

International Geographical Union T12-01 Olympiad Task Force

Report of Task Force Activities 2012-16

1. Membership

(a) Steering Committee. The 2012-2016 Steering Committee of the IGU Olympiad Task Force is made up of two co-chairs, the past, present and future Olympiad Local Organisers and three seconded members. With Olympiads scheduled every year in the 2012-2016 quadrennial, the rotation of organisers means that the Task Force draws membership from a range of countries, can draw on a wealth of experience, and is continually 'refreshed'. Further, the rotation is important in the mentoring role of the Task Force and induction of future Local Organisers. The Steering Committee has the following membership; the proposed membership of the 2016-2020 Task Force is listed on page 7.

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(b) Membership (i.e. the email distribution list). The current active membership totals 113 from 51 countries. It is made up of the Steering Committee (8) the International Board composed of representatives (40) of participating countries, other Olympiad team leaders, and geography educators from countries actively considering participating in future Olympiads. In addition, there are 15 geography educators in another 13 countries with whom we communicate at least annually, but who would not be described as active members. The country break-up is as follows:

Active members	
Argentina	1
Armenia	2
Australia	3
Azerbaijan	1
Belarus	3
Belgium	2
Bolivia	2
Brazil	1
Bulgaria	3
Canada	2
China-Hong Kong	2
China-Macau	2
China People's Republic	3
China-Taipei	3
Croatia	2
Cyprus	1
Czech Republic	2
Denmark	2
Estonia	3
Finland	2
Germany	1
Hungary	2
Indonesia	2
Iran	1
Japan	3
Kazakhstan	2
Kyrgyzstan	1
Latvia	3
Lithuania	2
Malawi	1
Mexico	3
Mongolia	2

Montenegro	2
Netherlands	2
New Zealand	5
Nigeria	2
Pakistan	1
Philippines	4
Poland	3
Romania	2
Russia	4
Serbia	2
Singapore	3
Slovakia	2
Slovenia	2
Switzerland	1
Thailand	3
Turkey	2
Turkmenistan	1
UK	2
USA	3
Non-active members	
Chile	1
India	1
Ireland	1
Israel	1
Italy	1
Jamaica	1
Kuwait	1
Portugal	1
Saudi Arabia	1
South Africa	2
Spain	1
Sweden	1
Tunisia	2

(c) URL of the Task Force website is <http://www.geoolympiad.org/> .

2. Meetings

(a) and (b) The meetings of the Task Force with summary information on location, dates, and numbers of participants; along with a brief summary of themes addressed.

Since the 2012 Congress, the Task Force has organised Olympiads in Kyoto, Kraków and Tver.

2013 International Geography Olympiad

The 2013 iGeo was held in Kyoto, from 30 July to 5 August 2013. It was hosted by the Japan Committee for International Geography Olympiad, a committee of the Association of Japanese Geographers (Nippon Chiri-Gakkai) under the leadership of Prof Yoshiyasu Ida and Dr Hiroya Yoshimizu. The Local Organising Committee provided a great atmosphere and a testing set of experiences for young geographers.

Teams from 32 countries competed, and we welcomed new teams from Kazakhstan, Mongolia and USA. Participation was 194 students, leaders and official observers, plus a large number of members of the Local Organising Committee and volunteer assistants.

The six themes explored in the Written Response Test were Tourism and Conservation, Volcanoes and Tectonic Activity, Managing Urban Areas, World Energy Production, Climate Change in Sudan and World Development. The fieldwork was undertaken in Fushimi, an urban community of 280,000 people in the Southeast of Kyoto, with observation, cartography and a written response exploring urban development and water issues with reference to transportation, domestic and ceremonial use, and industrial use.

Daniel Wong from Singapore was assessed as the best young geographer, Andreea Manea from Romania was second, with Maris Serzans of Latvia in third place. The ranking of international teams placed Romania first, Croatia second and Singapore third.

2014 International Geography Olympiad

The 2014 iGeo was held in Kraków in Poland from 12 to 18 August 2014. The event was jointly organised by the Polish Geographical Society and the Pedagogical University of Kraków, with financial assistance from the Polish Ministry of National Education. The Local Organising Committee was led by Tomasz Sawicki of the Society, with support of Prof Wiktor Osuch of the Pedagogical University. Tomasz Sawicki holds a unique position in Olympiad history; he was a student participant in the 2002 Olympiad, a volunteer at the 2004 Olympiad, a team leader at the 2006-12 Olympiads, a member of the Task Force at the 2013 Olympiad, and Local Organiser of the 2014 Olympiad.

Thirty-six teams competed at the Kraków Olympiad, with Montenegro and Serbia participating for the first time. Total participation was approximately 235 people, made up of 144 students, plus team leaders, official observers and members of the Local Organising Committee. In addition a large number of volunteers assisted.

