

# Strategic plan 2017-2021

**Royal  
Geographical  
Society**  
with IBG

Advancing geography  
and geographical learning



# Strategy objectives



- 1. Geography: promoting and sustaining a vibrant discipline** To represent, promote and advocate for geography as a leading discipline, so that its contribution to understanding our changing world is appreciated by the public and it maintains a strong position in education, research, fieldwork & expeditions, in civic society and in informing policy and business.
- 2. Knowledge and understanding: helping create a better informed world** To advance, interpret and share geographical knowledge more fully, so that the world is better understood and more people benefit from using and enjoying geographical knowledge in their work, leisure and communities.
- 3. Geography in practice: enabling professional and student communities** To help meet the needs of practising geographers and students, so that there are vibrant, well trained and accredited professional communities, and highly employable students.
- 4. Growing our reputation: building on tradition, independence and contemporary relevance** To build further the Society's strong profile, reputation and presence, nationally and internationally, reinforcing and publicising its role as a leader among learned societies and a partner of choice.
- 5. Enhancing our Membership: an important source of expertise, funding and enthusiasm** To reach and engage new supporters and retain the enthusiasm and expertise of existing Fellows and members, across the UK and beyond, ensuring a strong and growing membership of both professionals and enthusiasts who support our activities.
- 6. Securing the future: as one of the world's largest and most active scholarly geographical societies** To enable a robust future for the Society, by increasing income sustainably, using technology effectively, and enhancing staff capabilities.

Geography is the integrated study of the earth's landscapes, peoples, environments and places – their nature, dynamics, interactions and change. Bridging the natural sciences, social sciences and the humanities, it is the spatial discipline.



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**Over the next five years, with the support of our staff, members, donors and other stakeholders we will retain and build upon our current vibrancy for the benefit of everyone interested in understanding the world around them.**

### **From the President**

Geography concerns the people, the places and environments of our planet. Never has the role of geography been more relevant. The future of humanity depends upon global engagement with disrupted earth systems. Climate change, geopolitics, population, migration, resources, water, oil, energy, oceans, natural hazards, are all planetary concerns, affecting all people in all places. They are geographical concerns.

As the world's population climbs from 7.5 billion today towards 9.8 billion by 2050 and as rising global temperatures increase pressure on the planet's resources, new solutions will have to be sought for unprecedented challenges. Geographical science will make a difference and so will the engagement of 'citizen geographers'.

Deep down, we are all geographers, building awareness of the people and places around us, and learning little by little about the world we live in. Geography enriches our lives, whether we study it formally or not. On this finite orb, with its battered habitat, sustained by its intricate, interconnected systems, we have reached a point where knowledge is the best guarantor of the future. Geography will keep us human.

### **From the Director**

The Society and UK geography enjoy a strong position in 2017. Both are world leading in their respective peer groups. The past two decades have seen both grow and gain in standing, significantly and hand in hand, supported strongly by the geographical community, nationally and internationally. Currently an estimated 3.5 million people benefit directly from the Society's work each year in 'advancing geographical science'.

The strategy seeks to sustain both strengths in the face of inevitable changes and challenges in the external operating environment over the coming five years. This reflects our belief that geography, through advancing and sharing knowledge of our changing and interconnected world, is an essential underpinning for better world stewardship, for a tolerant society, and for citizens' enjoyment and understanding of people, places and environments.

The Society has vital subject leadership, facilitating and advocacy roles. Equally as important, our ability to inspire curiosity, and to help develop the geographical leaders of the future, underpin the strategy too, sitting comfortably alongside our actions to help advance and share knowledge and understanding.

The strategy sets out to address some key emerging needs – for geography, for geographers, and across the audiences that we serve. Our audiences span research, education, professional, policy, expedition and public audiences. They range from non-specialist enthusiasts and students to leading experts and decision makers. The strategy reinforces this breadth of scope, as vital to the future of both the Society and geography.

Meeting the emerging needs will build on successes, develop the Society and its activities further, and will draw on the Society's rich assets:

- Reputation and brand, convening power, and networks.
- Mutually supportive collaborations across the geographical community.
- Willingness of members, donors and others to contribute expertise, volunteer time, and provide funding.
- Iconic facilities, important Collections and knowledgeable staff.

Expanding our role as a professional body will help meet the needs of the professional community and the skills agenda more fully. New education activities will focus on schools where

# Vision, mission and objectives

geography is weaker, and in enhancing learning through fieldwork, data skills and the independent study. Ensuring geography is central to the challenges led agendas is important for research communities. We need to enhance our work in knowledge exchange to UK policy. The successful completion and evaluation of the Society's collaborative field research programme, *Migrants on the margins* is a high priority; as is developing further aspects of our support for expeditions and fieldwork. Widening diversity in the discipline is a theme throughout.

