



QUEENSTOWN - Adventure capital of the world

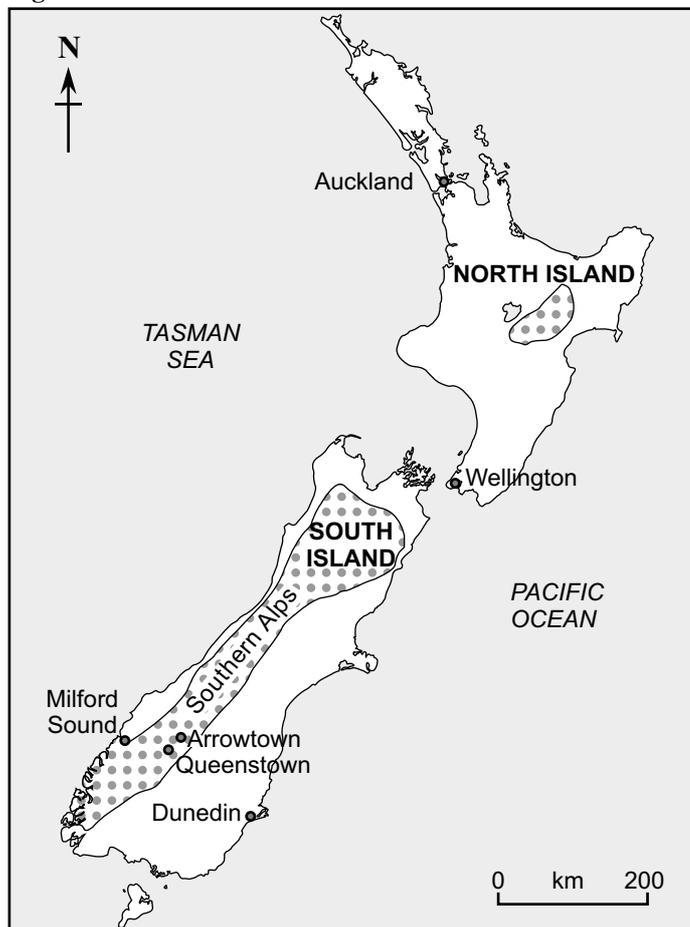
Introduction

Tourism is the World's fastest growing industry and as the cost of flights in real terms has decreased, more of us are travelling to long haul destinations such as New Zealand. Many people are attracted to New Zealand because of its spectacular beauty but within such areas other, more specialised tourist centres have grown and developed in order to appeal to a wider range of visitor. The town of Queenstown is one such location.

Queenstown is an important alpine resort located in the Southern Alps on South Island New Zealand (Fig. 1). The town sits on the shores of Lake Wakatipu, a glacial lake which is 82km in length and 378m deep and is overlooked by the range of mountains known as the Remarkables, giving it a spectacular setting.

The town is connected to the rest of the country by the main State Highway 6 from Cromwell and the scenic road over the Crown Range from Wanaka as well as an airport that receives direct flights from Australia as well as internal domestic flights from Auckland and Christchurch.

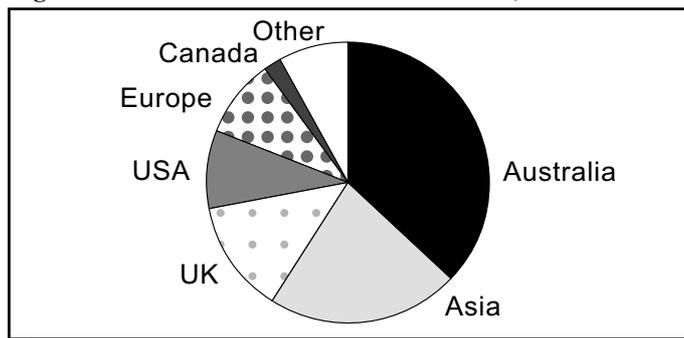
Fig. 1 New Zealand.



The town has a population of about 9000 (2006 estimate) but has a huge transient population of visitors, both domestic and international. Over half of all properties in the town are holiday/second homes and tourism is the main source of income. In 2005 \$NZ 541.8 million was spent by visitors in Queenstown, with 82% of this from international visitors.

