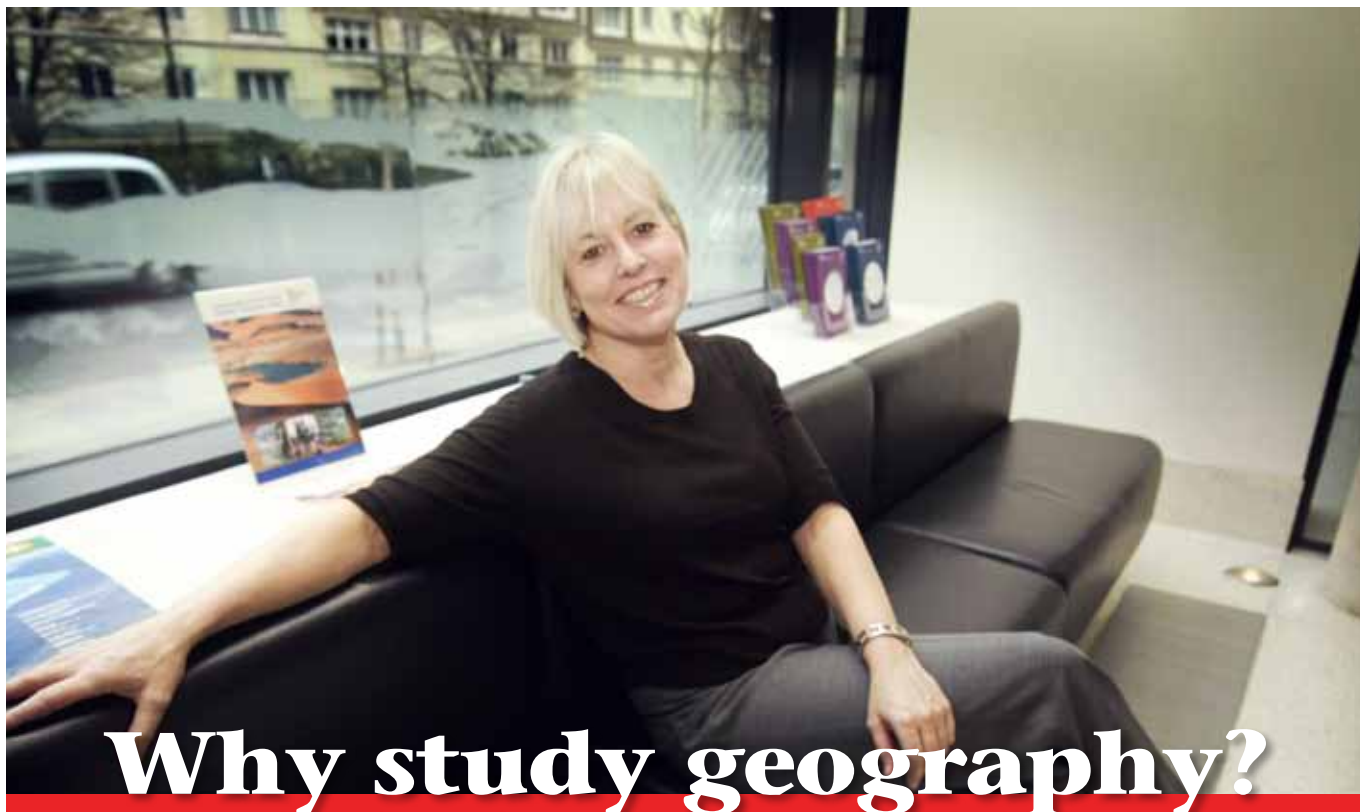


I'm a Geographer

EXPLORING NEW VISTAS





Why study geography?

Amid all the changes occurring in UK universities, one thing is abundantly clear – geography remains one of the best subjects to study. Whether measured in terms of students' enjoyment of their course, rates of completion, or employment rates and career paths following graduation, geography ranks in the very top group.

In a recent report entitled 'Informed Choices', the 20 leading UK universities rated geography as a 'facilitating subject'. They see A-level geography as a solid qualification that will help you make good progress into university study – whether you choose to study geography or a different subject at university.

As you think about studying geography at university, there are a number of questions you will be asking:

Will I be employable?

Over the past year, the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) has looked closely at surveys of employers and conducted our own analyses of government data. These all confirm that employers are actively searching for the skills, knowledge and understanding that geography graduates possess.