In the face of populism and the many geographical challenges society faces, we are planning a new series of topical public discussions and factual briefings; and it is timely to rethink also how we focus and present the Society's UK-wide offer. An integrated digital strategy, starting with a new website, will be essential in making more of our work. There will be a major appeal to conserve the south façade of our historic premises. The greatest challenge is to sustain our core income generation in a period of considerable political and economic uncertainty and to fund the exciting new developments.

The Society is the learned society and professional body for geography in the UK. It has national and international activities, reach and influence.

The Society's Royal Charter, granted in 1859, sets out the objective of the Society as 'the advancement of geographical science'. In the 21st century, the Society's trustees interpret the Charter as a vision and a mission for the future:

## **Vision**

A world-leading learned and professional body for geography, widely respected for its independence, quality, innovation and for the breadth of its activities promoting and supporting geography as the means for everyone to discover, understand and respect the world's peoples, places and environments.

## **Mission**

A world centre for geography and geographical learning dedicated to the development and promotion of knowledge together with its application to the challenges facing society and the environment.

## **Objectives**

The Society's mission is supported by six strategic objectives. These focus the activities of the Society and ensure that the Society's operational development is planned, integrated and responsive to the needs of the discipline, its practitioners, the public at large and the membership.

Three objectives concern first and foremost the discipline. These are to safeguard the discipline, to develop and share geographical knowledge and understanding, and to support practitioners and students. Three objectives concern the Society. These are to grow our reputation, enhance our membership and sustain the future. The objectives appear in full on the front inside cover and they are explained in more detail on pages 6 to 11.

# The Society and Geography today

The Royal Geographical Society (with The Institute of British Geographers) is the United Kingdom's learned society and professional body for geography and geographers. Founded in 1830, it is one of the oldest, largest and most active geographical societies in the world. It operates at international, national, and regional levels from its London headquarters and eleven regional branches.

The Society is an innovative, dynamic and professional organisation; a charity with a strong brand, a loyal membership and many valued partnerships in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. As a UK registered charity the Society serves public benefit. Most of its activities, live and online, are open to all. It has a 16,000 strong membership drawn from more than 100 countries. Fellows and members support the Society's work in many different ways, are part of a global geographical community, and receive selected member benefits.

The Society exists to advance geography. This is the understanding of our world, from local communities to global scales. Understanding the processes by which the environments, societies and places of the world are continually shaped, changed and interact lies at the heart of geography. It is of relevance to us all; we

centre our lives in 'places,' and through our actions we increasingly change our natural and built environments.

Geography is one of the few disciplines that spans the natural and social sciences, and humanities, and brings with it an understanding and integration of the different approaches of these three broad areas of study. It is the spatial science and it provides an ideal framework for relating other fields of knowledge; intellectually and through modelling and computer-based, geographical information systems.

Geography plays a vital role in understanding and helping to manage some of the most pressing challenges facing us today. Over the coming decades our world will change faster than ever before, affecting individuals, communities, nations, and the planet as a whole. There is increasing recognition of the need to live sustainably, and while there are some welcome, positive signs of change, we still face the prospect, for example, of:

- The world's population rising to 8.5bn by 2030, largely from growth in developing countries; in 1980 it was 4.5bn.

- Unprecedented rates of climate change and its effects in causing extreme weather events, sea level rise and in creating pressure for migration of people, flora and fauna in vulnerable places.
- The economic balance of power shifting more fully to China and India.
- 80% of people living in cities, with continuing rapid expansion of cities in Africa and Asia especially.
- Widening cultural, economic and social inequalities between communities, countries and regions.
- Greater levels of political and economic uncertainty in the UK.

Changes like these will affect different places in different ways, bringing both challenges and opportunities. They will also affect the lives of us all, and the social circumstances and physical environments around us. The changes and how we manage them in the coming years will determine our legacy for future generations on planet earth.

Geography is, in the broadest sense, an education for life and for living. Learning through geography, whether gained through formal learning or experientially through travel, fieldwork and expeditions, helps us all to be more socially and

environmentally sensitive, more culturally aware, and more informed and responsible citizens and employees. More informed, for example, about:

- The places and communities in which we live and work.
- Our natural environments and resources and the pressures they face.
- Cultural diversity and the ways in which that is changing.
- Geo-politics and the legacies of history.
- How and why the world is changing, globally and locally.
- How our individual and societal actions contribute to those changes.
- The choices that exist in managing our world sustainably for the future.

