



This is a peer-reviewed, post-print (final draft post-refereeing) version of the following published document and is licensed under All Rights Reserved license:

Hall, Tim R, Toms, Phillip ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2149-046X>, McGuinness, Mark, Parker, Charlie ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4569-7580> and Roberts, Neil (2015) Where's the Geography department? The changing administrative place of Geography in UK higher education. *Area*, 47 (1). pp. 56-64. doi:10.1111/area.12154

Official URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/area.12154>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/area.12154>

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/3504>

Disclaimer

The University of Gloucestershire has obtained warranties from all depositors as to their title in the material deposited and as to their right to deposit such material.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation or warranties of commercial utility, title, or fitness for a particular purpose or any other warranty, express or implied in respect of any material deposited.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation that the use of the materials will not infringe any patent, copyright, trademark or other property or proprietary rights.

The University of Gloucestershire accepts no liability for any infringement of intellectual property rights in any material deposited but will remove such material from public view pending investigation in the event of an allegation of any such infringement.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

Where's the Geography department? The changing administrative place of Geography in UK higher education

Tim Hall*, Phil Toms**, Mark McGuinness[†], Charlotte Parker** and Neil Roberts^{††}

*Department of Applied Social Studies, University of Winchester, Winchester SO22 4NR

Email: tim.hall@winchester.ac.uk

**School of Natural and Social Sciences, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham GL50 4AZ

[†]School of Society, Enterprise and Environment, Bath Spa University, Bath BA2 9BN

^{††}School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Science and Environment, Plymouth University, Plymouth PL4 8AA

Revised manuscript received 11 September 2014

This paper considers recent patterns of departmental change in the management of Geography in UK universities. It notes the increasingly multidisciplinary management of Geography since the mid-1990s. Various measures of this trend are explored and discussed. The paper also considers the problematic accommodation of Geography within the faculty structures of institutions. These findings speak of a problematic identity for the discipline within this institutional context. The paper goes on to consider some of the impacts of these trends for the practice of Geography in UK higher education.

Key words: *United Kingdom, Geography department, higher education, multidisciplinary, management, administration*

I wondered if the institutional position of the discipline had strengthened with its recently enhanced intellectual position, and what the geography of geography's institutional presence and strength was. For sure, anecdotal stories circulate regarding the opening or closure of a geography department, a renaming, a split and so forth . . . (Kong 2007a, 13)

Introduction

Disciplinary evolution is not reducible to the intellectual exchanges that occur within the supposedly discrete onto-logical spaces of the academy. Rather, it is more accurately situated within structured but often messy networks of people, places and institutions (Hubbard *et al.* 2005, 185; Barnes 2008, 650). It has, thus, become common to speak of the reciprocities between dynamic socio-economic contexts, changing institutional forms and shifting disciplinary hierarchies and epistemologies (for discussion in Geography see Sidaway 1997; Johnston 2004a 2004b; Li *et al.* 2007; Barnes 2008; Erickson 2012). Discussions of Geography's recent histories and immediate futures (Philo 2012) have encompassed a number of dimensions including its intellectual (Thrift 2002), institutional (Castree 2011; Erickson 2012) and international (Kong 2007b) security. The contemporary management and administration of Geography in universities is an issue that regularly crops up in these discussions but it is scarcely documented at length in these published accounts.¹ Departmental configurations, mergers, closures and related processes have profound impacts on the nature and security of Geography, the conditions under which geographers collectively labour and the opportunities and constraints affecting the knowledges they produce (Gibson 2007; Murphy 2007).

This paper starts from the premise that the department is a key site in the reproduction of disciplines. Thus, to fully appreciate this requires that we understand both changes in the nature and management of academic departments and explore the reproduction of disciplines within individual departmental sites (Lorimer 2003). This paper addresses the

first of these issues in the context of UK higher education. In doing so the paper draws together a range of evidence. This includes an analysis of the Royal Geographical Society (with Institute of British Geographers) (RGS-IBG) database of Geography department names (1995–2013),² a survey of UK Geography departments asking about the administrative place of Geography in their institutions,³ an analysis of the faculty location of all UK Geography departments in 2012, statistical analyses of the sizes of Geography departments of different kinds and data relating to departments' performance in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise. The paper seeks to contribute primarily to two emergent literatures. It provides a context for more grounded histories that emphasise the importance of the sites and spaces within which disciplines are reproduced (Jenkins and Ward 2001; Lorimer 2003). It also aims to sit among recent histories and sociologies of Geography that have spoken of the relationships between disciplinary evolution and its institutional and socioeconomic contexts (Sidaway 1997; Roberts 2000; Barnes 2008).