Employers recognise that geographers can write, undertake research, analyse and visualise data, integrate ideas and work independently and in groups. They also have expert knowledge of many of the most important issues of our time – whether it be climate change, sustainable development, migration, resource security, environmental degradation and social cohesion, or equality. Geographers' ability to understand these issues from a breadth of different perspectives,

and their implications locally and globally, mean that their knowledge and skills are highly sought after in the workplace.

Moreover, in a world where much of our information is now spatially based – from postcodes to sat navs – geographic information science (GIS), which is studied in all geography degrees, has rapidly grown to become an essential tool in business and government, creating even more opportunities for those with geographical skills and knowledge.

What kind of career would I be able to enter?

The Society's careers brochure 'Going Places with Geography' (downloadable from www.rgs.org/careers) highlights a wide range of careers and opportunities in which geography graduates flourish. It shows what these jobs entail and the value of geography to them, and when taken together with the profiles contained within the following special supplement, it illustrates the amazing diversity of paths open to geography graduates.

How do I find out more about choosing a university course and making a successful application?

Geography is a popular choice at university – across the UK, almost 90 universities offer degree courses in geography. The range of options is large and constantly developing. You can choose from single honours degrees in geography (offered as either a BSc or a BA) or joint degrees if you want to combine geography with, for example, economics, a language or a science such as biology or chemistry. You can also specialise in a

particular area of geography, such as geo hazards, climate change, international development, or GIS.

The Society has developed a number of resources to support young geographers, with advice and guidance on progressing to university. Our 'Study Geography' web resource (www.studygeography.rgs.org) provides information on university courses, how to apply, guidance on key issues to think through when choosing the best programme of study, and advice on writing a strong application. The site is constantly being updated with key information for students, the latest information on careers and employability, and also updates on new initiatives and opportunities for funding. Do have a look.

What should I write in my personal statement?

Entry to university is competitive. Clearly, academic background is vitally important, but universities also want to see evidence of your motivation and passion, so make the most of the opportunities and resources that the Society has to offer. Join us (see www.rgs.org/joinus) and become a Young Geographer; attend lectures and debates or use our online resources, such as 21st Century Challenges, Geography in the News, and Discovering Britain; or draw on our advice about getting the most from a gap year using our online toolkit. And above all, be clear about why you want to study geography.

Dr Rita Gardner, CBE
Director, Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

Andrew Badham, air-traffic-management specialist

Andrew Badham has come full circle in his long career in aviation. After starting out in air-traffic control, he worked in airport management for 18 years before coming back to air-traffic control again.

After graduating from UCL with a BSc in geography in 1980, Andrew went on to study for a Masters degree at the University of Liverpool. 'I studied town and transport planning, and obtained the fancy title of master of civic design,' he says. 'I did my thesis on planning and design of airports.' Just nine months later, he landed his dream job as an air traffic control officer (ATCO) with the National Air Traffic Services. 'My interest in airports then allowed me to move on to management positions at Luton and Glasgow airports. I spent 18 years with the British Airports Authority specialising in airport safety.'

Two years ago Andrew joined the UK Civil Aviation Authority as an air-traffic-management specialist, bringing him back into the world of air-traffic control. 'Some of the issues I deal with now are developing air traffic control policies and procedures, unmanned aircraft systems, space tourism and space weather, and more recently, working with other experts in developing airspace procedures for the Olympics,' he says.

Andrew had a keen interest in aviation from an early age, and knew he wanted to be involved in it in his career. Geography, he says, certainly helped. 'It has always been said that geographers can do almost anything; it's a good general degree to have,' he says. 'My knowledge of maps, navigation and meteorology helped with becoming an ATCO.'

Geography has now come full circle in Andrew's family, too: 'My son has just completed his first year studying geographical information systems at Bath Spa University – so he did listen to something I told him!'



Nick Williams, police officer

Nick Williams completed his Bachelor of Science degree in human geography in 2004 and is now fulfilling a lifelong ambition, working as a police officer. 'I love the job as it's vital, unique and extremely varied, a bit like geography,' he says. 'It's different from one day to the next, and you get to meet and help a lot of people. I respond to a variety of calls on a daily basis when people ring 999 in an emergency, or when they have problems in their life.'

Like many geography graduates, Nick cites the field trips as the most enjoyable parts of his degree. He recalls a trip to Dublin: 'We went to study the culture, both historical and modern. It was probably one of the most enjoyable experiences I have had, and what other course would involve studying the Guinness factory?'