In recent years the Society has opened itself and its activities wholeheartedly to the wider world (summary on page 16). It has built upon its traditions with dynamism and imagination. It has modernised, extended its range of activities and audiences, enhanced its facilities, increased its revenues, and grown the numbers of people who use and benefit from its work to ca 3.5million annually. It has drawn together professional communities of geographical expertise, sharing their knowledge widely, while equally engaging enthusiasts

and non-specialists in understanding our world.

The Society has achieved this through a clear sense of vision, a succession of sequential strategies, and collaboratively with the encouragement, support and advice of many who care about and respect the organisation and the discipline. It exists at the centre of a strong, multi-dimensional community.

The Society's work today:

- Promotes, develops and safeguards geography as a discipline.
- Supports, trains and accredits its students, field scientists, teachers, researchers, and wider professionals across many employment sectors.
- Generates new knowledge and shares understanding of the world with and between professionals, policy makers and the public.

The Society's work builds on a powerful history, strongly associated in the 19th and early 20th centuries with scientific exploration. It was also the lead body in establishing geography both in the school curriculum and as a teaching and research discipline in British Universities over a century ago.

Arising largely from its work, the Society holds two million items in its historic

Collections, including the world's largest private map collection, more than 500,000 photographs plus archive papers and diaries, journals, books, artefacts and moving films. These are designated of national and international importance. The Collections are an extraordinary record of our changing world and provide a unique cultural and research resource today. A £7.2m project to widen access to them and to add educational value through interpretation, was completed in 2004 and provided public access for the first time to all the historic materials and to the Society in general. Our collaborative work with BAME communities in the UK explores cultural and historical perspectives on the Collections.

The Society generates all the income to fund its work; currently around £6m per annum – we do not receive core government funding, but depend on our track record, innovation and enterprise, and loyal supporters. The main sources are membership subscriptions, charitable operations, commercial enterprise activities, and fundraising, in roughly equal amounts. We warmly thank all supporters.



# 1. Geography

## Promoting and sustaining a vibrant discipline

### Objective

Represent, promote and advocate for geography as a leading discipline, so that its contribution to understanding our changing world is appreciated by the public and it maintains a strong position in education, research, fieldwork & expeditions, in civic society and in informing policy and business.

### Context

Geography has an essential role in the 21st century in helping everyone to understand our world. 2012 to 2016 saw significant strengthening in the standing and study of geography. 2017 to 2021 has uncertainties in the face of UK political and economic change.

### The Society's current position

The leading advocate and a powerful and influential voice for geography in the UK; valued for this role by university, school and field science communities, sought out by decision-makers in government and by the media, and increasingly recognised by the public.

**By 2021** the Society will have maintained its position as the primary advocate for UK geography; developed greater engagement with the business community and public sector; and sustained the high standing of geography.

Meeting this objective will involve:

### 1.1 Making the case for geography

- Successfully advocating the benefits of studying geography to government, schools and universities across the UK, and to parents and students.
- Demonstrating and promoting the relevance and impact of geographical research, geographical information and geospatial technologies.
- Positioning geography, its research and practice communities more fully to the front of the challenges-led and interdisciplinarity agendas; and more firmly in knowledge exchange to UK policy, while maintaining a strong disciplinary identity.
- Advocating the benefits of employing geographers and their value to society.
- Maintaining strong networks of influence, UK-wide and internationally.
- Implementing recommendations of the Reviews of Physical and Human Geography.

### 1.2 Advising on geography

- Advising government on policy relating to geography and geographers in all sectors.

- Using the Society's convening power and contact to ensure geography contributes to key policy agendas.

### 1.3 Promoting geography to wider audiences

- Engaging people with the relevance of geography to employment and to citizenship.
- Promoting and demonstrating the contribution of contemporary geographical research to the challenges facing society and the environment.
- Showcasing the best of geography in the media.
- Extending awareness of the discipline and the Society with underrepresented groups.
- Extending relevant Society work, and awareness of the discipline, with underrepresented groups.
- Using landscape, travel and culture to introduce new audiences to geography.

### Overview

The approach is to build on our record of successful advocacy to continue to strengthen the understanding and profile of the discipline, and inclusively so, recognising its importance to the UK and the world.



# 2. Knowledge and understanding

## Helping create a better informed world

### Objective

Advance, interpret and share geographical knowledge more fully, so that the world is better understood and more people benefit from using and enjoying geographical knowledge in their work, leisure and communities.

### Context

In a period of uncertainty and rapid change there is a greater need than ever to advance, and share, well-founded knowledge and understanding of the UK and the world. And to do so in ways that are meaningful to professional and public audiences today. We will bring our independence, convening power and inspiration to bear.

### The Society's current position

A well-established leader among learned societies in advancing and sharing knowledge within and between academic, teacher, field science and public audiences.

