

Response ID ANON-B1Q8-JJ18-S

Submitted to Curriculum and Assessment Review
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Foreword from the Review Chair

Background to the Review

Why does the Review matter?

What is in scope of the Review?

About this call for evidence

Who is this call for evidence for?

Section 1: About you

1 Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

Section 1: About you

3 If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, which of the below best describes which part of the sector your organisation represents? [If more than one applies, please select the one that you think is most important to understanding your consultation response.]

Professional association

Please describe:

4 What is the name of your organisation?

Organisation name:

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

5 What is your role within the organisation?

Job role:

Director or Research, Education, Professional

I am responding on behalf of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), the UK's learned society and professional body for Geography. We draw on our expert and in-depth knowledge of Geography, its teaching in schools and higher education, and the needs of professional geographers - employers and employees.

In preparing this response, we consulted with our members who are primary and secondary Geography teachers and school members; academic geographers and heads of the ca. 70 Geography departments in UK higher education institutions; professional members (employees and employers drawing value from geographical skills and knowledge in the workplace); the standing committees for these three communities (Education, Research and Higher Education; and Professional) and our more general Fellowship (ca 15k members). We have and do work closely with other sector bodies and associations, notably the Geographical Association.

In this response we signal the value of a geographical education for all young people, the strengths of the current provision, and some areas in need of attention for the geography curriculum.

We offer our support to the next stage of the review – the subject deep-dives – if our helpful. We would be pleased to convene an expert working group(s) with the Geographical Association, to make specific evidence-based recommendations.

Section 1: About you

6 What is your name?

Name:

Dr Catherine Souch

7 What is your email address?[Please note: If you are willing to be contacted about your submission, please provide your email address. You do not have to give your email address, and your views will be considered whether or not you provide this.]

Email address:
c.souch@rgs.org

8 Are you happy to be contacted directly about your response?[Please note: The Review may wish to contact you directly about your responses to help our understanding of the issues. If we do, we will use the email address you have given above.]

Yes

9 Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?

No

Reason for confidentiality:

Definitions

Section 2: General views on curriculum, assessment, and qualifications pathways

10 What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways are working well to support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

What is working well?:

The current statutory entitlement to education in Geography is a strength of the UK educational system and it must be retained. Geography is the core subject through which young people learn about issues such as globalisation, development, sustainability, resilience, interdependence, inequality and climate change. Geography enables the development of world knowledge and a 'sense of place'. Geography is one of few subjects that provides students with significant insight into the world of today - what is happening and why - and equips them to develop and evaluate potential solutions to pressing global challenges.

Geography is a subject that develops young people's curiosity and helps them to apply that curiosity and learning in real-world contexts. This real-world focus of Geography is a strength. It builds skills of problem solving and critical thinking and understanding of what constitutes evidence, alongside the ability to critically evaluate information and to develop informed judgements. Importantly, geography encourages students to understand how people from different backgrounds and in different places other than their own experience the world in different ways.

Geography's focus on the integrated study of people, places and the environment is integral in promoting a holistic understanding of contemporary global issues (e.g. inequality, injustice, climate change). This is essential to shaping a fairer, just and more inclusive society on both a local and global scale, for both people and the environment.

Geography does (and should) teach young people about the UK and the wider world and the interconnections and dependencies between them. It is a subject through which students can see themselves in the curriculum and explore the ways in which they can have impact and make a difference. It supports young people to thrive and become well-rounded citizens, who appreciate the diversity and pluralism of our society, and to understand their own agency.

Place-based understanding is important. It enhances young people's ability to make connections from local to global, to understand solutions, and to feel a greater sense of agency in the place they are starting from. An effective geographical curriculum holds the potential to give a foundation to the practice of environmental citizenship throughout life. It equips students to recognise differential impacts of policies on communities, sectors and regions; and to acknowledge the global context and key drivers of change.

Geography is a subject that delivers both STEM and SHAPE ways of thinking, skills and insights. Importantly this includes core communication (literacy and oracy), digital, numeracy and data skills. At GCSE is the core - anchor - social science subject. It is essential in the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum. Its position in the EBacc must be retained.

Geography develops skills of enquiry and analysis with specific insights into geospatial (location) data and mapping. All are essential in the development of informed and engaged global citizens, and for many future jobs, notably for the burgeoning green economy.

The requirement for young people to do fieldwork, and to have structured learning in and out of the classroom and experience the outdoors, is essential and should feature at all stages of the National Curriculum and at GCSE and A-level (and in other relevant post-16 pathways). Fieldwork is a powerful mode of learning which delivers an array of skills, behaviours and capabilities. For some students it is particularly stimulating and enjoyable, providing them with the foundation and motivation to pursue lifelong learning. Research shows that time spent outdoors and with nature is directly linked to benefits for health and well-being. Programmes such as the National Education Nature Park have significant potential in this realm. More curriculum time needs to be given to higher quality fieldwork experiences and creative, critical thinking: to prepare students for their time in the field and to give them time to reflect on the experience and what they learnt.

Geographical skills, including those in the use and analysis of geospatial (location) data, must remain integrated into the curriculum and specifications with more support for teachers. Geography provides a rich context for the development of numeracy, data and digital skills in schools. The ability to reason with numbers is an essential feature of life in the 21st century: vital for the economy, for our society and for us as individuals. Such skills are key

for employability, notably for a greener and more digital economy. An understanding of spatial (location) data is crucial to interpret, understand and problem-solve current day issues. The use and analysis of spatial data and Geographic Information Science (GIS) underpin modern life, enabling the logistics which keep supermarket shelves stocked, efficient farming, keep shipping and aircraft moving and facilitating the work of every government department and public body. The Geospatial Commission estimate that smarter use of such data will unlock £11 billion. Geography is the school subject where the GIS experts of the future (geographers, data scientists, engineers, designers etc) will encounter this technology for the first time.

Climate change education must remain anchored in Geography. Geography is unique in its capacity to teach students about why and how climate change is happening, what the impacts of this are on places and people from a range of backgrounds, and how these impacts can be mitigated. It is one of few subjects that are also able to explore issues like climate anxiety, political influence and radical climate action. These are all issues that naturally arise through the teaching of climate change through from a geographical perspective.

11 What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways should be targeted for improvements to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

What should be improved?:

Updated content: Elements of the geography curriculum do need to be updated, notably in terms of the teaching of topics such as climate change and sustainability, international development, and geospatial (location/mapping) methods.

Reduction in content: At all levels the curriculum is packed, but we highlight GCSE in particular. There is repetition that could be removed between KS2 and KS3, and also between KS3 and GCSE. We look forward to participating in more detailed discussions on this topic as part of planned subject deep dives.

Climate Change and sustainability. The futures of young people today will be significantly shaped by the climate and ecological emergency, and they will also be impacted by growing inequality globally and in the UK. Students need to better understand not just the causes, but also the implications of climate change and biodiversity loss, and to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to act – to develop solutions, and approaches to mitigation and adaptation.

