

# A World of Opportunity

## Going Places With Geography

*"The universe is full of magical things, patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper."*

Eden Phillpotts



**A Guide for Scottish  
Secondary Pupils and  
Parents**

**Reasons to Learn  
Geography at School**

**Advantages  
of Studying a  
Geographical Degree  
at University**

**Career Opportunities  
With Geography**

**RSGS: a better way to see the world**

The Royal Scottish Geographical Society (RSGS) is an educational charity that has a distinguished history of supporting and promoting geographical education, research and exploration. Please contact us or visit our website for more information on our work, including our publications, national public talks programme, visitor centre opening times, and membership details. We hope you will consider joining us and sharing your passion for, and fascination with, our world.

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## Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

Never a day goes by without something of geographical concern in the news. Geography is weather, climate, oceans, volcanoes, deserts, populations, migration, atmosphere, and ecosystems. It is food, agriculture, environment, trade, transport, communications and sustainability. It is how we live, where we live, why we live there, and how we interact. It is our sense of place, our sense of community, and our sense of self. It is the whole of Earth's history, the whole of Earth's present interactions, and the whole of Earth's possible natural and human future.

It is not surprising that many enjoy and choose to study Geography. It is a dynamic subject that provides real insight into the world around us, and combines naturally with a range of other subjects, from Physics to Sociology. Geography delivers on citizenship, sustainability and outdoor learning, key driving principles of Curriculum for Excellence, whilst giving children and young people a sense of their place in the world, and encouraging exploration, analysis and joined-up thinking.

Due to the broad nature of Geography and associated skill development, choosing Geography is a great way for young people to keep their options open, irrespective of whether they are going into further or higher education or straight into a job. Statistics continually show that studying Geography gives young people a wide range of study and employment options that are linked either directly to the course content, or to the attributes and skills developed during study.



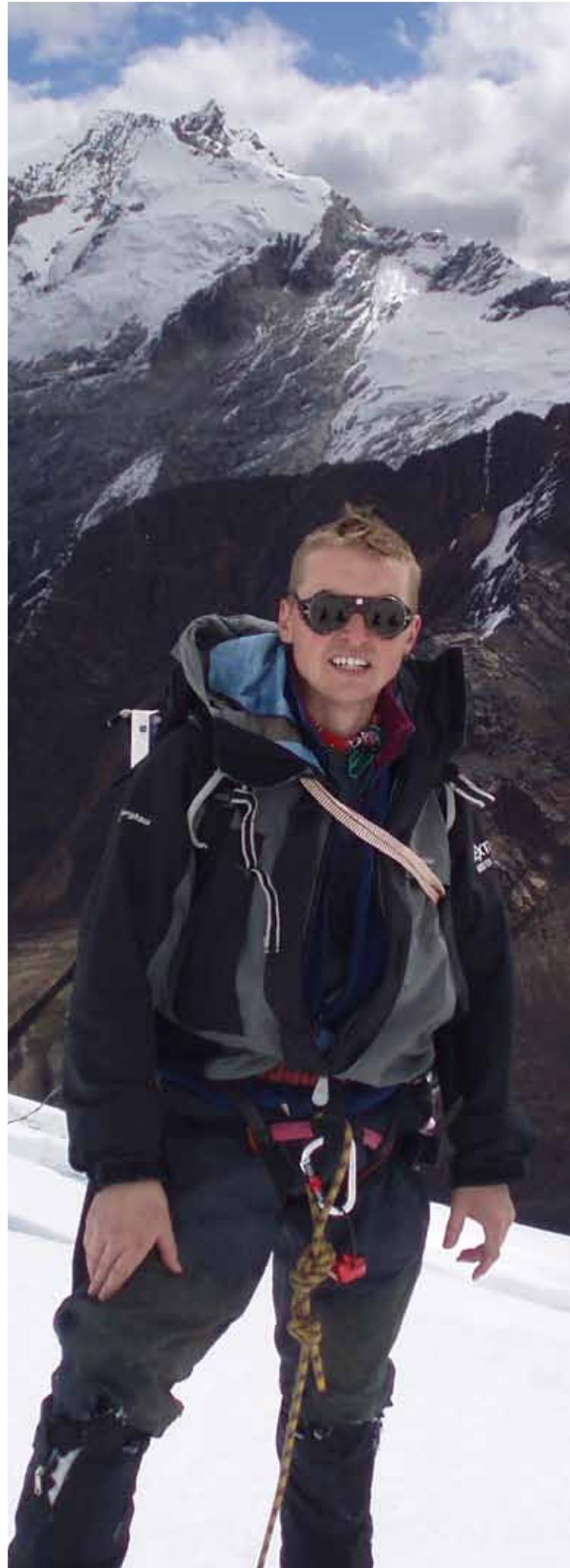
This booklet has been produced by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society for pupils and parents to outline the benefits of choosing to study Geography beyond the compulsory stages, and I sincerely hope that you enjoy getting to know your world, and going places, with Geography.