**By 2021** the Society, in addition, will be well regarded for its informed commentary on key geographical issues that affect us all, and knowledge sharing among professional audiences.

Meeting this objective will involve:

### 2.1 Advancing knowledge

- Completing the Society's *Migrants on the margins* Field Research Programme successfully; evaluating the outcomes to inform decisions about future research programmes.
- Awarding the Society's competitive grants for research and scientific expeditions; sharing the outcomes more effectively as a source of inspiration and learning.
- Promoting and enabling new research on the Society's Collections.

### 2.2 Interpreting and sharing knowledge

- Maintaining, and further developing, our topical programme of events for non-specialists in London and venues across the UK. Piloting one or two other major city 'hubs'.
- Providing an independent and expert source of online geographical information, insight and discussion on major issues affecting our lives.
- Sharing and promoting the research strengths of UK geography and its contributions to understanding a world in rapid change.
- Engaging more people through the Society's Collections, including digital.

- Engaging and challenging people through fieldwork, learning outdoors, informed travel and our walks.
- Being at the forefront of meeting teachers' needs for subject knowledge following recent curriculum changes.
- Developing the Society's impact in knowledge exchange to policy.
- Building the Society's capabilities for knowledge sharing across communities of professional practice, business, policy and research, and HE and schools.

### 2.3 Extending our engagement with new audiences

- Using a new digital strategy to extend the reach and engagement in general.
- Supporting social mobility through geography, and supporting widening participation in geography with underrepresented groups.
- Targeting schools and areas with low geography performance and uptake.
- Extending our work with the AGI and geospatial community.

### Overview

The approach continues to place the Society's support for geographical knowledge production and dissemination at the heart of its work.

# 3. Geography in practice

## Enabling professional and student communities

### Objective

Help meet the needs of practising geographers and students, so that there are vibrant, well trained, accredited professional communities, and highly employable students.

### Context

Geographical knowledge and skills are increasingly recognised at work and sought out by employers. Professional development and accreditation is becoming more widely valued and rewarded by employers. It is timely to expand the Society's role as a professional body and its support for professional geographers.

### The Society's current position

A respected professional body with an established chartered accreditation and a strong reputation in providing advice and training for selected professional and student communities.

**By 2021** The Society will be offering a significantly enhanced programme of professional support and accreditation for practising geographers, including a strong regional presence; with more focus in its training for field leaders, teachers and lecturers in areas and on groups with greatest need.

Meeting this objective will involve:

### 3.1 Promoting the professionalism of geography and geographers

- Raising the profile of professional and Chartered Geographers.
- Developing initiatives with the new 'Head of Geography' in Whitehall, the geographers in government more widely, and the geospatial community to support professionalism and extend awareness of C.Geog.
- Extending the range of employment sectors engaged actively with the professional geography agenda.
- Growing the number of Chartered Geographers, and those working towards chartership, in the UK and internationally.

### 3.2 Developing substantially the programme of professional support and accreditation

- Enhancing the activities with, and for, the professional practitioner geography community.
- Developing further the pipeline and pathways of accreditation from undergraduate/postgraduate courses.
- Extending the accreditation of undergraduate/postgraduate programmes in geography.
- Piloting professional geographer groups outside the UK.

### 3.3 Sustaining a strong training function in schools, higher education and field science

- Identifying and helping to meet priority professional development needs in these sectors.
- Focusing teacher professional development activities to the most pressing areas of challenge: disadvantaged and low performing/low take-up schools; and challenging topics.
- Providing advice, inspiration and skills-based training for those undertaking fieldwork, field research and scientific expeditions, including advice on health and safety; developing the *Explore* seminar.
- Acting as an information and resources hub for teaching and learning geography in higher education.

### Overview

The approach is to develop further as a professional body to promote, support, and grow the practitioner geography community, to maintain standards, and to advance the standing of geography in the workplace. While sustaining a strong and focused training presence in fieldwork and expeditions, for teachers and students, and in higher education.

# 4. Growing our reputation and presence

## Building on tradition, independence and contemporary relevance

### Objective

Build further the Society's strong profile, reputation and presence, nationally and internationally, reinforcing and publicising its role as a leader among learned societies and a partner of choice.

### Context

The Society is well established and highly respected, UK-wide and internationally. It has a well-developed international reach in selected activities and an international membership in more than 100 countries. It is regularly consulted as a leading learned society. Geopolitical changes and technological developments offer incentives and opportunities to establish a stronger presence, and partnerships with sister societies, across the UK and internationally, for mutual benefit and that of geography.

### The Society's current position

Recognised as one of the world's leading and most active geographical societies, with a distinguished history and a modern reputation for innovation, advocacy and effectiveness in supporting and advancing geography.