Fig. 2 shows where most visitors to New Zealand come from. Visitors from the UK are second in number only to Australasia, due to historic and family links. Queenstown has particular appeal to the young and active and over 51% of UK visitors to the town are in the 20-39 age group, drawn in by the large variety of activities on offer.

Fig. 2 International visitors to New Zealand, 2006.



Why has Queenstown become a hotspot for adventure tourism and extreme sports?

1. Climate

Initially it was the summer season that attracted visitors to the area in order to access the spectacular scenic walks. The warm, dry climate made it ideal for walking. With the development of the Coronet Ski Field, a winter season began. Good coverings of snow and clear but cold days attract large numbers of skiers, and not just from within New Zealand. Since the beginning of the 1990s Queenstown has gradually developed festivals and events to attract visitors in Spring and Autumn when the weather still offers clear skies and often some warm days, thus ensuring tourist activity all year- an important issue when tourism is the main thrust of the economy.

Table 1 The four seasons of Queenstown.

Season	Months	Daily Average Temp. °C	Weather Description
Spring	Sept - Nov	9-15	Showery, some crisp days
Summer	Dec - Feb	19-30	Hot and dry
Autumn	March - May	11-23	Clear, warm days, cool nights
Winter	June - Aug	1-10	Crisp, clear days, cold nights

Rainfall total for Year: 832mm

2. History

Today Queenstown is known as the Adventure Capital of the World but its beginnings were based in agriculture in the 19th century – dominated by sheep farming. In 1862, gold was found along the nearby rivers and it was then that Queenstown and its near neighbour, Arrowtown, developed as gold rush settlements. Queenstown went into a decline as the gold soon ran out (population in 1900 was only 190) but the area gradually became known for its spectacular lakes and mountain scenery with access to the famous Routeburn, Milford and Hollyford tracks during the summer months.

The town only developed a winter season after the creation of the Coronet Ski Field in the 1950s. Also in the 1950s the jet boat was invented by a South Island man who wanted to be able to use the very shallow rivers in some areas. The boats could be used in rivers with only a depth of 3cm and were highly manoeuvrable, using a jet of water drawn in through an inlet and driven out through a nozzle in the rear. In the 1970s a commercial jet boat company was set up and added to the skiing and trekking activities. Jet boating was soon followed by white water rafting and the two nearest rivers to Queenstown, the Shotover and the Kawarau became centres for water activity.

In the 1980s the first commercial bungy jump occurred in the area, and this linked to well-established ski fields and the water-based activities led to the town’s special emphasis on adventure tourism. Skydiving and other air-based sports have joined the range of options for the visiting adrenalin junkie with the various adventure activities having had a multiplier effect within the region.

3. Adventure Activities

Queenstown offers a huge range of adventure activities (Fig. 3):

- Perhaps the most famous activity in Queenstown is the **Bungy Jump**. This was developed commercially on the Kawarau River by A.J. Hackett. He got the idea from the Oxford University Dangerous Sports Club who used to jump from the Clifton Suspension Bridge in the UK but originally the activity, an ancient one, was carried out in the South Pacific as part of a fertility rite - the young men jumped from heights with lianas (vines) tied around their ankles. In 1987 AJ Hackett made news by bungy jumping from the Eiffel Tower. A year later, bungy jumping began at the Kawarau Suspension Bridge, 23km from Queenstown. It is 43m down to the river surface. Another bungy jumping site is the Nevis Highwire (begun in 1999) where the 134m drop is from a gondola suspended over a narrow gorge. AJ Hackett continues to develop this sport and has recently won awards for the way they have blended in their activity with the natural environment. Since 1988 there have been over 7 million “jumpers”.
- The nearest bungy jump to Queenstown is “**The Ledge**” which is situated 400m above the town near the top of the scenic gondola with a drop of 47m. For visitors staying a day or two, this is the most popular.
- Also operating from the top of the Skyline Gondola is “**The Luge**”. This consists of two 800m tracks which travel down the side of the slopes above Queenstown. Passengers ride in three-wheeled carts and have complete control as to how fast they travel. Many use the gondola to ride up the mountain side and the Luge to come down.

Fig. 3 Adventure activities, Queenstown.