**Mike Robinson**

Chief Executive

Royal Scottish Geographical Society



# What is Geography?

Geography is the study of Earth's landscapes, peoples, places and environments. It is, put simply, **about the world in which we live**. Our world is likely to change rapidly in the next 50 years. Geography helps us to understand the nature of these changes (the *who, where, what, why, when* and *how*) and to prepare and plan for the future.



## Why should I choose Geography?

### Learn to think in a holistic way

Geography is the most **interdisciplinary** subject, sitting in a unique position as a bridge between the social sciences (Human Geography) and the natural sciences (Physical Geography). Human Geography topics are concerned with understanding cultures, societies and economies, and Physical Geography topics investigate the environment and the processes that shape the Earth's landscapes.

Geographers study the **interactions between human and physical processes**, drawing on (and integrating) a range of other subject areas, from Physics to Sociology. Geography therefore teaches us to think in a 'joined-up', holistic way about issues at **local, national** and **global** scales.

# Understand > Empathise > Contribute

## Be a better informed and more aware citizen

Geography will help you to be more aware of the **everyday lives** of the people who live around you, in other parts of the UK, and around the world. Often, the top **media stories**, such as migration across the Mediterranean, the spread of Ebola in west Africa and the impacts of earthquakes in Nepal, are underpinned by Geography, making Geography a hugely **exciting, relevant** and **dynamic** subject to study.

Geographers study the majority of today's most pressing **challenges** and in understanding complex issues more fully, are best placed to offer **solutions**. Examples include, climate change, energy resources, natural disasters, land use conflicts, the globalisation of trade, transport and health planning and inequalities. Geography provides us with knowledge and understanding that allows us to tackle local problems, as well as global issues.

## Build your skills for future employers

Many of the **transferable skills** that are developed through studying Geography, including research and data collection skills, report writing, time management and organisation, communication and interpersonal skills, use of IT, numeracy, problem-solving and group work skills, will help you in the future, **no matter what your future path might be**. **Subject-specific skills** include producing sketches and graphs, as well as the practical skills of fieldwork and data collection and analysis. Choosing Geography is a great way to remain flexible and **keep your options open for the future** as it offers a **broad knowledge base alongside skill development**. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is likely that you will have a varied career path, and Geography equips you with a range of skills and knowledge that will give you a flexible approach to work.



“

Geography helps you to **understand the world around you**, and develop useful **skills**, whatever your future path may be.

Rachel Hay, Geography Teacher

”

# Will Geography help me to get a job?

The answer is a resounding **YES!** Geography was recently named as one of the few recession-proof degrees, meaning that Geography graduates' employability remained high, despite the economic downturn. Geography allows you to explore questions about the planet and how it works, forming a solid foundation for lifelong learning, no matter what your future path may be.

## Geographers can...

|   |
|---|
| Research, and write concise reports           |
| Ask questions and find the answers            |
| Make informed decisions about complex issues  |
| Carry out fieldwork tasks in 'the real world' |
| Solve problems                                |
| Handle data                                   |
| Use maps with confidence                      |

## Geographers are...

|                                    |
|------------------------------------|
| Confident communicators            |
| Critical thinkers                  |
| Socially and environmentally aware |
| Problem solvers                    |
| Effective team players             |
| Computer literate                  |
| Independent, flexible thinkers     |



“ Geography is an **adaptable, interesting** and **relevant** subject, which develops excellent **transferable skills** that are of use in a wide variety of careers.