**By 2021** The Society – the home of geography – will have a stronger regional presence in the UK, an enhanced engagement with selected specialist

communities, a sustained UK profile, and greater engagement internationally.

Meeting this objective will involve:

### 4.1 Developing and consolidating bilateral relationships

- Strengthening bilateral relationships with sister bodies in the UK for mutual benefit, including a new strategic alliance with the Association for Geographic Information.
- Supporting the international partnerships being developed as part of the *Migrants on the margins* Field Research Programme.
- Exploring opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships with a small number of international sister bodies.
- Working with local communities, sister bodies and organisations to develop a stronger educational presence for geography in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

### 4.2 Enhancing our presence, online and across the UK

- Formulating and using a new digital strategy, including a new website, to extend engagement in our work by all user groups, including our global membership.

- Sustaining our high national and international profile.

- Rethinking how the Society presents itself and delivers its many regionally-based activities in the UK; while developing its profile and engagement in the Midlands and/or Northern England, to complement that in London and the South.

### 4.3 Extending the international dimension of current activities

- Developing greater awareness and use of the Society's professional offer outside the UK.
- Sustaining those of our activities that already have a strong international uptake and presence.
- Seeking ways to support overseas members more fully.

### Overview

The approach is to message, and to develop further, a clear Society presence across the UK, and with the Geographic Information community, working in partnership with sister bodies as appropriate, and supported by an enhanced digital capability. Existing international activities will be sustained and our international reach extended.

# 5. Enhancing our membership

## An important source of expertise, funding and enthusiasm

### Objective

Reach and engage new supporters and retain the enthusiasm and expertise of existing Fellows and members, across the UK and beyond, ensuring a strong and growing membership of both professionals and enthusiasts who support our activities.

### Context

The Society benefits from its Fellows and members knowledge, enthusiasm, time, contacts, and their subscriptions which provide around a quarter of the Society's gross income. The Society especially values its many loyal Fellows who are long term supporters. To continue to develop sustainably, the continuing high retention and good recruitment of Fellows and members is essential.

### The Society's current position

A stable membership of 16,000 professionals and enthusiasts, regionally, nationally and internationally, who support the Society and who value its communities and activities.

**By 2021** The Society will have grown membership further as a result of initiatives in the strategy relating to regional development, professional accreditation, engagement of new geographical communities, an enhanced

digital presence, and the reshaping of public engagement activities.

Meeting this objective will involve:

### 5.1 Continuing to improve engagement and communication with members

- Sustaining, and building on, improvements in communications with members in recent years.
- Re-presenting and enhancing the Society's regional offer and activities, to be seen less as a London-based organisation and to engage users and members more fully.
- Using the digital strategy to engage our membership and our volunteers more easily, widely and interactively with the Society.

### 5.2 Enhancing recruitment and retention of Fellows and members

Ensure our Fellowship in particular, and membership in general, continue to grow sustainably, meeting a target of 200 net new members per year, through:

- Sustaining recruitment and retention activities across all sectors, including recruitment by existing Fellows and recruitment of Young Geographers.

- Continuing to explore ways to recruit more geography graduates and members living across the UK.

- Promoting Chartered Geographer to new professional communities.

- Reviewing professional membership charges, and early career and online membership options.

### 5.3 Learning more about our members and their engagement with the Society

- Understanding more fully the use members make of our activities.
- Considering, for all audiences, the balance of activities between free access, paid access and membership only access.
- Seeking to do more for overseas members.

### Overview

The approach remains to engage existing members more fully in the Society and its activities by a combination of the digital strategy, communication and enhanced access; while targeting specific groups/areas for potential new Fellows and members, recognising that some join to receive benefits while others join to 'give back' to geography.

# 6. Securing the future

## As one of the world's largest and most active scholarly geographical societies

### Objective

Enable a robust future for the Society, by increasing income sustainably, using technology effectively, and enhancing staff capabilities.

### Context

The Society is an independent body and, like other learned and professional societies, receives no core government funding. Annual income has more than doubled in real terms since 1996, and substantial external donations have been attracted. The current UK setting places greater uncertainty on growing income over 2017-2021. We are thus aiming for modest, sustainable growth in core funding from subscriptions, enterprise, operations, and corporate support; plus fundraising success for new projects and the endowment.

### The Society's current position

A strong record of fundraising, a stable and diverse range of core income sources and a sound financial position exists for the Society, with the capacity for modest growth; but without the ability to fund strategic new projects from core funds.

**By 2021** Core income levels will at least have been sustained in real terms, and ideally grown by between 1% and 1.5% per year above inflation; projects will have

been successfully fundraised for, and the endowment grown to £5million to help pump prime strategic development in the future.