Naming and defining Geography departments

Identifying Geography's institutional manifestation is less clear than might first appear. The naming of departments is the first port of call and involves the combination of both administrative and disciplinary titles. It has been argued that this ' "naming" of the units where geography is housed is critically important' (Gibson 2007, 101). It matters because the names of departments are subject to regular change through processes of rebranding and restructuring, involving management perceptions and preferences, which might not necessarily align with staff allegiances, both to academic disciplines and to other colleagues within their institution. Thus the naming of Geography departments can become contested processes (Swords 2013; Winkler 2014). Of the 86 Geography units recorded in the RGS-IBG database in 1995, only 20 (23.3%) retained the same title in 2013. Some had changed their title several times during this period. Although little can be discerned directly from this bald statistic, it suggests that during this time at least 66 discussions, debates or disputes had taken place over the naming of the units within which Geography is housed in UK higher education institutions.

While the vocabulary of disciplinary administration is largely generic, its application across institutions is highly inconsistent, producing huge diversity to the names of Geography departments in the UK. The administrative titles attached to Geography units in the UK, most commonly 'department' but including alternatives such as 'division', 'school', 'centre' and 'institute', can reflect the size and nature of these units, their relationship to other, perhaps higher, tiers of management, institutional fads and fashions or some combinations of these. There appears to be little consistency in the ways that these titles are deployed between institutions. Similar units in different institutions might have very different titles. Thus, the language of disciplinary administration both reveals and obscures subtle institutional micropolitics in the ways that disciplines are managed.

Disciplines, measured through people and the academic work that they do, exceed their formal, named institutional units. Thus, the correspondence between a discipline and a set of academic departments is, at best, partial. For example, we can recognise a great deal of Geography that takes place beyond the Geography department. This involves both 'stand-alone' geographers (Carter and Housel 2012) and larger groups who might be part of units, typically in the natural sciences but also including some concerned with issues such as planning or transport, with little or no formal or practical links to the discipline. Middlesex University's Flood Hazard Research Centre would be an example of such a unit. Speaking only of a discipline's named units therefore offers only a partial take on its institutional distribution. While excavating the hidden geographies that unfold beyond named Geography departments is a valuable endeavour, this paper is concerned with the ways in which Geography's formal organisation into some 86 administrative units in the UK has evolved since the mid-1990s. It focuses on those departments that provide undergraduate degree programmes in Geography, while recognising that this does not fully capture the problematic entity that is the Geography department.

Departments, change and Geography's global futures

Although the department is a key site through which Geography is reproduced, it is neither stable historically nor universal in nature. Rather Geography, in its institutional manifestations, varies in the degrees of administrative autonomy, visibility and security it enjoys within and between national systems of higher education (Gibson 2007). However, our knowledge of this is somewhat 'scrappy' and anecdotal at present because there have been few attempts to map these patterns systematically within national, let alone comparative international, contexts (though see Li *et al.* 2007 in the case of China). We can discern some trends from the international, albeit partial, literature with which the UK case discussed here can be compared.

In Anglophone universities elsewhere, Geography appears to be losing administrative autonomy. However, this is not

universal and it is possible to note some important differences in the nature and degree of this trend and in the institutional histories of Geography in higher education in different countries. For example, in South Africa and Australia, Geography's increasing incorporation into merged multi- or interdisciplinary units is a relatively recent phenomenon (Gibson 2007; Mather 2007), while in the USA it has been weaker historically and has traditionally enjoyed limited administrative autonomy (Smith 1987; Murphy 2007). Within these broad national trends, some commentators note countervailing tendencies or degrees of ambiguity (Gibson 2007; Sidaway and Johnston 2007).

Here, Geography is often seen as 'good but marginal' (Kong 2007b, 54) within institutions, compared with other disciplines whose institutional identities are seen as much more clear-cut. As Kong argues, 'while geography's synthesising nature is an intellectual strength, it can have complications for institutional positionality, with attendant implications for the department's healthy existence' (2007b, 46). Faculty structures do not lend themselves to Geography's easy or comfortable accommodation. Thus, geographers internationally appear to be increasingly located within institutional environments that might challenge or impact on their disciplinary identities and integrity, in both positive and negative ways (Johns 2012; Hall 2014) and about whose effects and consequences for the discipline we currently know very little (Sidaway and Johnston 2007, 73).