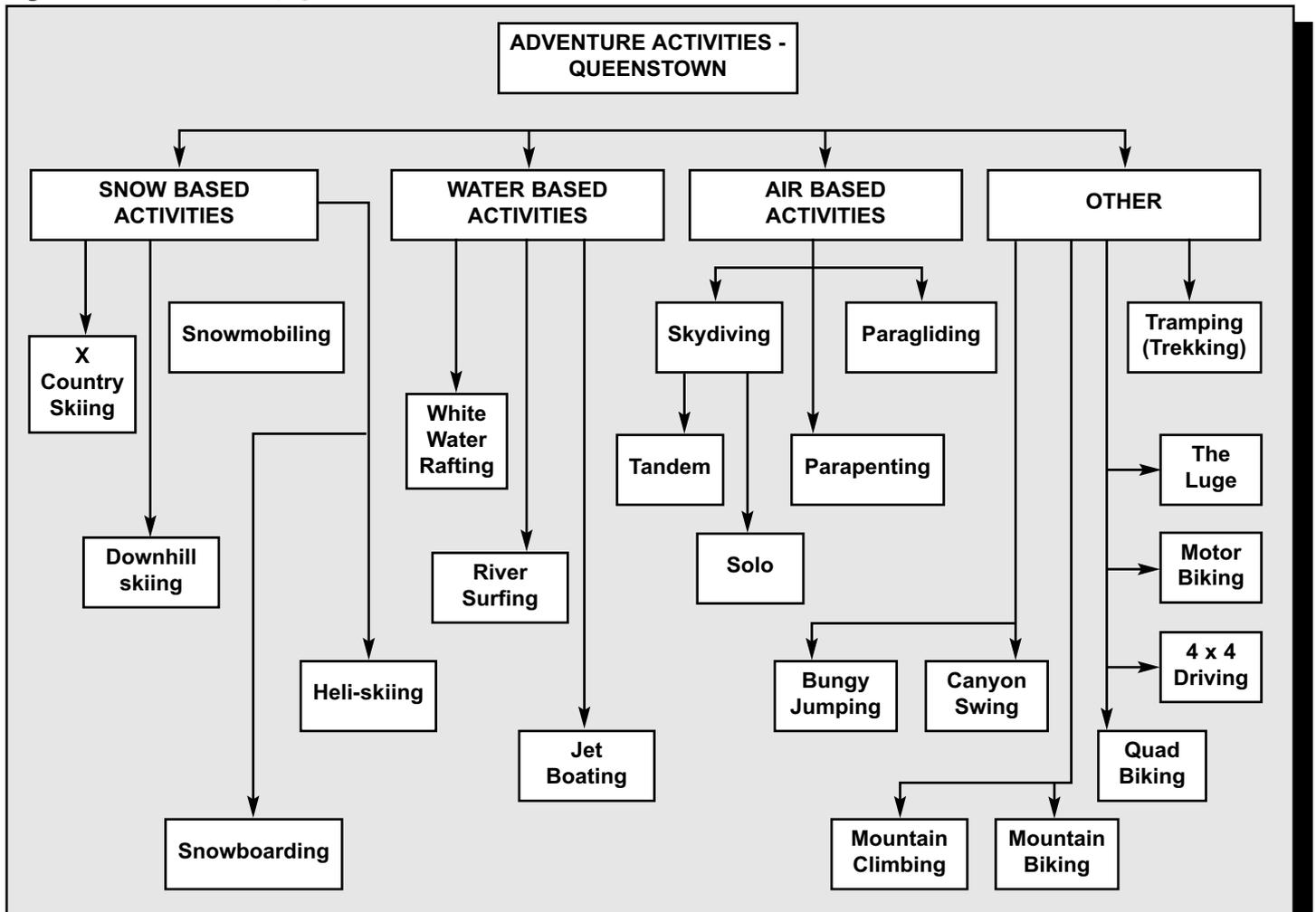
