



I'm a Geographer

YOUR PATH TO A CAREER IN GEOGRAPHY

Geographical

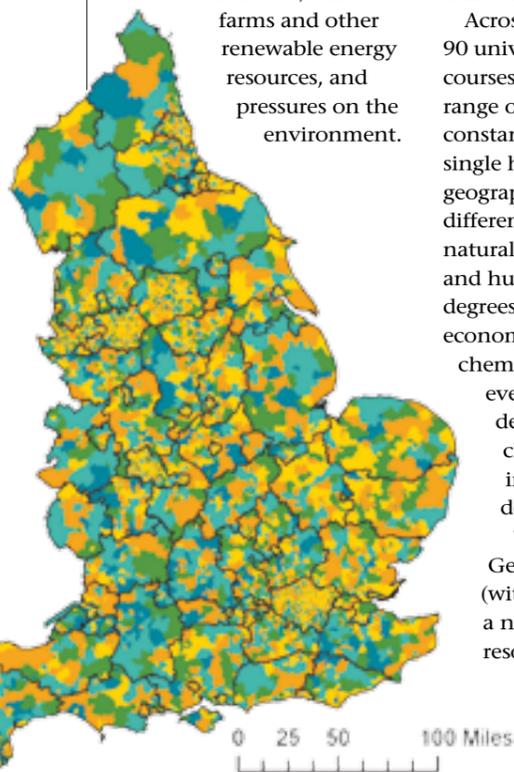
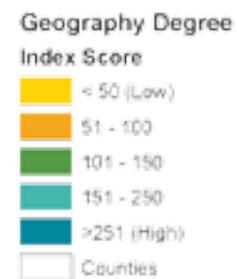


From the ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY (with the Institute of British Geographers), otherwise known as the 'home of geography'

The proportion of students going on to study geography at university level in the UK is highly variable geographically. In this map, below average participation is shown in yellow and orange, while above average take-up is shown in green and blue

There has never been a better or more important time to study geography. With growing interest in issues such as climate change, sustainable development, migration, environmental degradation and social inequality, geography is one of the most relevant courses you could choose to study. Not only is the subject itself intrinsically interesting, but geographers are also highly employable.

Often, the top media stories of the day concern topics related to geography, such as crime statistics, the spread of disease, wind farms and other renewable energy resources, and pressures on the environment.



Geographers' abilities to understand the local and global implications of such issues, from a breadth of different perspectives, mean that their knowledge and skills are highly sought after in the workplace. And in a world where much of our information is now spatially based – from postcodes to sat navs – geographic information science (GIS) has rapidly become an essential tool in business organisations and government, creating even more opportunities for those with geographical skills and knowledge.

Across the UK, more than 90 universities offer degree courses in geography. The range of options is large and constantly developing – from single honours degrees in geography (which stress different dimensions of the natural and social sciences and humanities) to joint degrees with, for example, economics, business, chemistry or tourism, or even more specialised degrees in geo-hazards, climate change, international development, or GIS.

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) has developed a number of new resources to support young geographers with advice and guidance on progressing to

university. Our 'Study Geography' website (www.studygeography.rgs.org) provides information on university courses and how to apply, as well as guidance on key issues to think through when choosing the best programme of study and advice on writing a strong application. Our careers brochure 'Going Places with Geography' (downloadable from www.rgs.org/careers) highlights a range of careers in which geography graduates flourish, explaining what these roles entail and why geography is so valuable to them. The opportunities range from those that suit the many transferable skills geographers develop, such as marketing, public sector and communications work, to those that draw more directly on specific geographical knowledge and training, including environmental management, GIS and planning.

Whatever your passion in the world – whether it be fascination with landscapes, interest in urban development or concerns about social inequality – geography will provide you with the knowledge, experience and transferable skills that will reward you personally and advance you professionally.