**Liz Crisp, Geography Teacher/SAGT**

”

## Geographers work in a wide variety of fields.

Geography directly relates to careers in:

- Renewable energy
- Town and transport planning
- Environmental management and conservation
- Travel and tourism
- Education, including teaching
- Housing and social welfare
- Resource exploration and extraction  
e.g. mining, petroleum
- Work in the charity sector  
e.g. aid agencies



Geography also provides skills suited to a wide range of other careers.

From postcodes to 'Sat Navs', much of our IT is now location-based, and **Geographical Information Systems (GIS)** has grown rapidly to become an essential tool in **business** organisations and **government**.

The result is more opportunities for geographers at a time when competition for jobs is higher than ever before. The skills developed during Geography courses, including data and map analysis and exposure to GIS, link to careers in:

- IT
- Administration, logistics and business management
- Financial services
- Retail and marketing
- Research and development
- Industry



“ I studied Geography at university, including modules in Urban Geography and Climatology, before completing a law conversion course. A classmate of mine is now a chartered accountant in Abu Dhabi! **Geography definitely helps you to keep your options open!** ”

**Richard Hogwood, partner in Family Law, Stewarts Law LLP**

# Geography



## Geography with...

## Potential careers

**Art & Design; Technology;  
Graphic Communication**



advertising, architecture, cartography, landscape design, town planning

**Biology; Chemistry**



environmental health, nature conservation, agriculture

**Physics**



volcanology, earthquake monitoring, surveying, meteorology

**History**



archaeology, law, museums, libraries, publishing

**Modern Languages**



international business and marketing, leisure and tourism

**Maths**



civil engineering, meteorology, mining, air traffic control, market research, international business, accountancy, surveying

**Computing**



town and transport planning using GIS, logistics, web design, health service planning

**Various subjects**



leisure services, sport and recreation management, social work, youth work, local government, teaching, transport services, financial services, civil service, NHS, secretary/PA, police, armed forces



“ Studying Geography at St Andrews taught me to think critically and creatively about the world in which we live. It is a truly varied and fascinating subject which has informed so much of my work since; from the meteorology I have needed to fly helicopters, through to understanding the human impact of elephant and rhino conservation in Africa. There is so much still to discover in the world, and Geography is an excellent place to start. ”

**HRH The Duke of Cambridge**



“ Geography literally means ‘writing about the earth’, and that is what I have been doing since graduating with my BSc (Hons) in Environmental Chemistry and Geography in 2007. I always enjoyed learning about the physical features of our planet and studying how human activity affects, and is affected by, the environment, so my degree subjects felt like a natural choice. ”

**Dr Helen Murray, Assistant Scientist, Scottish Environment Protection Agency**



“ I’ve always had a burning desire to explore the world. I graduated with a BA Honours in Geography from Strathclyde University, before completing an MSc in GIS at Edinburgh University, preparing me for a career in digital mapping. The distinct advantage of studying Geography is you’re not pigeon-holed into a set career path or specific industry sector, although there are plenty of opportunities to specialise, like I have in GIS. ”

**Wendy Campbell, GIS Data Manager, Natural Power**

# What will I study in National 4/5 Geography?

## Studying Geography will help you to understand our physical world:

- **Weather**
- **Landscape** types: Glaciated uplands and coastal landscapes OR upland limestone, and rivers

## Geography will help you to understand human activities in our world:

- **Land uses** and **land use conflicts**, including farming and tourism
- Recent developments in **towns, cities** and **rural landscapes** in developed and developing countries
- **Population** and migration
- **Development** and **trade**
- Relief efforts after **natural disasters**

## Geography will help you to understand global issues (2):

- **Climate change**
- **Landscape degradation** and management strategies
- Methods of prediction for **volcanic eruptions, earthquakes** and **tropical storms**
- Strategies to reduce inequalities in **world trade** e.g. trade alliances, fair trade
- Features, impacts and management of **tourism**
- Causes, effects and strategies adopted to manage **diseases in developed and developing countries** e.g. AIDS, malaria, heart disease

Working on your 20-mark assignment will help you to develop all of these skills, and demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of a geographical topic or issue of your choice.



“ I knew as soon as I took Geography that I was going to love it! There is something truly amazing about **learning how Earth itself has been formed and shaped over time**. Geography reveals how everything and everyone is **interdependent**. Best of all, it explains why the planet looks and ‘works’ like it does. I have had loads of fun doing **field work**. Geography includes the widest range of content compared to other subjects, and I know that it is something I will continue to love all my life.

