

The Geography Curriculum

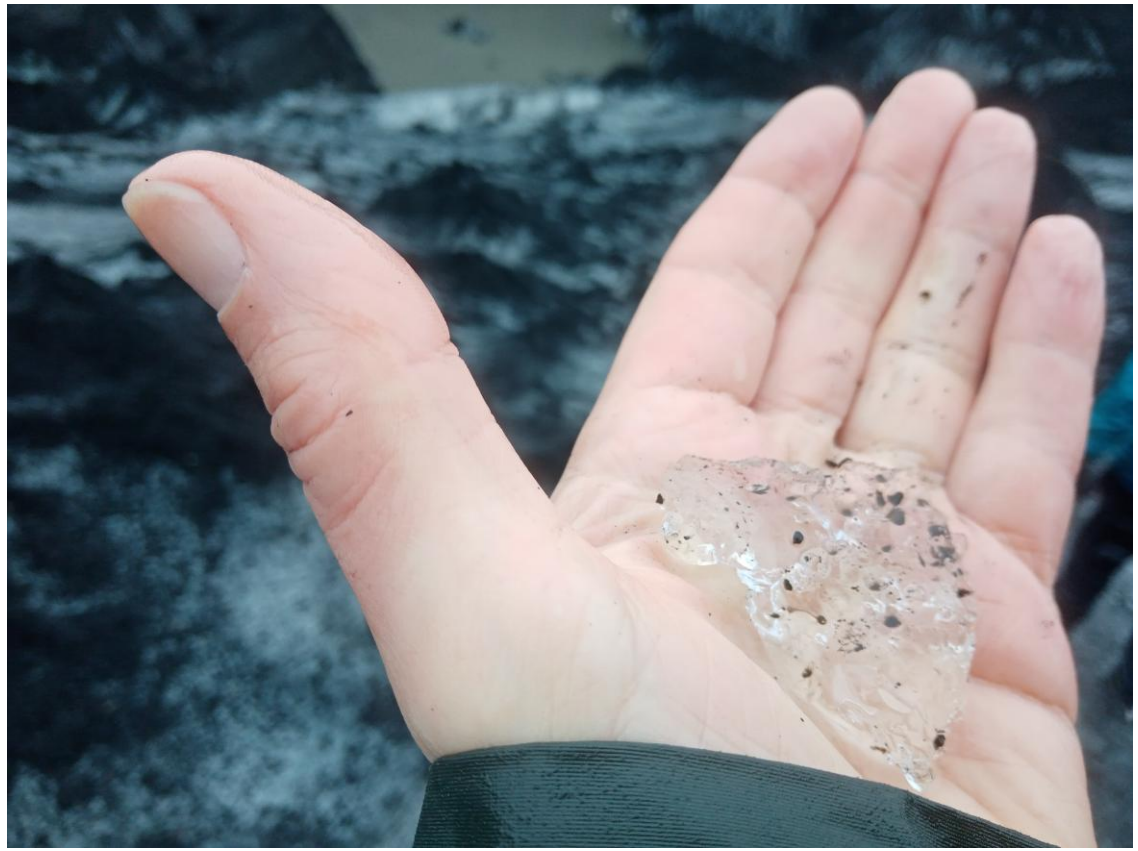
Steve Brace
Chief Executive
Geographical Association
www.geography.org.uk

Our Geographical backgrounds
What inspired us …



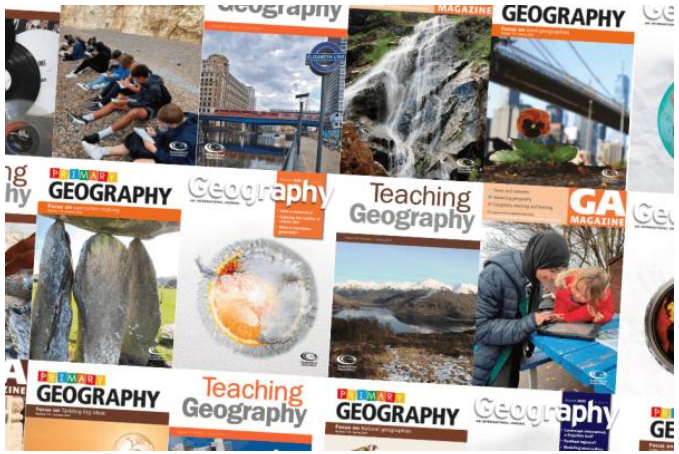


Both photos taken in Iceland 2026: Which is youngest - the ice or the basalt?











Geographical Association, we

- Support teachers to improve the quality of their lessons, so more young people can enjoy benefits of studying geography
- Work with 20,000 teachers, championing their good practice
- Are a voice for geography, advocating for the power of the subject in education and to society
- All geography teachers and their schools are welcome to join the GA