Where changes in the administration of Geography within systems of higher education are discussed, it is common for the literature to bemoan a loss of the discipline's administrative autonomy (Gibson 2007, 97–8; Li *et al.* 2007, 32; Murphy 2007, 124). This reflects a number of concerns. Clearly, some feel that Geography is losing out in games of institutional politics. For example, Gibson writes of his own institution:

other disciplines such as psychology and chemistry do not appear to need to justify what they do, and are rarely worried about whether their identities might be actively dissolved in the name of promoting 'synergies' between disciplines. (2007, 101)

There are also concerns about resources, particularly those contingent on student recruitment, although here the evidence seems contradictory. While some are concerned that a lack of visibility of Geography in names of units will harm recruitment to Geography degree programmes or modules (Gibson 2007, 101), others have noted increases in registrations where Geography is de-emphasised in course and department titles (Kong 2007b, 45; Li *et al.* 2007, 32). However, the concerns seem to go deeper than this. They seem to speak of ambiguities within aspects of Geography's identity and concerns over its security within wider institutional terrains (Kong 2007b, 45–6). Overall then, the broad tenor of these discussions is that where Geography is losing administrative autonomy, this is bad for the discipline. However, this inference seems to be somewhat at odds with discussions of the intellectual nature, development and futures of Geography that see Geography as outward looking, progressive and interdisciplinary, rather than autonomous, defensive or parochial (Thrift 2002). This literature is generally positive, in contrast to the more ambivalent tone of much of that on Geography's recent institutional histories, and this optimism is largely predicated on Geography's ability to reach out and connect in numerous ways beyond the discipline (though see Clifford 2002). The paper now turns to a discussion of the ways in which these processes have played out in the UK in recent years.

The changing administrative place of Geography in UK higher education

UK Geography plays a pivotal role in the discipline at a global level. Even if most subject ranking surveys are dubious methodologically, for example, in biases against non-English speaking countries, it is surely no coincidence that there are more UK Geography departments in the top 100 than from any other country (QS World University Subject Rankings 2014). Its high standing is supported by the recent ESRC-RGS-AHRC *International benchmarking review of UK Human Geography* (2013). Consequently, the institutional configuration of Geography as a discipline with UK higher education is potentially of international as well as national significance.

In this context, there has been a clear trend towards multidisciplinary in the nature of the administrative units within which Geography is managed in British universities (Table 1), and the majority of Geography departments in the UK are now multidisciplinary in some form. The number of autonomous, single subject Geography departments in the UK has fallen from 47 in 1995 to 30 in 2013. The sharpest decline, from 41 to 33, occurred between 2003 and 2005. Correspondingly the numbers of multi-disciplinary departments of various kinds within which Geography is located rose from 29 in 1995 to 47 in 2013. This shift towards administrative multidisciplinary was reflected in the respondents to our survey of Geography departments. Of the 40 respondents, 26 (66.7%) indicated that Geography existed with a multidisciplinary unit of some kind.

The loss of Geography's administrative autonomy should not necessarily be automatically equated with in the loss of its institutional visibility. During the period under scrutiny the number of departments with 'geography' somewhere in their title was relatively stable, moving from 57 in 1995 to 54 in 2013, with a low of 52 in 2005.

Table 1 Different types of Geography administrative units (1995–2013) (Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) (RGS-IBG))

Department	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2010	2013
1. Single Geography unit	47	46	45	44	41	33	32	30
2. Geography named with one other subject	10	12	9	12	13	15	12	13
3. Geography named with two or more subjects	0	0	0	0	1	4	12	11
4. Geography not named in unit title	19	22	25	24	27	29	22	23
5. Departments included in database but no data/ Geography not taught	10	6	7	6	4	5	8	9

Table 2 Number of single geography units by institution 1995–2013 (percentage of total institutions in that category with single geography units) (RGS-IBG)

Institution	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2010	2013	Total loss (% of 1995 total)	Total institutions 1995–2013
Pre-1992 University	32 (69.6)	32 (69.6)	31 (67.4)	29 (63.0)	27 (59.7)	25 (54.3)	25 (54.3)	23 (50.0)	9 (28.1)	46
Post-1992 University	9 (28.1)	8 (25.0)	9 (28.1)	10 (31.2)	10 (31.2)	5 (15.6)	4 (12.5)	4 (12.5)	5 (55.6)	32
University College/College of HE	6 (75.0)	6 (75.0)	5 (62.5)	5 (62.5)	4 (50.0)	4 (50.0)	3 (37.5)	3 (37.5)	3 (50.0)	8

These data suggest that there has been no tendency to de-emphasise Geography for departments in the UK, despite the shift towards administrative multidisciplinary.

