

# GEOGRAPHY MATTERS

*The world around us is geography's laboratory*

## HERE ARE 9 REASONS WHY GEOGRAPHY MATTERS

*Image source: Shutterstock*

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### 1. Geography describes the earth

Geo comes from the Greek word for Earth and the "graphy" part comes from the Greek word which means to write about something. Thus, geo and graphy literally means "to write about the Earth." Geography teaches vital skills that help us describe and read the world and its representations, from ancient maps and charts to contemporary models and satellite images. Irish statesman and scholar Edmund Burke noted, "geography is an earthly subject, but a heavenly science".

### 2. Geography links the past to the present and the future

Geography helps us understand how past societies and environments developed, which provides the context for the present and helps us to plan for our future. Geography helps us answer the question of "how do we wish to live?" in an informed way. As Michael Palin said, "geography is the subject which holds the key to our future".

### 3. Geography involves different disciplines

Geography combines the study of physical and human worlds and provides a unique context to study how our world is changing and how we can adapt to and mitigate changes. Geography considers both human and non-human processes and how they affect each other, for example how and why floods occur and how they impact landforms, human settlements and industries.

It combines scientific and social literacy; it provides a bridging space in the curriculum to bring together the creativity of the arts, the insights of social science

and humanities as well as the important principles of natural science methods and practices. It gives students a "big picture" view of the world as well as detailed understanding of natural and social systems and provides students with the ability to translate knowledge across disciplinary fields, a skill that will become increasingly important in the 21st century.

### 4 Geography contains essential survival skills

In December 2004, an earthquake in the Indian Ocean formed tsunamis (tidal or seismic sea waves) that devastated communities and environments in 14 countries making it one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history. One student from the UK holidaying with their family recognised the signs of an impending tsunami – the tide rushing out, the bubbling water, and the erratic movement of boats - from the geography lessons they had received and warned their family to leave the beach immediately.

### 5. Geography provides an understanding of scale

Geography covers processes operating at and across scales, from the microscopic to the extra-terrestrial and the world needs geographically literate and global citizens now more than ever. Understanding the earth and society should be a pre-requisite to govern. Former US president Barack Obama put it like this in 2012: "the study of geography is about more than just memorising places on a map. It's about understanding the complexity of our world, appreciating the diversity of cultures that exists across continents. And in the end, it's about using all that knowledge to help bridge divides and bring people together."

## 6. Geography gives us an understanding of place

The world around us is geography's laboratory. Geography provides a tangible means for students to put theory into practice, to take learning from the classroom into the real world. It provides the lived context to connect understanding of physical properties – such as landslides - to the fundamental cycling of water to the importance of decision making about appropriate land use and settlement location. It helps people to understand their place in the world and comprehend current and historical social, cultural, economic, environmental and political events. To quote geographer Yi Fu Tuan, "geography is the study of earth as the home of people"

## 7. Geography helps us address the big challenges

There is no silver bullet to resolve global challenges such as biodiversity loss, mass extinctions, major societal upheaval, rising inequalities and global climate change. Geography provides the intellectual glue that can bind together insights from physics, chemistry, biology, geology, sociology, economics, political science and many other disciplines.

For example, geography helps us understand how our climate has changed over time, how human and physical processes have interacted to cause current conditions and how those interactions will continue to change landscapes, environments and livelihoods in the future. Geographical understanding helps us plan for uncertain futures based on our knowledge of past and current conditions. Geography helps

inform human development illustrating how our very survival relies on the effective functioning of both natural and social systems.

## 8. Geography helps people get jobs

Geography provides important applied and transferable skills, with many employers prizing the knowledge and skills that geography students acquire throughout their education. UK studies have found low levels of unemployment amongst geography graduates where leading universities and politicians recognise geography as one of the key "facilitating" subjects for entry to degree level study.

*Geography helps create the kind of global citizens that are required to navigate the challenges that lie ahead*

## 9. Geography provides an education that everyone deserves

Ireland has a proud history of geographical trailblazers, from the late and great Anne Buttimer to the current leaders of our discipline who are making theoretical and empirical contributions to knowledge worldwide. However, geographers are not created at university, the seeds are sown in primary school and cultivated at second level.