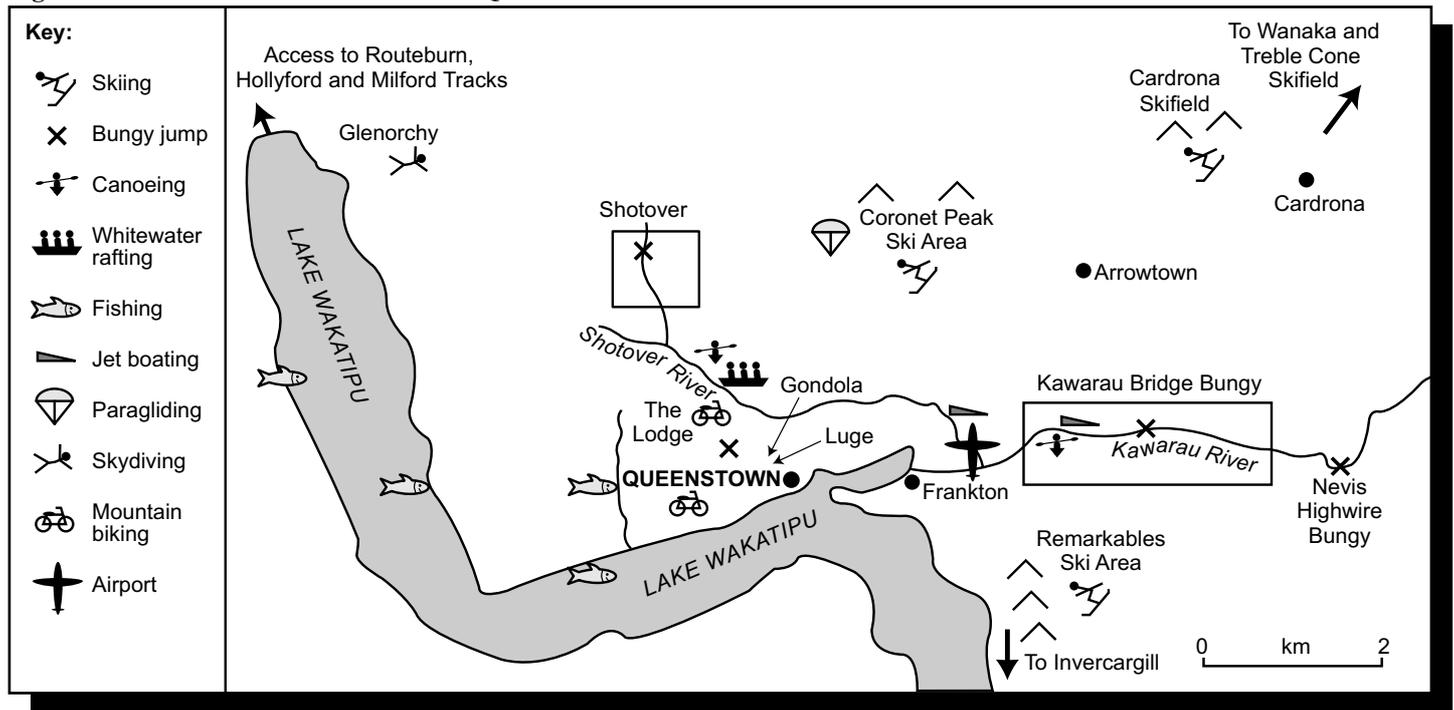