The decrease in Geography's administrative autonomy in the UK is observable across institutions of all kinds, although it varies considerably in its extent (Table 2). The proportionate loss of autonomous, single-subject Geography departments in post-1992⁴ institutions of various kinds is significantly higher (at over 50%) than in pre-1992 institutions. Despite the relatively small numbers in some categories, there seems to be a broad cross-sector split with a greater tendency for the multidisciplinary management of Geography observable in post-1992 institutions. However, pre-1992 institutions are certainly not immune from this process. For example, while in 1995 almost 70 per cent of Geography departments in pre-1992 institutions were autonomous, single-subject units, this had fallen to half of all departments in these institutions by 2013. Combining both post-1992 universities and university colleges/colleges of HE together sees a decline in single subject, autonomous Geography departments from 15 out of 40 (37.5%) in these institutions in 1995 to only seven out of 40 (17.5%) by 2013. Single subject Geography departments in post-1992 institutions showed some resilience to restructuring until 2003. However, thereafter their loss of administrative autonomy was rapid. Thus, the trend towards the multidisciplinary management of Geography in British universities shows institutional, sectoral and temporal contingencies. Broadly though, the administrative autonomy of Geography remains more secure and widespread in pre- than post-1992 institutions.

Refinement of these data by size of department (using undergraduate Geography student and staff FTEs as measures) both confirms the shift over time towards increasing multidisciplinary management of Geography in the UK, while qualifying it to a degree. For example, between 2002/03 and 2010/11 the proportion of undergraduate Geography students in UK higher education taught in single-subject Geography departments dropped from 62.43 to 56.40 per cent (Table 3). This compares with a drop of roughly 10 per cent in the numbers of such departments over this time (Table 1). Indeed, there was actually an increase in the aggregate number of undergraduate Geography students in these departments over this period, despite the numbers of these departments declining. Correspondingly the average size of these departments grew significantly over this period. The most significant aggregate growth in student numbers though has been for departments where Geography is managed along with two other subjects, and almost all of this growth has occurred after 2005.

The proportion of academic Geography staff FTEs based in single-subject Geography departments is roughly equivalent to the student population proportions, although there are some differences between staff and student figures for other categories of department (Table 4).

Table 3 Analysis of size of all departments (student ftes) included in RGS-IBG database (JACS code analysis)

Department status (2010)	Total student numbers (2002/3)	% of total students (2002/03)	Average dept. size (student ftes) (2002/03)	Total student numbers (2010/11)	% of total students (2010/11)	Average dept. size (student ftes) (2010/11)
1. Single Geography unit	12 773	62.43	310.56	13 650	56.40	440.32
2. Geography named with one other subject	3659	17.94	332.64	3654	15.10	304.5
3. Geography named with two or more subjects	90	0.44	90	3045	12.58	253.75
4. Geography not named in unit title	3610	17.70	164.09	3854	15.84	174.27
5. Departments included in database but no data/ Geography not taught	303	1.49	303	20	0.08	6.67
Total	20 395			24 203		

This data records 11 institutions that contain undergraduate geography students, registered to the UCAS application codes F800 and L800, but which are not included in RGS-IBG database of geography departments. These represent 361 student FTEs or 1.47% of 2010/11 student total.

Table 4 Analysis of academic geography staff FTEs of all departments included in RGS-IBG database by type of administrative unit (JACS code analysis)

Department status (2010)	Total staff numbers (2010/11)	Percentage of total staff (2010/11)	Average dept. size (Geography staff ftes) (2010/11)
1. Single Geography unit	846	56.18	28.20
2. Geography named with one other subject	360	23.90	25.71
3. Geography named with two or more subjects	115	7.64	19.17
4. Geography not named in unit title	185	12.28	18.50
5. Department included in database but no data/Geography not taught	–	–	–

Data on the size of different Geography departments in the UK therefore confirm that there is a move, in aggregate terms, towards multidisciplinary but that this is more of a characteristic of smaller Geography units. Single-subject Geography departments do account for a greater proportion of students and staff than might be inferred from reference to the analysis of numbers of Geography departments alone. However, we can say that, currently, well in excess of 40 per cent of undergraduate students and academic Geography staff in the UK are now based in multidisciplinary departmental environments of some kind. There are many other dimensions of departmental size and influence that could be analysed including, for example, taught postgraduate and doctoral student numbers, receipt of research grant funding and various publication metrics. While being beyond the scope of this paper, these would repay further analysis.