Meeting this objective will involve:

### 6.1 Growing net core income

- Develop and implement a new, sustainable five-year strategy for enterprise income stability and growth, building on the successes of 2015 and 2016.
- Sustain charitable operating income; and grow membership income steadily.

### 6.2 Seeking efficiencies; mitigating risks

- Look ahead to anticipate and manage risks to the Society and to its funding in the current climate of political and economic uncertainty.
- Ensure finance and web/data integration systems are operating efficiently and effectively.
- Continue to move the Society on the path towards greater environmental sustainability in its operations, in so far as the Grade 2\* historic premises permits.
- Review the costs and benefits of hard copy and digital publications for the membership.

### 6.3 Sustaining fundraising and our assets

- Continually develop a capable, enthusiastic and appropriately trained staff.
- Sustain the Society's Collections and enhance public engagement with them.
- Maintain the building and essential IT and facilities services efficiently and cost-effectively, to underpin the Society's operations and venue hire income.
- Meet the challenge of funding the proposed projects and enhanced work areas in the strategy, including a members' appeal.
- Introduce a new legacy programme with the aim of building the endowment to £5million.

### Overview

The approach is to try to achieve sustainable growth through the Society's core income streams and increasing efficiency, while fundraising to meet the project-based needs of the strategy and the endowment, and continuing to manage risks effectively.

# The rationale behind the strategy

The Society is a dynamic institution, with a distinguished history and a powerful modern reputation and brand. Since 1995, as the RGS-IBG, the Society has sought a fine balance between respecting its traditions, modernising its feel, approach and activities, and broadening its audiences. This has been the path to creating a vibrant learned society and professional body that is open and welcoming to all.

The Society today works collaboratively with both professional and citizen / enthusiast audiences, across the breadth of geographical communities, interests and applications. Its promotion and support of geography across research and higher education, expeditions and fieldwork, school education, and with policy, public and professional audiences is a key strength. Of necessity, therefore, its work is broadly based, and aims to inspire and question, as well as inform and engage.

RGS-IBG is a learned society, a professional body, a charity for public benefit, and an organisation supported by members, Fellows and Chartered Geographers. It has a UK-wide remit, complemented by international activities, presence, users and members.

The Society is highly respected for the way in which it champions its discipline of geography and for its capacity to be innovative and creative in developing and funding new programmes of work. The Society has proven expertise in identifying, managing and adapting to external changes. The mitigation of risk to itself, to geography and to its communities is an essential aspect of our work.

At the present time, external risk and uncertainty in general are high, both in the world and in the UK: deepening economic uncertainty, and on-going political, technological and social changes. The populist movement, and fierce competition in the knowledge economy of which we are a part, are but two elements of this. We can expect some changes to affect the Society and geography negatively, but others will offer opportunities too.

Fortunately, the profile and standing of both geography and the Society are higher now in the UK than for many decades. And, as in any vibrant discipline, geography itself is constantly evolving; geographical understanding continues to advance on many fronts. There remain significant needs and opportunities for geographical knowledge and understanding to inform public policy,

enhance business decisions, and enrich society and individual lives.

The strategy has been formulated against this background of:



- Continuity in the progressive development of RGS-IBG; building on the best elements of the Society's traditions and on the substantial new developments seen over 20 years and more.
- Changing external contexts and the perceived opportunities, risks and constraints for the Society and for geography.

And in the knowledge that what drives the organisation today is:

- Our shared passionate belief in our discipline and its applications.
- The value to society, the environment and the economy of advancing and sharing understanding of our changing world – its peoples, places and environments – and country.
- The benefits of trained and accredited geographers in the workplace and in society.

The unanimous view of the many people consulted in the formulation of this strategy was that it should be 'evolutionary', building further on the





trajectory of growth and development of the RGS-IBG. The Society has been through a sustained period of planned change over more than 20 years and is not seeking major disruption or fundamental change in its aims, scope of work, or breadth of audiences at this time. This view was shared by trustees, committees, Fellows and members who responded to the consultation, staff, donors and other stakeholders.

Thus, 'evolution' underpins the strategy, as does maintaining a balance in two ways. The first is between innovative, sustainable development in our work and the effective management of risks. The second is a broad balance across our work with different audiences, both specialists and non-specialists, so that the Society remains a 'broad church' and benefits from being so.

The framework of evolution and balance provides the scope for both continuity and further development over the next five years. This applies to both our activities and our audiences, including our traditional and newer audiences, namely:

- The geographical research and higher education, expeditions and fieldwork, and teacher communities,

nationally and internationally, all of whom are at the heart of the learned society.