Dr Rita Gardner
DIRECTOR OF THE RGS-IBG



Chloe Whitcomb works in Tewkesbury as part of the flood incident management team at the Environment Agency. She studied at Gloucestershire University, graduating last year. 'Choosing to do a geography degree stemmed from my enthusiasm

for the subject at A Level,' she says. 'I loved how wide-ranging it was and felt that it gave me a breadth of career opportunities.'

During her degree, Chloe's main interest was in society and the environment. 'A highlight was a field trip to Uganda, where I did a project on secondary school children, comparing the expectations and aspirations they had for their life after school,' she says. 'Most had ambitions to be doctors, nurses and teachers, but the reality is that they are expected to provide for their families and end up farming and staying at home to look after the children.'

Chloe also covered aspects of physical geography, in particular geomorphology and climate change, leading to her dissertation on the misconception of climate change in Worcestershire communities affected by flooding. 'Locals largely had a misunderstanding of climate change and how or if the flooding was linked,' she says. 'I'm interested in this relationship between the environment and public awareness.'

Chloe did work experience with the Environment Agency during her degree, and her enjoyment of the experience encouraged her to look for work there after she graduated. 'I primarily deal with flood warning systems,' she says. 'We monitor flood plans in areas highlighted as being at high risk and aim to address how best to deal with the threat. My role draws on what I learnt at university and gives me great satisfaction as a part of a team responding to a significant issue.'



Emma Taylor is based in Nottingham, where she is a transport planner for Atkins, a global design and engineering consultancy. 'Planning is essentially applied geography,' she says. 'A lot of the concepts I learnt about during my geography degree at

Nottingham, such as regeneration, sustainability and social inclusion, I'm now putting into practice.'

With a keen interest in urban geography, Emma decided that she wanted to have a career in the built environment, which led to her undertaking a Masters in spatial planning at University College London.

'I am interested in the impact that people have upon their environment and the impact that it has on them,' she explains. 'My dissertation was on studentification: looking at what happens when a large concentration of students moves into a neighbourhood. My degree and Masters meant that when I went to the interview with Atkins, I could justify why the job interested me. It also gave me the numerical and communication skills I need to pass the assessment tests.'