In this context, while we support calls for more teaching of climate change and sustainability across the curriculum, we firmly believe that Geography is and should remain the core/anchor subject for teaching and learning of climate change and sustainability in the national curriculum. The inherent nature of the subject brings understanding of the environment and people together – the climate system, how it works and how it is changing, with the unequal impacts on places and communities.

Sustainability and climate education through geography offers opportunities for students to develop criticality and problem-solving skills, and to take part in action-based learning, working individually, collaboratively or within the community. Engaging students in collective action can be particularly effective for empowering them and instilling hope. It is a powerful route for students see themselves in any new curriculum and to feel that they have agency. A revised geography curriculum must make explicit reference to the climate emergency, to climate action, and to climate justice. Even the youngest children can think about, and act with, sustainability in mind. Teaching for sustainability needs to start early, not only because young children are capable of engaging with it, but because attitudes begin to become entrenched in KS2. This will require new ways of teaching existing and new content and will require support and CPD for some teachers.

Quality climate education should also enable young people to recognise their place in nature and the world and become active stewards of natural environments and our shared finite resources.

Fieldwork: Quality geography education encourages learning by doing in the real world, enabling students to work independently and with others. Quality fieldwork should be delivered for all students at stage appropriate levels with clear progression between stages. We do have concerns about the current delivery of fieldwork and of its assessment. This has been documented by Ofsted (2023).

The assessment of fieldwork at GCSE – particularly through 'unseen fieldwork' – presents challenges for some pupils and centres. Incorporation of a wider range of learning styles and methods into assessment would help to evaluate a broader range of learners. This would serve to recognise achievement and progression across a broader body of each cohort. Attention also needs to be directed to the NEA and its assessment in the context of AI (see our response to Q 22).

There are issues in terms of equality of student access and participation in fieldwork, with implications for student attainment and progress. Where this is due to resources in schools, this needs to be addressed, and teachers also need to be supported. The National Education Nature Park has a potentially significant role to play here.

Virtual class-based field trips are helpful for encountering environments without the logistical and financial challenges of field classes. Through interactive digital simulations, students can experience diverse environments, expanding their sense of place and enhancing their understanding of both physical and human geography. These are a useful aide but should not replace field-based teaching.

GIS and digital mapping have moved on considerably in the last decade. This needs to be reflected in a new curriculum. These are critical skills for the economy, society and environment. A greater emphasis on spatial data and its analysis in geography skills is essential for individual students, both in terms of employability and citizenship. This element of the curriculum needs to be rethought, starting in primary, with progression through all levels of the curriculum. We know that, with careful handling of core concepts and practical applications, there is huge potential, to excite students to embrace powerful technological advances., building confidence and critical awareness of vital digital and numeracy skills. This will require investment to upskill all teachers so they can properly integrate geospatial work / GIS into their teaching. Working directly with GIS and digital mapping gives students clear opportunities to engage with vital questions about the origins and veracity of claims based on data and encourages them to hone critical skills. It is a key opportunity in the school curriculum to interrogate the authority of data and apply these lessons to the exercise of citizenship. This can be powerfully

illustrated when working with data generated by students themselves. It is also an opportunity to raise ethical questions about how data on people (the students) are collected and used (e.g. from Apps, social media).

Progression and pathways. There needs to be clearer education and careers pathway guidance, to encourage young people to recognise the 'value' of geography in educational / social / citizenship / career-progression terms - from the start of their school experience to the end. This is particularly the case for subjects such as Geography where there is not one clear employment outcome, yet overall employment outcomes are very strong because of the knowledge and skills developed (Reference: <https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/what-do-graduates-do>).

Additional post-16 pathways need to be developed focused on the application of geographical knowledge and skills, particularly in the contexts of the green and digital economies. These could be standalone qualifications, or involve geographical concepts and methods being embedded in existing/new qualifications (focused on the green economy; sustainability; data science). There is huge potential for more qualifications that focus on spatial (location) data. This is an area where the Society is keen to play an active role. See Q.28.

A sustainable curriculum. Teachers need to be supported in transitioning to the new curriculum – and understanding their part in the process of curriculum making – with appropriate recognition (and appropriate resources) for teachers with other specialisms (out of field teachers) who will be teaching geography at secondary level, as well as primary practitioners who may need to develop materials for a range of subjects.

Section 3: Social justice and inclusion

12 In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage?

Barriers for socioeconomically disadvantaged:

All students in all localities should have equal access to a broad and rich curriculum. Currently there is inequity of provision and access which should be addressed.

Low-income communities are disproportionately impacted most by climate and environmental change, in the UK and globally. Yet these are the very communities often disadvantaged or disproportionately excluded from the current educational system. We draw attention to the recent study of more than 2,400 school students aged 11-14 in England about their views on climate change and sustainability education (Climate Change and Sustainability Education: A survey of students in England - UCL Discovery). Children from more advantaged backgrounds were more likely to want to learn about climate change and sustainability, to want to do more to look after the environment and to believe that adults are not doing enough. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to engage. This is concerning but unsurprising given the other challenges many of these students are facing.

A quality geography education supports learners to understand the impacts of climate change and globalisation in a way that is relevant and localised to them. It also helps equip students with the skills to address these challenges – enhancing their confidence and aspirations.

For geography, as with other subjects, the shortage of specialist teachers impacts on the experience of learners, and often disproportionately those experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. More could be done to ensure subject specialists are encouraged into teaching.

In addition to the barriers common to all subjects, for geography there are two specific areas of concern related to:

Fieldwork and the unequal access to the benefits for learning and development of critical skills through fieldwork, and the benefits also in terms of students' health and well-being from being outdoors and engaging with nature. There should not be financial barriers to access quality fieldwork. It can be delivered to a high quality anywhere. It is in the field that students really engage and learn about the natural world in which they live. Promoting field-based learning is critical and inability to participate is a key barrier for student access and participation, and for student attainment and progress. We also note that children from disadvantaged backgrounds also experience many barriers to participating in nature-based activities outside school. These include lack of availability, cultural exclusion and safety concerns.

The challenges of digital inclusion and addressing inequalities in access to technology, IT and AI. For geography specifically this has implications for the learning and teaching of geospatial technologies (those associated with location data, Earth observation and GIS) which are critical skills for students progressing into all disciplines. It also has implications for the completion of the A-level NEA (see later comments).

Ref: <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10195286/>

13 In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other characteristics (e.g. disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion or belief etc.)

Barriers based on protected characteristics:

We note that geography at A-level is one of the most gender balanced subjects. Given the part-STEM nature of the subject, it is an important qualification through which to deliver the knowledge and skills of science, numeracy and data analysis to female students, in addition to substantive discipline-based knowledge.