Despite all the Guinness, Nick learnt a lot of valuable lessons from his geography studies. 'My degree has helped me by giving me a broad skill base to take into my career,' he says. 'I'm able to analyse a lot of information quickly and identify patterns and trends that support good decision making. Being able to process information quickly and accurately is a skill I developed on the course and it helps me on a daily basis.'

Nick describes geography as a degree for those who like variety and independence, but points out that it also makes graduates highly employable. 'It's such a fantastic subject,' he says. 'The emphasis is really on the student to put the work in and do the wider reading. It's also a subject that's appealing to employers as it demonstrates versatility.'

Rose-Marie Roberts, trainee geography teacher

Rose-Marie Roberts loves being outdoors, which was one of her reasons for choosing to study geography at university. It's hardly surprising, then, that field trips were the highlights of her degree – a snowball fight on Mount St Helens is a particularly fond memory, she says. Her studies also inspired her to get involved with other adventurous souls at the University of Exeter. 'I had a particularly keen involvement with the expedition society, the sailing society and the geography society,' she says.

After graduating in 2009 with a BSc in geography with environmental management, Rose began teaching environmental education at an outdoors centre that offered inner-city students an experience of the countryside, often for the first time. 'This allowed me to offer students opportunities to do the fieldwork that I loved when I was at school, and also helped me realise that I loved teaching,' she says.

This led her to apply for the PGCE for which she's currently studying, again at Exeter, which she describes as 'brilliant'. 'I've been very fortunate with my placement schools – they've been very positive about my passion for fieldwork, thankfully,' she says. 'Everyone has now got used to seeing me running around the school grounds with clipboards and class in tow.'

Rose is now busy applying for teaching jobs, and intends to complete a Masters of Education within the next two years, investigating the advantages of creativity and out-of-class learning. 'When I selected geography, the only real inspiration I had for a career was being outside,' she admits.

'The process of completing my degree focused my interests and showed me that sharing my knowledge about the environment with young people is something I truly enjoy. To have the opportunity to do it as a career is ultimately thanks to skills I acquired during my degree.'



Christopher P Baker, adventurer, travel writer and photographer, USA and South America

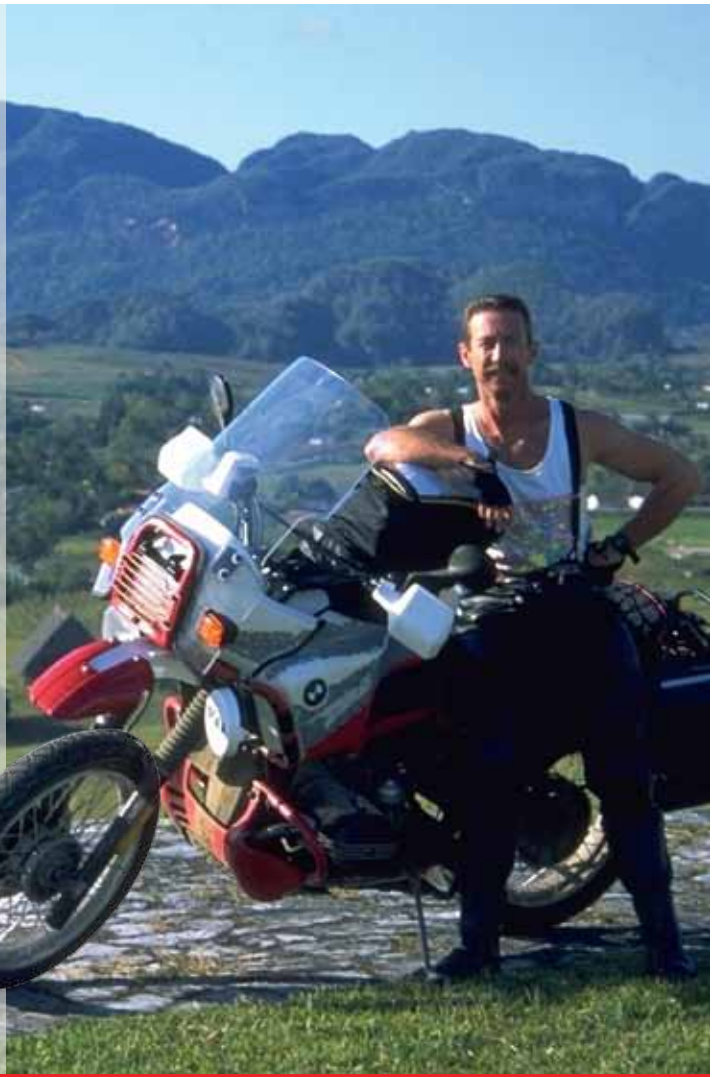
Before he went to university at UCL in the 1970s, Christopher Baker hadn't set foot outside of England. Geography introduced him, quite literally, to the world, he says. 'In 1975, I participated in a university field-study programme to the Moroccan Sahara, driving through France and Spain to get there,' he says. 'The experience sparked a passion for travel, adventure and discovery.'