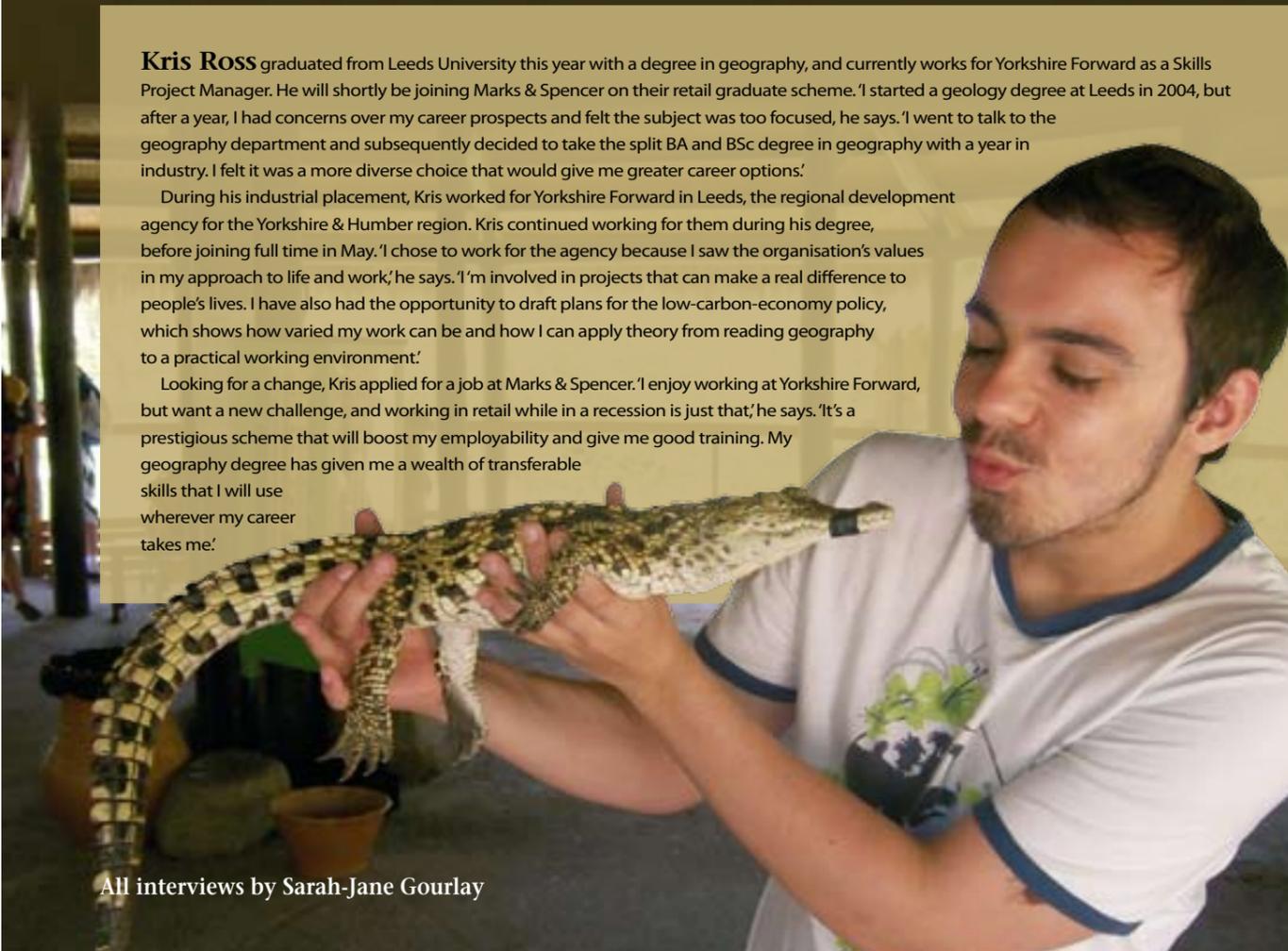
'I didn't really know what career I wanted to go into,' she continues. 'I knew I didn't want to be a geography teacher, but I still wanted to be able to apply my knowledge to a role. Planning offered the opportunity to turn my interest in geography into a professional career.'

Emma's role incorporates master planning, travel planning and transport assessments that implement the theory and policy she learnt at university. 'Studying geography teaches you about the world around you and gives you a general knowledge of issues affecting society today, such as climate change, globalisation and social inequality,' she says. 'After graduating, I felt I had the right skills for whatever career I chose.'

Kris Ross graduated from Leeds University this year with a degree in geography, and currently works for Yorkshire Forward as a Skills Project Manager. He will shortly be joining Marks & Spencer on their retail graduate scheme. 'I started a geology degree at Leeds in 2004, but after a year, I had concerns over my career prospects and felt the subject was too focused,' he says. 'I went to talk to the geography department and subsequently decided to take the split BA and BSc degree in geography with a year in industry. I felt it was a more diverse choice that would give me greater career options.'

During his industrial placement, Kris worked for Yorkshire Forward in Leeds, the regional development agency for the Yorkshire & Humber region. Kris continued working for them during his degree, before joining full time in May. 'I chose to work for the agency because I saw the organisation's values in my approach to life and work,' he says. 'I'm involved in projects that can make a real difference to people's lives. I have also had the opportunity to draft plans for the low-carbon-economy policy, which shows how varied my work can be and how I can apply theory from reading geography to a practical working environment.'

Looking for a change, Kris applied for a job at Marks & Spencer. 'I enjoy working at Yorkshire Forward, but want a new challenge, and working in retail while in a recession is just that,' he says. 'It's a prestigious scheme that will boost my employability and give me good training. My geography degree has given me a wealth of transferable skills that I will use wherever my career takes me.'