However, the situation with respect to ethnic diversity of students at higher (A) levels is concerning. We refer to the research commissioned by the Society (2019), on the 'Geography of Geography' (Geography of geography: the evidence base - RGS). This investigated who is and is not studying Geography at GCSE and who is, and is not, studying the subject at A-level. Over the last decade there has been a very significant increase (>100k/year) in the number of young people studying Geography at GCSE. This increase in entries has come predominantly from groups who had been less likely to take geography

GCSE previously – notably, disadvantaged pupils, BAME students, and those with lower prior attainment (Geography of geography: the evidence base - RGS). However, progression to A-level is disproportionately lower for these very students. Numerous reasons have been suggested – increasing uptake of pure-STEM subjects; lower engagement by these students in core topics of the geography curriculum (comments elsewhere on climate change and sustainability); out-dated ideas, stereotypes and representations of parts of the world; and less clarity in terms of employment opportunities and outcomes. These could all be addressed or mitigated through a refreshed geography curriculum.

Ref: <https://www.rgs.org/about-us/what-is-geography/geography-in-schools/geography-of-geography-the-evidence-base>

14 In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers in continuing to improve attainment, progress, access or participation for learners with SEND?

Barriers based on SEND:

Students with SEND have very different needs and require a variety of extra support. In geography this may be in the form of fieldwork accessibility (including the social and emotional aspects of being away from family) or resource modification (e.g. colour vision deficiency (CVD) access to maps, graphs, infographics). Effective accessibility provision should be a high priority for investment. This will require sustained investment in both training and resources as well as curriculum design, as well as for digital assessments, when used.

15 In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any enablers that support attainment, progress, access or participation for the groups listed above? [e.g. socioeconomically disadvantaged young people, pupils with SEND, pupils who are otherwise vulnerable, and young people with protected characteristics]

Enablers:

Geography is a multi-faceted subject that draws on a variety of skills (e.g. written, numerical, data, map skills), which enable young learners to draw on their strengths. It supports a variety of analytical techniques due to the variety of topics and skills it assesses. It creates space for students from social disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds to have a voice and can instil in them a sense of agency.

Fieldwork in geography is especially important for disadvantaged and some SEND students who may have fewer opportunities to learn outside and benefit from being outdoors.

Section 4: Ensuring an excellent foundation in maths and English

16 To what extent does the content of the national curriculum at primary level (key stages 1 and 2) enable pupils to gain an excellent foundation in a) English and b) maths? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim? [Please note, we invite views specifically on transitions between key stages in section 9.]

English and maths - primary content:

Foundation skills in English and maths are fundamental to all students. Other subjects beyond maths and English, also support the development of literacy, oracy, digital, numeracy and data (mathematical) skills. Geography is a prominent example with a distinctive strength at the present time: it requires the application of these skills in an integrated way in real world contexts.

We draw particular attention to our sustained programme of work on numeracy, data and digital skills delivered through geography (Data Skills in Geography - RGS). The collection, analysis and presentation of data in many forms runs through all stages of the geography curriculum. This has been aligned with the Nuffield Foundation (Q-Step | Study Social Science | Nuffield Foundation) and now with the Core Maths (Geography and Core Maths - RGS). It is underpinned by research led by the Royal Society and Royal Statistical Society (Embedding statistics at A Level) and the British Academy (Count Us In). A number of subjects at school – geography foremost amongst them - provide a rich context for the development of data skills in young people – not just in subjects which are formally labelled as mathematics or science.

Ref: <https://www.rgs.org/schools/projects-and-partnerships/data-skills-in-geography>

<https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/students-teachers/q-step#:~:text=Q-Step%20is%20a%20major%20strategic%20programme%20designed%20to,to%20the%20>

<https://www.rgs.org/schools/projects-and-partnerships/geography-and-core-maths>

<https://royalsociety.org/-/media/policy/Publications/2015/embedding-statistics-at-a-level-07-2015.pdf>

17 To what extent do the English and maths primary assessments* support pupils to gain an excellent foundation in these key subjects? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support this aim? *These include SATs at the end of key stage 2, the phonics screening check and the multiplication tables check.

English and maths - primary assessment:

Some schools do prioritise English and maths assessments over providing curriculum time for subjects such as geography. This fails to recognise the reinforcing benefits for student progression in English and maths of applying such skills and knowledge in integrated ways to urgent real- world problems.

18 To what extent does the content of the a) English and b) maths national curriculum at secondary level (key stages 3 and 4) equip pupils with the knowledge and skills they need for life and further study? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim?

English and maths - secondary content:

We reiterate our comments in answer to question 16 that subjects beyond maths and English support the development of literacy, oracy, digital, numeracy and data (mathematical) skills. Geography is one such subject. There is strong evidence that documents the effectiveness of embedded learning through real-world applications and understanding (see Rawlings Smith and Pike (2023) (<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003386162>)).

The A-level NEA also helps students develop extended researching and writing skills, as well as data collection and analysis skills. These are core skills that support the transition to higher education.

We are also aware of the energising effects for learners of engaging with practical knowledge and skills that address some of the biggest challenges and concerns that young people live with, including climate change and biodiversity loss. These important themes are being explored by teachers and learners as part of the National Education Nature Park, which allows opportunity for the collection and analysis of geospatial data.

We recommend embracing multiple pathways towards developing and embedding such skills.

Retaining geography within the 'core' group of subjects taught at Key Stage Four (currently the EBacc) will go a long way in supporting the teaching of English and maths at this level, developing the transferrable skills that students are able to apply to these important subject areas such as essay writing, data analysis and presentation and critical thinking.

19 To what extent do the current maths and English qualifications at a) pre-16 and b) 16-19 support pupils and learners to gain, and adequately demonstrate that they have achieved, the skills and knowledge they need? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support these outcomes?

English and maths - qualifications:

See comments in response to questions 16 and 18.

20 How can we better support learners who do not achieve level 2 in English and maths by 16 to learn what they need to thrive as citizens in work and life? In particular, do we have the right qualifications at level 2 for these 16-19 learners (including the maths and English study requirement)?

Support for learners who do not achieve level 2 by 16:

We recommend embracing multiple pathways towards developing and embedding such skills.

Geography is a subject that enables the development of communication, oracy, numeracy, digital and data skills in the context of understanding the world in which young people live. Many learners are energised by engaging with practical knowledge and skills that addresses issues important to them, which affect them and their local communities, as well as issues of global concern.

21 Are there any particular challenges with regard to the English and maths a) curricula and b) assessment for learners in need of additional support (e.g. learners with SEND, socioeconomic disadvantage, English as an additional language (EAL))? Are there any changes you would suggest to overcome these challenges?

