

Consultation on how the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) advances geographical knowledge through research and scientific expeditions

All submissions please to be received by 23 December 2009

Further details can be found at: www.rgs.org/Review

Please return the completed questionnaire in hard copy form by mail or by email (a digital version is available at www.rgs.org/Review)

Post: Review, Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), 1 Kensington Gore, London, SW7 2AR,
UK

Email: review@rgs.org

Consultation Questionnaire

Before completing this questionnaire please do read the background notes attached.
More information is also available at www.rgs.org/review

We encourage you to complete as many questions as you feel confident in answering. If you feel that you would like to register a view that this is an important area of activity for the Society in general but at the same time do not feel sufficiently knowledgeable to complete the questionnaire in full, we are happy if you simply answer question 1.

A. Your views on if / how the Society, as a leading learned society, should advance geographical knowledge through research in the next ten years

1. Should the Society advance geographical knowledge about our world through research and why?

No. It should advance all knowledge concerning the undiscovered world through multidisciplinary expeditions. This approach has a longer lasting legacy than isolated bits of mainly incomprehensible research which is currently backed..

2. Tell us what you think are the strengths and weaknesses of the Society's current two approaches (see section 2 in the notes). These approaches are:
(a) new programmes of research grants (including grants for scientific expeditions) that award c. £130,000 per annum;

The major weakness is that much of the work funded is not of a sufficient academic standard or pertinence to the world but rather plays to academic geographer's own agenda

(b) pump-priming grants for research on a single theme of Geographical Perspectives on Global Change? (£36,000 in total provided through six grants)

Again just geographers and more geographers. The Society is bigger than that or used to be.

3. What challenges and opportunities do you think the Society currently faces in advancing geographical knowledge through research and why?

Understanding the multidisciplinary nature of the world, where the RGS used to hold the flame until it was taken over by a single interest hegemony.

4. Looking forward, what geographical topics are most in need of study and why?

You preface all your questions with 'geographical' biasing the whole point of the RGS which was exploration and discovery

5. In the next 10 years, by what means do you think the Society should best advance geographical knowledge through research and why (see sections 3, 7 and 8 of the notes)?

You are repeating yourselves

6. Please specify the benefits that your preferred approach would bring to: (a) geographical science, (b) the Society, and (c) the participants?

If you made the RGS a broad church again thousands would support you across the country

7. The Society already provides leadership in many different ways across much of its activities. What approach to leadership do you favour in its work advancing geographical knowledge through research, and why (see section 4 of the notes)?

It doesn't provide leadership either then or now. It should provide insight and learning into how the world works but it is just an exclusive preserve of geographers now who exclude everybody else.

B. Your views on the attributes / values that should underpin the Society's role in advancing geographical knowledge through research, including scientific expeditions

Please tick the box that corresponds to your view on the importance of each attribute/value. The following explains the highest and lowest categories used: *strongly agree* = you consider highly important; *strongly disagree* = you consider of low importance

The Society's role in advancing geographical knowledge should give priority to research that is:

	strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	disagree strongly
High quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Innovative in terms of topic or approach	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Good value for money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Open to all researchers to apply	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brings benefit to geography	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brings benefit to the Society	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Brings benefit to the individual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Offers Society PR opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
On a theme, place or topic chosen by the Society	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Encompasses the breadth of geography	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Multidisciplinary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
About the UK and wider Europe	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
About other areas overseas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Involves international collaboration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contributes to training UK students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contributes to helping researchers overseas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

develop their own research capacity					
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Any other attributes that you feel are very important. Please list up to three

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

C. Please tell us about yourself

1. Do you consider yourself to be an active researcher / member of scientific expeditions?

Yes No

If yes, please provide some details of your most recent project (for example title, aim, location and funding)