In addition to teaching, the move towards multidisciplinary management structures for academic staff within many Universities has significant implications for research, potentially including the Research Excellence Framework (REF2014), the most recent round of the national assessment of research in the UK. Closer links with cognate disciplines offer the possibility of new and innovative interdisciplinary avenues for research connections within individual higher education institutions leading to co-supervision of PhD students and joint grant funding applications, for example. In practice, these linkages are most likely to be realised if there is co-location of staff, which is often not the case. In some cases (for example, Edinburgh University), staff within the same School (in this case, Geosciences) are physically based in separate campuses. As with teaching, the subject mix within a multidisciplinary 'School' can influence research directions. Thus, for example,

where Geography is placed together with Earth and Environmental Sciences, human geographers are likely to find opportunities to provide a social science dimension within research programmes such as climate change and biodiversity. It is not yet clear if and how revised administrative configurations will bear on national research assessment, such as REF2014. However, an analysis of the RAE2008 Unit of Assessment³² results shows that single subject departments achieved a mean star quality rating ~0.3 higher than multidisciplinary departments of the same size (Figure 1). While

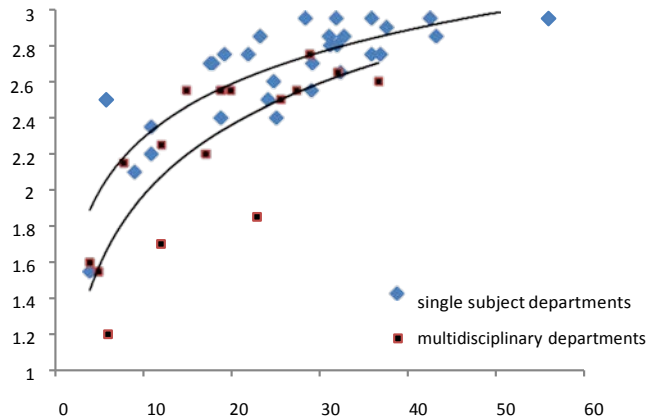


Figure 1 Mean (unweighted) star rating versus numbers of staff returned to UoA32 in RAE2008

these RAE2008 data are suggestive rather than definitive, and there may be a number of reasons underpinning this finding that at present are difficult to speculate about Design and Technology; Information Technology/Science; Maths/Computer Science; Paleoecology; Philosophy; Astronomy and Natural History; Disaster Management; Forensics; Shipping/Engineering; Social Policy¹ response each with any certainty, if the same outcome is repeated in REF2014, then it might imply that geographers in higher education institutions with multidisciplinary units are being disadvantaged or discouraged in terms of research quality relative to those in single-discipline departments. One specific concern is that the ‘best’ physical geographers may have been cherry-picked and submitted to REF2014 unit B7 rather than C17 (which receives STEM funding weighting), and that this is more likely to occur in multidisciplinary than in single-discipline departments.

Table 5 Disciplines/subjects managed in the same administrative units as geography (online survey n=40)

Environmental Science	11
Environmental Management; Sociology	7
Archaeology; Geology; Politics	5
Biology; Earth Science; International Development; International Relations	4
Built Environment; Chemistry; Criminology; Psychology; Sport and Exercise/Sports Development etc.	3
Physics; Anthropology	2
Design and Technology; Information Technology/Science Maths/Computer Science; Paleoecology; Philosophy; Astronomy and Natural History; Disaster Management; Forensics; Shipping/Engineering; Social policy	1 response each

A sense of Geography's 'ambivalent identity' (Savage 2003, 74) emerges from an analysis of its positioning within British institutions. Table 5 shows the array of disciplines alongside which Geography is managed within multidisciplinary departments, based on responses to the online survey. There are, perhaps, few surprises in these responses. However, they confirm that Geography does not lend itself to easy accommodation within UK institutional structures that are typically based around a separation of the natural and social sciences. Geography is managed alongside disciplines from both sides of this division. Although various environmental disciplines are more prevalent in these responses, a number of social science disciplines are also present. Further down Table 5 we can also note a number of less prevalent design-based and applied disciplines.

This ambivalent institutional positioning is further confirmed through an analysis of the faculty (sometimes referred to as 'school' or 'college') location of Geography in the UK. Figure 2 shows the results of an analysis of the faculty locations of all departments within which Geography is managed in UK universities.