Challenges with curricula and assessment - changes to overcome these:

Section 5: Curriculum and qualification content

22 Are there particular curriculum or qualifications subjects* where: a) there is too much content; not enough content; or content is missing; b) the content is out-of-date; c) the content is unhelpfully sequenced (for example to support good curriculum design or pedagogy); d) there is a need for greater flexibility (for example to provide the space for teachers to develop and adapt content)? Please provide detail on specific key stages where appropriate.*This includes both qualifications where the government sets content nationally, and anywhere the content is currently set by awarding organisations.

Subject content:

We received a significant number of contents and suggestions from our communities of teachers, academics and professionals, and from young people. These are not all listed here. We would be delighted to collaborate with DfE to convene a working group on geography as part of the proposed subject deep-dives to work through these, collaborating with the Geographical Association and other sector bodies, including employers and representatives of higher education (the previous review resulted in the creation of ALCAB to advise on A level content).

Updated content: Elements of the geography curriculum do need to be updated, notably in terms of teaching of topics such as climate change and sustainability, international development, and geospatial (location/mapping) methods. Geography's unique importance is the understanding it provides on the relations between people and environments. This underpins many of the most pressing issues we face today and helps students in their development to become informed global citizens. The curriculum at all levels needs to be recast from this perspective.

Reduction in content: At all levels the curriculum is packed, but we highlight GCSE as requiring particular attention along with its relation to KS3. Across

the curriculum and specifications, there is some repetition of content which could be refined. Topics identified include hazards, coasts, rivers and population. More systematic assessment is required on this issue.

KS1 and KS2

At the primary level, geography should foster curiosity about the world, encouraging students to see themselves as explorers and problem-solvers across physical, human, and virtual realms. Fieldwork has a key role to play in this. Time spent outside and socialising is particularly important not just to learning but also health and well-being. Improvements have occurred in the amount of fieldwork undertaken at KS2 (following an OFSTED focus on subject specific learning) but it remains absent in some settings at KS1, which needs to be addressed.

All KS1 and KS2 pupils should have an opportunity to develop geospatial (mapping) skills. It is a requirement but needs development. Concepts, skills and tools of digital navigation should be introduced earlier on.

National adoption of agreed benchmarks for progression of knowledge through primary would help teachers better sequence the curriculum and plan to achieve, using the benchmarks as their guide. This would also make assessment more straightforward. Aligned with these benchmarks, access to an agreed progression of mapping and fieldwork skills would be useful as a tool to help teachers select the pitch and level required when planning the skills in.

KS3

KS3 needs to be a protected three-year entitlement with no encroachment of curriculum time to start teaching GCSE content.

KS3 should focus on the skill-building to be a geographer, whether this is skills of fieldwork, data presentation and analysis, GIS and maps, or critical thinking and enquiry. These are skills of value to all young people, whether they progress in geography or not. These should be underpinned by core concepts, recognising the speed at which technology advances. We need to build future capabilities - to develop skills in young people to thrive in future careers and make sense of our complex and dynamic world.

Geography learning across secondary education needs to develop greater breadth of learning. Key Stage 3 should not be a diluted version of GCSE and neither should there be repetition between GCSE and A-level.

There is a strong sense in the teaching community that sufficient rigour and standards can be maintained by cutting the areas of study - keeping those that really do affect the future of our students, emphasising the application of geographical knowledge- and radically trimming much of the rest.

There also needs to be more comprehensive careers advice so that students make informed choices about the subjects they will study. Teachers will need expanded career advice capacity and a strong understanding of the different routes available if they are to better support their students in the ways envisaged.

GCSE

1. The quantity of content. It is almost universally agreed amongst teachers that there is too much content at GCSE level geography. The volume of content needs to be manageable and comfortably fit within teaching hours. It needs to allow more time to draw in contemporary geographical events and issues, whether environmental, social, economic or geopolitical. The optionality approach used in GCSE History may be one option.

We need to ensure the progression of topics from KS3 to A Level builds on processes, theories and concepts and not just repeating them.

2. Content also needs to be refreshed to have more contemporary relevance and to be more applied. Those topics/issues covered need to be more relevant to the world of today and helpful in informing students about their future and the impact they may have on it. In this context, the curriculum needs to be flexible to change. The world is dynamic and Geography teaching needs to be responsive to this. The teaching community have suggested a broad range of updated content (e.g. topics such as UK landscapes could focus more on the applications of the understanding for clean power or the impact on/of flooding; concerns about air pollution could be linked to new road schemes or low traffic neighbourhoods; there could be more coverage of the geographies of health, conflict, global interdependence and food security; in teaching of climate change, and topics like glaciers and glaciation, there needs to be a greater link to societal implications of a warming world, sea level rise, water shortages and changes in migration etc). This all needs to be carefully thought through.

There are some areas that need urgent attention. For some global themes and aspects of development we urgently need to address outdated stereotypes about parts of the world. It is absolutely vital that all students feel represented by the curriculum they are learning, and that unbiased and balanced views are presented. There is huge potential to foreground learning from different (not just western) perspectives. An example here might be to use cities in, for example, Nigeria or India to talk about wealth, economy and technology rather than using traditional well established, even over-familiar, western examples. Such a refreshed approach in curriculum design to case-based learning offers opportunities to unpack themes that have been lively in research and wider commentary for some years but are underrepresented in the school curriculum. Engaging with a wider range of contexts and voices in exploring, for example cities, employment and technology, can integrate decolonial and anti-racist themes in important ways.

3. Fieldwork. Quality fieldwork is about learning not location. We recognise the huge practical barriers for many teachers in fulfilling current requirements about location. This puts a disproportionate burden on some teachers, exacerbated in schools with greater numbers of non-specialist teachers. Increasing costs (of coach hire and fieldwork equipment) has made some requirements (e.g. coastal fieldwork) unobtainable for many parents, even with school subsidies. There must be greater choice in themes and geographical enquiries. We argue strongly for the current requirements for the amount (two days) to be maintained, but for the requirements on location to be relaxed. Quality fieldwork (learning in the field) can be achieved locally and be inclusive.

More curriculum time needs to be given to higher quality fieldwork experiences and creative, critical thinking: to prepare students for their time in the field and to give them time on the experience and what they learnt.

Assessment of fieldwork needs to be revisited. Fieldwork in geography provides an excellent opportunity to give value to a broader range of assessments and skills (including teamwork and other skills highly valued by employers but rarely exercised or assessed within most of the rest of the academic curriculum). Fieldwork questions in exam papers are very divisive, especially for EAL and SEND learners. There is a consensus that questions about unseen fieldwork are not helpful and disproportionately disadvantage under-performing students. These students have probably benefited in enhancing their geographical understanding by carrying out fieldwork but encounter barriers when attempting exam questions due to the wording or questions or presentation of evidence. If fieldwork is to be assessed through exams, then it should also focus on what students did, what they learned from this, or problem solving through which candidates can reflect on their fieldwork experiences.