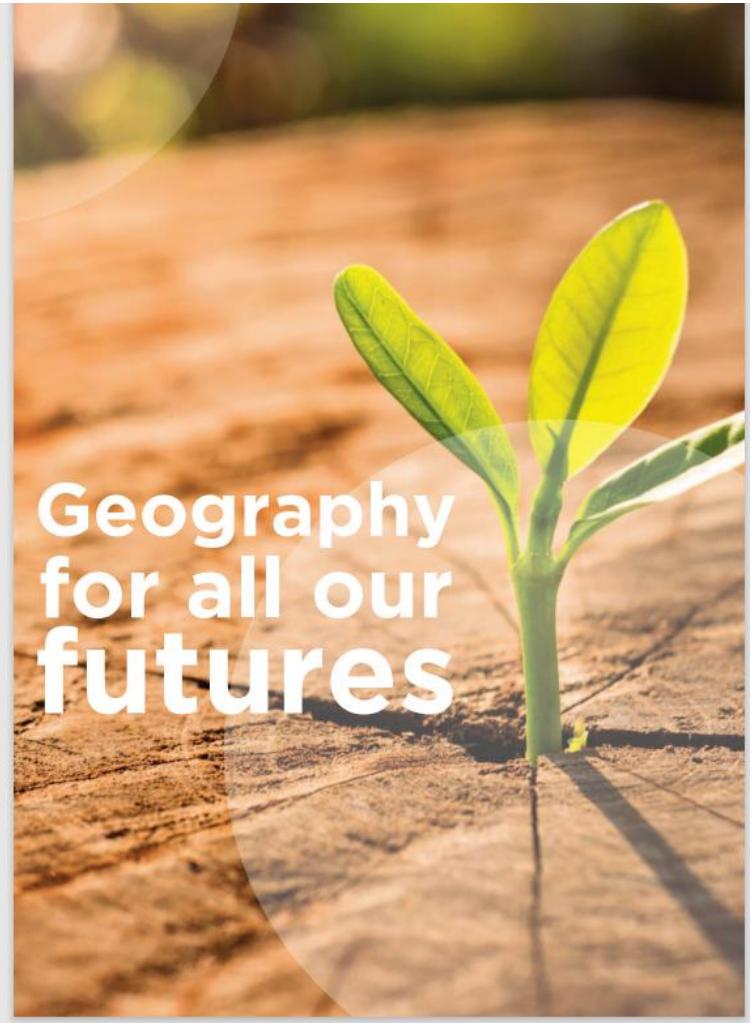
“Geography enhances our lives, learning & livelihoods”

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Geography's purpose …

A *geographically literate* society is needed to:

- Address a warming climate
- Decide where to build new homes and protect them from flooding
- Tackle inequality in the UK and abroad
- Live sustainably and promote biodiversity
- Safeguard our place in an uncertain world

