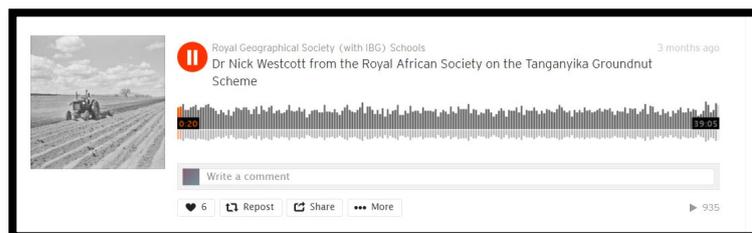
Crossing Continents Connecting Communities (2006-09). In partnership with Afghan, African, Chinese and Punjabi organisations the Society co-developed a series of exhibitions and online learning resources which were viewed by over 60,000 individuals.



Crossing Continents: Bombay African exhibition and learning partnership

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[Geographical subject knowledge podcasts](#). These interviews with higher education and other leading experts are published to update teachers' subject knowledge and to inspire A Level students. The Society has foregrounded colleagues of African heritage through podcasts with [Francisca Rockey and Louise Smith – Black Geographers initiative](#), [Dr Jazmin Scarlett - the dark geocultural heritage of the La Soufriere volcano](#), [Dr Pat Noxolo - How is creativity produced in the Caribbean](#) and [Jini Reddy - A search for magic in the Landscape](#). In addition, the wider podcast series include expert commentary from Higher Education geographers and others including the following podcast with the Royal African Society.



[Career profiles of Black heritage professional geographers](#). Within its work to promote the value of geography to further study and careers to all, the Society has highlighted the careers of professional geographers of Black heritage. These include [Samia Dumbuya - Campaigns Assistant](#), [Chipo Meke - Management Consultant](#), [Prof Christopher Jackson - Earth scientist](#) and [Caroline Yermosol - Disaster risk management](#).

Alongside these profiles we have also recognised and featured the work of Black teachers - such as [Charity Mhlanga](#) recipient of the Society's 2020 Excellent Teaching award – and the Black undergraduate geographer [Victoria Ayodeji](#).

[CARICUK](#). The Society has been pleased to work with the CARICUK project led by Dr Pat Noxolo which is exploring the themes of race and in/security in the Caribbean and the UK. This has included the creation of the Dreading the Map installation in the RGS's Map Room (created by sculptor Sonia Barratt through the shredding and braiding of from surplus RGS maps of the Caribbean) and an accompanying programme of new resources and training for teachers.



Dreading the Map-RGS Map Room 2021

7.3 Other relevant support for geography teachers.

There are several important other initiatives:

[Black Geographers](#). Established in April 2020 this initiative is working to tackle the erasure of black people in geography. It provides a space for #blackgeographers to network and connect, had

developed scholarship and internship programmes, undertakes research and provides a programme of events and training.

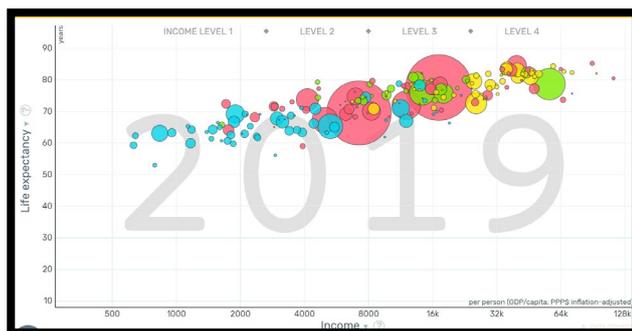
[Decolonise Geography](#). This twitter feed and network of 150+ geography teachers and educators is looking at ways to decolonise the curriculum.

[Inspirational Geographers](#). This collection of profiles of inspirational geographers includes representation geographers with African and diaspora backgrounds has been collated by geography teacher [Rachel Robinson](#).

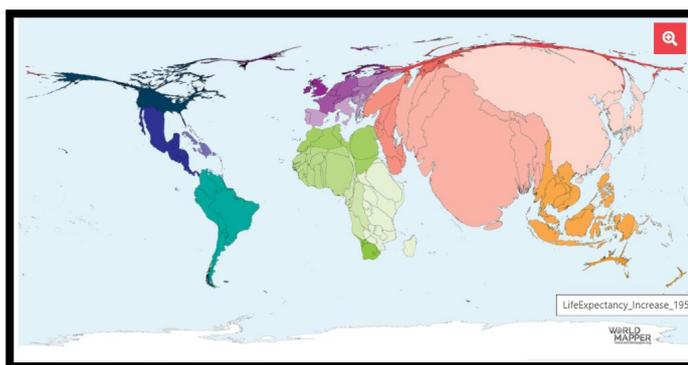
[Action research](#) papers by geography teachers such as [Starting a conversation about diversity in the classroom](#) by Hafsa Bobat, Hina Robinson & Charlotte Milner.

[Scottish curriculum developments](#). Geography Teacher [Mr Das](#) is currently working with geography teachers, Edinburgh County Council and the Royal Scottish Geographical Society to review elements of the geography course.

[WorldMapper](#) and [Gap Minder](#). These data led initiatives provide updated information, graphics, maps and cartograms revealing global conditions and change. They are widely used by geography teachers and they have been instrumental in connecting up-to-date statistics and data with the geography classroom.