- Professional geographers and those from allied disciplines generating and using substantial geographical knowledge, expertise and geographic information systems in their work, who relate especially to the Society's work as a professional body.
- Decision and policy makers in government, non-governmental organisations and business who require information and advice on geographical matters and access to the latest research.
- Students of geography at school and in higher education.
- Adventurous young people seeking to develop their leadership skills, cultural and environmental awareness, and training in geographical techniques, through expeditions and fieldwork.
- Graduate geographers who wish to support and keep in touch with their subject.
- Writers, media commentators and researchers who use the Society's information resources and access to geographical expertise.
- Geography enthusiasts keen to discover more for themselves about

the earth's environments and peoples, either actively through travel and personal exploration or through events and publications.

- Diverse communities seeking to explore cultural heritages, and whom the Society seeks to engage more fully with geography in general.
- Citizens seeking independent and authoritative knowledge, and access to geographical perspectives and thinking, especially on issues of our time.

The Society's membership embraces people from all the above audience groups, as a set of interconnecting communities that come together through the RGS-IBG and a shared engagement with understanding our world. Members support the Society's work in many different ways but they are not the primary beneficiaries. Non-members – the public in its widest sense – are the primary beneficiaries of our work as a charity.

# Principles and ethos

The following principles underpin the Society's strategy and guide its operation.

1. Build on the Society's three previous strategies and maintain the current breadth of activities and audiences.
2. Recognise the historic traditions of the Society and its contemporary activities and image.
3. Value both professionals and enthusiasts as users and members; and recognise the need to communicate with widely different audiences.
4. Balance the requirements of being a charity, a learned society, a professional body and an organisation supported in part by members.
5. Meet the 'public benefit' requirement of all charities and lead good practice in doing so.
6. Act in a manner befitting a world-leading geographical society and the UK's innovative, respected and independent learned society for geography.
7. Anchor the strategic development within the context of political and other external threats and opportunities currently facing geography.
8. Recognise, and mitigate where possible, the risks and uncertainties for the Society in the current economic climate.
9. Value our staff, donors, volunteers, partner organisations and members for their many contributions, and further develop these groups of supporters.
10. Be an open and inclusive organisation, welcoming of diversity.
11. Be as environmentally sustainable as resources and circumstances permit.
12. Be accountable and stand by what we have collectively agreed in the strategy.
13. Balance ambition with realism in what we can deliver and prioritise our efforts and resources accordingly, sustaining high standards of work.
14. Focus on a small number of new initiatives that fill identified strategic gaps, while maintaining and/or developing most existing activities.

# Governance, funding and contacts

## Governance

The Society is governed by its Board of Trustees – the Council. This is chaired by the President and has a further 20 members elected by the Fellowship. There are in addition four co-opted positions on the Council. Each Trustee serves for a term of three years.

## Recent Presidents

Nicholas Crane	2015-2018
Professor Dame Judith Rees	2012-2015
Michael Palin	2009-2012
Sir Gordon Conway	2006-2009
Sir Neil Cossons	2003-2006
Professor Sir Ron Cooke	2000-2003
Earl of Selborne	1997-2000

## Funding

In 2016, the Society generated around a quarter of its annual income of £6.5million from each of four main income sources:

Membership subscriptions	25%
Charitable activities	21%
Commercial enterprise operations	23%
Fundraised income, primarily for projects	20%

including Corporate sponsorships (<5% of total income)

The Society receives no core government funding.

## Would you like to help?

The delivery of this Strategic Plan will require additional resources. Those interested in helping the Society to take its plan forwards should in the first instance contact the Director

**E** [director@rgs.org](mailto:director@rgs.org)  
**T** 020 7591 3010

or the Development Office

**E** [development@rgs.org](mailto:development@rgs.org)  
**T** 020 7591 3017

The Society welcomes support from individual donors, trusts and foundations, and from corporate sponsors within the context of its guidelines for corporate support. Donations under Gift Aid are welcomed.

**W** [www.rgs.org/supportus](http://www.rgs.org/supportus)

## To contact the Society

### Registered Office

1 Kensington Gore  
London SW7 2AR UK

Registered Charity No. 208791

**T** 020 7591 3000  
**F** 020 7591 3001  
**E** [enquiries@rgs.org](mailto:enquiries@rgs.org)  
**W** [www.rgs.org](http://www.rgs.org)

Details for individual departments can be found on the website.

The Executive Committee of Council led on the formulation of this strategy, which has the full approval of the Council. Its members were:

**Dr Michael Firth**  
Vice-President  
Education

**Dr Rita Gardner CBE**  
Director & Secretary

**Mark Humphreys**  
Honorary Treasurer

**Dr John Shears**  
Vice-President  
Expeditions & Fieldwork

**Prof Adrian Smith**  
Vice-President  
Research & Higher Education

# Achievements

## 1996-2016

The RGS-IBG has implemented a programme of planned modernisation and development continuously since 1996. This steady evolution has been guided by three former strategies.