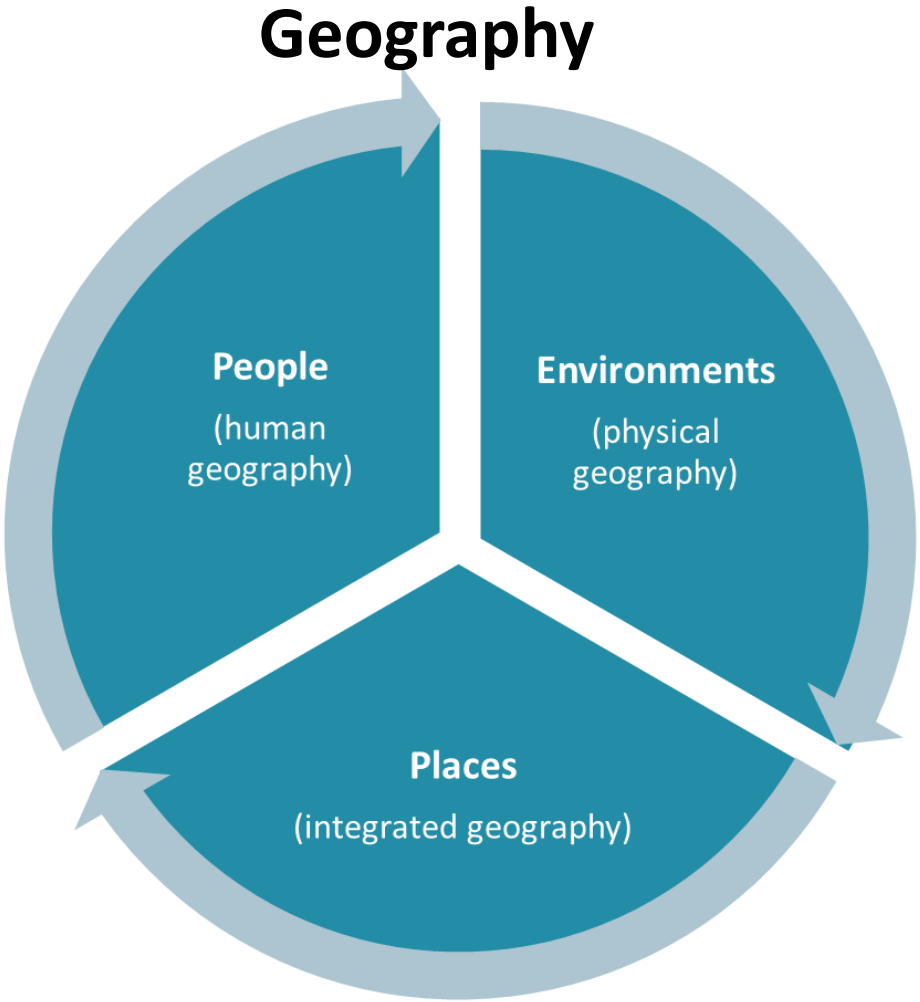


1. What we know

2. Curriculum & GCSE changes

3. Some other perspective in our subject?

4. How the GA can help you



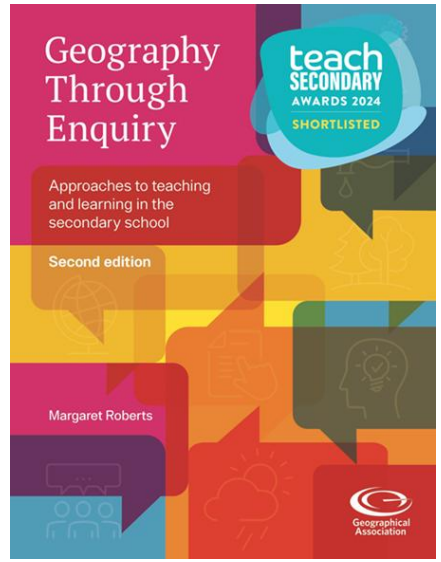
1. What We Know: Ofsted

Research and analysis

Getting our bearings: geography subject report

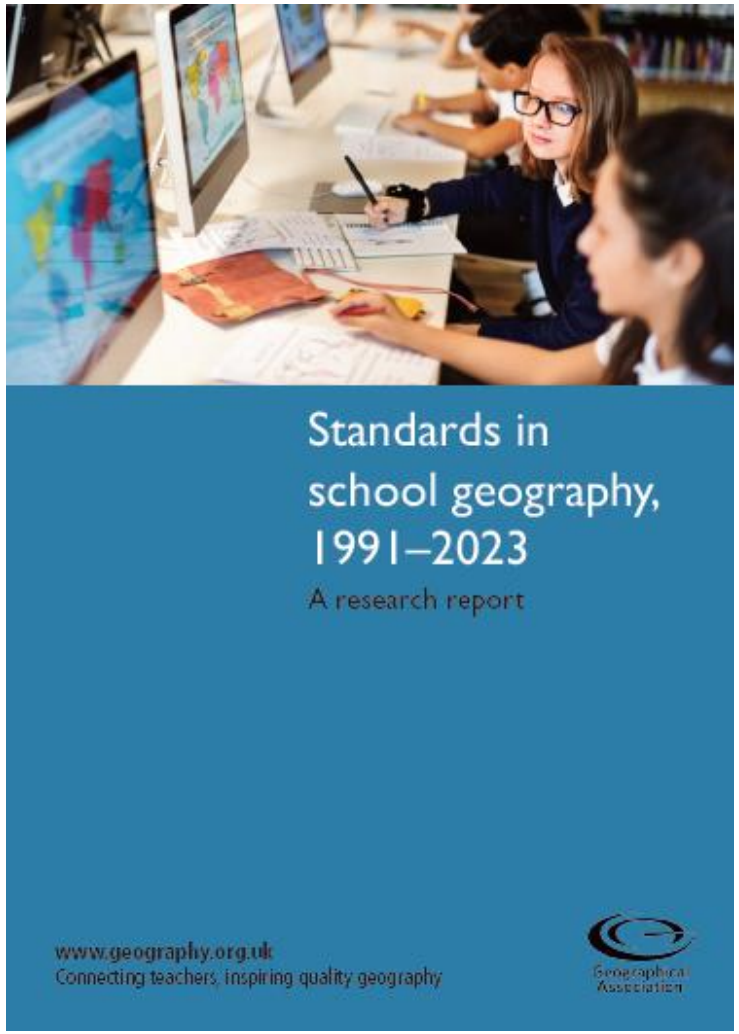
Published 19 September 2023

+ Improvements in the teaching of geography (KS3)
+ Geography more ambitious & focus on its distinctive nature
+ Schools including *enquiry* questions in topics



- Need improvements in mapwork, field*work* & GIS
- Limited by weaknesses in professional knowledge
- KS4 specification & textbooks are the curriculum
- Study of place (and regions) poorly planned