All interviews by Sarah-Jane Gourlay



Robin Garton is based in Wiltshire, where he set up the Glacier Trust in July last year. As a small NGO working with high-altitude communities in the Himalaya, the trust relates environmental science to the issues of climate change that are so dramatically affecting the region.

After a 40-year career as an art dealer, Robin decided it was time for a change. A latecomer to mountaineering, and with a keen interest in glaciers, he went to university to study physical geography at Southampton University, graduating in 2007 at the age of 61. He focused his degree on glaciology and researched glacier hazards in the Swiss Alps for his dissertation.

'Following my degree, I identified that there is a gulf between the sciences dealing with the hazards produced by rapidly melting glaciers on one side and scientifically based coping strategies for the communities that are most affected on the other,' he says. 'This opened up a range of other areas where environmental science could provide real support for Himalayan communities affected by climate change. So I became interested in trying to bridge this gap between science and the community.'

The Glacier Trust works with Nepalese communities to find local solutions to local problems. It also sponsors local postgraduates' field research through its education programme, which enables students to benefit their native region. 'Atmospheric warming in the Himalaya seems to be increasing at up to three times that at sea level and has brought dramatic changes to the weather patterns, he says. 'These, in turn, have implications for agriculture and survival. Increased drought and monsoon-related hazards are among the major issues that many subsistence communities face. Developing replicable schemes that include innovations in water storage and high forest conservation are among the ways in which we can help.'



Marc Height is an editorial officer at the Energy Institute in London, writing for one of its magazines, *Energy World*.

'My geography training allowed me to secure a job that I really wanted and gave me the edge over other applicants,' he says.

'I chose to study physical geography at Sheffield because I have always been interested in how the world works. During my degree, I enjoyed learning about natural processes, and in particular, climate change and human impact on the environment.'

After studying Arctic sea ice coverage and the mass balance of the Greenland ice sheet for his undergraduate dissertation, Marc chose to go on to do an MSc in climate change. After graduating in 2007, he took a year out to travel, and on his return, came across an editorial vacancy at the Energy Institute. 'I have always enjoyed writing, so I applied for the position and got the job,' he says. 'My manager has since told me that my strong climate change background was central to why I got the position over those with an editorial background.'

The Energy Institute is a professional membership body for those working in the energy industry, linking them to events, conferences and training. Members receive *Energy World*, which largely discusses renewable energy, climate change and energy security. 'Writing for the magazine draws on my scientific knowledge while also allowing me to learn and write about the current solutions and developments in sustainability,' he says. 'Geography is a fascinating subject in its own right, through which we can learn about the world in which we live. It's such a comprehensive field to study that the career options are considerable.'



Llew Hancock graduated last year with a BSc in geography, before going on to join Arup, an international firm of engineers and consultants that provides professional services for all aspects of the built environment, as a fluvial geomorphologist based in Sheffield. 'I have always been interested in fieldwork, the outdoors and the environment, so I chose to study the physical aspects of geography during my degree at Gloucestershire, with a focus on rivers, he says. 'I spent more than a month in Switzerland studying the palaeohydrology of glacial outburst channels for my dissertation. I reconstructed past flood levels from evidence found in the beds of old channels, estimating the magnitude of flow from the channel dimensions scoured out in front of a glacier.

'I found out about the opportunity with Arup through the university and successfully applied to join their graduate scheme,' he continues. 'The programme aims to develop graduates so that they can become chartered. I intend to work towards a charterhip in engineering, but I could also choose to be an environmental scientist.'

Llew is part of the Rivers Team at Arup, working for clients such as the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water and developers to provide engineering solutions for potential flood hazards. 'We use hydraulic modeling to review surface water in different areas and study overland drainage patterns to enable us to develop sustainable drainage systems,' he explains.

'I have been able to apply the knowledge that I gained from my degree to my job and build upon this in a work environment where I'm continually learning.'



Kerrie Scholefield works at ESRI (UK) in Aylesbury, where she's a year into a graduate scheme.

