

2021 Australian Geography Competition

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to present challenges for the Australian Geography Competition in 2021. The Competition was to be held in schools from 18 March to 31 March. However, an extension of two weeks for the return of answer sheets was given due to the short lockdowns affecting several states during the Competition timeframe. Answers received after the cut-off were marked and results and certificates returned, but those students were ineligible for prizes.

The Committee appreciated the support from teachers around Australia as entry numbers returned to pre-2020 Competition levels, with 73,032 students from 728 schools entered. The Competition is particularly strong in New South Wales and the ACT, with **30,870 students from 273 schools** and **2,227 students from 13 schools** respectively.

Prizes

Congratulations to the NSW and ACT students who were awarded prizes, as shown in the tables below. Because of lockdown disruptions to schools, we do not yet have the permissions to share all the names.

Year	NSW Students	Name	School
7	Equal first in Australia	Zygmunt Gray	Finigan School of Distance Education
		William Gray	Finigan School of Distance Education
8	Equal first in Australia	Jeffrey Tang	North Sydney Boys' High School
		Darcy Redican	St Andrew's Cathedral School
		Findlay Gordon	Sydney Grammar School
		Ben Murphy	Champagnat Catholic College Pagewood
		Daniel Becker	Shore School
		Wil Lo Russo	Shore School
		Daniel Davey	Arndell Anglican College
		Edward Baker	Newcastle Grammar School
9	Equal first in NSW	Bowen Wu	North Sydney Boys' High School
		James Boyle	Sydney Grammar School
		Manas Jiwane	Sydney Grammar School
		Kevin Du	James Ruse Agricultural High School
		t.b.c.	St Aloysius' College
10	First in Australia	Ashton Searle	Searle Home School
11	First in Australia	William Stafford	Sydney Grammar School
12	Equal first in Australia	Charlie Veeneklaas	Sydney Grammar School
School	First in Australia		Sydney Grammar School

ACT is part of the Combined Territories group in the calculation of prizes. This also includes students from: Christmas Island, Cocos Keeling Islands, Norfolk Island and Northern Territory. Prizes were awarded in the ACT as follows:

Year	ACT Students	Name	School
7	First in Territories	Jorden Warmington	Campbell High School
8	Equal first in Territories	Edward McCammon	Canberra Grammar School
9	First in Territories	George Birmingham	Radford College
10	First in Territories	Thomas Lin	Canberra Grammar School
11	First in Territories	Jack Gardner	Canberra Grammar School
12	Equal first in Territories	Owen Stothart	Canberra Grammar School
		Alexander Popple	Narrabundah College
School	First in Territories		Canberra Grammar School

School prizes and rankings are calculated using the scores of the school's best five students from each of Years 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12. This method is used so that schools that enter only their best students are not advantaged. These NSW and ACT schools ranked in the top 10 in Australia.

Australian Rank	School
1	Sydney Grammar School
2	Sydney Boys High School
3	Knox Grammar School
7	Northern Beaches Secondary College - Balgowlah Boys
8	Canberra Grammar School

2021 International Geography Olympiad

The fieldwork-based Geography's Big Week Out (GBWO) is the usual method to select students to represent Australia at the International Geography Olympiad (iGeo). The 2020 GBWO was to have been hosted by the Geographical Association of Western Australia (GAWA) but had to be cancelled due to COVID-19. Instead, top-performing Year 11 students were invited to complete a two-hour written examination. The four students selected for the 2021 iGeo Australia team were:

- Nikki Ballinger – Walford Anglican School for Girls, SA
- Imogen Cooper – Wesley College, Vic
- Rhea Sankar – Canberra Grammar School, ACT
- Gemma Snyman – Roseville College, NSW

The four students selected came together with members of the Competition Committee during the Easter school holidays to receive some of the training that would normally be provided by GBWO. This training was to have been held in Brisbane, but COVID-19 border restrictions interfered, and it was transferred to Sydney at short notice.



Australia's iGeo team in Sydney for training

The 2020 iGeo had been cancelled because of the pandemic. The 2021 iGeo was scheduled to be held in Istanbul, Turkey, from 10 to 16 August. At a Zoom meeting of representatives of the participating countries, it was decided that the 2021 iGeo would be held virtually, rather than cancelled.

The recommended scenario was for all students from one country to sit the three tests in the same place. However, given the lockdowns, Imogen and Gemma had to compete from home, and Nikki and Rhea were able to come together in Darwin – the only place possible without quarantining. Rhea just made it before the ACT lockdown. All students were observed and recorded by international monitors, both via the computer on which they were working, and via a second observing camera.



Rhea and Nikki sitting a test in Darwin



Nikki checking out the crocodiles

It wasn't Istanbul, but Rhea and Nikki were able to explore the area around Darwin, including the local markets, a jumping crocodiles cruise and swimming under waterfalls in Litchfield National Park.

However, even the students in lockdown appreciated the experience, as this quote from Imogen attests:

For me, the 2021 iGeo was a little challenging, but mostly lots of fun. It was bizarre to do the tests online and from home, especially since there were people all over the world sitting the same tests, despite time differences and covid. I thought it was awesome how even though we all came from different cultures and backgrounds we were able to come together (virtually) because of a shared passion: geography. I loved that the Olympiad gave me the opportunity to learn about other countries and cultures, and make new friends. It's a shame we couldn't all meet in person, but it was still a fantastic experience.

Imogen Cooper

A short lockdown also affected the travel plans of the Committee members. It was fortunate that Simon Roos-Freeman was able to fill the supervising role at short notice. Simon was a key staff member at the 2017–2019 GBWOs held at Kangaroo Island, SA, as well as at an earlier one when he was teaching in Perth. Simon was also a leader with the Australian team to the 2019 iGeo, so was excellently fitted to the role.

Teams from 46 countries took part. All four Australian students won bronze medals, placing all our students in the top half. Australia was one of 14 countries from which all team members won medals.

2021 Geography's Big Week Out

The 2021 GBWO was scheduled to have been held in Perth in July, hosted by GAWA. However, in February the Competition Committee, in consultation with GAWA and AGTA, took the decision that it should be postponed to later in the year to avoid any winter spike of cases and when the vaccination programme would be further advanced. As the Western Australian teachers were unable to host it later in the year, the 2021 GBWO has been rescheduled to take place on the Gold Coast and its hinterland in December 2021. Given the COVID-19 cases in four Australian states in July and the closing of Western Australia's borders, this proved to be a wise decision.

The 2021 GBWO will run from 6 to 10 December and will mainly be based at the Numinbah Valley Environmental Education Centre. The programme will concentrate on a catchment study, including land cover transformations. It will conclude with an assessment that will be used to select Australia's team to the 2022 iGeo to be held in Paris, in association with the International Geographical Union Centennial Congress.

The Committee does not yet have the necessary permissions to share the names of the participating students. We very much hope that both the 2021 GBWO and the 2022 iGeo will not be disrupted by COVID-19 restrictions.

2022 Competition Goes Digital

Next year's Competition will change from paper-based to online delivery using the Education Perfect platform. (Think of the trees and vehicle emissions saved!) This will allow a greater range of question types than have been possible in the past. Over 50 schools and nearly 10,000 students are taking part in the trial of the digital delivery. We have included interactive stimulus material in the trial and if that does not present practical difficulties in the classroom, we look forward to being able to use further examples in the 2022 Competition.

The 2022 Competition will be held in schools from **24 March to 6 April 2022**. Here's hoping to no more lockdowns in 2022.

We look forward to your school's participation in what we trust will be an even more engaging Competition for your students.

For more information, please contact:

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