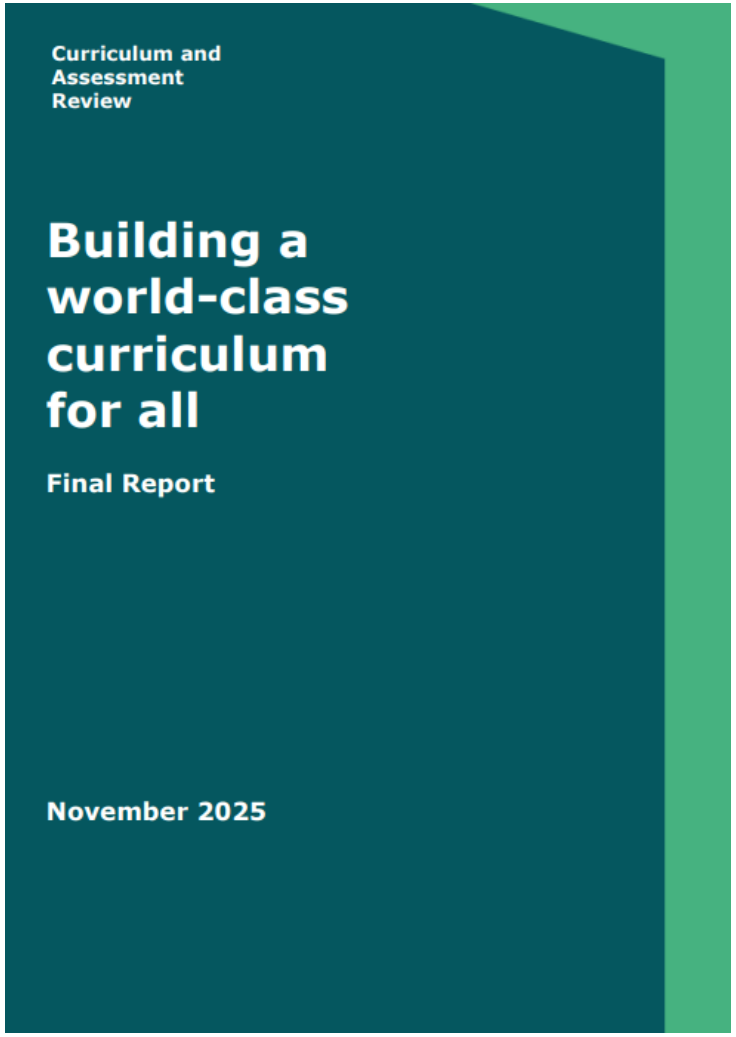
Standards in geography, 1991 - 2023



For over 30 years Ofsted has monitored and largely defined standards in geography. This report identifies changes in standards over time, including:

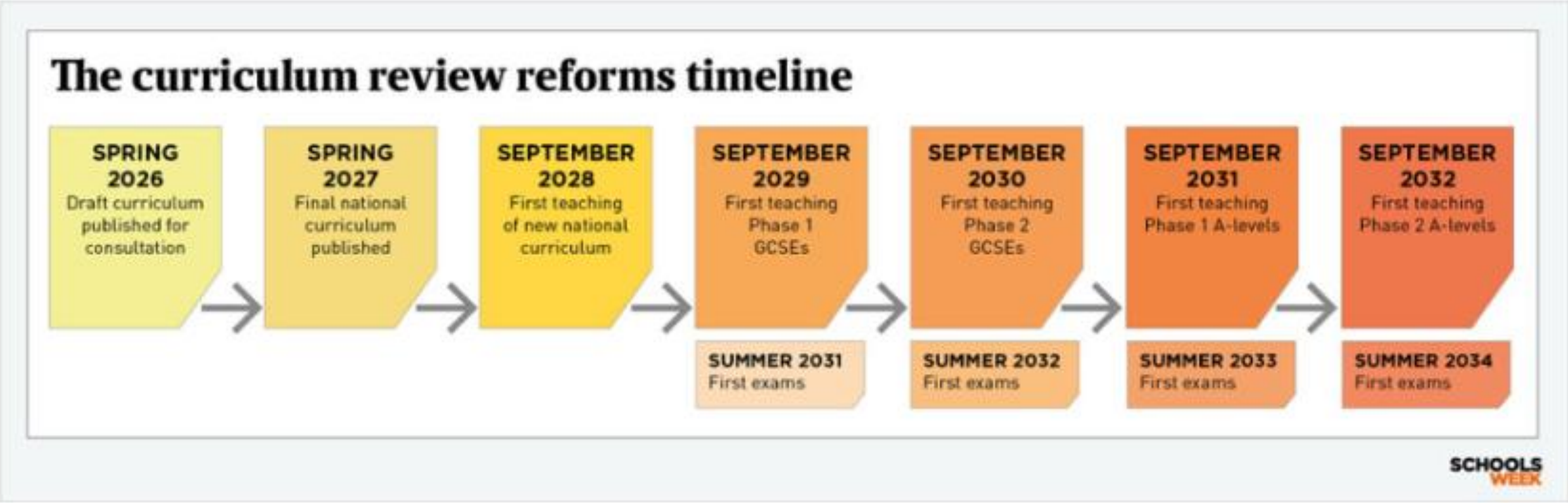
- periods when school geography was flourishing and standards were improving, as well as other times when the subject was under pressure
- notable strengths and achievement across key stages 1 to 4. Between 2000 and 2025 alone, over 6 million students in England, Northern Ireland and Wales sat a GCSE geography exam
- enduring weaknesses, including the study of places, the development and use of geographical skills, fieldwork, ICT and GIS.

2. The Curriculum and Assessment Review





When is change happening



Curriculum and Assessment Review: Recommendations

- *Evolution not revolution*:
- Curriculum 'overload' (GCSE) "Lack of specificity can, counter-intuitively, contribute to greater curriculum volume, as teachers try to cover all eventualities"
- Geography
  - Concepts
  - Disciplinary Knowledge
  - Fieldwork
  - Climate change and sustainability
- Public consultation on DfE's proposals for KS1,2&3 in September + GCSEs
- DfE appointed Steve Brace/GA as Curriculum Drafter for geography to support the department draw in the Review's recommendations

Some possible implications



National Curriculum KS1,2 and 3: Light touch review, reduce repetition and overlap

- Strengthen fieldwork – without additional burden
- Strengthen climate change and sustainability, and people-environment interactions
- Potential stronger places for 'disciplinary knowledge' e.g. geographical concepts, geographical enquiry, spatial reasoning & fieldwork. Alongside the – substantive - content.
- Diversity, up-to-date and representation
- Digital and GIS

GCSE: Refresh amount of content and update

- Reduce content and repetition
- Fieldwork – potential to strengthen, possibly quantify as two days

A Level: light touch review of content - NEA, (a GA view) fixed word length

Curriculum Consultation September 2027



- DfE will run a public consultation about the new National Curriculum (Geography KS1,2 & 3) and ‘phase 1’ GCSEs in September.
- The GA will be sharing lots of info about this & how you can take part
- It’s your chance to share your views and comments on DfE’s proposals
- If you have suggested changes do provide an alternative form of words
- Do share your views with the GA, which will be also responding to DfE

- The GA will be providing significant support and briefing materials about the new curriculum. And then advice, guidance and resources to help you implement the changes ready for Sept 2028.

