

Contributing to curriculum delivery in a sixth form college

Dawn T. Nicholson, Manchester Metropolitan University

Brief context

A significant challenge for academic staff in UK HEIs is the common lack of knowledge and understanding of pre-University education. Curricula, learning activities and assessment types appear to be in a constant state of flux and many academic staff have lost touch with what and how GEES disciplines are taught in schools and sixth form colleges. This case study outlines one simple, and probably common approach, to improving understanding at the school – University transition.

The nature of that public engagement

Xaverian College, Manchester, is a Catholic Sixth Form College with Beacon status and an outstanding reputation for student success and academic achievement. It is located just south of the city centre and on the periphery of the urban academic corridor comprising Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Manchester. The College has a philosophy of enriching students' educational experience through a wide range of activities and events. This includes inviting academic staff from local HEIs to contribute to the delivery of specialist elements within the 'A' Level curriculum and to paint a picture of University life and the opportunities that it presents.

The Edexcel 'A' Level Geography curriculum includes the module *World At Risk*, encompassing global natural hazards and climate change. Two members of academic staff from the Division of Geography and Environmental Management at MMU, both physical geographers, were invited to deliver a two-hour class to a group of about 50 geography students on the topic of geohazards. The University staff both have a breadth of teaching and research experience in geophysical hazards including earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic activity. The Geography Curriculum Leader at Xaverian was keen for the content to complement the set 'A' Level curriculum but at the same time to broaden students' horizons by providing a glimpse beyond.

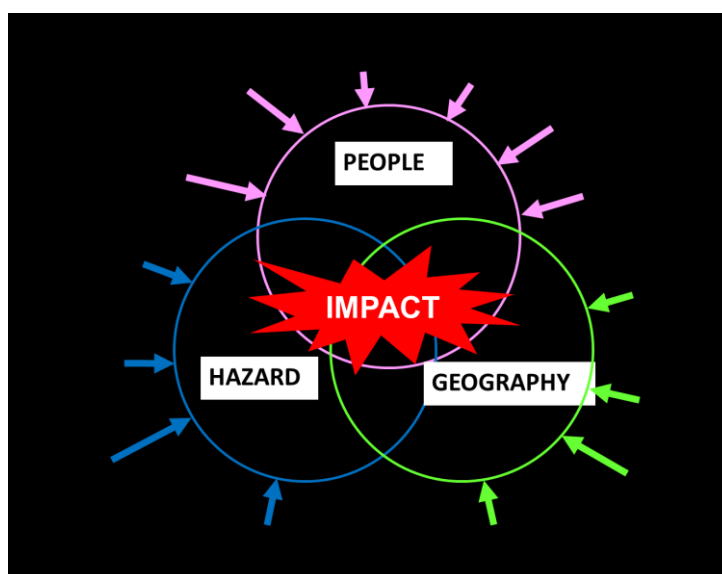


Figure 1: Summary of geohazard processes, influencing factors, response and management

The class presentation followed the broad requirements of the curriculum, and considered hazard processes, impacts and approaches to mitigation and management. The presentation was interactive

and students were encouraged to respond to open-ended questions and to ask questions themselves. The opportunity was taken to draw on the teaching and research activities of the academics and to make links with modules delivered as part of the Geography and Physical Geography courses at MMU. The case studies used to illustrate the hazards were drawn from a mixture of recent, widely known examples, and older, classic events which probably pre-date the students, but from which, valuable lessons in hazard response have been learned.

The benefits of the activity for all those concerned

Informal feedback after the event indicated that students really enjoyed the contribution made by two academic staff from the local University. In particular, they valued the opportunity for a taste of University teaching as well as the links made to research activities which made the content seem more authentic. It was helpful to strengthen links between the University and the College and to provide an opportunity for pupils to ask questions about University life, making the transition, and about the courses available. For the academic staff, the experience provided an opportunity to publicise the University and its courses and also to learn more about the content of the 'A' Level Geography curriculum.

Longer term impacts arising from the activity

Xaverian College have maintained links with academic staff at MMU and there may be opportunities to repeat this activity in the future. Other academic staff are now making links with other schools and colleges in the local area with a view to engaging in mutually beneficial ways. The presentation has since been used as the basis for a talk on hazards to a group of geology enthusiasts participating in a U3A (University of the Third Age - <http://www.u3a.org.uk/>) course.

Useful resources

A collection of examples from around the North West of the UK of how academic HE STEM staff have engaged with schools and colleges:

National HE STEM programme (2012). *Regional Projects: HE Engagement With Schools and Colleges*. http://www.sci-eng.mmu.ac.uk/he_stem/regional_projects/actions/?show=1