The Written Response Test asked questions in the areas of Geology and Coastal Landforms, Forest Resources, Global Ecological Footprint, Impacts of Global Warming, Population and Health, and finally Globalisation and Transnational Corporations (TNCs). The fieldwork site was the Błonia and Jordana Park area in Kraków, and students investigated various aspects of the provision and use of public space.

James Mullen (USA) received the highest mark, with Lim Wei Chong Timothy (Singapore) second, and Janice Mui (Australia) third. The top three international teams were Singapore, Australia and Romania in that order.

2015 International Geography Olympiad

The Olympiad associated with the 2015 Regional Conference meeting in Russia was organized by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, Tver State University, Lomonosov Moscow State University and the Russian Geographical Society. The venue was the “Computeria” youth recreation and educational center, 200 km from Moscow. Assoc Prof Alexey Naumov led the Local Organising Committee.

The Olympiad continues to expand and teams from 40 countries participated in 2015. We were particularly pleased to welcome our first South American teams – from Argentina and Bolivia – along with other first-time participants Armenia, Philippines and Thailand. Total participation was approximately 265 people, made up of 159 students, plus team leaders, official observers and members of the Local Organising Committee. In addition a large number of volunteers helped in the organisation.

The six themes addressed in the Written Response Test were Weathering, Tropical Storms, Mapping Skills and Cold Environments, Water Conflicts, Living in Slums and, finally, Geography and Cultural Diversity. The location of the Fieldwork environment was Staritsa (a regional town of 8000 people). Observation and mapping formed the first part of the test, with ‘sustainable options for Staritsa’s future’ forming the basis of the written assignment.

Chang-Chin Wang of China-Taipei was assessed as the best young geographer, with Oxana Repina of New Zealand second and James Mullen of the USA third. The top international team was from Poland, with Romania second and China-Taipei third.

The six images that follow have been selected from a large number taken by Russian colleagues and Press photographers who expressed great interest in the Olympiad.



The Written Response Test requires students to use given resources to answer questions from six of thirteen topics.



High above the Volga at Staritsa, students observe the Assumption Abbey on the Field Work Exercise.



The Multi-Media Test at Computeria explores the currency and range of students' geographical knowledge.



The Gold Medal winners receive their awards at the Official Ceremony at the IGU Conference in Moscow.



Fireworks and balloons mark the river-bank Closing Ceremony at Computeria.



Experiencing local culture forms an important part of the program at Computeria.

(c) Future Meetings. The Task Force plans to conduct International Geography Olympiads annually. The IGU Executive adopted an annual strategy for the 2012-2016 quadrennial but will revert to the biennial Congress and Regional conference model in 2016-2020. This model does not suit the Olympiad funding cycles of most countries where between six and seven Olympiads are state-funded on an annual basis.

Given the interest in and growth of the Olympiad, and the national status associated with hosting such an event, the Task Force has decided to continue offering an Olympiad every year. In non-IGU Congress/ Regional Conference years, the events may be attached to conferences of other IGU Commissions, but are more likely to be independently organised by the Task Force. Planning is already under way with the Local Organising Committees for these future Olympiads:

2016 International Geography Olympiad

The 2016 Olympiad (the thirteenth iGeo) will be in Beijing between 16 and 22 August. The Olympiad runs immediately prior to the IGU Congress and the Olympiad Gold Medals will be awarded at the Opening Ceremony of the Congress. The Olympiad is being hosted by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, China Association for Science and Technology, the Geographical Society of China, and Beijing Normal University. The Local Organising Committee is co-chaired by Prof Wang Min and Dr Wei Dongying from Beijing Normal University, with the event held in the Beijing Conference Centre. Planning for the Beijing Olympiad is well advanced, and Task Force representatives have made site visits to consult on the fieldwork test. Applications to participate have been accepted from 47 countries, including 6 new ones.

2017 International Geography Olympiad

The 2017 Olympiad will be held from 2 to 8 August in Belgrade. It will be hosted by the Regional Center for Talented Youth Belgrade II, whose invitation was selected by the Task Force after a competitive bid process. The Local Organiser, Nikola Srzentic, Director of the Center, and his committee have preparations well in hand.

2018 International Geography Olympiad

In 2018 the Olympiad will be held from 31 July to 6 August (dates to be confirmed) at the Université Laval in Quebec. It will run immediately prior to the IGU Regional Conference. The Task Force is in regular communication with Prof Matthew Hatvany from the Université Laval, and Beth Dye from the Royal Canadian Geographical Society.

3. Networking and Communication

Since it was established in 2004, the Task Force has had regular contact with the Steering Committee of the Commission on Geographical Education. This arrangement has worked to our mutual benefit.

The Task Force has negotiated with Prof Benno Werlen on ways that the Olympiad programme could contribute to the International Year of Global Understanding (IYGU), in association with the Geographical Education strand in the IYGU. It is planned that topics relevant to the IYGU will be included in the 2016 Olympiad tests.

