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Issues in Geography Education: Session 8 'Progression'

'Progression'

Think Piece from David Lambert

What is 'level 8' geography? What is 'exceptional performance'? How do we recognise these categories when we encounter them? How do we get young people to aspire to these higher levels of achievement?

This article begins with these questions, but ends by wondering out loud whether they are in any case helpful questions to ask. They may in fact be profoundly damaging - depending on why we think teaching geography is educationally purposeful and useful in the first place.

The article is brief. But it is supported by several appendices:

- The level descriptions [Appendix 1]
- A 'levelled' marking scheme [Appendix 2]
- An attempt to 'level' a key geographical concept (location) [Appendix 3]
- The Geographical Association's 'position statement' on level descriptions [Appendix 4]
- The Importance Statement for Geography (Appendix 5)

Let me start with an anecdote. As part of the Action Plan for Geography, the GA has funds for a project called **Making Geography Happen** (see the January 2010 edition of *GA Magazine* and the www.geography.org.uk website). This began as a project to 'exemplify standards' in national curriculum geography, in key stages 1, 2 and 3. But before it really got started QCDA decided it was going to do that. The GA project therefore focussed more on 'progression' in learning geography and the 'quality' of what children and young people do in geography lessons. In effect, in the context of local geography curricula we asked:

"This is what we give children in geography. So, what do they make of this? What do they give us in return?"

From the beginning, the teachers selected to work on the project assumed that assessment would be central to the process. Quite right. We have to have some means of judging 'quality'. This is what the levels are for [Appendix 1]. However, at the first project meeting, when teachers were to spend the day discussing pupils' work, most came armed with what can only be called 'assessment for learning (AfL) paraphernalia' – including: mark schemes, self assessment charts, peer assessment criteria ... a raft of carefully constructed 'instruments' like those in Appendix 2 and 3.

The project team, including the teachers, realised that the bureaucratic weight of all this was likely to drown out the geography! The tools of AfL would literally get in the way of our ability to make sense of 'what the children are giving us in return'. So, we decided, somewhat against the *zeitgeist* or 'spirit of the times' (which sees AfL as a silver bullet for raising standards), to ignore formative assessment processes and procedures. This is not to attack the *principles* of formative assessment (used here synonymously with AfL), but to set aside the practical manifestations of how the principles have been interpreted in schools – and, as can be argued, distorted, perverted or at least 'lost in translation'. AfL definitely is undermined when it becomes bureaucratised into form-filling – e.g. self-assessment forms and utterly meaningless 'target setting'

exercises. It is also eroded of its power when linked to external standards – e.g. in the form of national curriculum levels.

For one thing, as the GA has been at pains to point out (Appendix 4), the level descriptions were never designed to be used to mark students' work. They are too broad, vague and open to interpretation. A single 'level' is representative, broadly speaking, of two or more year's work – a pretty blunt instrument on which to base your week-to-week marking! Thus, we have the commonplace absurdity of school teachers being instructed by senior leadership teams to create intermediate levels (e.g. level 3a, 3b, 3c etc).

Fabricating such a quasi-scientific basis for reporting 'progress' to the SLT, parents and Ofsted has become in this way, let's face it, an enormous professional hoax. There are eight levels (nine including 'exceptional performance'). If we subdivide each by three we are saying to the world that there are at least 24 ways to distinguish different levels of achievement in geography. This is simply absurd. And it is surely professionally dishonest to give the impression that we have such a finely graded understanding of learning geography outcomes.

Let me continue with another anecdote. The QCDA proceeded to develop its exemplification exercise with the help of a group of selected teacher consultants. One of the challenges this project faced was in identifying 'level 8' and 'exceptional' work. Special efforts were made to identify examples of work at these levels, but they were hard to come by. And yet the need for them was urgent: it would not look good for the QCDA website to imply that geography failed to produce level 8 and exceptional achievement. It would risk reinforcing the idea that has sedimented over the years through QCA¹ and Ofsted's² reporting of geography in the national curriculum: that *teaching quality* is too often deficient and that pupils' *achievements* and general expectations were modest in comparison with other subjects.

