

# Consultation response

## ● Mayor's Education Inquiry

The London Mayor's Education Inquiry, which will run until September 2012, will explore the critical challenges facing London's primary and secondary schools.

<http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/young-people/education-training/mayors-education-inquiry>

### **Q.12 How can we improve the take-up of STEM subjects and modern foreign languages in London?**

We believe take up can be improved by focusing on supporting schools in teaching the E-Bacc in London, in which STEM and MFL are included; and on improved career information, and in particular information as to how all the enabling subjects cited in the Russell Group Report (2011) can provide the skill sets required by a very wide range of well paid and fulfilling careers.

The inquiry should also not forget the importance of geography, which is officially defined as a Part-STEM subject owing to its environmental science components). It offers a good way into STEM for some pupils and, therefore, ensuring that geography is well taught by specialist teachers at Key Stage 3 would be a good start. The potential increased role which programmes like the geography ambassador programme run by the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) – see Q 14 - can play in informing young people about career options and widening participation and access of young people to higher education in subjects such as geography.

### **Q.13 What kind of careers advice do young Londoners need and how can this be linked more strategically to employers and FE/HE?**

Young Londoners need practical advice that is as wide ranging as possible about the careers on offer and embraces knowledge of the skills of different career options on offer and what they require.

In our experience the careers services on offer have not met that need for many young people, alongside a lack of useful information for prospective students about higher education courses on offer and how the various options support future careers choices. In response the Society set up its own programme for those interested in following a career in geography, highlighting the wide range of careers that geographers head into. This information is available at <http://www.rgs.org/careers> and through the ambassadors programme (Q14).

Without information such as this there is a risk that young people, alongside their parents, will not see the ways in which more traditional and academic courses, such as geography, actually deliver great employability benefits. There are wide benefits from studying geography. In those schools where geography was strong, the subject contributed to satisfying pupils' curiosity about people and places and offered opportunities to develop a wide range of skills and knowledge (OFSTED 2011) and the Russell Group of Universities, along with the Universities Minister David Willetts MP, recognise A Level geography as one of the key 'facilitating' subjects for entry to degree level study.

### **Q.14 What good models of practice exist to help young people from the most disadvantaged groups access higher education?**

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The Society's Ambassadors programme recruits, trains and supports geographers currently at university and graduate geographers from the workplace to act as ambassadors for geography in the classroom. The ambassadors are able to introduce younger students to the benefits of studying at university, of studying geography and encourage them to pursue the subject further, acting as positive role models for pupils and illustrating specific and transferable skills that can be developed as a geographer and how they are used in the workplace. The scheme also offers schools the opportunity to strengthen links with their local Higher Education Institutes and businesses.

Through the Society's Geography Ambassadors programme, more than 1,200 presentations about the relevance of geography to further study and careers were provided to 37,000 school pupils last year alone. Having started in 2006 by providing visits to just ten schools, the Ambassador programme has grown rapidly and now covers all nine English regions and recruits Ambassadors from 47 universities and many different geographically-driven professions.

Our geography ambassadors play a key role in inspiring and raising awareness of opportunities and benefits of higher education amongst hard to reach communities in inner city schools, thus contributing significantly to the widening participation agenda. Further information about the scheme can be found at [www.rgs.org/ambassadors](http://www.rgs.org/ambassadors)

There is considerable potential to expand the programme for hard to reach pupils and schools, building on our success.

A second model that the Society has used successfully is in raising aspirations through VI form level fieldwork master classes. These residential weeks, led by the Society and fully funded, and supported by young Geography Ambassadors, have led to demonstrable development of confidence, skills and aspirations. So, too has the Society's sister project of supporting young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds in undertaking mentored 'gap' experiences. Further information on how this has encouraged young people to aim high, achieve and succeed in higher education is available, if desired.

**Q.15 What should every London school child know about their city and how can we help schools to achieve this?**

For London school children to learn about London means to learn about its geography: including its physical environments and the challenges they pose (eg flooding); its structure and evolution as a world city; where people live and work in London; the nature and locations of its different communities, including ethnic communities; its demography and demographic change; its place in the world as a centre of trade and finance; the migration of people to and from London and the causes of such migration; housing and land values in different parts of London; pollution and its links to health in different parts of London; and London as one of the world's most sustainable big cities. All this can readily be encompassed within existing Geography curricula.

Geography is the subject through which young people learn about the contemporary world in which they live – its people, places and environments and the links between them. Those topics and links can be studied at the scale of towns and cities, regions and nations, as well as globally. London offers the potential for a great integrated case study. However currently there are not the teaching resources to support teachers in teaching and learning about London through geography.

The Society would be well placed to create online teaching resources at KS3 and KS4 about the Geography of London, adding to the award winning resources currently on our website; and/or by developing new teacher professional development modules. For example, we have developed a Key Stage 3 teaching resource on London 2012 available freely on our website at [www.rgs.org/schools](http://www.rgs.org/schools), where a variety of other free resources for both teachers and students are available.



**Q.16 How do schools currently access opportunities to build partnerships across London and what more could be done to help them?**

We engage London schools to build partnerships through our education programme. A lot of resources are provided free, but we also encourage schools to become schools members. This enables opportunities for teachers to access high quality, affordable continuing professional development (CPD), networks and other benefits. The latter include being able to bring students to our 21st Century Challenges discussion series, as well as access to our study centre of 2 million maps, photographs and books, and specialist advice. Though the Society works to support the whole country, it is inevitable that schools in and around London would find it easier to benefit from some of these activities, particularly onsite events.

The Society has also run extensive exhibition and educational programmes to engage black and minority ethnic communities through geography, using the understanding that geography brings of place, community, migration and interconnections between the UK and other parts of the world. The subject provides a good basis for engaging the breadth of Britain's ethnic communities.

Enabling more schools to know about the options that such partnerships with relevant Learned Societies provide; offering sponsored taster partnerships for one year; and supporting the Society to develop local networks of geography teachers in all London boroughs (building on the pilot ones we have) would all be good places to start.

Dr Rita Gardner CBE  
Director  
Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

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