**Bethany Douglas, S6 pupil**

”

“ In my teens, I was interested in many subjects. Geography suited me well because it’s **one of the most comprehensive disciplines that exists**. Ranging from glaciers to governments, erosion to economics, it has a bit of everything! So if you’re feeling greedy, go for it!



**Alexa Martin,**  
Geography graduate

”

“ Geography at school was really good **fun**, and learning key concepts and ideas **inspired me to want to know more about Earth**. I’m now studying Geography and Earth Science at university, which has really opened my eyes to how these two subjects affect everyday life in so many ways.



**Robert Tiainen, 1st year,**  
University of Glasgow

”



# Why should I choose Higher Geography?

Higher Geography allows you to gain a deeper insight into topics and themes covered during the N5 course, and study some new ones too:

## Physical Environments

- **Biosphere** – soil types and profiles
- **Lithosphere** – glacial erosion and deposition, coastal erosion and deposition, coastal management, and land use conflicts
- **Hydrosphere** – the hydrological cycle, storm hydrographs
- **Atmosphere** – global heat budget, atmospheric and oceanic circulation

## Human Environments

- **Population** - population pyramids, demographic transition, census, migration
- **Urban** – reasons for urban growth, traffic management, housing problems, retail
- **Rural** – impact and management of rural land degradation

## Global Issues (2)

- **Development and Health** – indicators, explaining differences between countries, malaria, primary health care
- **Global Climate Change** – causes, effects, management strategies
- **River Basin Management**
- **Trade, Aid and Geopolitics**
- **Energy**

Working on your 30-mark assignment will allow you to do some in-depth research into a geographical topic or issue that interests you. Fieldwork is strongly encouraged.



“ Studying Geography has helped me to **understand the forces that shaped Scotland’s stunning landscapes**, and consider future change. Studying Geography, especially at Higher level, sparked an interest that drove me to choose to study Earth Science at university.

**Katy Mellor-Jones, S6 pupil**



# Why should I choose Advanced Higher Geography?

Advanced Higher Geography is a **varied** and **challenging** course during which you will develop confidence in using a wide range of **geographical methods and techniques** for analysing and interpreting geographical data. You will further develop your ability to **think critically about geographical issues**.

Your teacher will guide you through the course, but the onus will be on you to carry out **fieldwork** and **research** to produce a field work report and an essay on geographical issues that interest you. This course is great preparation for university study.



# Why study Geography at university?

- Choose to study Geography because **it is a subject you enjoy and want to study further**. It is important that it suits your capabilities and motivates you to find out more about the wider world.
- Geography is so broad that it gives you a chance to **pursue wide interests before specialising**. Some people gain a Geography degree before specialising with a Masters degree, or going on to further training e.g. accountancy, law, teaching.
- Most employers are looking for well-rounded graduates with a range of skills rather than specialists who focus on a narrow area of study. Geography courses are ideally suited to help you to **develop these skills in the context of a wide range of interesting and relevant subject material**.



“ I was always fascinated by documentaries on Discovery and National Geographic so chose to study Geography in Dundee. I am now studying a MSc in ‘Water Hazards, Risk and Resilience’ in Dundee, which is about **tsunamis, storms and landslides** and their impacts on people. **It’s fascinating!** ”

**John Simpson, MSc student, University of Dundee**





### Craig Davidson

Studying Geography at Glasgow University

“The first two years at university introduce you to a wide range of topics from cultural, historical and urban geographies, to the more scientific physical or environmental geographies, and their interactions. I am now choosing modules for Honours and there is just so much to choose from! From the Geographies of Political Solidarities and Internationalism, to the Social Geographies of Outsiders, to Limnology: Understanding Lakes...it’s just a shame I can’t do them all!

Probably the best thing is the opportunity to meet and work with your fellow students, who soon become friends. Although you are given the skills to **work independently**, much of the course involves **group work**, either in **labs** or **tutorials**, which allows you to get to know your classmates in a way that might not happen on other courses.

**Field trips** are one of the best things about studying Geography! During the field trips you **learn** much more than you would in lecture theatre, but there is also the chance to **socialise**. In third year our “compulsory” field trip is to spend a week in the sun in Mallorca!