This anecdote reminds us, if we needed it, that we exist in a high-stakes environment which is intensely 'political'. There is intense pressure to comply, play to the 'rules' and to demonstrate our success (through our pupils' attainments). The GA's ambition with the **Making Geography Happen** project is to cut through the deadening weight of what amounts to 'teaching to the test' and attempt to focus on the educative outcomes of teaching and learning geography in schools. For example,

- How does geography help children think about themselves in the world?
- Do they 'get' a global sense of place?
- In what ways do they comprehend 'interdependence'?
- Is sustainable development a helpful idea – in what way? How do they express this?

It is highly likely that the project will try to use the level descriptions – but they will be kept firmly in their place, in the background. The project will foreground the young people's work. This may help us make sense of the levels – rather than the other way around as is implied by objectives-led teaching.

And now for the really challenging bit. If my line of argument so far makes any sense, then it has implications. This can be expressed most clearly as a question:

¹ http://www.geography.org.uk/download/GA_NKS3QCAreport.pdf

² <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/News/Press-and-media/2008/January/Geography-in-schools-changing-practice>

"To what extent are we clear about 'achievement' in geography?"

The answer is probably dependent on the content: we are probably pretty good at describing how children may progress in terms of learning map skills (4 and 6 figure grid references), or aspects of knowledge recall (the capital of ...) or ability to recite definitions (birth rate is ...) and offer explanations for specific landforms (an ox-bow lake is formed by ...). However, if we examine the *Importance Statement* of the KS3 national curriculum for geography (see Appendix 5), we see that these fine grained aspects of achievement are only stepping stones (they are curriculum 'objectives') – they do not quite get us to the bigger picture (of curriculum 'aims'). One of the problems with what I called the 'AFL paraphernalia' is that it gets in the way of our thinking about curriculum aims and purposes.

The 2008 revised national curriculum at KS3, and the way in which geography is expressed in the proposed primary curriculum 'learning area' of history, geography and social understanding, explicitly encourages teachers to think about the subject conceptually. This is helpful because it takes us to the realm of aims and purposes, but it is challenging. Thus, think about our question (To what extent are we clear about 'achievement' in geography?) in terms of how children think about, and with, these ideas:

- **Place**
- **Space**
- **Scale**
- **Interdependence**
- **Sustainable development**
- **Diversity**
- **Human and physical**
- **Environmental interaction**

This question becomes even more intriguing when we reach beyond KS3. How are ideas like these – and others we may identify, some of which may spring from the above list, like global and globalisation, economic development etc – expressed in GCSE and A level specifications? What expectations are placed on students in terms of their intellectual development in relation to these concepts?

Dwelling on these questions for a little while has led me to wonder whether, while we have been fiddling around with the various technical aspects of 'teaching and learning' (including the invention of AFL paraphernalia), *geography the school subject* has been disintegrating. We are used to acknowledging the 'chasm' that has grown between school geography and the vibrant, diverse subject in Higher Education. But is a gap also opening up between geography as expressed in examination specifications for 16 and 18 year olds and the subject as it expressed in the national curriculum to 14 years?

Thus I do not really have an answer to my opening question (What is 'exceptional performance' in geography?). I have further questions. There are several issues of concern for us here, which to some extent the GA has, arguably, started to address through its 'manifesto'³ and Making Geography Happen.

David Lambert
January 2010

³ www.geography.org.uk/adifferentview

APPENDIX 1

Level descriptions for Geography:

The Attainment Target for Geography consists of eight level descriptions of increasing difficulty. Teachers use their judgment to decide which level best fits an individual student's performance at the end of Key Stage 3. Most students would be expected to have attained level 5/6 by the end of year 9.

Attainment target for Geography Level 1

Pupils show their knowledge, skills and understanding in studies at a local scale. They recognise and make observations about physical and human features of localities. They express their views on features of the environment of a locality.

Level 2

Pupils can describe physical and human features of places. They show an awareness of places beyond their own locality. They recognise how people affect the environment. They carry out simple tasks and select information using resources that are given to them.

Level 3

Pupils show their knowledge, skills and understanding in studies at a local scale. They describe and compare the physical and human features of different localities and offer explanations for the locations of some of those features. They are aware that different places may have both similar and different characteristics. They offer reasons for some of their observations and for their views and judgments about places and environments. They recognise how people seek to improve and sustain environments. They use skills and sources of evidence to respond to a range of geographical questions, and begin to use appropriate vocabulary to communicate their findings.

