

Geography

News on Geography and
Environmental Science



Queen Mary
University of London

Welcoming our new cohort of students

Welcome Week 2016 saw over 180 new first year students enrol on to geography and environmental science degree programmes in the School of Geography at QMUL this September. The week was an opportunity for students to get to know the university, their academics, fellow students and each other; as well as to find out about the Students' Union and the different support and services available to them. A range of activities and events were on offer to introduce new students to the campus, the local area and London. **Springboards**, the School's dedicated team of undergraduates who help new students with the transition from school to university, were also on hand to help new students settle in, which included a treasure hunt for freshers that has since received a lot of positive feedback.

Led by students for students, the **Geography Society** (or GeogSoc) intertwines passions for learning,

development and exploration. They welcome a vast array of students from a diverse spectrum of backgrounds (from the Maldives to Malaysia to Brazil) which is something that QMUL and the School of Geography values and prides itself on. "We have found this cohesive connection contributes to academic and social development and everlasting global friendships; and we work closely with the School to deliver legendary social events such as karaoke, laser tag, go-karting, quizzes, sporting activities and other outings – there really is something for everyone!" said second year environmental scientist, **Jason Lynch**, this year's President of GeogSoc. "For example, this year's freshers week pizza party was a great successful boasting record numbers for any GeogSoc event and feedback was really encouraging giving us momentum for planning further events this academic year", he added. "We are working towards hosting some high profile events such as a Climate



GeogSoc and Springboards at the Welcome Fair.

Change Awareness Week which is one of the most pressing matters we face in the present day," he concluded. GeogSoc and Springboards worked alongside each other at Welcome Fair during Welcome Week – a fair where new students can find out about and join one or more of the 160 clubs, societies and sports that Queen Mary Students' Union has on offer.

- Find GeogSoc online at **facebook.com/groups/qmulgeographicsociety** and read the Springboards blog at **qmspringboards.wordpress.com**

Succeed at university



*Geographer
Aqeeb Akram*

A new series of short video resources have been developed by the School of Geography this summer.

The videos form part of the **Succeed Project**

and will be invaluable to anyone at the start of their university geography or environmental science course as

they aim to help students make the transition to degree-level study by providing resources, sharing advice and signposting further support. Packed full of practical, down-to-earth advice and tips, this series of 16 short videos follow Aqeeb, a first year geographer at QMUL, as he seeks support from other students, academics, and advisers. The project was led by **Dr Stephen Taylor**, a lecturer in human geography and deputy schools liaison officer, and **Kate Amis**, the School's widening

participation officer. "We understand that the transition to university can be quite daunting for some," said Dr Taylor, "but through these new resources we're hoping to demystify certain elements of university life, signpost the wealth of support services available in the School and on campus, and provide top tips for success at university and beyond."

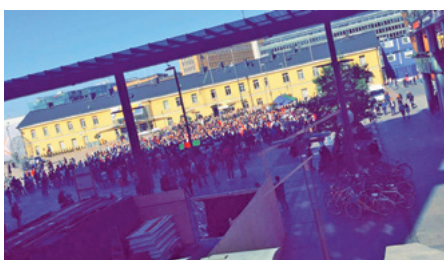
- Watch the videos at **youtube.com/QMULGeography**



Expeditions over the summer

Fieldwork plays a vital role in geography and environmental science students' lives. It takes learning from the classroom out into the world, turning it into a real experience. At QMUL Geography our students are required to undertake an independent research project (dissertation) as part of their degree programme so carrying out some sort of fieldwork inevitably becomes part of the process. The Expeditions Fund at QMUL offers financial assistance to undergraduate and postgraduate students for expeditions they would like to undertake during the summer vacation, including those working on their dissertation. Trips supported by the Fund this year included Kenya, Pakistan, Finland and Singapore for geographical research; Goa and Morocco for volunteering; a research expedition to Norway and summer schools in China and India.

BA Human Geography student **Farhasaad Shahid** decided to research the refugee crisis in Finland's metropolitan area as her dissertation project. "Having lived in Finland all my life, it sparked my interest to look further into the issue when I read about the crisis it was facing in terms of accommodating these newcomers," she said. During her research, she interviewed refugees about their journey to Europe, their life at the refugee camps on the way and after arriving to Finland, and their future aspirations in this new 'home'. "Overall I am very satisfied with how my research went and I'm happy that my original motive to help these refugees and get their voices heard was fulfilled. The Expeditions Fund helped me to



World Refugee Day gathering at Helsinki city centre where Farhasaad interviewed some refugees for her research.