Fig. 4 Location of adventure activities in Queenstown.



- An activity linked to bungee jumping is the **Canyon Swing** which opened in 2002. The passenger is strapped into a chest and seat harness and swung out in a 200m arc over the canyon at up to 150 kph
 - **Jet boating** has been developed, mainly on the nearby Shotover and Kawarau rivers (see Fig.4) where the trips pass through canyons and around rocky outcrops. The Dart River also has jet boating but is a more scenic and less used location. Since the 1970s when this activity was first commercially operated, over two million passengers have taken a ride. The boats go at speed along stretches of the river and, because of their manoeuvrability, can be spun around a full 360 degrees within their own length. The jet boats on the Shotover River use V6 engines which eject 800 litres of water a second.
 - **Whitewater rafting**, which was developed at about the same time as the jet boating activities, is mainly operated on the Kawarau and Shotover Rivers (see Fig.4). There are various grades of rapid from 1 – 6 with 6 being unraftable! First time rafters can usually cope with up to grade 4 with tuition. Each trip takes about 4-5 hours and includes a mini bus ride from Queenstown. The Kawarau River has 4 main rapids, the last being the 400m Dog Leg Rapid. The Shotover River has 10 rapids, some at high grades.
 - **Skiing** is the important winter activity and the town has two nearby ski ranges. Coronet Peak, developed in the 1950s, is 30km away from Queenstown. It has a fully sealed access road and is home to the New Zealand National Ski Team. The Remarkables ski area opened in 1985 and has gentler slopes for the less confident skier. Further away, towards Wanaka, skiers can also access the Treble Cone ski field as well as the Snow Farm which specialises in cross country skiing.
 - **Heli-skiing and boarding** is increasing in popularity as it gives people access to previously unskied areas. Skiers and boarders are taken away to upper slopes of the mountains with no road or ski lift access. Private ski fields such as the “Invincible Ski Field” specialise in offering untouched runs on snow and on glaciers. People are moving further into the mountains in order to ski and snowboard.
 - For those who cannot or do not want to be on the ski slopes, several companies offer **snowmobiles** for hire, some with laid out trails.
 - **Skydiving** is a very popular activity amongst the young international visitors. The trips come with the option of Accelerated Freefall Training if you want to go solo rather than jumping in tandem with an experienced skydiver.
 - **Tandem Paragliding** is on offer from Coronet Peak. This is the highest take off in Queenstown. You jump from 1266m in the summer and from 1800m in winter.
 - **Parapenting** is a mix of parachuting and hanggliding and is gaining in popularity in the area.
 - **Off-road treks using 4x4s** to places like Skipper’s Canyon are an alternative activity although there is some concern about the environmental damage done. **Quad bikes** can also be hired in the area.
 - There are a range of **mountain bike trails** that can be followed, suitable for all levels of ability and fitness.
- Exam hint:** Practice drawing a sketch map of Queenstown from Fig. 4 and annotating it with all the key activities.
- #### 4. Other Activities
- Not everyone coming to Queenstown wishes to undertake extreme adventure activities and the strength of the town’s activity base is that it has a wide range of less frightening activities!
- Trekking is still a very important visitor attraction as is fishing in the lakes and rivers of the area.
 - Older visitors may well come to enjoy the scenery and have a quiet holiday. The Skyline Gondola which goes up to Bob’s Peak gives panoramic views over the town and towards the Remarkables.
 - Historically, there are attractions based on the gold rush period of the region such as the gold mining settlement of Arrowtown.
 - There is also much wildlife to be seen in the area.

Managing Queenstown's tourism

The Ministry of Tourism supervises a number of RTOs (Regional Tourism Organisations) including Queenstown. Data derived from the International Visitor Survey and the Domestic Travel Survey are used in order for the town to be able to maintain and further develop its tourism industry. Destination Queenstown is an organisation that markets the town and its area through literature, marketing campaigns, websites and at international conferences. There are also independent bodies such as "The Queenstown Adventure Group", a co-operative adventure tourism marketing group. Five local adventure activity operators (including activities such as bungy jumping, jet boats, sky diving, rafting and combinations of these) have come together to promote Queenstown as the Adventure Capital of the World through promotions, group brochures and having a presence at trade fairs.

To encourage visitors during the "shoulder periods" of spring and autumn, special campaigns have been launched. One of these is "Spring Loaded" to celebrate the arrival of spring in September and October. There is an important jazz festival and also the Remarkables Spring Festival. Figures for 2006 suggest that this has been successful in increasing visitor numbers with an overall 2.6% increase. This is despite the fact that the New Zealand dollar has grown stronger and the destination is therefore more expensive than in previous years.

In autumn the focus is on Queenstown's near neighbour, Arrowtown, where there is the Arrowtown Autumn Festival and has an historical focus on the mining history of the area as well as some early ski events.