Level 4

Pupils show their knowledge, skills and understanding in studies of a range of places and environments at more than one scale and in different parts of the world. They begin to recognise and describe geographical patterns and to appreciate the importance of wider geographical location in understanding places. They recognise and describe physical and human processes. They begin to understand how these can change the features of places, and how these changes affect the lives and activities of people living there. They understand how people can both improve and damage the environment. They explain their own views and the views that other people hold about an environmental change. They use primary and secondary sources of evidence in their investigations and communicate their findings using appropriate vocabulary.

Level 5

Pupils describe and begin to explain geographical patterns and physical and human processes. They describe how these processes can lead to similarities and differences in the environments of different places and in the lives of people who live there. They recognise some of the links and relationships that make places dependent on each other. They suggest explanations for the ways in which human activities cause changes to the environment and the different views people hold about them. They recognise how people try to manage environments sustainably. They explain their own views and begin to suggest relevant geographical questions and issues. They select information and sources of evidence, suggest plausible conclusions to their investigations and present their findings both graphically and in writing.

Level 6

Pupils describe and explain a range of physical and human processes and recognise that these processes interact to produce the distinctive characteristics of places. They describe ways in which physical and human processes operating at different scales create geographical patterns and lead to changes in places. They appreciate the many links and relationships that make places dependent on each other. They recognise how conflicting demands on the environment may arise and describe and compare different approaches to managing environments. They appreciate that different values and attitudes, including their own, result in different approaches that have different effects on people and places. Drawing on their knowledge and understanding, they suggest relevant geographical questions and issues and appropriate sequences of investigation. They select a range of skills and sources of evidence from the key stage 3 programme of study and use them effectively in their investigations. They present their findings in a coherent way and reach conclusions that are consistent with the evidence.

Level 7

Pupils understand that many factors, including people's values and attitudes, influence the decisions made about places and environments, and use this understanding to explain the resulting changes. They appreciate that the environment in a place and the lives of the people who live there are affected by actions and events in other places. They recognise that human actions, including their own, may have unintended environmental consequences and that change sometimes leads to conflict. They appreciate that considerations of sustainable development affect the planning and management of environments and resources. With growing independence, they draw on their knowledge and understanding to identify geographical questions and issues and establish their own sequence of investigation. They evaluate critically sources of evidence, present well-argued summaries of their investigations and begin to reach substantiated conclusions.

Level 8

Pupils begin to account for disparities in development and understand the range and complexity of factors that contribute to the quality of life in different places. They recognise the causes and consequences of environmental issues and understand a range of views about them and different approaches to tackling them. They understand how considerations of sustainable development can affect their own lives as well as the planning and management of environments and resources. They use examples to illustrate this. Drawing on their knowledge and understanding, they show independence in identifying appropriate geographical questions and issues, and in using an effective sequence of investigation. They select a wide range of skills from the key stage 3 programme of study and use them effectively and accurately. They evaluate critically sources of evidence before using them in their investigations. They present full and coherently argued summaries of their investigations and reach substantiated conclusions.

Exceptional Performance

Pupils refer to a wide range of geographical factors to explain and predict change in the characteristics of places over time. They understand alternative approaches to development and the implications of these for the quality of life in different places. They assess the relative merits of different ways of tackling environmental issues and justify their views about these different approaches. They understand how considerations of sustainable development can affect their own lives as well as the planning and management of environments and resources. They illustrate this with a full range of examples. They draw selectively on geographical ideas and theories. They carry out geographical investigations independently at different scales. They evaluate critically sources of evidence and present coherent arguments and effective, accurate and well-substantiated conclusions. They evaluate their work by suggesting improvements in approach and further lines of enquiry.

APPENDIX 2

Marking Criteria (Geography Enquiries)