Removal of geography as a core subject for the Junior Cycle risks impoverishing our future. Geography fosters critical thinkers who are able to navigate the complexity of our data rich world. Practical and relevant, it is a living, breathing discipline, a science of sciences; a site of synthesis and integration. It helps create the kind of global citizens that are required to navigate the challenges that lie ahead.

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The views expressed here are those of the author and do not represent or reflect the views of RTÉ

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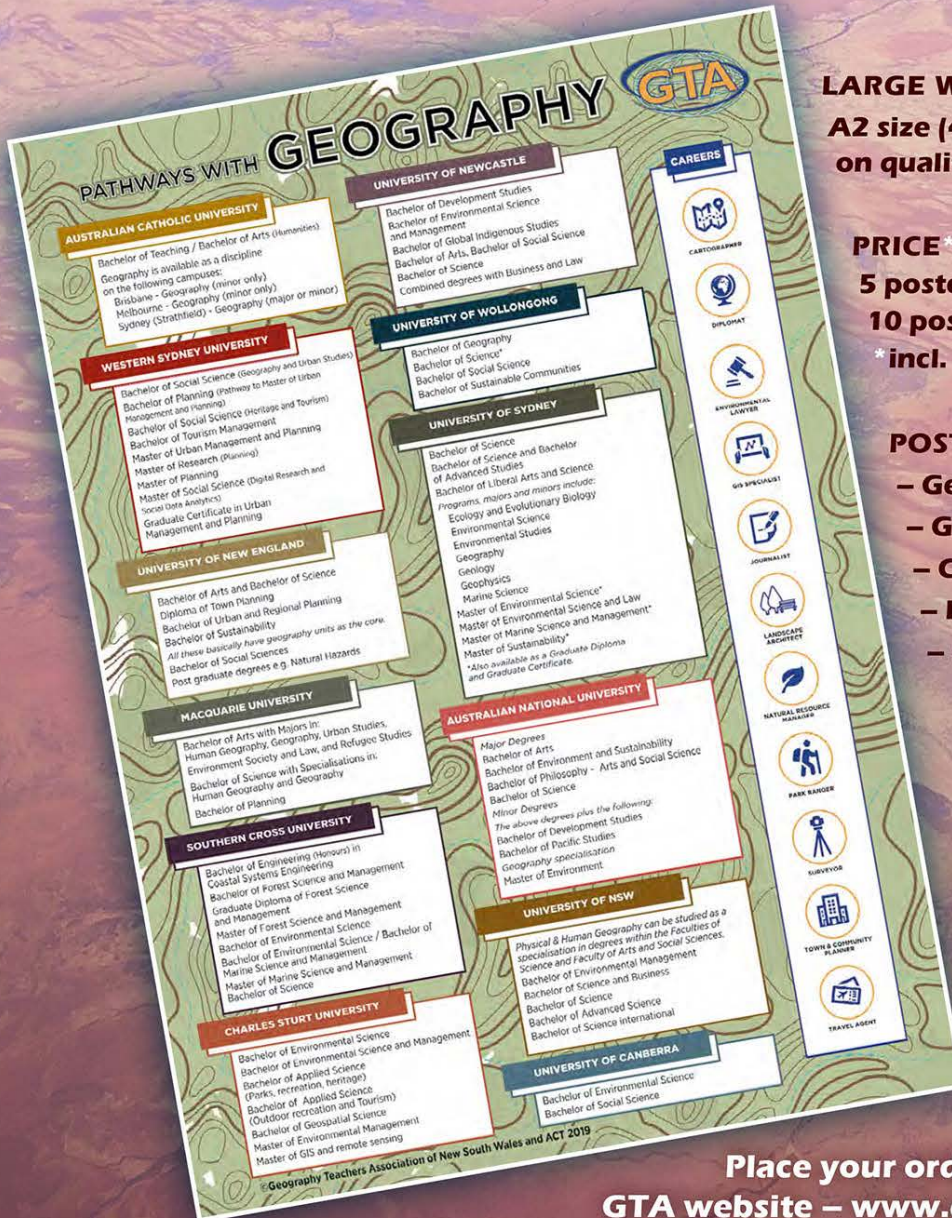
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