3. Wider Perspectives: What does geography give you?

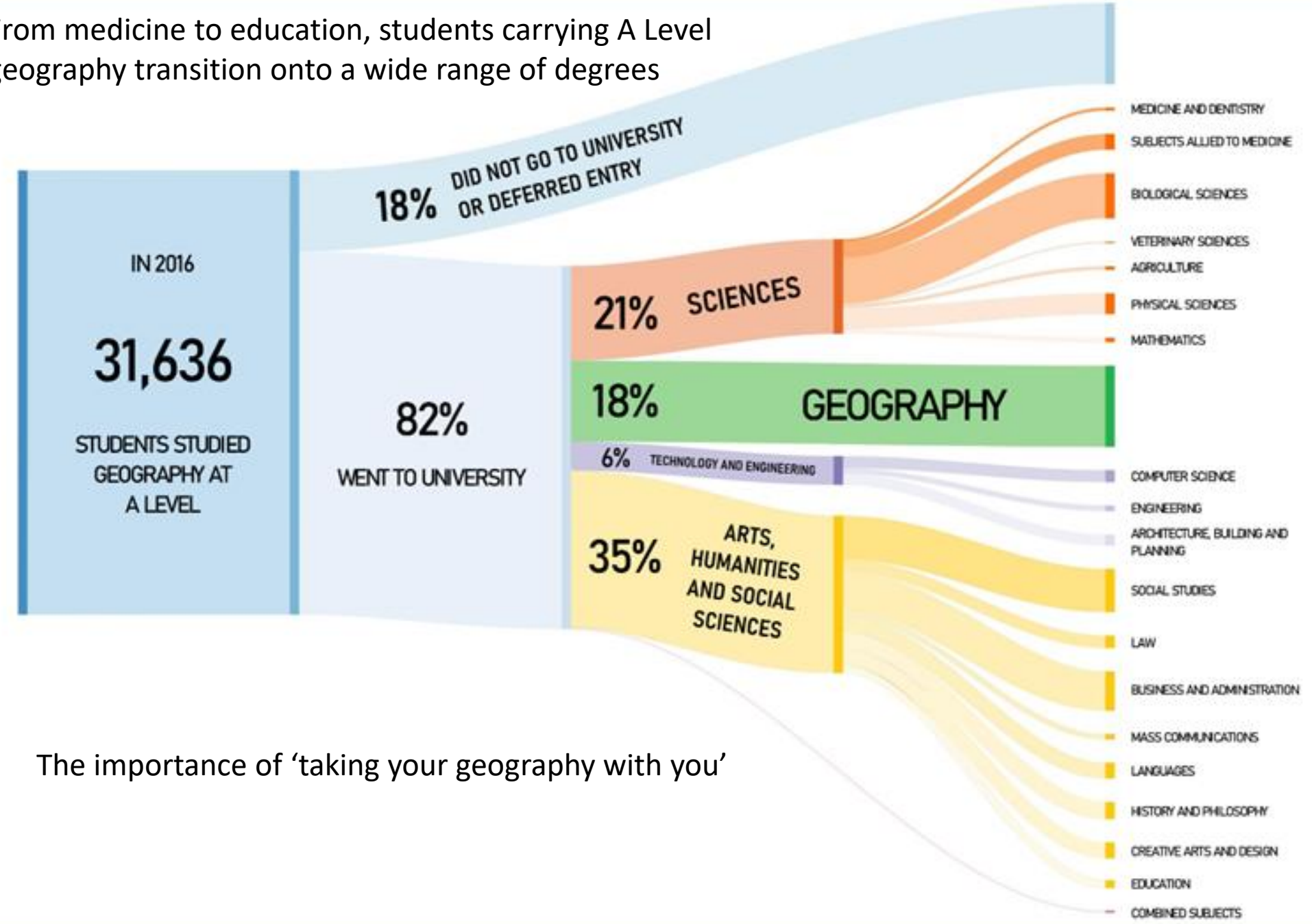
- Study: Geog. undergrads are **more likely to complete their degree,** have the **3rd lowest drop-out rate** of all subjects & have some of the highest National Student Satisfaction scores.
- Employment: Five years after graduation, geography graduates have an **above average likelihood of gaining employment**.
- Earnings: Geography graduate earnings **outperform** many other subjects & geographers earn “Top 10 Salaries”

Top 10 highest earning degrees

How much is your degree worth?

Degree	Average net lifetime earned income
Medicine and Dentistry	£897,500
Economics	£671,000
Law	£738,500
Maths	£662,000
Business	£659,000
Politics	£640,500
Engineering	£625,000
Computing	£614,500
Pharmacology	£614,000
Geography	£591,000

From medicine to education, students carrying A Level geography transition onto a wide range of degrees



What do A Level geographers go onto study?

