

Schools and Universities – the Great Divide

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For much of the hundred years over which it has existed, the Geographical Association's fortunes and development have been linked to the activities of Professors from British University Geography departments. It was, for example, Mackinder, the new Reader in Geography at Oxford, who presided over the meeting in May 1893 at which the Association was founded. He played an active role as Chairman of Council, Trustee and President until his death in 1947. It was his Oxford colleague, Herbertson, Honorary Secretary of the GA from 1900 until his death in 1915, who established *The Geographical Teacher* (which subsequently became *Geography*). Professor H. J. Fleure was another senior academic who served the Association loyally and at a high level over an enormous span of time, being Honorary Secretary from 1917–1946 and Chairman of Council from 1948–1969. Indeed, when one looks at the list of Honorary officers published in Professor Balchin's admirable history, one appreciates the extraordinary contribution made by the likes of Alice Garnett, Stan Gregory, David Linton, Norman Pye, Dudley Stamp, William Balchin and Denys Brunsden.

The current involvement of Professors and other university teachers in the Geographical Association is sadly at variance with this history. There are notable exceptions, including the present Editor of *Geography*, but for the most part the current generation of academics do not serve on GA Committees or its Council, they do not join the Association, they choose not to send their best articles to its journals and few attend its Annual Conference. A chasm has developed between those who teach at school and those who teach in universities.

One can speculate as to the reasons why this gulf has developed. Many academics are increasingly driven by the desire to do research and have less time for teaching and education. The burgeoning of textbooks at all levels means that the direct input of intellectual material to school teachers may be less fundamental than previously. The Geographical Association itself has changed – university teachers probably have less direct interest in the primary sector than in the secondary. Moreover, because of recent political pressures some would argue that the GA has become more concerned with Education *per se* rather than with geography. Curriculum development has become a central focus and has in recent years been a major component of the Annual Conference. Some academic sessions have been badly attended.

Whatever the reasons may be, the lack of contact between the universities and the schools in our subject is a cause for concern. For their part, universities depend on schools for the bulk of their undergraduates; they need to influence what is taught and examined in schools, and they need to be aware how methods of teaching (and what is taught) have changed over recent years. There is very little sense in moaning about what new undergraduates do or do not know if one has made no effort to influence what is done at school.

To put it starkly, where would geography be in the National Curriculum without the GA, and where would geography be in the universities in years to come were it not in the National Curriculum?

For their part schools need to find out what universities seek and desire from school children, they need the intellectual stimulation of those engaged in producing exciting research, and they need early access to new ideas, themes and techniques that can filter through to schools and add a new dimension to teaching.

Thus, in our Centenary year we need to seek a rapprochement between schools and universities within the GA. The GA must seek to make itself attractive to academics through its journals, conferences and branch activities, while those in higher education must, for the future health of their subject, make a deliberate effort to join the GA, encourage others to join the GA, help GA branches, and contribute to its journals and Annual Conference!

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