4. Geospatial (GIS, location, mapping skills). As noted in Q11. The teaching of this topic needs to be significantly updated. We recommend a specific working group as part of any geography deep-dive to rethink delivery of core GIS/geospatial concepts and methods, how to support teachers better in this rapidly developing field, and investments in technology that would be needed. Such a group would include teachers and industry leaders such as Ordnance Survey and Esri UK. This curriculum needs to include consideration of trust in data, authoritative data sources, as well as the science of our 'the blue dot', how such location data generated by the students themselves are used and by whom, along with considerations of equity and ethics (of access and impact). These are critical elements of digital literacy and judgement in the creation and use of data.

Geographical skills should better integrated into broader subject contents, not taught as a separate unit. Assessment should follow likewise.

A-level

The general sense is that A-level is generally fit for purpose, but the content needs to be more forward-looking with greater attention on contemporary and future issues. Also, it needs to be more flexible to allow it to be more responsive to the values of society and young people today and into the future (e.g. on issues such as climate action, environmental and social justice, and inequality). Any review of content should be undertaken in collaboration with colleagues in higher education, as was achieved with ALCAB in the last review.

NEA (project)

The Geography A-level NEA is valued as a means for students to learn about research; to develop critical thinking, problem solving and data collection and analysis skills; to undertake place-based research on a topic that interests them; to gain a deeper understanding of (and build connections with) a community or environment; to apply concepts and classroom learning; and to have experience of extended writing. These are all skills important for progression to further study and to the professional workplace.

However, some teachers do express concerns - for both students and teachers - about the disproportionate amount of time the NEA takes; the advantage to students in schools which may have more resources, time and access to conducting the fieldwork required for this piece of work; and the (unrealistic) expectation that students can complete the write-up of this piece of work without support from their teachers. Concerns are also expressed about the reliability of assessment and the independence of the students in undertaking the study. There is also concern about the impacts (present and future) of AI generated work. It is also important to recognise that the NEA is teaching skills (e.g. of standardised referencing), and using Office products not covered elsewhere in the curriculum (this places additional demands on teachers).

The technical requirements should be refined to provide more coherence with the NEA assessment undertaken in other A levels, notably around guidance and word length.

In terms of responding to the challenges of AI, there may be opportunities to learn from the EPQ and how that is assessed, with more attention on students' reflections on their learning (why did you do what you did? what did you get out of it?). But this would require time for teachers to provide a viva style discussion with candidates to draw out their thinking.

23 Are there particular changes that could be made to ensure the curriculum (including qualification content) is more diverse and representative of society?

Changes to ensure curriculum is more diverse and representative of society:

Please also see our response to Q22. GCSE Point 1 above.

This needs to be carefully considered across the Geography curriculum, with particular attention to the teaching of globalisation and international development. Outdated and inappropriate development models and Anglocentric stereotypes and language need to be removed, and new approaches adopted. It is vital that all students feel represented by the curriculum they are learning, and that unbiased and balanced views are presented. There is huge potential to foreground learning from different (not just western) perspectives and to use case studies (from the Global South) to talk about wealth, economy and technology or sustainability, for example, rather than using traditional western cities. Opportunities should be made to draw on students' own knowledge and experience from different places and cultures they know well.

Recognising that as well as knowledge there are different views and ideas about places and how they should be used for example, introduces learning of empathy as children in earlier stages begin to think from others' perspectives and understand or are at least open to, other points of view.

The teaching of climate change should be explored in an intersectional way, both within the subject of geography, and across other subjects too, with a focus on climate justice and the impact of inequalities. This could help learners to appreciate diversity and pluralism in our society and the idea that their experience (particularly given the UK's global location) may not be the norm. This would contribute to the aims of the curriculum in terms of addressing injustices, helping learners to understand historic responsibilities associated with climate change in the Global North and by those more privileged, and

the unequal burden placed on already marginalised communities. In this way, students would have the opportunity to hear from underrepresented voices. By learning about these disparities, the curriculum can increase awareness of social inequities, instil values of empathy, and empower young people to advocate for fair and just solutions.

24 To what extent does the current curriculum (including qualification content) support students to positively engage with, be knowledgeable about, and respect, others? Are there elements that could be improved?

Respect for others:

We refer to our responses to Q22. GCSE Point 1 and Q23 above.

A core tenet of geography is the understanding and respect of similarity and difference locally, regionally and globally, and the recognition that global environmental, economic and political processes and events have uneven implications. It is a subject that also recognises and values different ways of knowing and different traditions of knowledge production (for example, indigenous land-use, approaches to climate change, paths to economic development) and of instilling values of care for the environment and global concerns about people's treatment of Earth, given the climate and biodiversity crises.

Social and environmental issues also present opportunities for students to share their own cultural heritage and connections to other parts of the world, fostering a sense of global citizenship which is a key indicator for measuring progress on SDG Goal 4: Quality Education

Our world is more divided than ever. As well as addressing current areas of concern (noted above re international development), as the curriculum is refreshed there should be attention to integration of topics such as borders and conflicts; sites of new development colonising the global commons (oceans / Antarctica /space) etc.

Climate justice recognises the disproportionate impacts of the climate emergency on those already oppressed and marginalised and acknowledges the intersectionality of these. Through this lens, students can understand how protected characteristics such as race, gender, disability and socioeconomic status intersect and influence who is most affected by climate change, who has contributed the least and who has power in exacerbating, mitigating, or adapting to climate change. By learning about these disparities, the curriculum can increase awareness of social inequities, instil values of empathy, and empower young people to advocate for fair and just solutions. This is a core element of quality geographical education.

25 In which ways does the current primary curriculum support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for life and further study, and what could we change to better support this?

Primary - skills and knowledge needed for life and further study:

Pupils need to be prepared with skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, innovation and creativity, communication and ethical awareness, whilst developing values which empower students to be agents of change and to care for people and planet.

At primary level, there needs to be better support for generalist teachers. Subjects such as geography require a good understanding of a wide range of geographical topics and themes – geography will always be taught better when a teacher understands how geographical themes are interconnected and is able to lead a cohesive curriculum that builds on knowledge and skills progression rather than 'patching in' geographical elements where they feel they fit. Many primary teachers do not feel confident in their own subject knowledge, and therefore curriculums can be lacking in detail and fail to show students that much of their geographical understanding can overlap (both with other geographical topics and also with other subjects). Much more support is needed, in the form of professional development training and also in curriculum planning and resourcing, to ensure that all primary schools are preparing their students adequately to think like geographers.

As part of a systematic review of way finding/mapping skills (see comments above) specific attention needs to be directed to this in primary.

There must be an opportunity for all pupils to undertake fieldwork and to spend time outdoors (see comments above).

26 In which ways do the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work, and what could we change to better support this?

Secondary - skills and knowledge for life and further study:

Geography helps students develop specialist knowledge on many of the key issues affecting society today: climate change, sustainability, inequality, migration, development, global instability. This knowledge is of critical importance in the development of informed citizens for life and for work. Geography also helps deliver a broad range of skills – subject specific and transferable skills – of communication, problem solving, critical thinking, in evaluating evidence, in collection and analysis of data.