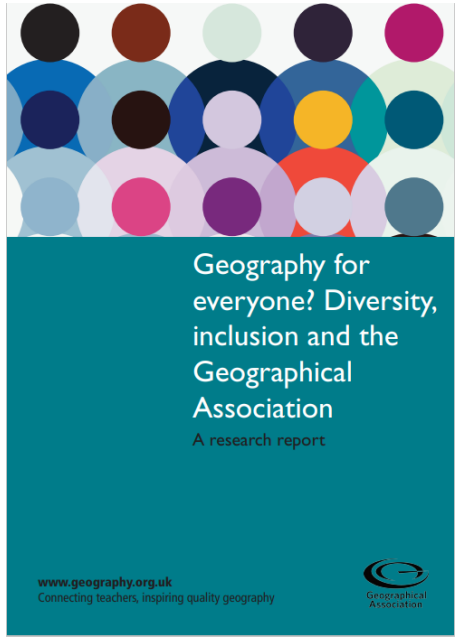
The importance of ‘taking your geography with you’

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What else is happening in our subject? GCSE to A Level

- Since 2010 the proportion of young people taking GCSE geography has *risen* from 26% to 42% (*)
- Entries 180,000 in 2010, to almost 302,000 in 2025
- A more representative uptake. Chinese students 52%, White students 42%, Black/Black British 37%
- A relatively good gender balance

- **But** …



(*) Geography of Geography RGS 2020

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At A Level & beyond geography narrows



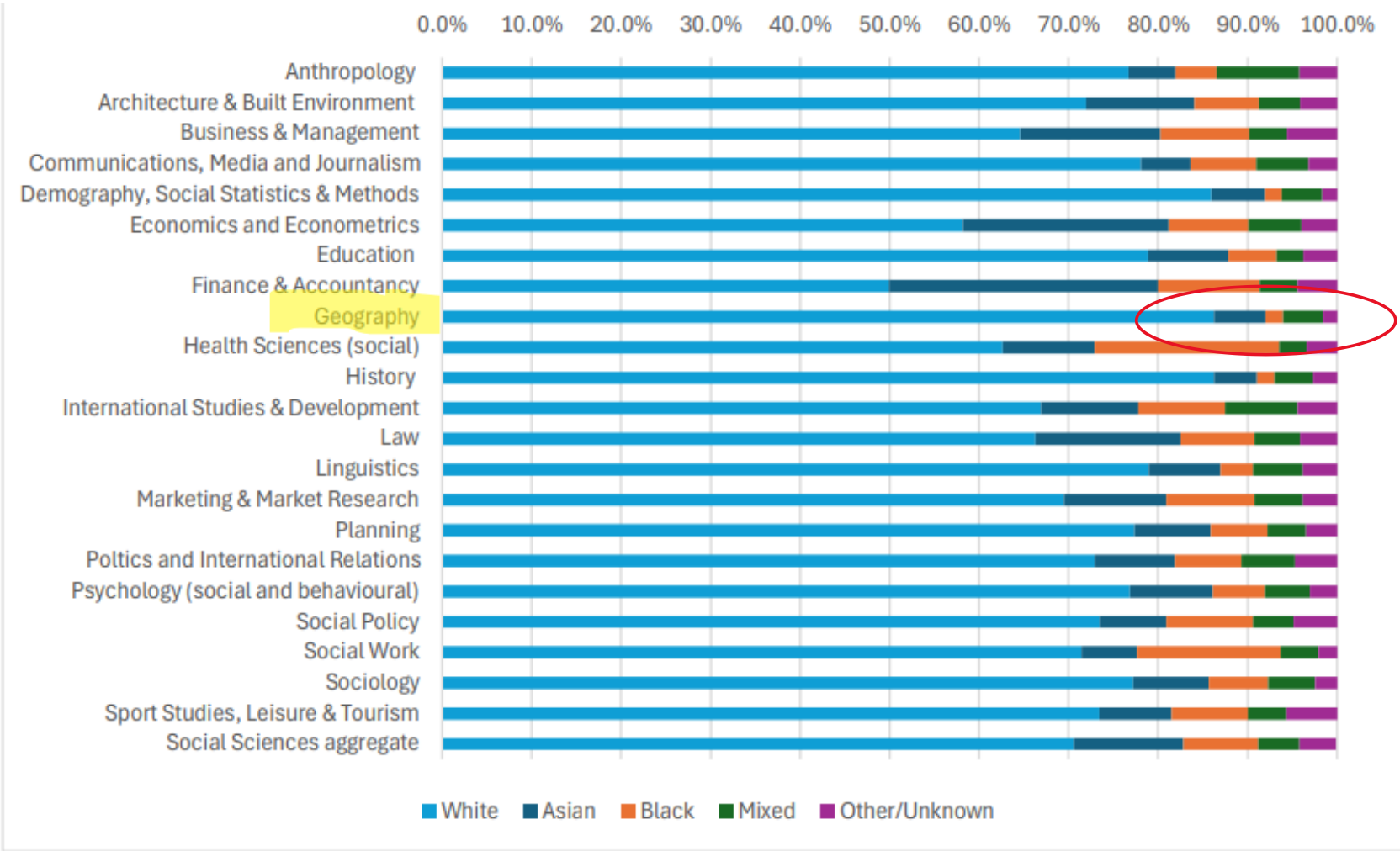


Figure 17 - Student ethnicity (total student population, UK only) for the social science disciplines versus the social science aggregate

What might be going on?