ADB TA 4640-PRC Ningxia Yinchuan Integrated Ecosystem Management Project 2006, GEF Leader, 4 month; PRC-GEF Country Planning Framework - Land Degradation in Dryland Ecosystems, Sustainable, ADB C51110-PRC, 2005, 1mo; Chairman, The Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Development, Guyana, 2002-2004; PRC-GEF Country Planning Framework - Land Degradation in Dryland Ecosystems, ADB TA3657-PRC, 2002, 1 month; Gorai River Restoration Project, Bangladesh; Environment Advisor, independent Panel of Experts, World Bank 1999-2001, 2.5 months; Biodiversity Information Management System, Swaziland, British Council, University of Swaziland, DICE, 1998-2001, 2 Months; The Santay Project, Ecuador, Fundación Malecon, 2002; ADB, Protected Area Management and Wildlife Conservation, Sri Lanka National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, Swaziland, UNDP/SEA1997-1998, 2 months; Biodiversity Conservation and the Environment Project, Peru, DICE, 1996, 1.5 months; Tourism, Conservation and Sustainable Development, India, Indonesia, Zimbabwe, 1994-1997, 36 months part-time; Biodiversity Conservation in China, China, Canadian Government, China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development, DICE, 1997-2000; Biodiversity Conservation of the Sundarbans, Bangladesh, ADB, 1996-1997, 2 months; International Strengthening for Biodiversity Conservation and Commercialization of Protected Areas, Indonesia 1993-1995, ADB TA 1782-INO, 6 months; Biodiversity Conservation Information and Databases, Worldwide, DFID, 1994-1997; Biodiversity Conservation of the Sundarban Forest, Bangladesh, ADB PPTA BANG/96-188 /97-363, 1996-1997; Biodiversity Conservation and the Environment Project, Peru, DICE, 1996, 1.5 months; Southern Africa Wildlife, WWF, South Africa, 1996 (1 mo); Kafue National Park, Management Biologist, GRZ, Zambia 1973-1974; International Scientific Authority, Queensland Kangaroo Management Programme, 1989

Check Who's Who.or the web if you want more.

2. Have you ever received a grant from the Society? Yes No

If yes, please state approximately when and for what topic?

3. Have you ever participated in any of the Society's multidisciplinary field research programmes?
If yes, which and in what role?

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4. Full Name *Ian Swingland*

Fellowship / membership number *21425X*

D. Any additional comments you would like to make

An Open Letter to Sir Gordon Conway KCMG, FRS,

President of the RGS

22nd April 2009

Dear Gordon,

I have been perusing the academic projects that the RGS currently puts forward in its website as examples of their commitment to research. These, they say, will bring new knowledge and improved understanding of the world and the potential to apply that knowledge to solving some of the many challenges facing society and the environment today.

I have worked all over the world involved in actually partnering communities and Governments in changing what they do to their environment and improving both communities' standards of living and the economic and environmental sustainability of their and their Government's behaviour. These have not been merely academic or research indulgences but very large scale projects indeed that I have designed with others in China and South East Asia backed by the ADB, World Bank, GEF, sovereign Governments and many other smaller institutions. They work. They are creating new futures.

The projects that the RGS is promoting now, as opposed to the large scale field expeditions that they used to organise, until the smaller academic IBG took over, are not concentrating the

Society's limited firepower and budget on a single focus that produces long term results. Those field expeditions left a social and research legacy still felt today. Instead, the RGS is dissipating its budget on superficial and inconsequential lightweight academic work that will change nothing except perhaps improve those University's Departmental RAE score.

Two projects put forward by the RGS in defence of their protestation that they maintain the integrity of the Society particularly draw my attention as examples of where the Society is misdirecting its mission. One entitled, 'Global change and post-socialist urban identities' says it will bring together an international, inter-disciplinary group of researchers working on issues of post-socialist urban identity for two international workshops leading to a major publication and further grant applications, and that through these activities the project will develop a research agenda for the study of post-socialist urban identities and advance theory which will shape geographical approaches to urban identities more generally. Another entitled, 'Children and global change: Experiencing migration, negotiating identities' suggests that earlier studies usually make explicit reference to processes of global change, but rarely interrogate the concept of global change, what it means for children in different migratory contexts and how migration affects children's reflexive negotiations of their identities. This project will explore the implications of global changes in migration patterns and processes for the construction - and reconstruction of the national, social, cultural and political identities of children and young people.

My scientific and international experience strongly suggests to me that neither of these projects is academically robust, likely to change anything on the ground, improve the status of the environment or the social woes of the world, and they are frankly to a large degree incomprehensible. In other words, they will make no difference to anything other than those prosecuting the work. What are "post-socialist urban identities" exactly? What are "children's reflexive negotiations of their identities" precisely? And does it matter? And will this work educate the future ways we can help the world?

There is a widespread feeling that the Society has lost its way and is losing the respect of the country.

Yours sincerely,