Grade	Level	Criteria
A	7/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Accurate facts with the source of information given (i.e. which books, websites and authors were used).▪ Information has been analysed and a personal opinion given, including whether there is any bias.▪ Diagrams, graphs and tables of data have been included and they have been explained in detail.▪ Excellent conclusions have been made and all arguments have been backed up by real scientific evidence.▪ An excellent evaluation of how the project was created: what would have you done differently if you had to do it again?▪ Excellent geographical vocabulary.▪ Excellent presentation.
B	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Accurate facts with the source of information given (ie which books, websites and authors were used).▪ Information has started to be analysed and occasional personal opinions have been given.▪ A diagram, graph or table of data has been included with a brief explanation.▪ Good conclusions have been made and some arguments have been backed up by real scientific evidence.▪ A brief evaluation has been given of how the project was put together and any changes that would be made next time.▪ Very good geographical vocabulary.▪ Very good presentation.
C	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Good answers to most of the questions with good descriptions and explanations but lacking in detail.▪ Starting to make conclusions about the information that has been read.▪ Starting to evaluate (what are the good and bad things) about the information.▪ Diagrams have been drawn but there is little writing to explain what they mean.▪ Good geographical vocabulary.▪ Good presentation.
D	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Not all of the tasks answered.▪ Descriptions given with only a few explanations.▪ Diagrams have been drawn but there is little writing to explain what they mean.▪ Lack of geographical vocabulary.
E	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ No structure.▪ Untidy presentation.▪ Lack of information.

Source: Stockton G: <http://www.sln.org.uk/geography/AfL.htm> (accessed 8 Jan 2010)

APPENDIX 3

There are four elements to describing locations:

- Scale – how large an area of place you are referring to and how it relates to larger scales
- Directional language – points of the compass and the word central
- Nearby features and places – a feature which is well known that is near to your location, such as a city or a distinctive coastal shape
- Distances – estimated distances to or from features or places

	Image	This location description:	Example
Stage 1		Uses one place at one scale.	The Peak National Park is in the centre of England. Kenya is in East Africa
Stage 2		Uses two scales of places Or Simple directional language [North, South, Central, East or West]	The Peak National Park is in the centre of England, East of Manchester. Kenya is on the East Coast of Africa.
Stage 3		Uses estimated distances and directions from places and features nearby Or Uses two or more nearby features or places	The Peak National Park is in the centre of England, about 25 km East of Manchester. Kenya is on the East Coast of Africa spanning the equator.
Stage 4		Uses two or more scales of places combined with more accurate directional language [such as 8 points of compass] and nearby features and places [cities, coastal features, oceans, mountains].	The Peak National Park is in the centre of England, about 25 km East of Manchester and 10 km west of Sheffield. Kenya is on the East Coast of Africa bordering the Indian Ocean spanning 200km either side of the equator.
Stage 5		Uses more than two scales of places combined with accurate directional language [such as 16 points of compass] and distances to or from nearby features and places [towns and cities, countries, mountains, rivers and coastal features, seas and oceans].	The Peak Park is in the centre of England, between the North West, Yorkshire and the Midlands regions. It is surrounded by cities, Manchester 25km to the West, Sheffield 10km to the East, Nottingham and Derby 40km to the South East and Stoke on Trent, 15km to the South West. Kenya is on the East Coast of Africa bordering the Indian Ocean spanning 200km either side of the equator. Tanzania is to the south, Uganda is to the North West, Ethiopia to the North East.

APPENDIX 4

Level descriptions and assessment in geography: a GA discussion paper

(Downloaded from <http://www.geography.org.uk/aboutus/campaigningforgeography>)

The purpose of level descriptions

Level descriptions were introduced in SCAA's (now QCA) 1995 review of the curriculum and its assessment. Level descriptions replaced the vast, unworkable structure of statements of attainment that helped bring the original National Curriculum into disrepute. Level descriptions were intended to be used for long-term assessment, to help teachers reach a rounded judgement of pupils' attainments at the end of a Key Stage. They were designed to be used as 'best fit' descriptions to come to an overall judgement, drawing together evidence of what pupils know, understand and can do in relation to the taught curriculum, and not to require the assemblage of detailed evidence to prove every aspect has been attained. Each level represents about two years 'progress' – they are *that* rough-hewn. The level descriptions were not designed to be used as if they were assessment objectives, nor to be broken down into different elements; they were never intended to be used as instruments to assess individual exams, tests, homework or class based exercises.

Level descriptions were also designed to describe progression in the subject, by providing a structure to help teachers plan for progression, and to help them take a view of where pupils are heading in their acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills. They are also rough-hewn in the sense that they were QCA's best shot at describing attainment in the subject, rather than being based on any research; one result is that some distinctions between levels seem to depend largely on semantics, and in geography, some aspects of attainment are absent from one or more levels. However the level descriptions have been successful in providing a language for teachers to talk about progression and to plan for it and, when used well, end-of-key stage assessment and moderation has provided a focus for teachers to review pupils' attainments, improve pupils' skills at assessment for learning and to provide all KS3 students with feedback on their strengths and areas for development, often supported by QCA's exemplification guidance on the NC Action site.

