

Spring 2015

# Geography

News on Geography and  
Environmental Science



Queen Mary  
University of London

## Festival of Geography lands at QMUL

A brand new series of exciting open day events launched this term to give the next generation of geographers and environmental scientists a day in the life at QMUL Geography.

Hundreds of students travelled from all over the UK to our Mile End Campus in the heart of the capital's East End to take part in our Festivals of Geography. Open to those who are holding an offer for study in September 2015, each Festival offered the chance to not only meet with staff and current students but to also get a flavour for some of the subject areas for which QMUL Geography is world-renowned. From globalisation, migration and development to rivers, fossils, contaminated landscapes and more, taster lectures were on offer alongside an info fair and campus tours.



*Head of School Alison Blunt welcomes visitors.*

Head of School Professor Alison Blunt said she and staff understood the difficult choice A Level students had to make about where to study. "Finding the right course and university for you is not an easy task so we wanted to give our applicants the chance to get a real day-in-the-life feel for QMUL Geography," she said. "The Festival was a celebration of our subjects too – our staff are passionate about their research and are world-leading in their work. We hope our visitors got a sense of the exciting things that are happening here and can see themselves becoming a part of it."

The day would not have been possible without the help of the School's Geography Ambassadors who worked hard to make sure visitors felt welcome and had all the info they needed. "Our ambassadors are all current students – working at the Festivals is a great experience for them, but we really couldn't put on days like this without them," Professor Blunt added.

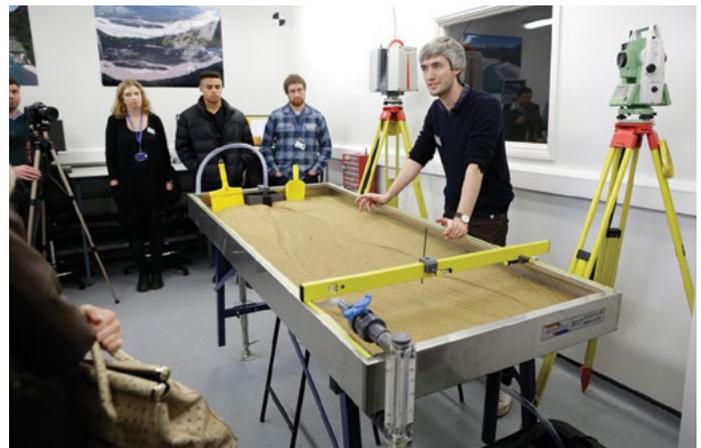


[www.geog.qmul.ac.uk](http://www.geog.qmul.ac.uk)



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# Festival of Geography



To see more images from the Festival of Geography, visit our Flickr page:  
[www.flickr.com/photos/qmulgeog](http://www.flickr.com/photos/qmulgeog)

## Want to study at QMUL too? Come and say hello...

08.06.15  
15.08.15

**Geography Taster Day**  
**Environmental Science Taster Day**

[www.tasters.gradsintocareers.co.uk](http://www.tasters.gradsintocareers.co.uk)

26,27.06.15  
10.10.15

**Undergraduate Open Day**

[qmul.ac.uk/events](http://qmul.ac.uk/events)

# Florida's flood risk future



How will low-lying south Florida cope with the sea-level rise predicted by scientists while climate change remains a contentious issue for some of the state's leaders? Students from QMUL Geography headed stateside this Easter to see for themselves the ongoing struggle between intense urbanisation, people and the sea.

With a population approaching 20 million and an estimated 803 new residents arriving daily last year\*, observers are concerned about not only what impact sea level rise will

have on Florida, but also the ongoing rate of new developments in such a geographically vulnerable area. Some 4.2 million US citizens live at an elevation of 1.2 metres or less; 2.4 million of those are in south Florida. Scientists are predicting a possible sea level-rise of 1.8 – 3 metres by the end of the century\*\*.