Figure 2 Word cloud analysis of the names of faculties within which Geography units are located in the UK

Geography, like Psychology and Anthropology, is unusual in straddling the divide between natural and social sciences. This has long created problems of which faculty it should lie in. However the creation of multidisciplinary units, along with some other trends, is bringing this issue into increasingly sharp focus. In essence, there are pressures towards Geography no longer straddling the fence, but instead having to choose whether to be a social or a natural science. In some universities (for example, Newcastle and Manchester), the disciplinary configuration is pushing Geography towards the former, in others (for example, Plymouth and Birmingham) towards the latter. The data shown in Table 5 suggest that institutional partnerships with natural science disciplines may be more common than social sciences ones. What will the consequences of this be for the character of human geography in particular? There is a further risk here, namely that in some institutions physical and human geographers could be split between different administrative units, and only come together to teach undergraduate Geography students. So far, this has only been the case in a few UK higher education institutions, but there is nothing historically inevitable about the two halves being part of the same discipline or department (cf. Sweden or the Netherlands).

There is some evidence that the ambivalent institutional positioning that characterises Geography presently is not insignificant for the reproduction of the discipline and for, perhaps in countervailing ways, its security and development. In terms of security, Geography's ambivalent institutional positioning appears potentially problematic. For example, the online survey records instances where the difficulties of accommodating Geography into faculty structures based around the separation of science and social science have caused anxieties for one half of the discipline.

Having being merged with Biological Sciences and remnants of some wound up social science departments a few years ago into a school, we are now a department again but in a College of Science (with Bio Sci, Maths, Physics, Comp[uter] Science) – strange bedfellows for Human Geographers. (Respondent 30 to online survey)

Finally, there is evidence that the training of undergraduate and postgraduate geographers in the UK is being influenced by the increasingly multidisciplinary departments that they are based in. While this and its impacts are explored in greater detail elsewhere (McGuinness and Parker 2012), it was touched on in our online survey of Geography departments. Respondents were asked to reflect on the delivery of the Geography curriculum, at all levels, in their department over the previous five years. Fifty per cent of respondents indicated that there had been noticeable attempts to deliver aspects of the curriculum in more multidisciplinary ways over this period. Respondents here referred to examples at undergraduate, taught postgraduate and doctoral levels where this had occurred. Research skills and field opportunities were the most commonly cited examples and included sharing the delivery of these elements of the curriculum with biology, ecology, environmental science, social and community development, sustainable development and tourism.

Drivers of departmental change

Although analysis of the reasons underlying the trends recorded here are beyond the scope of this paper, there is a little discussion of the drivers towards multidisciplinary Geography departments in the literature. Recent mergers into multi-

or interdisciplinary units appear to be driven primarily by financial or administrative reasons (Holmes 2002, 8). These include moves to secure direct administrative savings, economies of scale and rationalisations of staffing (Gibson 2007, 99; Kong 2007a, 15; Sidaway and Johnston 2007, 72) and to increase student recruitment and research income by emphasising the applied and interdisciplinary nature of the discipline and its courses (Kong 2007b, 45; Li *et al.* 2007, 32; Mather 2007, 151). These administrative rationales for restructuring are often overlain with further justifications, including fostering new research and teaching synergies between academics in formerly different areas (Sidaway and Johnston 2007, 72). Gibson argues though that 'these pressures are sometimes less about making disciplines speak to each other, and more about dissolving disciplinary identities altogether for convenient, short-term financial savings' (2007, 99). Geography, because it is seen as synthesising and interdisciplinary, or perhaps because geographers have been less resistant than other disciplines, appears to be especially prone to these forces of restructuring compared with other more discrete disciplines (Holmes 2002, 8; Gibson 2007, 101).⁵

From a managerial perspective, the organisation of staff into a departmental structure focused around single disciplinary units is potentially problematic in the face of dynamic patterns of student recruitment that can be characterised by sharp rises in popularity for some subjects and equally by sharp declines in others (Matthews 2014). By contrast, multidisciplinary units offer the potential for staff to be more easily redeployed across disciplinary boundaries into cognate areas when recruitment patterns change. Although this has not been studied in any systematic sense, anecdotally this disciplinary flexibility, determined by student recruitment, appears to be becoming an increasingly common aspect of contemporary academic working practices. This apparently growing disciplinary mobility raises some, as yet largely unexplored, questions about the ways in which academic loyalties might be becoming less strongly tied to specific disciplines, potentially further increasing the flexibility of labour within an ever more dynamic and in some ways uncertain academy.