During her geography degree at Swansea University, Kerrie wasn't sure of her career options, but

a final-year course in GIS led to her dissertation in the same subject and research into jobs in the field. 'I looked into different companies around the UK that worked in GIS and discovered that they commonly looked for graduates with a Masters in the subject, so I enrolled at Edinburgh University to do an MSc in GIS,' she says. After graduating last year, Kerrie joined ESRI (UK), which provides GIS solutions, technology and services.

'I began my graduate scheme in the Technical Solutions Group, which deals with demonstrating to new customers what ESRI (UK) can do for them and how we can implement GIS in their organisation,' she says. 'Six months later, I moved to the support team, where I have been supplying technical advice to customers.'

In September, Kerrie will move to the consultancy section for the final six months of the scheme, where she will be involved in maintaining relationships with clients and working directly with them on projects. 'My geography and GIS training has given me an understanding of the concepts behind the programs with which I work on a daily basis, and allows me to see them as a broad-based and beneficial resource, rather than just software tools.'



Emma Allcorn did a physical geography and environmental science degree at Gloucestershire University. 'Water quality was one of the subjects I covered and really enjoyed,' says Emma, who is now a

water quality permitting officer with the Environment Agency in Cardiff. 'It's a huge topic that's interlinked with everyday life, and with so many different impacts on water, it's a very relevant and important issue.

'I also enjoyed the field and lab work at uni,' she continues. 'Gathering your own data set is far more satisfying than using previously recorded data and ensures that it's the latest evidence. Two fieldtrips I went on included a week in Snowdonia testing soil samples and two weeks in Switzerland studying river sediments.' Emma's enjoyment of fieldwork led to a field-based dissertation. 'I did a GPS survey of Bredon Hill in the Cotswolds, comparing two data sets taken from a landslide area to see the impact of flooding from one year to the next.'

Emma graduated last year and was keen to work for the Environment Agency. 'To be able to work with such a reputable and influential public body was certainly an ambition,' she says. Joining in February, her role is to vet applications for permits under the Groundwater Regulations 1998 and Water Resources Act. 'I really enjoy my job and have always been interested in geography, so my decision to study the subject was definitely the right choice for me in leading to such a worthwhile career.'



Susan Muncey is the London-based creator and curator of ShopCurious.com, an online curiosity shop for unique clothes, jewellery, gifts and homewares, with an emphasis on their provenance and geographical significance. She graduated from Emmanuel College, Cambridge, with a degree in geography in 1983. 'The diversity of the subject was what attracted me,' she says. 'I love learning and am curious about the world, so my degree certainly satisfied my appetite for knowledge.'

During her studies, Susan developed an interest in urban and human geography, which led to her chartered surveyor training, then jobs in fund management and marketing. A love of fashion then led to the opening of her own boutique and the launch of the ShopCurious website and blog to unite her two passions: fashion and geography.

From standing knee deep in the Norfolk salt marshes as a student to documenting the history of the Silk Route across Asia and its impact on fashion in her ShopCurious blog, geography has underpinned every step of Susan's career. 'A degree in geography can lead to so many different professions, which makes it very appealing to those who, like me, are interested in learning about the world around them,' she says. 'Shop Curious has allowed me to use my geography training and combine it with fashion in a worthwhile and rewarding way.'



Dr Alex Singleton is a research fellow in the Department of Geography and the Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis (CASA) at University College London (UCL). 'I found geography very engaging at school and this later motivated me to study it at degree level in Manchester,' he says. 'During my studies, I developed an interest in quantitative geography, GIS and data mining. I felt that these would be key skills to have in preparation for the workplace.'

Graduating in 2003, Alex gained a place with Severn Trent Water working in their operations department. 'It was by accident that I ended up doing a PhD in geography instead,' he says. 'A week before I was due to start, my university tutor got in touch to tell me about a research opportunity at UCL, for which I then applied. My undergraduate dissertation had looked at issues of widening participation in higher education and the research with UCL was closely linked with similar use of spatial and temporal analysis.'