With effective subject-specific careers education, subjects like geography will be able to inform students of the education and career pathways available to them whilst also demonstrating how the subject knowledge they are learning in the classroom is applied in the real world by real people. Talking to students about career options and how they can use their geographical (and other) skills should not be limited to bespoke careers education activities in schools. If careers education becomes a normalized part of curriculum content, using real world examples of people doing jobs and using skills to demonstrate and enhance subject knowledge - students will better understand the content they are learning and how it applies to them. The relevance, and enjoyment, of studying the subject will be enhanced. Programmes such as the Society's Choose Geography initiative have a very important role to play in this realm.

Green skills:

The futures of young people today will be significantly shaped by the climate and ecological emergency. Equipping students with green skills will contribute to the mitigation and adaptation of these challenges whilst preparing them to participate in the green economy (World Economic Forum, 2020). To meet the UK's net zero targets, public awareness and acceptance of carbon reduction measures must increase. School education plays a vital role in ensuring fair and just transitions to net zero by shaping 'lifelong career choices', so greater support and coordination from government is needed to bring these transitions to a reality. This can be progressed through increased knowledge and awareness of students and, through them, their families and communities.

A 'green workforce' will be key to delivering net zero, on the government's Clean Energy mission, and on the UK's targets for environmental improvements. Skills England (2024) state that 'a fifth of all workers (19%) will have a core role in delivering net zero, with a further fifth (21%) helping enable the transition. The rate of growth of jobs in this area is four times the average growth in other sectors'. Some of these jobs are in energy supply and transmission including solar, wind and nuclear; land use including non-livestock agriculture and potentially food processing; buildings construction and retrofit; hydrogen and carbon capture and storage; and electric vehicle and battery manufacturing. But they are also jobs and skills that will be needed for a sustainable economy and will also be key to delivering net zero and environmental targets and ambitions. For example, skilled workers in environmental education, data collection and analysis, planning activities, environmental conservation, and species-specific action. These are roles underpinned by a geographical knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Geospatial data and analysis

The use and analysis of spatial data and Geographic Information Science (GIS) underpin every aspect of modern life. The Geospatial Commission estimate that smarter use of such data will unlock billions of pounds in economic benefits through harnessing technologies such as AI, satellite imaging and real-time data to boost location-powered innovation and driving the use of location data in key markets, such as property, transport and utilities. One key barrier to unlocking this value is skills gaps and shortages (About us - Geospatial Commission - GOV.UK). Geography is the school subject where the GIS experts of the future (geographers, data scientists, engineers, designers etc) will encounter this technology for the first time. This is relevant not only for the developers/users of this technology, but also all of those who will make decisions based on such location data in their everyday lives and professions.

The understanding of location (geospatial) data and its analysis needs to be updated and strengthened in the Geography curriculum, embedded in other subjects across the curriculum and the focus of new stand-alone more vocationally oriented qualifications.

27 In which ways do the current qualification pathways and content at 16-19 support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work, and what could we change to better support this?

16-19 - skills and knowledge for life and further study:

Geography is a subject that underpins students going into a broad range of further study and roles in the workforce. We refer to all our responses above re the knowledge, skills and capabilities developed through Geography. Q26.

However, while the pathway through traditional academic study (A level) is well developed, more vocational pathways are not. There is huge potential, and need, to embed more geographical knowledge, skills and capabilities, into existing qualifications and apprenticeships (e.g. in digital skills, sustainability etc), and also to develop new qualifications and pathways too. The Society is actively involved in work to signpost exciting opportunities to students of geography, to identify gaps, working with employers and other stakeholders to develop new offers. We have worked closely with IFATE and look forward to taking forward this work with Skills England.

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

28 To what extent does the current primary curriculum support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

primary - broad and balanced:

There is broad recognition of the value of geography – going beyond content knowledge – in developing a broad range of skills and behaviours with young people. See all of our responses above.

Primary teachers are often generalists and will rarely have specialist knowledge of geography. More support needs to be given to them to present a balanced and informed curriculum. Whilst curriculum content at primary geography level appears to be well-received by teachers, there is opportunity here to focus on enhancing the teaching of the content and skills that exist there already, rather than radically changing the breadth and depth of the content. Giving primary teachers (through training and support) a better understanding of geographical concepts and themes and how what is happening in the world today fits into the curriculum can only enhance children's understanding of their place in the world and the impact they can have on the bigger geographical topics and themes introduced to them (such as climate change).

29 To what extent do the current secondary curriculum and, qualifications pathways support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

secondary - broad and balanced:

Given its part STEM and part SHAPE nature, geography is a subject taken by students with a broad range of interests and future outcomes. It delivers knowledge, skills and capabilities for students progressing into a broad range of areas of further study and employment sectors. The study of Geography can serve as a natural opportunity to foster interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary learning. Cross-cutting topics like social, political or environmental challenges can be explored within the subject and problem-based learning can engage students in seeing the relevance of what they are learning.

We strongly support any initiatives to encourage students to take a broader range of subjects post-16 and to take combinations of subjects that cut across STEM and SHAPE. The recent report by the British Academy on subject choices post-16 documents a concerning trend towards concentration of choices.

30 To what extent do the current qualifications pathways at 16-19 support learners to study a broad curriculum which gives them the right knowledge and skills to progress? Should anything change to better support this?

16-19 - broad and balanced:

While we recognise the quality and reputation of A-levels, the knowledge, skills and capabilities they develop in students, and their value in preparation for specialised further study, we have significant concerns about the breadth of education experienced by most students 16-19.

England's curriculum has long been narrow compared to many peers (in many OECD countries students study at least seven subjects at this level). The phasing out of AS level qualifications in 2015-16, with AS levels no longer counting towards the overall A level, undoubtedly exacerbated a further narrowing of an already narrow post-16 curriculum. Today, students are taking fewer qualifications and increasingly all from one subject group (see the recent research by the British Academy and the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) report).

We strongly support any initiatives that will encourage students to take a broader range of subjects post-16, and to take combinations of subjects that cut across STEM and SHAPE.

In addition, more value needs to be given to non-A level routes and there needs to be a commitment to more continuity in terms of the type of offer (e.g. if this is to be T-levels). Our own experience of engagement with the Level 3 apprenticeships and T levels has identified significant opportunities to deliver geographically rooted education and training through standalone qualifications or stronger embedding of geographical skills through these routes. These do have the potential to deliver many of the benefits of A-level to a different group of students, preparing them for future life, to be informed and engaged citizens, and for work.