As someone who wasn’t even sure that they were going to study Geography until the UCAS deadline, **I can’t recommend it enough and honestly could not imagine studying anything else.**”



### Gavin Williams

Doctoral Researcher in Freshwater Ecology, University of Birmingham

“I studied Geography at school and went on to study it further at college as I enjoyed it so much. At college, I decided that I preferred Physical Geography, particularly **global environmental issues**. I then studied BSc Environmental Science at university. Studying Geography helped me to get onto the degree course. Now I am studying a PhD, looking at climate change in rivers. I get to do **fieldwork** and attend **conferences** in some great locations, which is great! After my PhD, I could continue my **research** at universities, or even go into **conservation work**, **consultancy** or something else, but I plan to **teach** Geography in schools.”



“

**Choosing to study Geography was one of the best things I have ever done.** It has allowed me to **travel** to some of the most remote areas of the planet, such as the Himalayas and Greenland, and enabled me to properly **understand** them and the issues they are facing.

**Cameron Mackay,**  
2nd year, University of Glasgow

”



**Zoe Robinson**

Studying Geography at  
Glasgow University

“Studying Earth Science at University has been incredibly **rewarding**. I love the subject and the in-depth knowledge it has given me of the **systems** and **processes** at work within the Earth, both past and present.

Studying at university provides me with a lot more **freedom** than at school. Choosing and specialising in a subject that grabs your attention and motivates you makes studying very easy because you naturally want to know and understand more. Seeing **passionate lecturers** not only teaching, but carrying out their own research also **inspires you and makes you think about all your options for the future**.

Ultimately, my degree in Earth Science will satisfy my aspiration to **learn and discover as much as possible about our complex planet**. I hope to **travel** and spend time in the field, potentially working with mineral exploration and mapping companies.”





# Conclusion

We hope that this publication has given you an insight into the **broad, relevant** and **exciting** nature of Geography, alongside the **wealth of travel and employment opportunities** the subject offers. Now, whenever anyone says 'Geography is just about flags and colouring in', we hope that you can put them right!

**We very much hope that you will enjoy getting to know your world and going places with Geography.**

## What next?

- **Join RSGS.** Keep up to date with the latest geographical news with magazines, newsletters and more. See **[www.rsgs.org](http://www.rsgs.org)** for more information.
- Contact your school's **Careers Officer** to discuss your options for employment or further study.
- If you are intending to go to university, visit the **websites** for Geography, Environmental Science, Earth Science and Social Science departments. **Contact departments** for more course information.
- Take your time to become familiar with **course information** from universities in Scotland, as well as further afield, so that you **choose the course that best suits your interests and future aspirations.**

# Contacts

## Education Scotland

Education Scotland is responsible for supporting quality and improvement in learning and teaching. You can find support documents for Geography on their website. [www.educationscotland.gov.uk](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk)

## Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

Scotland's national body for qualifications (excluding university degrees), the SQA provides information on National Qualifications, including course outlines, past exam papers and marking instructions. [www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk)

## Geography in Scottish Universities

Geography was one of the founding subjects listed in the charter for Edinburgh University in 1583, but it was not taught as a degree subject until 1908, when RSGS Secretary George Chisholm was appointed as the first Lecturer in Geography at Edinburgh.

Geographical or Earth sciences can now be studied to degree and post-graduate level at eight Scottish universities:

**University of Aberdeen:** Department of Geography and Environment  
[www.abdn.ac.uk/geography](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/geography)

**University of Dundee:** Department of Geography  
[www.dundee.ac.uk/geography](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/geography)

**University of Edinburgh:** Institute of Geography  
[www.geos.ed.ac.uk/geography](http://www.geos.ed.ac.uk/geography)

**University of Glasgow:** School of Geographical and Earth Sciences  
[www.gla.ac.uk/schools/ges](http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/ges)

**Heriot-Watt University:** Geography, Society and Environment  
[www.hw.ac.uk/study/uk/undergraduate/geography-society-and-environment.htm](http://www.hw.ac.uk/study/uk/undergraduate/geography-society-and-environment.htm)

## Scottish Association of Geography Teachers (SAGT)

The SAGT is one of the most active subject associations in Scotland. They organise an annual conference for teachers are involved in policy work with the SQA, alongside the RSGS. [www.sagteach.org](http://www.sagteach.org)