“Our field class is an opportunity to visit an environment under so much pressure – from both human and environmental factors,” said Dr Kate Spencer, an environmental geochemist who leads the trip. “We

not only look at the science behind some of the restoration projects underway, but we consider the economic and political factors which influence management decisions. Recent media reports suggesting that terms such as ‘global warming’ and ‘climate change’ are unofficially banned in government communications in Florida add to our concerns as scientists about what Florida’s future holds.”

Florida’s geography makes it highly vulnerable to sea level rise and tidal inundation. “Florida is low-lying, with a porous limestone geology and much of its coastline has a narrow continental shelf which means that storm waves have a big impact,” Dr Spencer explained. “It’s not just coastal erosion; seawater is backing up through sewage discharge pipes inundating homes and businesses on a regular basis. This has a serious threat to the availability of drinking water and the efficiency of sewerage systems.”

The visit to Florida is part of the Environmental Management Applications modules open in both the second and third year of study. It introduces students to methods, concepts and frameworks for environmental monitoring, assessment and restoration in fluvial, terrestrial, estuarine, coastal and marine environments.

\*US Census Bureau

\*\* *The Guardian*

## Water winner

Masters graduate Rosie Steadman has won the 2015 Company of Water Conservators dissertation prize for her research into the impact of a historic coastal landfill site at Newlands Marsh, Essex, on metal mobility and bioavailability in ancient and modern sediments. Rosie, who studied MSc Environmental

Science: Integrated Management of Freshwater Environments, will be spending the summer in the USA working as an environmental intern on river rehabilitation projects. Her research was supervised by Dr Kate Spencer.

[www.qmul.ac.uk/msc-env-sci-imfe](http://www.qmul.ac.uk/msc-env-sci-imfe)



QMUL graduate Rosie Steadman with Peter Hall, Thames Warden for the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators

# Health Geography in Tower Hamlets

Second year students have been working with community organisation Citizens UK to research the nature of health and wellbeing for residents in Tower Hamlets.

As part of their Geographical Research in Practice module, the students conducted 245 surveys asking residents questions about diet, exercise, access to green spaces and living environments.

Dr Philippa Williams, who leads the module, said she had been impressed with the students' approach.

"Research is a critical part of what geographers do and this project – with its focus on health and wellbeing – let the students apply those skills in the real world," she said. "From examining different aspects of wellbeing to looking at wider geographical factors such as housing and education, the teams covered an impressive amount of data."

The results were presented at QMUL Geography to an audience of local health practitioners, residents and staff Citizens UK and its Tower Hamlets team.

Yasmin Aktar from Citizens UK said that the students' work had fed directly into projects underway in Tower Hamlets. "We used the results as a launch for the borough's Health Campaign and then took some of the ideas forward to local NHS and Council authorities. It has contributed to projects on improving mental health, maternal health and healthy living standards in the borough," she said.



## Royal Geographical Society at QMUL



The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) came to QMUL Geography this term to train the next generation of Geography Ambassadors to work in schools across the UK.

The ambassador scheme is designed to take the knowledge and passion of geography students and graduates and send it out into schools to advocate the awesomeness of geography in the classroom.

QMUL Geography students were among those being trained at the special event. Organiser Simon Faulkner said the training places a large importance on making the subject relevant to school pupils. "The training is lively and hands-on. It covers everything from what geography means to people, interactive ideas for sessions and how to deliver effectively," Simon said.

The scheme reached out to some 25-30,000 school pupils in 2014 across 260 schools.

[www.rgs.org/ourwork/schools](http://www.rgs.org/ourwork/schools)

## Student mentors in Tower Hamlets

QMUL Geography is working with two schools in Tower Hamlets – St Paul's Way Trust and Mulberry High School – to provide mentoring for promising Year 12 geographers with little previous exposure to university.

Our undergraduate geography students are trained as mentors to provide a series of one-hour tutorials on globalisation. The pupils then work to submit an essay that is examined

by QMUL academics and which can be taken into account in UCAS applications to QMUL Geography.

Drs Philippa Williams and Stephen Taylor have been overseeing the scheme and are keen to extend it. "We've had a fantastic response from local teachers and students to the scheme and hope to roll it out even further next year," Dr Williams said.

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The Springboards team works with schools in London.

