

## Raising the profile of Geography – Additional notes

### **Marketing the department**

In a sense raising the profile of the subject and marketing the department go hand in hand and doing one will do the other. A good activity is to brainstorm all the opportunities you have to let other people know what Geography and the Geography department are about. A guiding thought might be to consider when anything to do with Geography in your school has any contact with anyone outside the department whether it be colleagues, the SLT, parents, governors, the press etc. You might think then of how you “sell” the subject. I borrowed principles from marketing and thought about the marketing mix – what is the product and who are the customers at each opportunity – tweak the advertising accordingly. Parents’ evenings and open evenings are key opportunities to meet key customers. Do you make a conscious effort to sell the product? Cross-curricular events are another prime opportunity to raise the subject’s profile. Does Geography lead on them or tag along? Is the subject driving the bandwagons or just a passenger?

### **Numbers opting for Geography**

Often seen as a key indicator of the health of the subject we need to consider how we approach “Options”. Do we concentrate on that period when the students are choosing which subjects to take? There are a number of videos and Power points available to sell the subject to Y9 students. Have a quick look at You tube for example. Some colleagues arrange their programmes of study to include an exciting unit to coincide with the options period. Others schedule some fieldwork, which students love and remember, for that part of the school calendar. A different way of thinking is to begin the recruitment process in Y7. Some departments have a Geography Club or Geography Master class to hook students into the subject. Of course, they must make sure that the activity is engaging or it becomes self-defeating.

### **What about ...**

Our guiding principal was to make sure that students in particular could not avoid Geography and to that end we organised events that made the students aware of the subject beyond the timetabled lessons. We organised an interform quiz for Y8 with rounds on each of the units plus some pub quiz Geography. We had buzzers and an electronic scoreboard and a trophy which the head presented. We identified the Geography in Action week as a key event and always did something a bit different. Inviting guests into school to explain how Geography was useful or essential to their work was popular as was inviting past students to come to talk to younger students. Although student voice is quite widely used these days, much of it is finding out what we want to hear rather than engaging with students in a real dialogue about what they need and want from the subject and responding in some way. Almost all students love fieldwork and it is the one part of their school experience that they always remember. Create opportunities for learning outside the classroom and Geography will inevitably become memorable and talked about. Of course, colleagues from other curriculum areas might talk about the subject in other ways but at least that will tell that the profile has been raised! Capture and celebrate success – wherever and whenever it happens and make sure everyone knows about it. The local press is always looking for copy to fill space and any stories about students doing anything positive will be welcomed. If you don't have a Press Officer/Media Relations person, find out who your local contact is in the press and cultivate a relationship with them. It will pay dividends.

### **Client base**

Anyone who has any contact with Geography in your organisation is a client. As in any service industry impressions are vital. Pay attention to how your clients perceive the subject. Do they see us as a professional outfit fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century or are we still a tweed jacket and elbow patches department? Is technology a key part of the subject or something we shy away from? Do our

teaching and learning spaces shout “Today and tomorrow” or “Last year, last century”? Is our curriculum engaging and relevant to our students or is it a tweaked version of what we have been doing for the last 20 years?

### **Teaching and Learning**

One sure way to raise the profile of the subject is to make learning about it relevant and engaging for all. If students adopt an “Oh good it’s Geography” rather than an “Oh God it’s Geography” approach it will make the subject important to them and thus high profile. Seize opportunities like curriculum development to make what we teach exciting and relevant to the students. The new KS3 Curriculum provides huge scope to ditch what is dull and irrelevant and bring in the opposite. Inertia should not be an excuse for disappointing Geography. Equally, make sure that every lesson is a compelling learning experience for all students irrespective of ability, particular intelligence or preferences in terms of learning. We know so much more about how people learn than we did and there are masses of resources and ideas to inspire or borrow from.

### **Marketing tools**

We tend to think about the face to face meetings as opportunities to sell the department and sometimes forget about other “products”. Think about anything produced by your department from worksheets to letters to parents and carers. What do they say about the subject? Do they suggest a professional organisation which cares about itself? Do you have a house style which always sends a clear message about the subject? Think about the impression you want to create and how you create that impression.

### **What next?**

Think about raising the profile of geography in your organisation. One approach might be to write down what you want it to be like and then what it is like now. The plan would be how do you move it from the now to the future. Like any change, it needs to be planned. Decide as a department

how long it is going to take. What are you going to do, what will you need, who is going to do what? Decide on some milestones and performance indicators – how will you know you have succeeded? Don't try to change everything overnight, think of it as a long term project and enjoy the journey!