The position in 2006

In the intervening decade the assessment situation as originally envisaged by QCA has changed significantly, with the result that level descriptions are now used in many schools for both medium and short-term assessments (sometimes, paradoxically, weakening their value for assessment at the end of the Key Stage).

One development is that schools have been under increasing and relentless pressure both to raise standards for pupils, and to be more accountable for their progress. These are laudable goals. To support them, schools can now deploy a formidable array of data to identify their strengths and areas for improvement at school, subject, group and pupil level; they can interrogate the data to identify the progress of individuals and groups such as boys, the more able, minority ethnic pupils etc., and to set targets for them. This data is founded significantly on test data from the core subjects and supported by sophisticated data handling and reporting systems, both internally and from DfES, such as the old PANDA and current RAISE online system. It is driven by school managers' desire to monitor and report progress closely, not least to OfSTED team inspectors, local authorities and parents. One effect is to put pressure on non-core subjects to produce similar detail and frequency of data to that expected from the core, even though there is no basis of test data for these subjects, and they have less curriculum time. Another effect of the 'fetishisation' of data is to exalt the quantitative over qualitative professional judgements and, arguably, to stretch what can be measured beyond the limits of reliability and validity.

Level descriptions and everyday assessment

As schools have become more systematic in using data and setting targets, they have also begun to extend the use of level descriptions well beyond their original purpose. One response to their broad-brush nature has been to look for more detail, by subdividing levels to make them more fine grained. In the process, some members of the profession have effectively re-invented the statements of attainment they saw abolished a decade ago. In geography at least, the result is akin to a massive professional confidence trick, lending a spurious exactitude to what can at best be an informed hunch about the complexities of progression.

The similar practice of turning percentages from tests and exams into level judgements - where for example 58% is said, by some mysterious process, to be Level 5 or whatever - is of equally dubious validity: it is a process to which Awarding Bodies devote huge amounts of time and resources trying to get right. These practices are promoted by some data handling systems, by commercial assessment packages and indeed by some inspection teams. It is madness - a clear case of the tail wagging the dog - puts intolerable pressure on subject practitioners and is almost certainly a total waste of time: a distraction from the real task, which is to get to know pupils, engage them in their work, promote learning and improvement.

A second response has been to increase the frequency of use of level descriptions to yearly, termly, half termly or even to apply levels to individual pieces of work. The latter is also pointless, partly because of the breadth of level descriptions and the impossibility of using them to signal, monitor or reward significant progress from week to week. These become serial summative assessments, in an education system where pupils' school lives are already dominated by this type of assessment. Some schools mistake this activity for formative assessment, and devote immense energy into manipulating level descriptions, rather than into teaching and learning improvements such as formative feedback that will result in genuine learning.

Together, these responses fly in the face of the research on assessment for learning, that grading pupils' work is almost always ineffective in promoting progress. This is because pupils focus on their grades, which they tend to use to compare with their friends, rather than focusing on the comment that goes with them and the improvement they need to make. Moreover, frequent testing tends to motivate those who anticipate success; even then students are often only motivated to perform better, not to learn better. For less successful students, repeated tests lower self-esteem and reduce effort, so increasing the gap between high- and low-achieving students⁴. If the main purpose of assessment is to help all pupils reflect on their learning and improve on it, the conclusion is that neither frequent summative marking using level descriptions, nor subdividing the levels will be effective in promoting learning.

Assessment for learning

A second significant development in the last decade has been the growth in understanding among teachers of formative assessment (or assessment for learning) and of strategies to promote it in everyday lessons. In contrast to assessment *of* learning, assessment *for* learning is concerned with helping pupils see what progress in their work means, especially to identify the next small steps in their learning,

Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students' learning. It thus differs from assessment designed primarily to serve the purposes of accountability, or of ranking, or of certifying competence (Weeden and Lambert, forthcoming).⁵

Assessment for learning is thus intimately founded in the curriculum and in teaching and learning, rather than focused on collecting numbers to feed into schools' performance and target setting systems: repeated measurement on its own will not bring about improvement. Two key principles are that assessment for learning practices give feedback to teachers and their pupils, so helping modify their teaching and learning activities to promote improvement, and importantly also let pupils in on their learning. For both these reasons they help to motivate pupils and give them the opportunity to take more responsibility for their learning. They are particularly useful for less successful learners, in contrast to repeated summative assessments. Whilst level descriptions

⁴ Assessment Reform Group (2002b) *Testing, Learning and Motivation*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge School of Education.