- Geography isn't projecting its value to young people (& parents) in terms of rewarding(£) & worthwhile careers
- You can do '*anything*' with geography … isn't giving an answer to the question 'what can I do if I choose geography.

- Is there a potential disconnect between geography / green skills & careers? (Is being green geography's 'side hustle' … not the gateway to successful careers?)

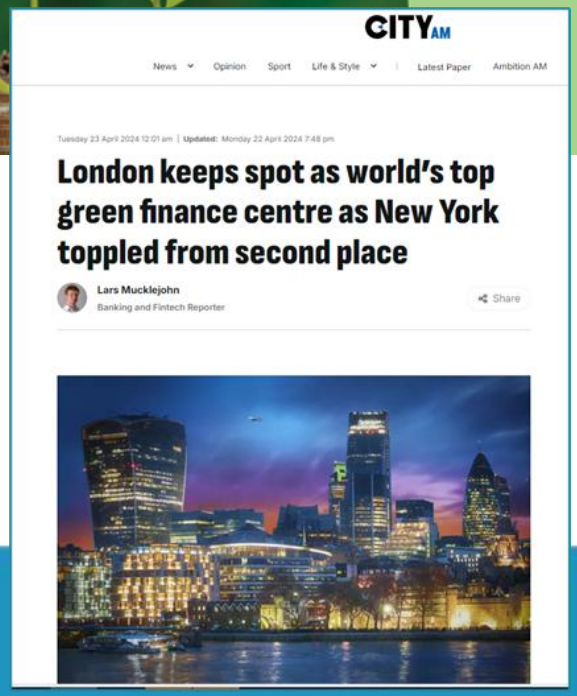
Value of green careers

- UK's low carbon economy worth £200B & employs 1.2M

- But little public knowledge of this

- CBI: lack of awareness of the green economy & a 'huge task' required to educate public about path to net-zero
- No clear (qualification) pathways
- Important role for GCSE geography as precursor to apprenticeships & T Levels - as well as A Level
  - 'take your geography with you'




CITY AM

News Opinion Sport Life & Style Latest Paper Ambition AM

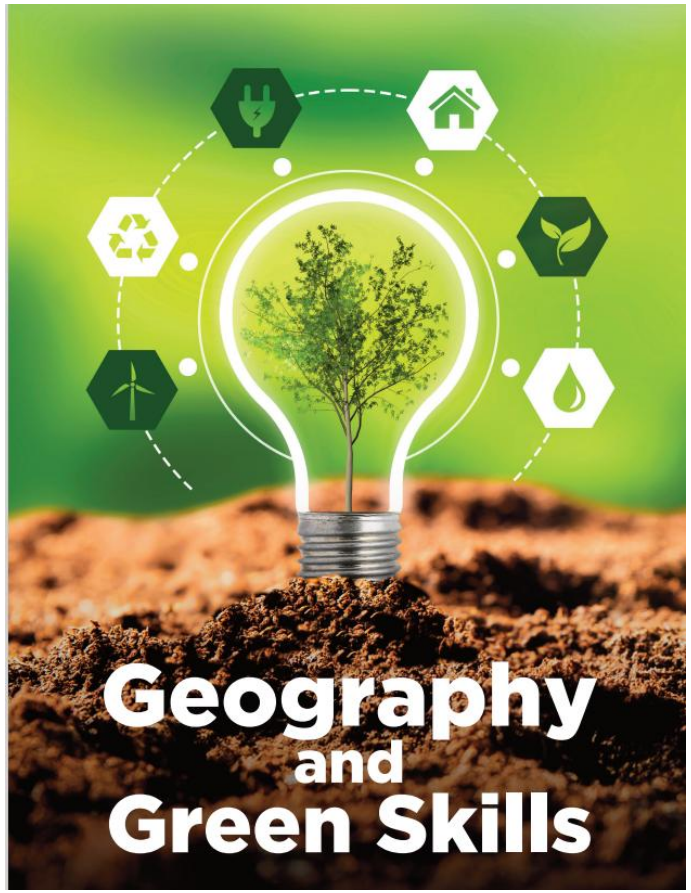
London keeps spot as world's top green finance centre as New York toppled from second place

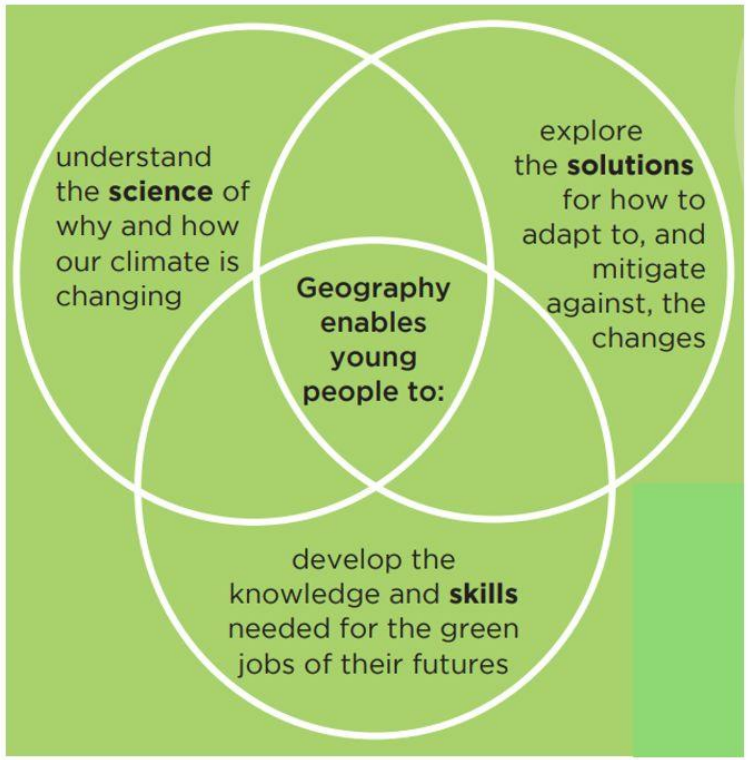
Lars Mucklejohn
Banking and Fintech Reporter