Over the next four years, Alex undertook a part-time PhD while working on various projects designed to enhance and promote spatial literacy. After completing his PhD in 2007, he became actively involved in the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) and is currently the chair of the Quantitative Methods Research Group. 'GIS is the main growth area within geography and provides the technology behind the web mapping that you see online or the GPS you get in mobile phones,' he says. 'I try to use GIS technologies to create outreach tools that are useful to everyone.'



Zoe Briggs is a geographic information manager for British Waterways, based in Gloucester. She studied physical geography at Hull University, followed by an MSc in GIS at Nottingham university, graduating in 2002. 'After completing my Masters, I had a temporary job at Rushcliffe Borough Council compiling contaminated-land data before joining British Waterways as a GIS assistant,' she says. 'British Waterways opened my eyes to a part of the UK that I previously had no idea about. We oversee more than 3,500 kilometres of canals across England, Scotland and Wales.'

Zoe compiles environmental data to monitor, maintain and improve waterways across the UK. 'I have developed two applications: the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and the Biological Recording Application,' she says. 'The BAP is a "living document" that is available for all in British Waterways to view. It can be constantly updated in response to work carried out, or our changing knowledge and aspirations with regards to helping improve the environment.'

'Biological recording captures information on different species seen around the network and allows us to track them,' she continues. 'One study has looked at the spread of giant hogweed, which is an invasive species with implications for health and safety.'

'I believe there aren't enough people choosing to study geography and that there is a misconception that it doesn't lead to a career,' Zoe says. 'However, geography underpins everyday life and is all around us. It's a great choice that can lead to so many different jobs. Going on to do my Masters course certainly focused my training and led me into working within GIS. Without my geography education, I would never have ended up working for British Waterways in such a fulfilling role.'



Leigh Richardson joined Frontier – an NGO that works to conserve threatened wildlife and habitats and to build sustainable livelihoods for marginalised communities in some of the world's

poorest countries – in February. He left school planning to do a sports degree, but after his gap year, he decided to study geography and environmental management instead. 'I was inspired by the different cultures and landscapes I had visited on my travels and thought the degree was far more suited to me,' he says.

Leigh went to the Cornwall campus of Exeter University and studied climate change and its impact on species and habitats. 'I was interested in studying the environmental influences on biodiversity,' he says. 'This interest led to a Masters in climate change and risk management at Exeter. I felt it was in my interests to learn more about the subject and hopefully go on to find ways to mitigate the impacts of climate change.'

Leigh now works as a research and development officer in London. 'I'm in contact with people working in the field on different projects,' he says. 'We're currently in the initial stages of a new venture that aims to reduce the impact of climate change in The Gambia through methods that will hopefully benefit both biodiversity and human needs. My job relies upon my understanding of the science of climate change, which, in turn, has provided a great basis from which I can continue to learn.'



Rebecca Lewis is a geography teacher at Eltham College, an independent school in South London. Graduating from Bristol University in 2002 with a degree in geography, Rebecca took time out

to travel and then spent a year working in legal headhunting in central London. 'The job didn't suit me at all, but helped me to work out what I wanted to do,' she says. 'I disliked the corporate environment and working in an office, so I decided to look into other career options.'

'Having always loved geography, I began to think about teaching,' she says. 'I did a taster course with the Teacher Training Agency (now the Training and Development Agency for Schools) and enjoying that, so I went on to do a geography postgraduate certificate in education at the Institute of Education in Bloomsbury.'

In September 2005, Rebecca joined Eltham College as a geography teacher to pupils aged 11–18. 'Geography is a really accessible subject that can be taught on many levels and is relevant to daily life,' she says. 'I love teaching it because it's fun, topical and visual, and the pupils respond well.'

'One of the best parts of geography is the opportunity to go on fieldtrips,' she says. 'It gets the pupils out of the classroom to see new environments and interact with their teachers in an informal setting. Seeing real evidence in the field of what I teach in the classroom is a great part of learning the subject. I would recommend studying and teaching geography to anyone.'

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