31 To what extent do the current curriculum (at primary and secondary) and qualifications pathways (at secondary and 16-19) ensure that pupils and learners are able to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects?

support for creative skills and access to creative subjects:

As with our comments with respect to maths and English, we note that creative skills can be and are developed through a range of subjects e.g. geography. The theme of our major (geography) academic conference next year (which attracts >2000 delegates) is on Geography and creativity. Creative and critical thinking are hugely complementary. Digital cartography and data visualizations are strong examples of creativity and impactful communication. A sense of place can be conveyed and expressed through the arts as well as through more traditional methods – augmenting them as sources of evidence.

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

32 Do you have any explanations for the trends outlined in the analysis and/or suggestions to address any that might be of concern?

Explanations of trends or suggestions to address:

Over the last decade, we have seen significant increases in the number and range of students (in terms of ethnicity and economic disadvantage) studying geography to GCSE level (see discussion above on Geography of geography: the evidence base - RGS). This has been in response to changes in the EBacc. As a consequence, more young people are better equipped with the knowledge and skills to address some of the most pressing issues of our time and to understand their uneven and unequal impacts on different communities across the UK and the world.

Ref: <https://www.rgs.org/about-us/what-is-geography/geography-in-schools/geography-of-geography-the-evidence-base>

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

33 To what extent and how do pupils benefit from being able to take vocational or applied qualifications in secondary schools alongside more academically focused GCSEs?

secondary - benefit from vocational qualifications:

We believe there would be advantages to many students being given the opportunity to engage in a broader range of subjects/activities – whether these formally lead to qualifications or not. It is important that there is a broad range of opportunities in the life of all schools.

34 To what extent does the current pre-16 vocational offer equip pupils with the necessary knowledge and skills and prepare them for further study options, including 16-19 technical pathways and/or A levels? Could the pre-16 vocational offer be improved?

vocational offer - equip for further study and improvement suggestions:

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

35 Is the volume of statutory assessment at key stage 1 and 2 right for the purposes set out above?

volume of assessment at key stage 1 and 2:

There is no statutory assessment in geography currently other than the national curriculum. Further training and the use of available and supportive benchmarks and progression tools for skills would be beneficial for teachers (see comments above).

36 Are there any changes that could be made to improve efficacy without having a negative impact on pupils' learning or the wider education system?

key stage 1 and 2 assessment improvements:

37 Are there other changes to the statutory assessment system at key stages 1 and 2 that could be made to improve pupils' experience of assessment, without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?

key stage 1 and 2 assessment improvements to experience:

38 What can we do to ensure the assessment system at key stages 1 and 2 works well for all learners, including learners in need of additional support in their education (for example SEND, disadvantage, EAL)?

key stage 1 and 2 assessment works for ALL learners:

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

39 Is the volume of assessment required for GCSEs right for the purposes set out above? Are there any changes that could be made without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?

volume of assessment at GCSEs:

Our answer to the first question is a clear 'no'. In geography, the burden on students is too high and there is evidence that the assessments are too complex to be reliably marked (we refer to research undertaken by Ofqual on reliability).

At present, students are over-assessed and methods of assessment do not foster the necessary skills for students' future work or lives. There is too much emphasis on terminal examinations which lend themselves well to some students but not to others. Assessments need to be made more accessible to all students. Alternative assessments should be trialed. As one example, the previous OCR Pilot GCSE offered a greater diversity of assessment.

To thrive in modern society, students must develop skills to interpret information (including spotting mis- and dis-information), critiquing data and assumptions, and developing problem-solving skills. Assessment methods that foster critical thinking and the application of knowledge principles, rather than memorisation, better prepare students for the realities of an information-rich society.

Quality Geography education can encourage learning-by-doing (especially through fieldwork), real world application, collaborative work and interdisciplinary thinking. The incorporation of a wider range of assessment methods would help to evaluate learners beyond rote memorisation and consider a wider set of skills, better preparing them for their futures. Group-based assessments, case studies and exam questions focused on problem solving or inquiry all are important options. Use of contemporary real-world examples and applied, hands-on assessments can give learners a greater sense of purpose and increase learning retention and enjoyment as well as providing them with agency

As noted in an earlier response, there are significant concerns about how fieldwork is currently assessed. There is support for the re-introduction of coursework at GCSE to assess fieldwork.

There is support for the use of decision-making exercises in geography assessments as these approaches allow students to directly apply their knowledge and skills to integrated topics. Pre-release materials for this kind of assessment are considered a useful addition by teachers.

There are mixed views on whether to retain an un-tiered GCSE examination or to move back to tiered papers.

40 What more can we do to ensure that: a) the assessment requirements for GCSEs capture and support the development of knowledge and skills of every young person; and b) young people's wellbeing is effectively considered when assessments are developed, giving pupils the best chance to show what they can do to support their progression?

GCSE assessments - support development of knowledge and skills and considers wellbeing:

There is too much content and too much emphasis on terminal examinations. Alternative assessments should be trialed.

For geography, assessments need to be designed to reward students more explicitly for their ability to 'think' and 'analyse' as geographers (e.g. across scales). To thrive in modern society, students must develop skills to interpret information (including spotting mis- and dis-information), critique data and assumptions, and develop problem-solving skills. Assessment methods that foster critical thinking and application of knowledge principles, rather than rote memorisation, better prepare students for the realities of an information-rich society.

Recognising the part-STEM nature of the discipline, and in line with STEM subjects, there needs to be more assessment of foundational knowledge, as well as the skills of analysis and evaluation that geography as part-SHAPE also develops. Such changes would lead to more equitable outcomes in assessments and reduce some of the uncertainties in assessment.

41 Are there particular GCSE subjects where changes could be made to the qualification content and/or assessment that would be beneficial for pupils' learning?

changes to GCSE qualification content or assessment:

See comments above. Q22. The Geography content for GCSE is overloaded and it needs to be updated. We look forward to being involved in discussions on this in the proposed subject deep-dive.

Specifically, the geography curriculum needs to be updated in its attention to climate change (our comments here relate to coverage of this topic in earlier key stages too). While we support calls to embed the teaching of elements of climate change more widely across the curriculum (climate change is an inherently multidisciplinary problem), geography is the subject that plays a unique role in bringing together the science of climate change with considerations of its impact and implications for people and places that vary across the world. Coverage of climate change needs to be expanded in the geography curriculum to consider more fully the implications of a warming world and the actions and solutions we will need, with hopeful messages focussing on sustainable futures.

The curriculum needs to be flexible enough to adapt as our understanding, technology and relevance changes. This relates to the state of the climate, climate impacts around the world and current issues relating to climate justice, politics, economics and communication, as well as technological solutions (and an understanding of their limitations).

Teacher support and professional development will be critical to the development of both the subject knowledge and pedagogy needed to deliver this amongst the current and future teaching community. All teachers should be able to access training to improve climate literacy and how best to lead climate education in their teaching. The RGS-IBG, working with partners – across academia and professional practice - has a key role to play in this and can provide access to experts at the cutting edge of relevant research and knowledge.