Shajiyah with other volunteers in the Sahara, outside Marrakesh.

reach my goals and ambitions and improve my chances academically. I believe because of this opportunity I will be able to do further research in the field and it will help my career plans in the future," Farhasaad added.

Shajiyah Begum-Uddin, also a final year student but on the BSc programme took the opportunity to volunteer in Morocco this summer. She set out on an adventure and travelled to Marrakech with **Original Volunteers** – one of the UK's leading independent volunteer provider. During the experience she helped set up an end-of-school party in a nursery, taught children British nursery rhymes, did face painting and arts and crafts with children in an orphanage. She also helped prepare meals for the homeless. "As someone aspiring to be a teacher, I certainly believe this experience has boosted my confidence to follow the teaching career pathway. The skills I have developed, the experiences I've encountered and the memories I've made will stay with me for a very long time. I had an amazing time volunteering and I would urge anyone who wants to volunteer abroad to just go for it!" While in Morocco Shajiyah managed to fit in some fun activities in her free time such as trekking in the Sahara and riding a camel.

Geographer **Koh Yi Thong's** research involved the reconstruction of Middle Pleistocene palaeoclimatic and palaeoenvironmental conditions in

Essex, using ostracods. Ostracods are small crustaceans often used in palaeoclimatic reconstruction. Koh was also able to participate in a training workshop about freshwater ostracods, held in the Yorkshire Dales. As part of the training, Koh and his supervisor **Professor Dave Horne** collected living ostracod specimens along the Pennines Way and from the Malham Tarn. "It was my very first time looking at live ostracods and I was thrilled to spot some on my first attempt! This generous funding has provided me with essential support that enabled me to participate in enriching activities such as the workshop and gave me the chance to meet with world-leading micropalaeontological experts. I have benefitted from this expedition tremendously and the knowledge I've gained will inform my own research," Koh added.



Professor Horne takes water samples at Tarn Moss in Yorkshire, to be examined for ostracods.

- For first-hand experience on what it's like to be a student at QMUL Geography, read our student blogs at blogs.studentlife.qmul.ac.uk

Latin American community is fastest growing in London

According to a new research, around a quarter of a million Latin Americans live in the UK, with over half (145,000) in London. The Latin American population is one of the fastest growing migrant populations in London, with two-thirds having arrived since 2000. The research is a collaboration between **Professor Cathy McIlwaine** from the School of Geography and the **Latin American Women's Rights Service (LAWRS)** and is funded by independent charity **Trust for London**. "As one of London's fastest growing migrant communities, Latin Americans make an essential contribution to how the city operates economically, socially and culturally. Yet only recently have Latin Americans begun to emerge from the shadows of invisibility as a population. While they are a diverse community, many end up having to work in low-paid jobs and live in poor

quality housing because of their lack of English language skills, despite being very well educated. Yet in analysing two data sets of more established and more recently arrived Latin Americans, this research also shows that Latin Americans do integrate successfully as long as they receive support and recognition as a community" – said Professor McIlwaine who directed the project. She has worked in the School since 1995, and with a background in development geography she has actively sought to work across geographical and disciplinary boundaries through her research on transnational migration in London. Her research has focused on issues of gender, poverty, civil society, as well as everyday and gender-based violence. She recently held her inaugural lecture at QMUL entitled *'From América Latina to Latin London: negotiating*



Professor McIlwaine (right) with friend, colleague and co-author of many books, Sylvia Chant after Cathy's inaugural lecture.

(in)visible geographies of international migration', and she is currently working on a new project funded by the ESRC on violence against women in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and among Brazilian migrants in London.

- Professor McIlwaine teaches various aspects of **development geography** at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels

Floods and coastal erosion may expose contents of UK landfills

There are over a thousand historic coastal landfill sites in England and Wales. These are at risk from climate change induced coastal erosion and sea-level rise, according to a new study. In the first academic study of its kind, researchers investigated the contents of two sites in Essex to determine the potential consequences should the sites be tidally flooded or erode. The study found that 100 per



Hadleigh Marsh in Essex.