Conclusion

Recent discussions of the state of British Geography have been divided in their views of the discipline's health and immediate prospects. For example, Sidaway and Johnston (2007, 74–6) were able to be optimistic about Geography's future within UK universities, although they do acknowledge pressures facing small departments. This optimism was based on Geography's robust undergraduate recruitment patterns, success in national research assessment exercises and the comparative cheapness of geographical research compared with that in 'hard' sciences. Castree (2011), by contrast, sounded a much more pessimistic note, outlining a number of immanent challenges facing the discipline within the UK university system, including the growing importance of teaching income to the sustainability of Geography, cuts in the public funding of teaching and research, changes in the relative balances of public funding of the natural and social sciences, and the growing influence of the National Student Survey, launched in 2005, on institutional strategy and practice.

The prospects for the discipline then are uncertain. While it is clear that Geography as a discipline is becoming managed increasingly within multidisciplinary management units, this is neither a universal nor a singular process for those departments affected. In some cases Geography might be strong, for example in terms of student recruitment and research income, and at the centre of multidisciplinary units surrounded by other smaller, perhaps more vulnerable, disciplines. Elsewhere Geography might be (one of) the smaller unit(s) clinging on among larger disciplines in the hope that synergies might result or vulnerabilities diminish. This paper does not attempt to argue whether the changes it notes are inherently good or bad for the subject. The issue is too complex and the 86 individual departmental stories within the data discussed here are too diverse to be so reducible. They are, however, undeniably important and affect the conditions under which Geography is taught, researched and managed, and they provide the changing institutional context within which the discipline is, and will be, reproduced.

This paper has sought to map Geography's broad institutional history in the UK over recent years. The picture it draws is broadly accurate, albeit incomplete. More fine-grained analysis of individual experiences of departmental change would be more revealing of the contingencies and complexities of these processes and they may be able to say more about the prospects of Geography's immediate institutional futures. This analysis remains to be pursued in any systematic sense. What is clear is that as UK higher education continues to bifurcate and fragment through increased competition into different types of institution and interest groups, under ongoing funding, management and policy regimes, its disciplinary futures are likely to be similarly uneven and locally contingent.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Catherine Souch, Head of Research and Higher Education at the RGS-IBG, for supplying the database of Geography department names and for her support and assistance throughout the project. Thanks also to Ron Johnston for feedback during the evolution of this paper and to all of those who contributed to this research by responding to requests for information. An embryonic version of this paper was presented in the session 'Interdisciplinary pedagogies and geographies' at the RGS-IBG Annual Conference in Edinburgh July 2012. Thanks are due to the Higher Education Research Group of the RGS-IBG and the Higher Education Academy for sponsoring that session, to all of the participants and to Jenny Hill for chairing. Thanks are also due to the editors of *Area* and the paper's referees for their support of this project and their constructive feedback. This research was funded by a grant from the GEES Subject Centre of the Higher Education Academy.

Notes

- 1 Though do see historical accounts including a discussion of the closure of the Geography Department at Harvard University (Smith 1987) and some historical reflection on Geography in provincial British universities (Slater 1988). There are also a small number of accounts in this vein on the 19th and early 20th century history of Geography in Britain (Darby 1983; Wise 1986). These historical accounts show that the concerns of this paper are not necessarily new for Geography, even though the specific contexts within which they are discussed are rather different.
- 2 This database was never intended as a formal, comprehensive record of the names of Geography departments. While there will inevitably be some errors and omissions, it is effective in broadly outlining the trends in the naming of Geography departments since the 1990s.
- 3 This was an online survey administered via the crit-geog-forum mailing list (www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=crit-geog-forum) between November 2011 and May 2012. The survey drew 40 responses. Based on the RGS-IBG database of Geography departments, which recorded 86 departments in both 2010 and 2013, this suggests a response rate of 46.5 per cent. The survey asked about the naming of Geography departments, their administrative arrangements, recent changes to the administrative place of Geography within institutions and awareness of any future plans that might affect Geography's administrative place.
- 4 Post-1992 institutions refer to those institutions, predominantly former polytechnics and colleges of higher education, that were granted university title following the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992; 38 institutions were granted university title in 1992, with a further 31 gaining university status since then. Although something of a generalisation, these institutions have tended to be predominantly teaching focused. Pre-1992 universities refers to all those institutions whose university title pre-dates these recent waves of change.
- 5 Little is known, beyond the anecdotal, about the experiences of different disciplines with regard to their comparative management. This is an area that would repay further research. This analysis might reference recent shifts towards interdisciplinarity (Frodeman *et al.* 2010), contemporary academic management practices and the influence of different disciplinary canonical traditions. On the latter point, it has been argued that Geography has been only weakly canonised. While these histories have been discussed (see Keighren *et al.* 2012 and other papers in this special edition of *Dialogues in Human Geography*), there has been little reflection on the influence of these histories, traditions and identities on the ongoing management of disciplines.