Key achievements include:

### The Society

- Developed a reputation for being one of the UK's leading, most dynamic, and broadly based learned and professional bodies; and established itself as a leading scholarly geographical society worldwide.
- Modernised its image to one of an open, inclusive, public-facing and welcoming charitable organisation, with good facilities that complement an excellent location.
- Worked closely with, and benefited from the expertise within, its communities of interest, including some 2,800 individuals (2016) who volunteered time and knowledge.
- Developed a balanced and increasingly integrated organisation in its support for research, education, expeditions and fieldwork, geography in society, and policy / advocacy.
- Acted effectively to represent and safeguard the discipline in the face of

the many political changes affecting education, higher education, research and fieldwork.

- Established a reputation for advocacy, influencing, and profile-raising, to promote geography and the understanding of geographical issues.
- Promoted, supported and widened access to new research through top-ranking international scholarly journals, a book series, successful conferences, and research groups.
- Quadrupled grant giving to close to £200,000 per year, supporting a wide range of field projects and research.
- Became a professional body: promoting and accrediting standards in the discipline and in the practice of geography in the workplace; and supporting the wider professional community.
- Worked with Chartered Geographers to establish the recognition of geographers in government with a 'Head of Geography' role in the science and engineering profession.
- Entered into a strategic alliance to promote geographic information and its applications.
- Developed the London lecture programme into the most popular

programme of lectures in the UK, with weekly lecture audiences between 500 and 750+ people.

- Advised and worked with the government to boost geography teaching and learning in school: from formulating and delivering in partnership the £3.8m Action Plan for Geography (2004-2011); advocating for geography to be included in the English Baccalaureate; being at the heart of the curriculum 5-19 review (2012-2015); to administering teacher training scholarships in partnership with the DfE (from 2016).
- Developed a Geography Ambassadors programme, with more than 30,000 school pupils each year benefiting from visits.
- Built a substantial CPD programme for teachers, supported with online resources, including most recently a focus on data skills and GIS, field teaching, and new curriculum content.
- Enhanced a long-standing strength in support of field science by advancing the safe fieldwork and expeditions agenda.
- Commenced its first collaborative human geography Field Research Programme, focused on an issue of global concern – migration to cities in Asia and Africa.

## Last words...

- Offered opportunities to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to learn, gain confidence and develop their potential through fieldwork.
- Engaged with a wide range of BAME communities in new ways focused on understanding shared heritage.
- Expanded public outreach and new audiences through an enhanced regional programme, website development, public access to the collections, a new membership structure, and new projects to engage the public with geography through travel and the landscape.
- Created a programme of high-profile discussions on topical issues for public and professional audiences.
- Created a national exhibition programme viewed by millions of people, featuring *Britain from the Air* and the *Enduring Eye*.
- Delivered on time and budget a £7.2m project for new, world-class physical facilities to provide public access, preservation, and added educational value to the Society's two million items in its historic Collections for the first time.
- Became more professional, streamlined its governance, grew the membership (to 16,000), dramatically increased the user

numbers (3.5m + in 2016), increased staff numbers (to 60), and more than doubled annual income in real terms.

- Raised £35m in fundraising to support capital developments, new programmes, grant-giving and the start of an endowment, and in doing so established rapport and respect with key donors and engaged the Society's membership in giving.
- Refurbished London's best lecture theatre – the Society's Ondaatje Theatre – conserved the North Face of the historic headquarters and created a much-needed Members' Room.
- Enhanced the media and digital profile of geography and the Society.
- Received a number of awards for our work.

Our work, plus that of sister bodies and our communities, has ensured that geography is valued and flourishing in the UK.

“Geography is the subject which holds the key to our future.”

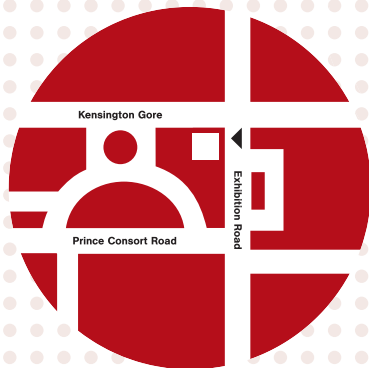
Michael Palin

“The RGS-IBG is a most significant dimension of the institutional capacity of UK human geography and is unequalled in any other country. It is an extraordinary disciplinary resource.”

*International Benchmarking Review of Human Geography 2013*

“Geographic information is critical to promote economic development, improve our stewardship of natural resources and protect the environment.”

Bill Clinton



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