Case studies, data sources and teaching approaches need to better reflect the contemporary nature of a changing world. Geography should teach about different societies, nations and circumstances accurately and should not present partial, inaccurate or prejudicial representations of the world.

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

42 Are there ways in which we could support improvement in pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3?

support pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3:

Through the development of a framework and benchmarks for progression, which builds on work completed by the Geographical Association.

43 Are there ways in which we could support pupils who do not meet the expected standard at key stage 2?

support pupils who do not meet expected standard at key stage 2:

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

44 To what extent, and in what ways, does the accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions in schools and colleges?

accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions:

45 How well does the current accountability system support and recognise progress for all pupils and learners? What works well and what could be improved?

accountability system support and recognise progress for ALL pupils:

46 Should there be any changes to the current accountability system in order to better support progress and incentivise inclusion for young people with SEND and/or from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds? If so, what should those changes be?

accountability system changes to support SEND or socio-economically disadvantaged:

Section 8: Qualification pathways 16-19

47 To what extent does the range of programmes and qualifications on offer at each level meet the needs and aspirations of learners? a) Level 3 b) Level 2 c) Level 1 and entry level

extent to which programmes and qualifications meet needs and aspirations of learners:

48 Are there particular changes that could be made to the following programmes and qualifications, and/or their assessment that would be beneficial to learners: a) AS/A level qualifications b) T Level and T Level Foundation Year programmes c) Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 3 d) Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 2 and below

changes to programmes and qualifications:

We refer to our response in Q30. We were, and remain, strong supporters of the AS level qualification. It enables students to broaden their choices and supports those who want to go on to university by offering additional UCAS points.

We continue to support the expansion of alternative qualifications in Core Maths and English.

We recognise that there have already been a number of substantial changes to Level 3 qualifications in recent years. We would note that T levels, in sharp contrast to BTecs, tend to more specialised qualifications, designed for particular industries/ occupations. This may inadvertently narrow training and the range of experiences for students.

Our own experience of engagement with the Level 3 apprenticeships and T levels has identified significant opportunities to deliver geographically rooted education and training through standalone qualifications or stronger embedding of geographical skills through these routes. These do have the potential to deliver of many of the benefits of A-level to a different group of students, preparing them for future life, to be informed and engaged citizens, and for work.

We point specifically to the need for more options to develop geospatial skills – the need for which have been clearly articulated by employers (Geospatial Skills). It is one of the strategic priorities of the RGS-IBG to do more work in this realm.

Ref: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6272707ce90e0746ca7e55f5/_Demand_for_Geospatial_Skills__report_.pdf

49 How can we improve learners' understanding of how the different programmes and qualifications on offer will prepare them for university, employment (including apprenticeships) and/or further technical study?

improve understanding on how programmes and qualifications will prepare them for future:

A campaign of awareness-raising is needed for parents and teachers to profile the value of different pathways. Given the rate of changes in many fields, teachers may be unaware of the range and breadth of jobs available to students studying their subject. Teaching resources and materials along with CPD should be provided to ensure careers education is fully and effectively embedded in the curriculum.

Geography is a prime example of how careers education can work within the curriculum rather than being peripheral to it. Much geography content could be demonstrated through the use of 'real people, real jobs' materials and case studies as well as via more traditional methods. There is no better way to demonstrate how geographical knowledge and skills relate to a student than showing them someone in the workplace doing a job using Geography that impacts them on a daily basis. In too many schools, careers education is seen as a bolt-on, dealt with outside of the regular timetable. It can be heavily centred around going to university rather than the other routes available. Our programme of work Choose Geography is attempting to fill this gap (Careers and progression in geography).

Ref: <https://www.rgs.org/schools/careers-and-progression>

Employers have a role to play in this too, making clear to prospective employees (students) the range of qualifications they value, and the opportunities that exist now and will in the future.

Significant investment is needed in terms of signposting options.

Equalising funding for students 16-19 would also help achieve this aim, in particular strengthening FE and sixth-form colleges. Such institutions will be critical in bringing academic and technical education together in a single menu.

50 To what extent is there enough scope and flexibility in the system to support learners who may need to change course?

scope and flexibility to support learners changing course:

We strongly support more flexible pathways that ensure access, participation and choice for all young people. Efforts need to be made to reduce the dichotomy between academic and vocational routes that lock students into choices made early on.

51 Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?

skills, subjects or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19:

All students should benefit from some knowledge of climate change and biodiversity issues, human impacts, mitigations and opportunities. This should be centrally delivered through Geography, supported in other disciplines. Geography and geographers are positioned to play a central role in meeting the needs of young people as they navigate a body of world challenges that will intensify across their lifetime.

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

52 How can the curriculum, assessment and wraparound support better enable transitions between key stages to ensure continuous learning and support attainment?

wraparound support enabling transitions between key stages:

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

53 How could technology be used to improve how we deliver the curriculum, assessment and qualifications in England?

how can technology be used to improve delivery of curriculum, assessment and qualifications :

There is significant potential for the use of digital assessment of Geography, notably for fieldwork and for data skills/GIS, but access and barriers to technology must be recognised and addressed. We are concerned that existing inequalities in digital access may be exacerbated through the adoption of new technologies without appropriate mitigation measures.

Digital delivery, including virtual fieldtrips, and other onscreen tools can support, but do not amount to a substitute for, fieldwork. These give students access to places and environments they would not otherwise encounter and are often the first experiences of the outdoors or places beyond their immediate environs, for many young people, particularly those who are disadvantaged.

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

54 Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?

Any further views:

Any new curriculum and assessment framework needs to be sustainable with respect to its impact on the teaching workforce who will deliver it.

Employing more specialist Geography teachers is essential for the achievement of high-quality education, as is retaining more in the profession. This is a necessary first step before any curriculum reform can begin. No framework, current or envisioned, can succeed unless current specialists are retained and more are recruited. We note that in the last year geography ITT recruitment was only 56% of its target.

Teacher training and Continued Professional Development (CPD) is a key enabler to curriculum reform and must be included in action plans from this review. Teachers will feel more confident and prepared to effectively deliver a new curriculum by being equipped with up-to-date knowledge, skills and pedagogies. Such support must be government funded. A Geographical Association report (2022) provides clear evidence of what teachers want (GA (2022) Listening Exercise report for what teachers want: Geographical Association (2022) ISBN 978-1-84377-538-6.

Recognising there are increasing number of non-specialist teachers who teach shortage subjects such as Geography, it is essential there is increased support put in place to support them in their teaching. Organisations such as the RGS-IBG, with partners, are very well placed to support such initiatives for our subject.

School leaders play a vital role in the effective implementation of curriculum reform. The requirement for all schools to have a Sustainability Lead and the incorporation of sustainability into National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) will support school leaders to be engaged and informed, creating an increased focus on sustainable practices and leadership for sustainability as a key value within the educational institution.