

# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome everyone to this extraordinary time in our teaching of Geography. Only a few months ago we were experiencing and contemplating the 'what now?' and 'what next?' related to environmentally focused events which presented significant future implications for the wellbeing of humans, the more-than-human species, environments, and places. Now, the global pandemic adds another layer of complexity to this challenging and rapid time of change.



Regardless of our education context we are compelled to engage with new ways of being in our teaching and learning practice. Hopefully, as geography teachers, we are also prompted to consider the importance of observing and interpreting the impacts and possibilities related to the current circumstances through a distinctly geographical lens. We would also be considering our pedagogical practice, for example, how can inquiry and fieldwork most meaningfully occur within a socially-distanced, #stayhomestaysafe and newly emphasised online context. Consequently, many of us are probably questioning the existing structures and processes in terms of what it is that becomes important emphasise and also to retain as we move between online and face-to-face presences. To use the words from a group of geography scholars I have recently had the pleasure to work alongside, "an absence of the familiar... opens up the possibility for thinking about different futures." (Rogers et al., 2020)

Thinking about future possibilities for the Association and being adaptive and responsive to the changing circumstances are at the forefront of discussions by GTA NSW&ACT Council. For example, the recent, no-fee Café Conversations series, conceptualised by Vice President Sharon McLean, is one way the Association can provide an accessible networking opportunity for members where lived experience about classroom practice in times of a pandemic can be shared in response to overarching questions. Piloted during the month of May, the feedback suggests there is scope for this initiative to continue. Another example of being adaptive and responsive to change will occur via the reimagining of traditional HSC Student Lectures, led by Councillor Catherine Donnelly. Another example, led and modelled by Immediate Past President, Lorraine Chaffer, is for a selection of case-study, classroom-ready articles from recent Geography Bulletins to be available on the GTA NSW&ACT website for all geography teachers to access.

One future possibility that also requires consideration is the future of geography – as a subject in schools, as a discipline, and as a career pathway. Such possibilities, across each domain are evident in the Strategic Plan for Geography, *Geography: Shaping Australia's Future* released at the end of 2018 by the National Committee of Geographical Sciences. In my previous President

Report I invited all readers to download and read *Geography: Shaping Australia's Future* <https://www.science.org.au/files/userfiles/support/reports-and-plans/2018/geography-decadal-plan.pdf> as part of professional reading and to focus on Chapters 1, 2 and 13. In my previous report I also said that a couple of the recommendations will become a particular focus for the Association over the next 12 months, and that I will provide further clarity and direction within the next issue of the Geography Bulletin.

Chapter 13, Geography in Australian Schools outlines the current, national context for the subject and provides four recommendations to ensure the future of Geography flourishes within the school education context. It is vital for the national view to be considered and included at a state and territory level in order to gain traction. One recommendation is about geography becoming compulsory or core learning up until the end of Year 10 or equivalent (whilst this exists in NSW, it is not the case around the country). Another recommendation focuses on initial teacher education in geography. The remaining recommendations surround recognising geography as a partial STEM subject and increasing opportunities for collaboration between school and university geographers. It is such recommendations that will become part of GTA NSW&ACT work in aligning geography as a subject in schools with the discipline of geography and as an important study and career pathway.

Some of you may know that during March 2020 I was appointed, by Science and Technology Australia, as a STEM Ambassador. In working alongside a Federal Member of Parliament and increasing collaborative opportunities between Associations such as GTANSW&ACT, the Geographical Society of NSW, and the Institute of Australian Geographers, it is hoped that advocacy for geography education to become more visible in STEM education will occur at a range of levels from various contexts, and that in time geography will become formally recognised in policy and practice as a partial STEM subject. More information is available in the following article *Science Meets Parliament; Geography Meets STEM*.

GTANSW&ACT is already fortunate to have a long-standing and very positive relationship with the