Gap Minder: illustrating how the majority of countries experience life expectancies that exceed 60 years



World Mapper: Illustrating the countries which have experienced increase in life expectancy 1950–2015

8. Recommendations

That the positive contribution that geography can make to teaching about Africa and its diaspora be recognised and endorsed in the Inquiry's report and recommendations.

The APPG recommend the establishment of an Africa and its diaspora Geography Action Group. This group would be tasked to develop an action plan which, with appropriate support, would take

forward relevant recommendations from the Inquiry. The Group should include geography teachers, Higher Education geographers, diaspora groups, the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) and stakeholders including Exam Boards, Teacher Trainers and others. The Society would be pleased to work with the APPG in the initiation and work plan of this Action Group.

The Society notes that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) funded Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning programme⁷ will complete in December 2021. The Society recommends that FCDO, in partnership with the Department for Education, be encouraged to address relevant recommendations from the APPG's Inquiry in any future UK based educational programmes that they support.

The APPG should encourage funding bodies, including heritage, cultural and educational funders, to increase support for projects that create educational partnerships that address the outcomes of the Inquiry

That any future reviews of the geography curriculum and/or examination specifications take note and act on relevant recommendations from the Inquiry.

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Appendix 1: Requirements to teach about Africa and its diaspora in geography 5 – 18

Note: *Italics* text indicates where geography teachers will include African case studies and context within the study of wider geographical themes and concepts.

The National Curriculum Geography Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 (5-11)

- Human and Physical Geography. Understanding geographical similarities and differences through studying the human and physical geography of a small area of the United Kingdom, and of a small area in a contrasting non-European country (*an African locality is often selected as the contrasting non-European country*)
- **Environmental Knowledge.** The location of hot and cold areas of the world in relation to the Equator and the North and South Poles
- **Physical Geography.** Including: climate zones, biomes and vegetation belts, rivers, mountains, volcanoes and earthquakes, and the water cycle (*African equatorial, savannah and desert environments are often selected, as well as the study of Nile*)
- **Human Geography.** Including: types of settlement and land use, economic activity including trade links, and the distribution of natural resources including energy, food, minerals and water (*trade links with Africa and the Caribbean, typically exploring where food originates from are often selected*)

Key Stage 3 (11 – 14)

⁷ The RGS is a delivery partner to the Connecting Classrooms programme

- **Locational Knowledge.** Extend their locational knowledge and deepen their spatial awareness of the world's countries using maps of the world to focus on Africa, Russia, Asia, and the Middle East, focusing on their environmental regions, including deserts, key physical and human characteristics, countries and major cities
- **Place Knowledge.** Understand geographical similarities, differences and links between places through the study of human and physical geography of a region within Africa, and of a region within Asia
- **Physical Geography** relating to plate tectonics (*this may include case studies of tectonic events, such as the Haitian earthquake of 2010*)
- **Human Geography** relating to population and urbanisation; international development; economic activity in the primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary sectors; and the use of natural resources (*studies of population and urbanisation, as well as international development and tourism will often include African and Caribbean examples and contexts*)

GCSE Geography

- **Global Ecosystems and Biodiversity** – An overview of the distribution and characteristics of large scale natural global ecosystems (*African contexts and case studies will be included*)
- **Geography of the UK.** Knowledge and understanding of the UK's geography its human landscapes, changing economy and society, the importance of cultural and political factors, and its relationships with the wider world. (*This will include exploration of the ethnic and cultural diversity of the UK's population, international migration and wider cultural ties and links*)
- **Resources and their Management** (teachers may include a variety of African contexts and case studies for example: the mining of Cobalt in DRC, diamonds in West Africa, the growing of out-of-season flowers in Kenya)
- **Cities and Urban Society** – An overview of the causes and effects of rapid urbanisation and contrasting urban trends in different parts of the world with varying characteristics of economic and social development. (*Lagos is a popular case study of urbanisation*)
- **Global Economic Development Issues** – The causes and consequences of uneven development at global level as the background for considering the changing context of population, economy and society and of technological and political development in at least one poorer country or one that is within a newly emerging economy (*The social, economic and demographical characteristics of many different African nations will be explored in relation to the global context and an African nation may be selected as a case study of a poorer country and/or a newly emerging economy*)

A Level Geography

- **Landscape systems.** This unit includes the opportunity to study Drylands (*which will typically be explored using African examples and contexts*)
- **Global Systems and Global Governance.** This unit explores international trade and market access, patterns of development and life expectancy, processes underlying global population migration, how unequal flows of people, money, ideas and technology within global systems can promote stability, growth and development but can also cause inequalities, conflicts and injustices, and how unequal power relations enable some states to drive global systems to their own advantage and to directly influence geopolitical events (*numerous African contexts and case studies will be used to exemplify this unit*)
- **Changing Places.** This unit includes the opportunity to changing demographic and cultural characteristics; economic change and social inequalities or food production, circulation and consumption (*which will be exemplified through the use of Africa and diaspora contexts and case studies*)



- **Use of geographical data.** A Level geography also requires A Level young people to undertake informed and critical questioning of data sources, data reporting and presentation, to identify the misuse of data and to understand the ethical and socio-political implications of collecting, studying and representing geographical data. (*A range of data relevant to Africa and its diaspora will be used to exemplify this work ranging from the variety of socio-economic development indicators use to compare nations to census data that reveals the ethnic and religious nature of Britain's diverse communities*)