cent of the waste samples from Leigh Marsh and 63 per cent of the samples from Hadleigh Marsh contained contaminants at concentrations that exceed marine sediment quality guidelines, meaning that adverse effects to flora and fauna could be expected if the waste was to erode into surrounding coastal wetlands. The findings are from a forthcoming report for the Environment Agency, authored by **Professor Kate Spencer** and PhD student **James Brand** from the School of Geography. "It's important to state clearly that we're not saying these sites are currently eroding. What our findings show is that in the event of erosion, there would be serious environmental consequences due to the level of contaminants that would pollute the surrounding protected ecological sites," said Professor Spencer. "If you take a look inside

these sites, they reflect consumption and waste patterns of the time. So one historic landfill site might contain a huge amount of plastics, and another might be full of coal ash. Many of them were in use when there were no rules about what went in – every landfill is essentially unique and some will prove more risky than others." The study says that while a policy of relocating the waste away from vulnerable sites would be ideal, it is likely that the waste will continue to be protected in situ due to the enormous costs and risks associated with relocating the waste.

- Professor Spencer is an environmental geochemist who teaches at all levels of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in **physical geography** and **environmental science**

Congratulations to the class of 2016

Over 120 students graduated this summer from the School of Geography and received degrees in geography, environmental science, as well as those with joint honours in business management. Students celebrated with their peers, family, friends and academics in the historic Octagon, then the class of 2016 gathered in front of the Queens' Building for the traditional group photo.



Class of 2016 celebrate outside the historic Queens' Building.

Each year, the School of Geography awards a number of prizes in recognition of exceptional academic achievement. Recipients from the graduating third year included **Menelaos Xenophontos** who received the Michael Alexander Jones Memorial Award for the best overall performance in the third year; **Adam Packer**, **Katharine Parker** and **Amber Lucy Carter** who received the A.E. Smailes Prize for best dissertation. **Kathryn Sutter** was awarded the Roger Lee Prize for best dissertation in the fields of economic geography, development geography or geography of social science; while **George Stanley** and **Paraskevas Tafas** received the Simon Tavana Writing Prize for creative writing in human geography third year coursework. Endowed in memory of **Simon Tavana**

who graduated from the School in 2004 and was tragically killed in a car accident, the prize aims to promote and reward imaginative and engaging writing of a high quality.

"I feel honoured to have been one of those who were chosen and it was above anything I could have hoped for" said BSc graduate **Katharine Parker** who is hoping to work as a geography teacher whilst studying for a masters degree in education and geography.



Graduate Kathryn Sutter with Head of School, Professor Alison Blunt.

Human Geography graduate **Kathryn Sutter** who received another award from Queen Mary Students' Union earlier this year for her volunteering activities said: "I feel it really topped off my time at Queen Mary to win the Roger Lee Prize. It was really nice to be recognised for the hard work I put into my dissertation on food waste solutions and food poverty and I hope I can apply what I learnt from this work into helping those in need in the future."

QMUL Geography gets sustainability awards

The School of Geography's Green Mary team, *Geography Greens*, have received a gold award in July at the annual *Green Mary Sustainability Awards*. They were the second-highest scoring team, having completed all the bronze, silver and gold criteria in the



Ed Oliver won a Green Mary Hero Award.

Green Mary workbook. Additionally, **Edward Oliver**, the School's cartographer and web manager, was awarded the 'Green Mary Hero Award'. Ed has been involved in the sustainability programme since it was first initiated. Head of School, **Professor Alison Blunt** said: "This a significant achievement and is testament to Ed's hard work and dedication in this field both in the School and at QMUL more widely."

"Ed has done much of the work himself on behalf of the School and has consistently worked to raise the profile of sustainability issues in Geography and the university as a whole. Starting off in the first year working towards bronze, he has steadily built a small then larger team

base, which without him would not have achieved the gold this year" said fellow Green Mary team member **Helen McLurg**. The *Geography Greens*, led by Ed, have done a number of fundraising activities throughout the year and have raised more than £500 for various charities, including Breast Cancer Now, Young People's Trust for the Environment, the Fairtrade Foundation, and more. They even twinned a toilet in Guatemala! Toilet twinning raises funds to enable people living in poor communities to have clean water, a basic toilet, and to learn about hygiene – a vital combination that helps end generational poverty.

- Green Mary is QMUL's sustainability engagement brand, find out more at qmul.ac.uk/about/sustainability

Join us at an Open Day

Open Days at Queen Mary provide a chance for you to find out what life as a student is like here, meet the team and find out more about our courses in geography or environmental science. Join us in 2017 on 23 and 24 June and 7 October.