## Geographical Association (GA)

The GA is a subject association that produces a wide range of materials to support the teaching and study of Geography. [www.geography.org.uk](http://www.geography.org.uk)

### University of the Highlands and Islands:

Geography  
[www.uhi.ac.uk/geography](http://www.uhi.ac.uk/geography)

**University of St Andrews:** School of Geography & Sustainable Development *and* School of Earth & Environmental Sciences  
[www.st-andrews.ac.uk/gsd](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/gsd)  
[earthsci.st-andrews.ac.uk](http://earthsci.st-andrews.ac.uk)

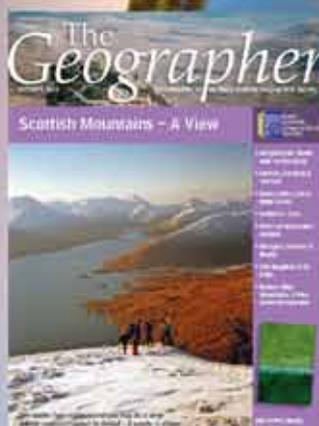
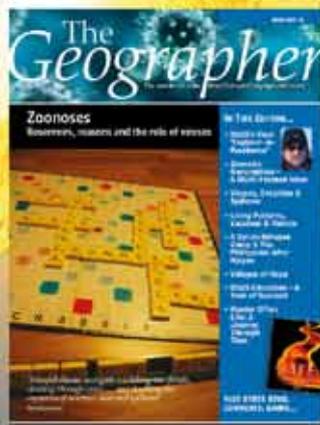
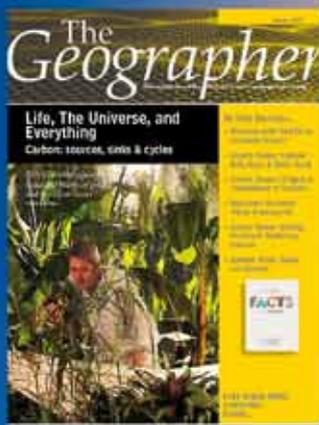
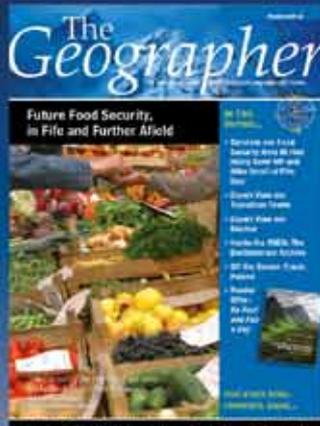
**University of Stirling:** School of Biological and Environmental Sciences  
[www.stir.ac.uk/natural-sciences/about-us/bes](http://www.stir.ac.uk/natural-sciences/about-us/bes)

A further three Scottish universities include some elements of geographical teaching within related subjects:

**Edinburgh Napier University:** Faculty of Health, Life & Social Sciences  
[www.napier.ac.uk/courses/ba-hons-social-sciences-undergraduate-fulltime](http://www.napier.ac.uk/courses/ba-hons-social-sciences-undergraduate-fulltime)

**Glasgow Caledonian University:** Glasgow School for Business and Society  
[www.gcu.ac.uk/gsbs](http://www.gcu.ac.uk/gsbs)

**University of Strathclyde:** Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
[www.strath.ac.uk/humanities](http://www.strath.ac.uk/humanities)





The Geographer, RSGS's intelligent, insightful, informative and impartial quarterly magazine, is sent free to all members. Each edition is packed with short articles written by professional geographers, RSGS members and others, introducing readers to a wide range of geographical topics.

# Join RSGS today!

Geography has a vital role to play in helping us to understand and address this century's crucial global concerns of environmental sustainability, social equity and economic balance. Scotland has long been at the forefront of geographical exploration, and RSGS has been working since 1884, with the support of thousands of members, to inspire people to want to find out more about the world.



Please join RSGS today, and get to know your world!

- Get FREE/discounted entry to c100 geographical, travel and adventure talks and other events.
- Receive quarterly copies of *The Geographer* and the *Scottish Geographical Journal*.
- Gain access to more than 130 years of RSGS collections and archives.
- Enjoy being part of a community that shares a passion for the world.

For further details, and to join, please visit [www.rsgs.org](http://www.rsgs.org) or phone us on 01738 455050.



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