⁵ Weeden P. and Lambert, D (2006) *Geography Inside the Black Box*, NFER Nelson

are useful in providing guidance on progression, they do not readily provide the fine-grained information that answers the question, for teachers and pupils, what next?

Assessment for learning can be promoted through tried and tested practices in everyday geography lessons, such as:

- clarity about learning intentions and what success looks like
- opportunities for self- and peer-assessment, such as peer-reviewing work against the criteria for success, and identifying achievement and improvement
- improved feedback, focused on achievement and improvement
- modelling examples of work which exemplifies achievement and success
- opportunities for reflection, for example in lesson plenaries⁶

Perhaps unusually in education, these assessment for learning practices are founded on a very strong research base, especially Black and Wiliam's many contributions⁷, as well as in strongly developing classroom expertise.

Level descriptions and medium-term assessment

Black and Wiliam consider that four assessment for learning strategies are particularly useful: improved questioning, peer and self-assessment, feedback focused on improvement, but also formative use of summative assessments. They argue that occasional monitoring of pupils' progress in relation to their summative goals is valuable to help pupils and teachers gauge progress and identify next steps: this is a practice that is considered essential in promoting progress and achievement at GCSE and A level.

This formative use of summative assessments is part of the solution that many secondary geography departments have arrived at in Key Stage 3⁸. They commonly make periodic judgements at the end of different units of work about pupils' attainments, using the level descriptions to devise assessment criteria. Commonly, because they relate their judgements to the taught curriculum, they identify attainment and progress only in relation to relevant parts of the level descriptions, often using the strands, which are known as 'aspects of performance' (places, patterns and processes etc), to help design the criteria. They can then use these periodic assessments formatively, to identify broad progress, strengths and weaknesses and to identify curriculum targets. Some teachers use the level descriptions to track progress by recording them in their mark books, but set pupils curriculum rather than level targets, thus avoiding the problems of distraction and motivation discussed above.

More effective practice includes:

- focusing assessments on enquiry
- varying the range and focus of assessment over a key stage, e.g. group presentation, oral, poster, extended writing etc, but not attempting to devise level tests
- using AfL strategies in these periodic assessments to promote achievement, e.g. by sharing success criteria in advance, using self- and peer assessment, modelling examples of quality work
- using the results of assessment to agree a learning focus for improvements in pupils' geography
- using the results of assessment to monitor and review curriculum and teaching, perhaps using the strands/aspects of performance to help identify strengths and areas for development
- being very cautious about overusing these assessments - about once a term seems about right - and being aware of the impact on the motivation of less successful learners
- ensuring these assessments supplement rather than supplant teachers' judgements gained from their everyday work with pupils

⁶ see DfES (2004) *Key Stage 3 Strategy: Assessment for Learning, whole-school training materials*, London: HMSO, and Clarke, S. (2001) *Unlocking Formative Assessment*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

⁷ See especially Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998b) *Inside the Black Box: Raising standards through classroom assessment*. London: School of Education, Kings College, and Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B. and Wiliam, D. (2002) *Working Inside the Black Box: Assessment for learning in the Classroom*. London: School of Education, Kings College.

⁸ see for example Howes, N. (2006) 'Teacher assessment in geography' in *Secondary Geography Handbook*, Sheffield, Geographical Association and Weeden, P and Hopkin, J. (2006) 'Assessment for learning in geography' in *Secondary Geography Handbook*, Sheffield, Geographical Association.

- developing these assessments over a foundation of the AfL practices in everyday lessons outlined above, not as a replacement for them.