# Students help on national park consultation



A week-long fieldwork course introduced this project to first years back in October when they joined QMUL.

QMUL Geography students were on London's South Bank recently to find out whether Greater London's economy, quality of life and environment would improve if it became a designated national park.

BA Geographer Tanzina Khatun was one of the students who took part. "Growing up as a Londoner in Tower Hamlets, our green spaces were really important to our family," the first-year student said. "This project encourages people to not only find out more about

their local environment, but to see how they could be a part of securing its future."

The event included discussions with residents, local authorities, businesses and environmental groups. "We had a huge walk-on black and white map printed by Ordnance Survey which we were colouring in by hand to show the green space," Tanzina added. "We gathered quite a crowd. People simply don't realise how much green space London has."

Covering an area of 1,500km<sup>2</sup>, London is home to more than eight million people and four UNESCO World Heritage sites – one of the highest densities in the world. Some 47 per cent of the capital is green space and Tanzina agrees that achieving national park status would mean that Londoners could have a say about how their city's environment, economy and overall quality of life could be improved. "Working on this project is my opportunity to have a legacy as a Londoner," she said. "We underestimate ourselves as citizens. Living in an urban area doesn't mean that you don't care about green spaces; nature was a treasured part of my childhood and I want that to always be there for others."

A final proposal for London to become the world's first national park city is due to be submitted this summer.

[www.greaterlondonnationalpark.org.uk](http://www.greaterlondonnationalpark.org.uk)



## Rescue Dig of the Year

The discovery of the earliest human footprints outside Africa at Happisburgh on the northeast Norfolk coast which was published last year has won the Current Archaeology Rescue Dig of the Year award. Dr Simon Lewis, a member of the project team and Reader in Quaternary Science in the School of Geography, attended the ceremony in London. "The footprints at Happisburgh gave us a rare insight into human activity nearly a million years ago, when early humans first entered Britain," Dr Lewis said. The

research, which received widespread news coverage and also featured in an exhibition at the Natural History Museum last year, is still continuing at Happisburgh, with new finds turning up on the beach on a regular basis and further results to be published in the future. Dr Lewis added "It's great that the Happisburgh research has been recognised by the archaeological community in this way and we are very grateful to everyone who has supported the project."

# Los Angeles: city of extremes



Geographers visit LA where the divide between rich and poor offers a stark contrast.

From the exclusive gated communities of Orange County to the homeless communities of Skid Row, QMUL geography students saw the extremes of living conditions for the people of Los Angeles on a recent field trip to America's second-largest city.

Studying QMUL Geography's Urban Futures module, the second and third-year students were encouraged to think through the ways in which cities are changing.

"Processes of globalisation and economic restructuring are transforming the economic and

social structures of cities rendering them both much more diverse but also much more unequal," explained Professor Jon May.

Students also visit some of the organisations who are working to improve the lives of those most badly affected – for example, Carecen, who is working to improve the pay and conditions of Central American day-labourers. "Our students begin to look at the cities with which they are more familiar in new ways and think about how they as citizens might work to tackle problems of injustice and inequality

closer to home," Professor May added.

Third year geographer Thomas Ganly said he too was struck by the stark divide of the city. "LA seems so familiar in your mind because of its fame in film and on television," he said. "When you go there, you see the depth of the divide and it is shocking," he said. "We were also taken aback by the strength of the community spirit in those more deprived areas; Understanding more about how the city was built and why it's always been so divided has been a real eye-opener."

## News in brief

- According to the Research Excellence Framework results (REF 2014) scores increased across all areas and the School is ranked joint 11th for geography in the UK overall.
- QMUL Geography has launched a brand new Masters degree: Global Development Futures starting September 2015 with several bursaries available from £1,000 – £3,000.
- Professor Catherine Nash has published a new book 'Genetic Geographies: the trouble with ancestry'.
- Dr Thomas Cronin, US Geological Survey, visited in March to discuss Arctic Ocean, sea ice and climate change.
- Professor Miles Ogborn has been awarded a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship to start in September 2015 to explore 'The Freedom of Speech: Talk and Slavery in the Caribbean'.