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Geography and Green Skills





- The need for Green Skills
- Value of Net Zero businesses and supply chains £83B & 9510,000 jobs
- Green Skills: gap, awareness and support
- The contribution of geography
- Industry and employer perspectives
- School perspectives on careers and the curriculum

Geospatial

- Geospatial is key asset for our economy, society & environment
- £11B annual benefit to UK
- NAUR save £250M just from cable strikes & burst pipes, & saves lives
- Vital for business planning, net zero & biodiversity

- Do we do full justice to geospatial in the classroom?

National Education Nature Park





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4. GA: supporting your professional development



GA annual conference 6-8th April 2027

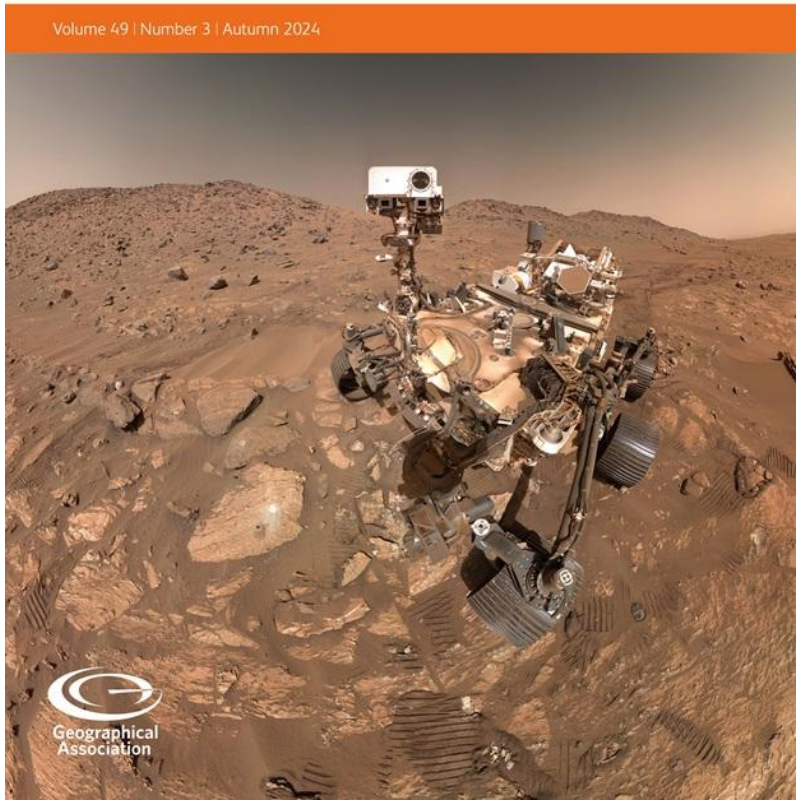




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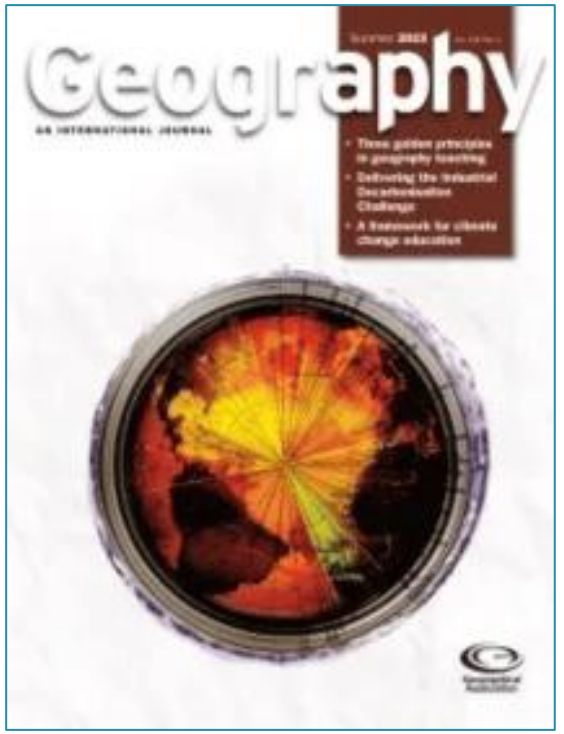
Teaching Geography

- How can I use Generative AI to support the creation of model answers at A level?
- Encouraging students' questions in the geography classroom
- Fostering sustainability at A level
- Our 'golden threads' curriculum



Geography –
Linking HE with the classroom

- Does spending time with nature affect people's desire to protect it? A case study of Nigerian beachgoers
- Landscape detectives, fieldwork
- Critiquing 'powerful knowledge' in school geography through a decolonial lens
- What is Antarctica?



Thank you



- To join log onto www.geography.org.uk

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on LinkedIn