This is not what level descriptions were originally designed for. But many departments report that this formative use of summative assessment has helped pupils to talk about their progress and improve their work over the longer term, as well as improving teachers' monitoring. By effectively redesigning the level descriptions to fit a rather different purpose, they are matching practice at Key Stage 3 with that at GCSE, and in line with HMI's advice.⁹

In conclusion, without attention to everyday teaching and learning practices that promote genuine progress, these summative-formative assessments can only have a limited impact. But carefully used and backed up by everyday teaching and learning strategies that promote achievement through formative assessment, occasional use of level descriptions to monitor pupils' progress and identify improvement should be supported by the GA. In contrast, sub-dividing levels and using them over-frequently, especially to mark individual pieces of work, should not.

Primary schools

The use of level descriptions is undeveloped in the majority of primary schools, and the majority of practices (and malpractices) discussed above apply largely to Key Stage 3. This is partly because, if anything, the pressure on core subjects is even more relentless in primary schools, especially compared with non-core subjects. However some schools use them very effectively, for example to review standards and provision in geography at the end of each Key Stage. The examples of standards in the [NC Action](#) website are useful for reviewing the pitch of pupils' work in this way, and an effective means of helping to monitor and review progress.

The future

QCA's curriculum review is currently focused on Key Stage 3, where the way geography is expressed in the PoS will be significantly different. There will be some changes of emphasis in the level descriptions above Level 3; the principles of their effective deployment to promote learning, as discussed above, are likely to remain the same.

The GA will continue to represent and support our members, for example by working with QCA on guidance for teachers, which is likely to re-iterate the messages here; by dissemination (e.g. through *Teaching Geography*) and engaging in development work: AEWG in particular will be taking this discussion paper forward.

***John Hopkin for GA Education Committee
December 2006***

⁹ OfSTED, 2003, *Good assessment practice in geography*, HMI 1474

Websites

Assessment Reform Group: <http://www.assessment-reform-group.org/>

DfES Key Stage 3 Strategy: <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/keystage3/>

General Teaching Council for England (for case studies): <http://www.gtce.org.uk/>

National Curriculum in Action (QCA exemplification): <http://www.ncaction.org.uk/>

QCA Assessment for Learning: <http://www.qca.org.uk/7659.html>

The Association for Achievement and Improvement through Assessment (AAIA) – <http://www.aaia.org.uk>

Reading

Arber, N. (2003) 'Assessment for Learning', *Teaching Geography*, 28, 1, pp. 42-6.

Hopkin, J., Telfer, S., and Butt, G. (eds) (2000) *Assessment in Practice*, Sheffield: Geographical Association.

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Lambert, D. (2002) 'Using assessment to support learning' in Smith, M. (ed) *Teaching Geography in Secondary Schools*. London: RoutledgeFalmer, pp. 123-33.

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Leat, D. and McGrane, J. (2000) 'Diagnostic and formative assessment of students' thinking', *Teaching Geography*, 25, 1, pp. 4-7.

Martin, F. (2004) 'It's a crime' *Teaching Geography*, 29, 1, pp. 43-46.

Weeden, P. (2005) 'Feedback in the geography classroom: developing the use of assessment for learning' *Teaching Geography*, 30, 3, pp. 161-163.

Wood, P. (2002) 'Closing the gender gap in geography: update 1', *Teaching Geography*, 27, 1, pp. 41-3.

APPENDIX 5

The importance of Geography – the GA's version, downloaded from Juicy Geography:
www.geojuice.org/importance.asp

"We all live our lives geographically. Planet Earth is our home. It is awesome, diverse, inspiring and ever changing. Studying geography invites us to participate more fully in the excitement, enjoyment and challenge of this dynamic world. It draws on personal experience, to help us better understand the places we live in, why they matter and how they are connected to a globalised world. Geography draws from across the physical, cultural, economic and political spheres to illuminate key issues for the present and the future, explored at all scales from the personal to the local and the global. Through geography we learn to appreciate the diversity of landscapes, peoples and cultures. Geography is therefore a vital subject resource for 21st century global citizens, enabling us to face questions of what it means to live sustainably in an interdependent world. Geography helps us investigate and to think critically and creatively about the complexities of places, and different views and feelings relating to places. Geography is studied through enquiry, this requires the formulation of effective questions. Fieldwork and outdoor education are essential to geography. The subject helps develop significant elements of the skills framework, with a strong emphasis on utilising maps and visual images as well as new technologies including Geographical Information. These transferable geographical skills help to equip us for lifelong learning as responsible global citizens."

The official version is found at

<http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/key-stage-3/geography/programme-of-study/index.aspx?tab=1>