The Task Force has also been working with a representative of the IGU project OURSUS (Our Sustainable Cities) on ways this could be incorporated into the Olympiad programme in Beijing. The posters being presented by the students will address the Sustainable Cities theme as applied in their home countries.

The communications of the Task Force are largely with national geography education representatives, where the Task Force is in regular contact with Geographers in more than 50 countries. As well as email communications to the international collective (constituted as the International Board, a governance group), discussion and debate over major issues takes place annually at Olympiad events.

The most important audience for the Olympiad is young geographers. We conclude this section with a participant comment to indicate the underlying social engagement the Olympiad seeks to foster:

One of the most satisfying things I found with the Olympiad was the opportunity to meet and befriend so many different people from around the world, which seemed to transcend the importance of the actual competition. Everyone at the Olympiad, all with the mutual interest of geography, was friendly and open to conversation about their homelands and lives within, and it was great to get a view of the world from so many different perspectives, from both students and team leaders. Although the Olympiad only lasted a week, staying in touch with the others from all over the world, online, has allowed the friendships to be continued, hopefully long into the future. Oscar Fawkes (student)

4. Publications

The Task Force relies on its website and email list to communicate with the geographical community. The Task Force itself does not publish any newsletters, journals or books. However, articles on countries' participation in the Olympiad appear in the newsletters, journals and websites of many national geographical education organisations. The Task Force contributed to the special issue of *Geographia Polonica* published in association with the Kraków Regional Conference:

Lex Chalmers, Kathryn Berg (2014) Changes, challenges and responsibilities in geographical education: The International Geography Olympiad. *Geographia Polonica*. Vol. 87, no. 2, pp. 267-276.

The website of the Olympiad Task Force is found at www.geoolympiad.org. The site is maintained by the University of Waikato. The site explains what the geography Olympiad is, with reference to the history stretching back to the 1996 Olympiad in the Netherlands. One key set of pages is found under the Statutes tab. The statements found here describe the key activities and processes of the Task Force. The second important set of pages is under the Test Guidelines tab, where the locations and details of the component tests (Written Response Test, Multimedia Test and the Fieldwork Exercise) are described. Each Olympiad LoC also creates its own website. These include large amounts of information about that particular Olympiad. Photos and news are added during and after the Olympiad.

5. Archives

With the current 2012-16 term of the Task Force drawing to a close, the electronic and hard copy files will be checked for material to be transferred to the IGU archive. Such material would include test papers, results and programme booklets. The Task Force gives permission to the IGU to hold and archive a digital copy of the information provided on the IGU Olympiad Task Force website, as at 1 March 2016, although we note that an upgrade will take place in March 2016.

6. Proposal for Continuance

(a) Name of the Task Force. No change is proposed to the name: Olympiad Task Force.

(b) Mission statement for the International Geography Olympiad Task Force. The mission of the Task Force is to organise International Geography Olympiads, and through this:

- to stimulate active interest in geographical and environmental studies among young people;
- to contribute positively to debate about the importance of geography as a senior secondary school subject by drawing attention to the quality of geographical knowledge, skills and interests among young people;
- to facilitate social contacts between young people from different countries and in doing so, contribute to the understanding between nations.

(c) Complete list of individuals nominated for the 2016-2020 Task Force. With the increased workload arising from annual Olympiads, the composition of the Steering Committee has been amended in the Olympiad Statutes. It is now made up of a chair (or two co-chairs), the past, present and the two future Olympiad Local Organisers and up to four seconded members. One member of the Steering Committee is therefore replaced every year. As stated in Section 1(a), the rotation of Local Organisers means that the Task Force draws membership from a variety of countries, has a wealth of experience available, and is renewed on an ongoing basis. This is also important in the mentoring role of the Task Force and induction of future Local Organisers. The proposed membership of the 2016-2020 Task Force is:

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(d) A summary of the work plan for 2016-20. The Task Force plans to conduct International Geography Olympiads annually as follows:

- 2017 – Belgrade, Serbia
- 2018 – Quebec, Canada
- 2019 – venue yet to be decided
- 2020 – Istanbul, Turkey

We are grateful that the Executive and IGU General Assembly supported the inclusion of US\$5000 for the Olympiad Task Force in Memoranda of Understanding with Regional Conference and Congress Local Organising Committees. The most important use of these funds is for Task Force representatives to visit the Olympiad hosts to consult on the fieldwork test, and check the accommodation and facilities.

The Task Force will continue to monitor its practices and procedures, and revise as necessary, to ensure that the Olympiad tests recognise the world's best young geographers, and that other elements of the programme facilitate intercultural sharing between the students, and international networking between the geography educators.

The Task Force will continue its outreach to countries that do not compete in the Olympiad and anticipates that the number of participants will continue to grow.