

Teaching the world

Over recent months, a flurry of consultations, drafts and ministerial announcements has signalled major changes to the school curriculum. These changes will fundamentally affect what is taught, how it's examined, how schools will be held accountable for performance and, for those in the final years of their schooling, how A-levels will be differentiated from AS-levels.

It's undoubtedly good news that the government intends to retain geography's compulsory status in the curriculum between the ages of five and 14. The National Curriculum's vision for geography is to 'inspire in pupils a curiosity and fascination about the world and its people' and to equip them with 'knowledge of diverse places, people, resources and environments, together with a deep understanding of the Earth's key physical and human processes'. These statements are encouraging. So, too, is the clear support for the use of maps and fieldwork at all stages, and for a better balance between human and physical geography.

As a reader of *Geographical*, you'll hopefully agree that knowledge of geography is essential for all young people. Without an understanding of where places are, how can anyone make sense of the news or the weather forecast? Without knowledge of the planet's key physical and human characteristics, how do we make sense of the differences between tropical rainforest and desert, or know how our population is distributed or where key natural resources are? The new curriculum proposals rightly put more of this 'what and where' back into the geography curriculum.

More than that, without studying the environmental, social and economic processes that bring about change and explain differences and interactions among places, societies and environments, how can we understand the present, or start to plan for the future? The National Curriculum proposals also clearly focus on this 'how and why' of geography. In doing so, the curriculum anchors the study of geographical processes back into the locational context of real places and countries, rather than as abstract thematic studies.

It's a curriculum that focuses on the basics of geography. The Society welcomes this and believes that in the hands of good teachers, the basics can be taught in imaginative and inspiring ways that will engage young people. We see the 5-14 curriculum providing a sound underpinning of factual knowledge to prepare pupils to study at GCSE and A-level the topics that confront us all, globally, as citizens and that are inherently geographical,



such as climate change, pollution, food, water and energy security, and globalisation.

Clearly, the demands on teachers will be great with such a degree of curriculum change, and we have already asked the government what support will be available for teachers - either directly or through organisations such as ours - for professional development.

What worries us most at the Society is the proposal to bring in a new main target measure for school accountability based on eight subjects at GCSE and to reduce the perceived status of the English Baccalaureate family of GCSEs (which requires study of English, maths, a modern foreign language, science and geography or history). Under the new proposals, a young person can attain their eight good passes without necessarily studying either geography or history at GCSE. If the government is keen to support the concept of a balanced education, this needs to be rethought to ensure that the core of subjects that young people study at GCSE includes English, maths, and at least one science, one humanity (either geography or history) and one language; with the further three subjects chosen more widely from among these or other academic subjects, the arts or vocational subjects.

The proposals on the new curriculum, on changes to GCSE, and on the main measure of accountability are still open for consultation, with closing dates of 16 April and 1 May respectively.

■ *Further details, including the Society's position on the proposals and links to the consultation materials, can be found on the Society's website at www.rgs.org/schoolspolicy*

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) promotes enjoyment and understanding of our world. Membership is open to all. You may use geography in your profession, have a thirst for geographical knowledge or a passion for travel. *Geographical* is the Society's magazine and is available as part of membership. To find out more, call the Membership Office on 020 7591 3080



ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY (WITH IBG)

SELECTION OF EVENTS FOR APRIL

Until 7 April

Visions of the world (Exhibition, Lancaster)

New lands and cultures have always attracted travellers and explorers, and photography has brought lasting and captivating insights into the world's people, places and environments. Final week of this stunning exhibition from the RGS-IBG archives. Venue: Lancaster Maritime Museum, Custom House, St George's Quay, Lancaster, LA1 1RB.

📍 *Entry is free to RGS-IBG members and museum ticket holders. For further information, visit tinyurl.com/a5qzho*

11 April, 7.30

In the footsteps of the 1868 British Abyssinian Magdala Campaign (Lecture, Kendal)

Using extensive illustrations, Dr John Macfarlane describes retracing this extraordinary military expedition, which marched 650 kilometres across unknown mountainous terrain in Ethiopia to rescue the British Consul from an 'impregnable' 3,000-metre fortress. Venue: The Box, Kendal College Media and Arts Campus, Station Road, Kendal, LA9 6BT.

📍 *Tickets: RGS-IBG members free, non-members £5 on the door.*

15 April, 2.30pm

Western crossings (Be Inspired, London)

The Blue Mountains in New South Wales are intersected by precipitous ravines and rise to an elevation of 1,215 metres. Aboriginal Australians knew of routes through; however, the rugged landscape barred early British colonists from pastoral expansion. Richard Cox outlines the first colonists' crossings in 1813 by Gregory Blaxland, William Lawson and WC Wentworth.

📍 *Tickets: RGS-IBG members free, non-members £5; pre-booking required. Call 020 7591 3044 or email showcase@rgs.org*

16 April, 7pm

Hot and wet, hot and dry: painting rainforests and deserts (Lecture, Truro)

Travelling on foot, canoe or raft, Tony Foster carries painting and camping equipment into the heart of wild country, painting for months in extreme local conditions. The artist tells of his adventures in primary rainforest in Guyana, Costa Rica and Honduras, and experiences in Death Valley and the Mojave and Sonoran deserts.

📍 *For further information, visit www.rgs.org/southwest*

16 April, 7.30pm

Around the world by clipper (Lecture, Norwich)

Graham Patrick recounts the many and varied experiences he had while crewing for five months of the gruelling 2010-11 Clipper Round the World Yacht Race, which took him from Cape Town to San Francisco. Venue: Kent Room, Assembly House, Theatre Street, Norwich, NR2 1RQ.

📍 *Open to all; RGS-IBG and Geographical Association members free, non-members £3 on the door. For further information, visit www.rgs.org/eastanglia*

29 April, 2.30pm

Everest pioneer: the photographs of Captain John Noel (Be Inspired, London)

As part of the Society's event series to mark the 60th anniversary of the successful 1953 ascent of Mount Everest, Sandra Noel recounts her father's role as a pioneer of Everest photography and cinematography.

📍 *Tickets: RGS-IBG members free, non-members £5; pre-booking required. Call 020 7591 3044 or email showcase@rgs.org*



The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is a leading world centre for geographers and geographical learning. One of our aims is to stimulate the awareness and enjoyment of the subject to a diverse range of people.

Geography is about the understanding of the people, places and environments of our world, the processes by which they are changing, and the interconnections between them - both locally and globally.

The Society carries out a wide range of activities to support its aims. We support research groups; promote geography within the national curriculum; produce scholarly publications; provide training in scientific field techniques and expeditions; offer information through our large map collection, library and picture library; and engage the wider public through our popular national lecture series.

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