Although he envisioned a career as a political journalist after studying journalism in California, he began working within the adventure-travel industry and soon became a professional travel writer and photographer. He has written guidebooks to the Caribbean and Central America, and is regarded as an expert on Cuba. He's currently writing a novel and planning a TV travel show.

'I don't see my profession as a job,' he says. 'It's my vocation, and an expression of who I am. To earn a living travelling to far-flung places and writing about my experiences combines two of my passions.'

One of the elements Christopher loves about his profession is the ability it gives him to shape his professional life to his interests and whims. 'In 1996, I shipped my BMW motorcycle to Cuba and spent three months riding the island end to end, resulting in the publication of a travel memoir,' he says. 'Studying geography helped to fuel my fascination with the world. It has also given me the fundamentals of a broad worldly understanding that infuses my writing. For example, most recently, I researched and wrote a book about the best scenic drives in California, in which I was able to explain the processes that have shaped the magnificent landscape, from the dunes of the Mojave Desert to the glacier-carved valleys of Yosemite.'

For Christopher, geography forms a perfect connection between the sciences and the arts. 'But most importantly, it opens the eyes and the mind to a world of possibilities.'



Beth Knowles, activism coordinator, Oxfam

Born and bred in the Cheshire countryside, Beth Knowles graduated from the University of Liverpool with a BA in geography two years ago. After interning with the British Red Cross, she became an activism coordinator for Oxfam. This involves supporting Oxfam's activist and university group network across the north of England to campaign on Oxfam's main issues,' she explains.

'I'm so lucky to be able to channel the energy I have for fighting injustice and working for positive change into my day-to-day work,' she continues. 'I honestly love my job, as every day I work with Oxfam activists who are incredibly passionate and enthusiastic about changing the world for the better.'

Beth says her degree has helped her to understand the issues that underlie world poverty – why it exists

and how it can be overcome – and she believes that having this understanding is vital to a career in the international-development sector. 'In my role as a campaigner, the political awareness I gained from my degree is essential, especially understanding the political reasons behind why countries are either developed or developing,' she says.

The thing that Beth enjoyed most about studying geography was learning why places, politics and people are the way they are. 'A field trip to Berlin and modules on the fight against fascism and shaping of democracy in South America were fascinating, and still help me to understand the world today,' she says. 'I also loved being constantly surprised at just how much geography covers. There's a running joke at work that I always have the answer to every "why is that?" question. I don't, but when I do, I always say that it's because I'm a geographer.'

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Explore

Geography



Jess Keeling, future transport logistics manager

Jess Keeling chose to study geography out of sheer passion for the subject. 'It's much more than a mere subject – a passion, a pleasure, a way of thinking and perceiving the world around me,' she enthuses.

'With geography you learn to approach things holistically, merging the present with history, idealism with realism, society with the physical environment – it gives you a very critical and nuanced perspective.'

Jess began her geography studies at Oxford but transferred to the University of Reading when the workload became too much for her as a stressed-out single mother. Since gaining a BSc in human geography, she has completed a Masters in spatial development and analysis at the University of Luxembourg with a heavy focus on cross-border cooperation. 'I spent half a year in Belgrade, Serbia, doing an internship as part of my Masters degree, and did my thesis on EU-funded cross-border cooperation programmes in Kosovo,' she says.

Having just completed a major house renovation project, her next move is into transport logistics. With an online course under her belt, she's now looking for a job. 'Logistics is a very practical job-friendly subtopic of geography, and it combines my passion for geography with the exciting real world of trade and business,' she says.

What Jess really enjoys about geography is its breadth. 'Geography is so broad that everybody can find something in which to specialise, be it politics, international relations, social issues, science, economics, maths, computing, transport, planning... But careers apart, geography must surely be the most pleasurable subject in the world – it's just so damned interesting.'

