

# 2006 iGeo – Brisbane, Australia



## Results

### *Team Ranking (By Score)*

1. Poland
2. Estonia
3. Romania
4. The Netherlands
5. Australia



## **Chair Report**

The 6th International Geography Olympiad was held in Brisbane, Australia, from 28 June to 3 July 2006, followed by optional fieldtrips from 4 to 9 July. The Olympiad was hosted by the Royal Geographical Society of Queensland (RGSQ) and the Australian Geography Teachers' Association (AGTA). It was held in conjunction with the International Geographical Union Brisbane Conference and the Commission on Geographical Education Symposium.

Teams from 23 countries took part, with 4 students and 2 educators per team. This was a pleasing increase over the 16 countries, only two of them non-European, that attended the 2004 Olympiad. The teams came from:

Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, China - Beijing, China - Taipei, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Slovenia and United Kingdom

Following the Olympiad rules, there were three parts to the testing: a written test, a multimedia quiz and a substantial fieldwork exercise. The first two tests were written by international committees. The fieldwork test was drafted by a Brisbane teacher, and refined after feedback

from the organising committee and an international panel. The fieldwork focussed on sustainable urban communities, using Kelvin Grove Urban Village as a case study.

The Olympiad's official language is English and all students sat their tests in English. Non-native English speakers were allowed extra time for the tests, could use a language dictionary, and were given a list of terms from the questions translated into their own language. Teams were told a couple of weeks in advance what the fieldwork would focus on and referred to several websites as background – which gave students a chance to become familiar with the vocabulary. The performance of these students in what was for most at best a second language was very impressive. Using English for the tests is the only practical solution. Students cannot be marked by their own teachers (which would be the case in quite a few of their native languages) and the Olympiad cannot afford to hire an independent marker for each language, even supposing they knew anything about geography.

As at other student Olympiads, gold, silver and bronze medals are awarded in bands of performance level. The student with the highest score overall was Jacek Próchniak from Poland. Eight gold medals were awarded – three to Poland, two to Romania, two to Estonia and one to Netherlands. Students compete individually, but in the unofficial team rankings Poland came first, followed by Estonia, Romania, Netherlands and Australia.

The gold medals were awarded during the Opening Ceremony of the IGU Brisbane Conference so that these upcoming young geographers could be acknowledged before all. The Olympiad's own Closing Ceremony was held in the suitably august surrounds of the Legislative Council Chamber of the Queensland Parliament, giving an appropriate sense of occasion. The Opening Ceremony had been graced with the presence of the Romanian Ambassador and various consuls, cultural attachés and community representatives from the participating countries.

As well as the tests, the Olympiad programme included formal opportunities for the students to exchange information on their home countries – a cultural evening and presentations on a geographical aspect of their country. The cultural evening was particularly good for encouraging mixing, with some teams taking a participative approach, such as teaching others to dance the polka. Among the geographical presentations, the Mexican team's presentation on immigration was widely regarded as the best.

The programme also included excursions to give the participants a feel for South East Queensland. These were very successful. One of the rangers who led the rainforest walk at Mount Glorious commented on the students' respect for the environment. A talk from a ranger on the indigenous heritage of the region around David Fleay Wildlife Park was much appreciated and there was great excitement about being up close to koalas and emus. Many of the students got right into the spirit of supporting the Brisbane Lions at the AFL game (Australian Football – a variation only played in Australia), and streamed on to the ground after the match, commenting that they would be arrested for this in their home countries.

Following requests at the 2004 Olympiad, for the first time participants had the opportunity to join optional fieldtrips after the Olympiad. A 6-day trip was organised to southwest Queensland, taking in a visit to Cubbie Station (cotton) near Dirranbandi, Myendetta Station (sheep) near Charleville, the bilby captive breeding programme, a meteorological station, artesian baths, talks on land management issues, etc. This trip was booked out and rejected applications then amounted to another coachload so a second fieldtrip, this time to the north, was organised so as not to disappoint so many teams (and despite the organisers' existing workload). The northern trip included a guided walk in a rainforest reserve, sampling the produce at a macadamia nut and sugarcane farm, visits to the port of Gladstone and the alumina refinery, a full day walking

in Cania Gorge National Park, etc. Around 90 students and teachers (of the 140 or so at the Olympiad) went on one of the fieldtrips. The students were cooperative, interested, uncomplaining of camping in freezing overnight temperatures – an all-round positive experience for everyone concerned, as was the whole of the Olympiad.

Kathryn Berg, Local Organiser



*Urban Fieldwork, Kelvin Grove, Brisbane*



*Team from Saudi Arabia*



*Team from Mexico*



*Team from China - Beijing*