

Demand for geography

Skills, knowledge and understanding wanted by employers

Geography is an intellectually challenging subject. It requires:


- An understanding and application of scientific logic, principles, methods and laws
- Flexibility and openness of mind to deal with a range of different conceptual paradigms in both human and physical geography (transcending the natural and social sciences and humanities)
- An ability to develop and test hypotheses and to integrate ideas
- Analytical capabilities to collect/select, analyse, present and interpret primary and secondary datasets, especially spatial data, and to understand and visualise complex data.

Most geography graduates are numerate, literate, good team workers, can think analytically and critically, and are highly computer literate. Geography consistently attracts large numbers of high quality students with excellent A level grades and a wide range of A levels often including at least one other science subject.

The nature of the discipline combined with the training geography students receive at university make graduate geographers employable:

- The most recent HESA survey (published in the HECSU report *What do graduates do?*) of university graduates showed the unemployment rates for geographers to be among the lowest recorded, second only to sports science.
- Analysis of a randomly selected sample by the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (First Quarter 2010) substantiates this. Using graduates of sociology, media studies, history, and chemistry/physics as a varied group of comparators: geography graduates show a relatively high employment rate (85% in full time or part time jobs, overall average 82%; chemistry/physics 78%); 67% of geography graduates in employment work in professional and managerial jobs (second highest to chemistry/physics (78%), and significantly higher than media studies (54%) and sociology (56%); and 74% of geography graduates earn more than £20,000 per year, above the overall average of 70% (behind chemistry/physics 87%; but well ahead of sociology 68% and media studies 50%).
- A study by the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) and research agency CFE, *Global Graduates into Global Leaders* (2011), found that cultural agility (an “ability to work collaboratively with teams of people from a range of backgrounds and countries”) is the most desirable graduate skill cited by multinational employers. This skill is a core part of many geography programmes and can be developed through international fieldwork and study abroad.
- A recent survey by ESRI (UK) (published November 2010) of 200 business leaders across the public and private sectors showed that the skills they are looking for in future employees are critical thinking (nominated by 78% of businesses leaders as key for graduates), advanced analytical skills (76%), understanding and interpreting complex data (71%), advanced technology skills (57%) and understanding socio-economic environments (54%) – all of which are gained through a geography degree.

In a modern world where an estimated 80% of business decisions are underpinned by location, it is hardly surprising that the geospatial industry is growing rapidly and of significant importance to the UK's technology base and international competitiveness. Knowledge of GIS and its applications in



business to make money or to yield efficiency savings, and in the public sector to better target funding and resources, means that geography graduates who are able to illustrate an understanding of these technologies are increasingly sought after.

The environment sector is also a varied, vibrant and vital part of the UK economy and society. It relies on highly skilled people who, through their knowledge and innovation, ensure that the UK provides international leadership and solutions to the long-term challenges we face; continues to attract inward investment of high-value business; and becomes a world leader in new areas of growth such as low carbon goods and services. The NERC report (2012) on professional skills needs in the environment sector, which draws on the perspectives of more than 140 employers, highlights 15 critical skills gaps. A training in geography contributes significantly to the development of between five and seven of those skills areas, depending on the specific geography programme. With their training transcending science, social science and humanities, geographers are unique in having an understanding of the methods and language of each. In addition, geography is a key provider of the knowledgeable personnel required across the wider business, management and commerce sectors as firms increasingly become environmentally aware and socially responsible.

The buoyant demand for geographers reflects the knowledge value-added in the course of their higher education, together with their strong transferable skills base.

Last updated: October 2014