Patrick Hearne, helicopter pilot

'I've wanted to be a military pilot for as long as I can remember,' says Yorkshire lad Patrick Hearne. Patrick is now living his dream. As a helicopter pilot flying the Merlin Battlefield Support Helicopter, he gets to travel all over the world. 'It can be very hard work and pretty unpredictable, but that's part of the attraction – it never stops challenging me and there's always something new to learn. As global politics



and technology change, we often find ourselves at the forefront of both arenas, doing things that ten years ago were unheard of.'

Patrick graduated with a BSc in geography from the University of Birmingham in 2001. After spending a couple of years doing charity work, a ski season and working in the renewable energy and energy conservation department of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, he joined the RAF.

Studying topics such as geopolitics, foreign cultures, history and ethics as part of his geography degree now affords Patrick a deeper understanding of the areas in which he finds himself, such as the Middle East. 'I often find myself in situations where something I learnt ten years ago and haven't touched since suddenly becomes relevant again,' he says. 'More specific skills that I still use today are the study of meteorology, remote imaging and satellite systems, and in-depth understanding of the physical environment, such as topography.'

Making groundbreaking discoveries in his dissertation was an especially enjoyable part of his studies. 'Working on my dissertation was very interesting as it resulted in the discovery of evidence of human habitation in ancient Turkey of which we were previously unaware,' he says.

Patrick would recommend geography to anyone. 'A geography graduate is very well rounded and possesses a broad skill set, with an ability to analyse situations from many different angles,' he says.

Colin Lovell, head of land use planning, Transport for London

Colin Lovell uses the geographical knowledge he gained at university to advise the mayor of London. Colin heads the land-use planning team at Transport for London, advising the mayor on the transport issues he has to consider when considering planning applications for large developments in the city.

'My geographical knowledge is critical to analysing the spatial impact of decisions on major developments such as the reuse of Battersea power station or Tottenham Hotspur's proposed stadium in north London,' he says.

Most of Colin's work is high profile, making for a challenging but interesting job in which no two days are the same. 'The job is very exciting because we are working to ensure London maintains its role as a major but liveable world city with a high quality of life, where people can move around without congestion or poor air quality,' he says. 'I'm very privileged to have this job, and I believe my degree in geography set me on the right path all those years ago.'

Colin specialised in urban geography and planning in his degree, graduating from UCL in 1975, before completing a Masters degree in environmental planning. The geographical knowledge that he gained during his studies has inspired him throughout his life, he says.

What Colin loves about geography is its relevance to a diverse range of current issues. 'Just open the pages of any newspaper and so many articles have geographical components: the need for housing, proposals for new sports stadia, the decline of certain species, conflicts over resources, climate change,' he says. This is why he chose to study the subject and would recommend others do the same. 'If you are interested in the world in which we live, geography helps you make sense of it all!'

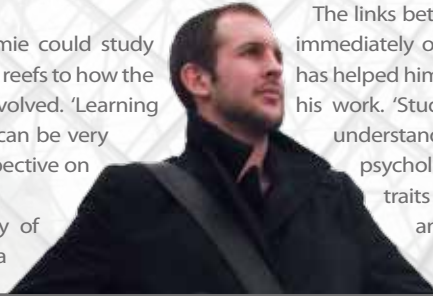


Jamie Sterry, experiential-marketing account manager

For Watford-born Jamie Sterry, geography seemed like the logical choice when deciding on a degree, as it opened doors to a wider world of careers. 'Unless you're planning on being a doctor or something, most people don't really know what they want to do at that age,' he says. 'Geography is a broad subject that opens people's eyes, helping to develop interests in more specialist fields once we have a better feel for what we want out of life.'

Taking a geography degree meant that Jamie could study everything from the effects of pollution on coral reefs to how the universe was formed and the human form evolved. 'Learning about the history of ourselves and our planet can be very enlightening, and helps to give us a good perspective on life and the world around us,' he says.

Highlights of Jamie's time at the University of Edinburgh were studying coral reefs in Jamaica



and doing groundbreaking fieldwork in Greece, but ultimately, it was the human elements that inspired him the most. He now works for a large marketing agency in the events and experiential department. 'My job involves studying people and audiences and establishing a creative way to connect with them through a live experience,' he explains. 'The job is great because every project is different. It's a great challenge to continually strive to create something original and memorable.'