- Register at qmul.ac.uk/undergraduate/openday



Geographer Katharine Parker talks to visitors at the QMUL Open Day.

Be part of our Festival of Geography



The Festival of Geography is a series of special open days at QMUL's School of Geography. Students who apply and receive an offer from us are invited to join us for a day to find out what studying at QMUL Geography is all about – it's our way of saying hello and welcome on board. From hands-on laboratory sessions to topical lectures, campus tours to inspiring graduate talks, fieldwork showcases and lively Q&A sessions, the whole day is dedicated to showing you what it's like to be part of one of the world's top geography departments. These events are by invitation only – so keep an eye on your inbox for details on how to register!

- Find out more at geog.qmul.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/festival and see images from previous years' Festivals at [flickr.com/photos/qmulgeog](https://www.flickr.com/photos/qmulgeog)

Forthcoming events

Hosted by the Geographical Association East London branch

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| 12 Oct 2016 | Data Skills for Geographers
Subject knowledge update for teachers |
| 1 Nov 2016 | 500 million years of Earth History: an adventure with ostracods
Inaugural lecture of Professor Dave Horne – professor of micropalaeontology at QMUL |
| 30 Nov 2016 | 13th David M Smith Annual Lecture
Vested interest urbanism – a lecture by Dr Tom Slater from the University of Edinburgh |
| 8 Feb 2017 | Urban Geography: Public Space
University-style lecture for sixth form students |
| 8 Mar 2017 | Fieldwork – Changing Places: Is life in Tower Hamlets getting better?
Preparation and subject knowledge for new A-level specs for teachers |
| 23 Mar 2017 | Fieldwork – Making Places: Creating neighbourhood identity in east London
Preparation and subject knowledge for new A-level specs for teachers |
| 4 Apr 2017 | Human Geography
Revision class for Year 13 students |
| 5 Apr 2017 | Physical Geography
Revision class for Year 13 students |

Read more detail and book your place at geog.qmul.ac.uk/events. Further GA events such as a tectonic hazards lecture and a GIS workshop are currently being planned – details will be announced on the website shortly, but you can register your interest now and book directly by emailing k.amis@qmul.ac.uk

Study abroad with QMUL

Spending a year abroad during university is an enriching and exciting way for any student to broaden their horizons and perspective – and exploring the world is second nature to our geographers and environmental scientists. At Queen Mary there are several opportunities for students who are interested in taking some time abroad – from summer schools to semester or year-long exchanges. We like our students to develop a global perspective and each year they travel as far afield as America, Asia, Australasia and Europe.

Geography student **Eleanor Dixon-Brandt** spent her second year at the University of California, Santa Barbara on the [international exchange programme](#). Ellie said: “I particularly liked UCSB because its geography department looked amazing and it offered exactly what I was interested in. Studying there was completely different but in a good way. It was much more difficult with mid-term and final exams, but every single essay was so interesting and sometimes I got to write the essay question which I loved. Everyone I met was super friendly, kind and open. I joined the excursion club, a surf team, the water polo team, and even an intra-mural soccer team, and



Tanzina (middle) with fellow QMUL students Khalil, Kai and Kathryn in Colombia.

I was able to visit places such as Las Vegas, Death Valley, Monterey, San Diego, San Francisco, Yosemite and Big Sur.”

QMUL also runs Erasmus+ and various partner summer schools programmes. Geography student **Lauren D’Costa** spent the first term of her second year at Roskilde University in Denmark on the [Erasmus+ programme](#).

“I definitely think it has enriched my

academic life and will help me with applications in my future career,” she said. “The best thing was living with 12 other Erasmus students. I managed to travel to Sweden and made numerous trips around Denmark. I’d highly recommend the study abroad experience to anyone as I think it will challenge you and make you a stronger person as a result!”

Final year student **Tanzina Khatun**, as part of QMUL’s [summer school programme](#), spent three weeks in Colombia at the Universidad de Antioquia. She says the classes were fun and it was enjoyable being taught in Spanish and English and having the choice to talk to the lecturers in either language. “I’ve been trying to practice Spanish since returning to England and will continue to do so. I hope this assists my career prospects when I endeavour to work with different communities, particularly those where Spanish is widely spoken,” she added. This year’s cohort was the first group to embark on this programme in Medellin, Colombia.



Ellie (right) with fellow exchange student Beatrix (from Imperial College London) on Devereux Beach, California.



@QMULStudyAbroad

qmul.ac.uk/undergraduate/exchange