References

- Barnes T 2008 History and philosophy of geography: life and death 2005–2007 *Progress in Human Geography* 32 650–8
- Carter E D and Housel J 2012 Stand-alone geographers in the North American academy: a survey of perceptions and concerns *The Professional Geographer* 65 230–46
- Castree N 2011 The future of geography in English universities *The Geographical Journal* 177 294–9
- Clifford N 2002 The future of geography: when the whole is less than the sum of its parts *Geoforum* 33 431–6
- Darby H C 1983 Academic Geography in Britain, 1918–1946 *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers (NS)* 8 14–26
- Erickson R A 2012 Geography and the changing landscape of higher education *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 36 9–24
- ESRC-RGS-AHRC 2013 *International benchmarking review of UK Human Geography*
- Frodeman R, Klein J T and Mitcham C 2010 *The Oxford hand- book of interdisciplinarity* Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Gibson C 2007 Geography in higher education in Australia *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 31 97–119
- Hall T 2014 Making their own futures? Research change and diversity amongst British human geographers *Geographical Journal* 180 39–51
- Holmes J H 2002 Geography's emerging cross-disciplinary links: process, causes, outcomes and challenges *Australian Geographical Studies* 40 2–20
- Hubbard P, Kitchin R and Valentine G 2005 Editors' reply *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 37 184–7
- Jenkins A and Ward A 2001 Moving with the times: an oral history of a geography department *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 25 191–208
- Johns J 2012 'Suited and booted': reflections on performing geography in business studies Paper presented at RGS-IBG Annual Conference, Edinburgh, July
- Johnston R J 2004a Institutions and disciplinary fortunes: two moments in the history of UK Geography in the 1960s – I: geography and the 'plateglass universities' *Progress in Human Geography* 28 57–78
- Johnston R J 2004b Institutions and disciplinary fortunes: two moments in the history of UK Geography in the 1960s – II: human geography and the Social Science Research Council *Progress in Human Geography* 28 204–26
- Keighren I M, Abrahamsson C and della Dora V 2012 On canonical geographies *Dialogues in Human Geography* 2 296–312
- Kong L 2007a The promises and prospects of geography in higher education *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 31 13–17
- Kong L 2007b Geography in higher education in Singapore *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 31 39–56
- Li X, Kong Y and Peng B 2007 Development of Geography in higher education in China since 1980 *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 31 19–37
- Lorimer H 2003 Telling small stories: spaces of knowledge and the practice of geography *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers (NS)* 28 197–217
- Mather C 2007 Between the 'local' and the 'global': South African Geography after Apartheid *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 31 143–59
- Matthews D 2014 Subject to popular demand *Times Higher Education* 2135 34–41
- McGuinness M and Parker C 2012 Interdisciplinary learning – listening to the student voice Paper presented at the RGS-IBG Annual Conference, Edinburgh, July

- Murphy A B** 2007 Geography's place in higher education in the United States *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 31 121–41
- Philo C** 2012 Security of Geography/Geography of security *Transactions of the Institute of British Geography (NS)* 37 1–7
- QS World University Subject Rankings** 2014 <http://www.topuniversities.com/subject-rankings/2014> Accessed 20 March 2014
- Roberts S** 2000 Realizing critical geographies of the university *Antipode* 32 230–44
- Savage V R** 2003 Changing geographies and the geography of change: some reflections *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 24 61–85
- Sidaway J** 1997 The production of British geography *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers (NS)* 22 488–504
- Sidaway J and Johnston R** 2007 Geography in higher education in the UK *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 31 57–80
- Slater T R** 1988 Redbrick academic geography *Geographical Journal* 154 169–80
- Smith N** 1987 'Academic war over the field of geography': the elimination of geography at Harvard, 1947–1951 *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77 155–72
- Swords J** 2013 Posting to Crit-Geog-Forum 26 March 2013
- Thrift N** 2002 The future of Geography *Geoforum* 33 291–8
- Winkler J** 2014 What's in a name? The renaming and rebranding of geography departments *AAG Newsletter* 29 April (<http://news.aag.org/2014/04/whats-in-a-name-the-renaming-and-rebranding-of-geography-departments>) Accessed 24 June 2014
- Wise M J** 1986 The Scott Keltie Report, 1885, and the teaching of Geography in Great Britain *Geographical Journal* 152 367–82