The links between geography and advertising may not be immediately obvious, but Jamie has found that his degree has helped him gain a sense of perspective that is valuable in his work. 'Studying human geography has helped me to understand human behaviour and, on some level, human psychology and community trends,' he says. 'These traits help in the world of marketing as they give us an insight into what consumers like and what they're most likely to respond to.'

Miriam Kennet, CEO and founder, Green Economics Institute

Miriam Kennet was in her late 40s and working to support her family when she began her geography degree, having worked in engineering for 30 years. 'I always had a yen to change the world – and felt that something wasn't working in the mainstream dialogue,' she says.

Deciding that she would take matters into her own hands, Miriam retrained. 'I looked for a holistic and interdisciplinary degree; geography included social theory and the physical world as well as economics, so it had all the drivers I needed,' she explains.

After graduating from the University of Oxford's school of geography with an MSc in environmental change and management, Miriam went on to create a whole new discipline, which she dubbed 'green economics,' founding the Green Economics Institute and an academic journal, *The International Journal of Green Economics*.

She describes green economics as a geographer's-eye-view of the world. 'It's about the complex mesh of social and environmental justice together – you can't have one without the other' she says. 'It aims to prevent poverty, not just mitigate it; to prevent further destruction, climate change and biodiversity loss.'

Since graduating in 1999, Miriam has published more than 100 book chapters, academic papers and articles, and is enrolled on a PhD-by-publication course. The BBC has even made a programme about her life and work.

'It's amazing – I never imagined this would happen,' she says. 'The skills I learnt as a geographer completely changed my life and have actually changed the course of economics history. If you want to change the world, choose a subject that helps you understand how it works in all its facets – human and natural – geography does just that.'



Rob Sharpe, GIS industry manager

Rob Sharpe chose geography because he wasn't sure which career path to follow. 'I was told that a geography degree would provide me with a skill set that would open up diverse opportunities,' he says. 'This has certainly been the case – friends I studied with are now working in accountancy, banking, law, computer programming, the environmental sector and GIS. One is even a BBC weatherman.'

After graduating from the University of Sheffield, Rob worked for the Ordnance Survey on a graduate programme before moving on to his current position at Esri UK, the leading provider of GIS software. 'I manage a team of GIS consultants who work across business sectors to understand business processes,' he explains. 'Every day is different. I can be working to understand the challenges a defence customer is facing one day, the Environment Agency the next and an insurance company after that.'

Studying geography allowed Rob to indulge his love of the outdoors, so field trips to the Peak District and southern Spain were the most enjoyable aspects of the course. But these trips have proved to be valuable in his career, too. 'During field studies and other group work, I was able to learn about how I best operate in a team environment,' he says. 'Management and leadership of the team is a daily learning curve, but the friends I worked with at university certainly helped me on my way in this area.'

Rob would love to study geography again, and would encourage anybody with an interest to do so, too. 'You will develop a unique set of skills that can be applied within the workplace,' he says. 'The business world needs people with geographical skills and the ability to think spatially. The ability to think about problems in an analytical and geographical way provides a different business insight.'





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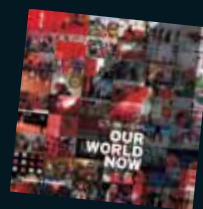
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John Sutton, water resources engineer, Pacific islands

After graduating with a BSc in geography from the University of Birmingham in 2007, John Sutton wasn't sure what he wanted to do with his degree. He was interested in environmental sciences, and rivers in particular had grabbed his attention during his studies, so he decided to study for an MSc in river environment management, again at Birmingham. It turned out to be a defining decision; he is now working as a water resources engineer in the Republic of Kiribati, a small Pacific island nation, formerly known as the (British) Gilbert Islands.

'The Kiribati Adaptation Project is a development project funded by the World Bank, and relates to improving water-resources infrastructure to help adapt to climate change, such as improving drought resilience,' John explains.

He currently manages three construction contracts with local contractors, overseeing construction of the designs provided by the project. 'I was heavily involved in the design work and specifying the works, so overseeing construction to see a project through is fantastic – it provides a real sense of satisfaction,' he says. 'Providing water for a school or a community building, or a whole island, makes all the hard work worthwhile.'