The area continues to be popular with backpackers - it was once noted for "bungee, beer and backpackers" - but now appeals to a far wider audience. The various marketing campaigns run by New Zealand, such as the one linked to the Lord of the Rings Trilogy (filmed in New Zealand, much in the Queenstown region) where it flagged itself up as "The Best Supporting Country", have led to a wider realisation of what the country has to offer. Many adverts feature the Queenstown area and the town is active in promoting its scenery, activities and quality of life. International celebrities have bought homes in the town and there has been a move towards upmarket tourism which is reflected in the opening in 2005 of the town's first five star hotel, owned by the Paris-based company Accor. Queenstown is regarded by many as "The Jewel in the Crown" of New Zealand's tourist industry and as such is attracting more high quality hotels and restaurants with many jostling to develop the lakeside frontage with its spectacular views.

Table 2 Queenstown – Recent Awards.

Year	Award
2004	Creeksyde Holiday Park - World's first Grenn Globe 21 environmentally certified holiday park
2005	Condé Nast Traveller Magazine "Friendliest Place in the World"
	3 rd in Top Pacific Cities Award (1 st was Sydney, 2 nd was Melbourne)
	"Sexiest Place in New Zealand"
2006	Best Ski Resort in the Southern Hemisphere (3 rd in world)

The Future

Over 80% of visitors would recommend Queenstown as a holiday destination (the national benchmark is 69%) and its main attractions are still its spectacular scenery and the range of activities on offer. Surveys of the town's visitors have highlighted aspects that could be improved such as the provision for campervan sites – a popular way of seeing New Zealand, especially for the young and active visitor and the upgrading of the airport – work began in 2006 on this project. Generally it is felt that highlighting the history and culture of the area would broaden its customer base. Events like the Arrowtown Autumn Festival will help answer this need.

In order to have a well-trained workforce, Queenstown has a Resort College where amongst other courses, students can specialise in Adventure Tourism Management. Tourism is growing in the town and as it does so, so too do the number of operators, leading to fierce competition. It has been estimated that by 2012 visitor numbers to Queenstown will increase by over 19% overall and that international visitors will increase by 31%.

Queenstown is continuing to develop its well-established and nearest market in Australia as well as developing new links within Asia, particularly with the emerging tourist market in China. Rising fuel costs will make the Australian and Asian markets more important as flight costs to New Zealand for their citizens will be considerably less than for those in the traditional markets of Europe and the USA.

From a pastoral beginning, through the gold rush and now to Adventure Capital of the World, Queenstown is determined to ensure a wide ranging tourism base. The wonderful setting continues to inspire the less adventurous who come to view, to walk and to enjoy the many good quality restaurants. With its new high quality accommodation and the recent development of an important wine growing area linked to its excellent adventure activity provision, the town is working hard to attract as wide a range of visitors as possible.

Review Question

Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of an economy based on tourism in an area such as Queenstown.

Answer Guidelines

Advantages:

- Income into a relatively isolated area.
- Queenstown can attract people all year round.
- All age groups catered for.
- Secondary spending such as retail and eating out.
- Wider range of jobs offered, rather than just farming and local retail.
- The possibility of training within the industry in Queenstown and gaining an internationally approved qualification.
- International community – cultural exchange.
- May help maintain area if tourism is well organised with a view towards sustainability.
- Foreign exchange into the country.

Disadvantages:

- The range of jobs is dependent on international visitors continuing to come.
- Transient community of people who do not spend much time in the town.
- The possibility of income "leakage" as foreign owned hotels begin to move in to the area.
- Many tourism jobs are part time, can be seasonal and are often paid at the minimum wage level.
- Environmental concerns such as:
 - sewerage system for a fluctuating population
 - the problem of access to ski runs
 - possible problems of wash from boats on the rivers
 - disturbance of wildlife in the mountains.
- The problems of projected air fuel cost rises.

Further Study

- Destination Queenstown - marketing/information: www.queenstown-nz.co.nz
- The Ministry of Tourism for New Zealand: www.tourism.govt.nz
- The site of the first bungy jump company: www.ajhackett.com
- Online encyclopaedia of New Zealand: www.teara.govt.uk

Acknowledgements

This Factsheet was researched by Sally Garrington whose daughter lives in New Zealand. She works at New College Telford. Curriculum Press, Bank House, 105 King Street, Wellington, TF1 1NU. Tel. 01952 271318. Geopress Factsheets may be copied free of charge by teaching staff or students, provided that their school is a registered subscriber. No part of these Factsheets may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any other form or by any other means, without the prior permission of the publisher. ISSN 1351-5136