In his free time on the island, John gets to snorkel, surf, and 'generally mess around on the lagoon, or even dance in the occasional Maneaba [traditional Kiribati ceremonial hall] covered in flour!' Working in such an exotic location isn't without its challenges, however; he once got stranded 300 kilometres from any

other land for two weeks, on Banaba, an outer island.

Despite being so far away from home, John is still informed by his studies in Birmingham. 'I probably use some skills I gained from my time at Birmingham every day,' he says. 'It provided me with the necessary analytical and problem-solving skills to find pragmatic solutions to problems relating to natural processes.'

Michael Furey, founder of a renewable energy organisation, Australia

Michael Furey only graduated last year but he's already making waves. Initially focusing his studies on rivers, he soon realised that climate change needed some 'serious attention.' 'I was lucky enough to be sent to Australia for a conference on climate change during my time at Birmingham University,' he says. 'I spent two weeks with a highly engaged group of young people from universities in the Universitas 21 Network. After that, I realised that getting the human world on to a sustainable system would be an awesome challenge to take on.'

Michael has now taken this challenge into his own hands. After working on the Youth Advisory Panel for the Department of Energy and Climate Change, and undertaking placements with renewable energy companies in the USA, he's now involved full time in Global Sunrise – an initiative he founded that focuses on supporting existing sustainable-development projects, empowering them to fulfil their renewable-energy potential.

'Our energy future is entirely up for grabs; working in the renewable energy industry right now is extremely exciting,' Michael says. And he's planning to be a leading light for the industry in the future. 'I intend to bring about a paradigm shift to 100 per cent renewable energy within the next ten years, and to play my part in empowering the renewable-energy generation.'

According to Michael, his geography degree provided an excellent understanding of the 'complex and intertwined systems



that dictate the environmental and sociopolitical games that we see throughout the world.' Would he recommend it to others? 'Absolutely – it's awesome. You get to learn about this planet, how it works, how humans interact with it and those who live on it. Erm, can I do my three years again please?'

Sabrina Chesterman, independent environmental consultant, Africa

Sabrina Chesterman was determined to be a travelling doctor in Africa when she was younger, but her passion for the environment got the better of her. 'I now work as an independent consultant, specialising in climate change, ecosystem services and environmental management, across east and southern Africa,' she says.

Sabrina worked in a number of roles before going solo, but it was a geography field trip that sparked her interest. 'A field trip working on capturing indigenous and local knowledge helped me find my absolute passion – which essentially involves trying to engage simple and pragmatic solutions to an array of environmental challenges – using the knowledge on the ground and trying to integrate this into sustainable local and national policies,' she says. 'I realised I wanted to be a link, and use my love of, and fascination with, the complexities of Africa, its geographical turbulence and its social dynamics to try to solve the environmental issues it's facing.'

The degree that Sabrina gained from the University of Oxford's school of geography in 2009 has been instrumental in shaping her career, particularly in making the link between the physical and human environments. 'The focus on population growth models in my degree has also been key – rural-to-urban migration and population growth are two of the biggest challenges we face in the work I do,' she says. 'What I learnt in my degree has aided me in many aspects of my work.'

Sabrina describes her work as continually dynamic and challenging, but she loves her job. 'Problems in Africa are complex and can be overwhelming, but the innovation and capacity make it such an exciting place to be working.'



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Queen Mary, University of London
www.qmul.ac.uk
Queen's University Belfast
www.qub.ac.uk

R
University of Reading
www.reading.ac.uk
Roehampton University
www.roehampton.ac.uk
Royal Holloway, University of London
www.rhul.ac.uk

S
University of Salford
www.salford.ac.uk
School of Oriental and African

Studies, University of London
www.soas.ac.uk
University of Sheffield
www.sheffield.ac.uk
Sheffield Hallam University
www.shu.ac.uk
University of Southampton
www.soton.ac.uk
Southampton Solent University
www.solent.ac.uk
University of St Andrews
www.st-andrews.ac.uk
St Mary's University College, Twickenham
www.smuc.ac.uk
Staffordshire University
www.staffs.ac.uk
University of Stirling
www.stir.ac.uk
University of Strathclyde
www.strath.ac.uk
University of Sunderland
www.sunderland.ac.uk
University of Sussex
www.sussex.ac.uk
Swansea University
www.swansea.ac.uk

U
University of Ulster
www.ulster.ac.uk
University College London (UCL)
www.ucl.ac.uk

W
University of West England, Bristol
www.uwe.ac.uk
University of Winchester
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University of Worcester
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