

The Geological Society

PUBLICATIONS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008 at Burlington House.

**PRESENT:** Dr N. W. Rogers (Chair), Dr N. Macleod, Dr R. A. Strachan, Dr J. P Turner, Dr M. Winter, Ms A. Hills, Mr N. Marriott, Mr E. Nickless.

**Action**

- 1 **Apologies for absence** were received from A. J. Fleet, R. E. Holdsworth, J. Marshall, R. J. Pankhurst and M. Rivett.
- 2 **Minutes of the last meeting** were agreed and signed; the Minutes of the February meeting were also signed.
- 3 **Matters arising from the last meeting. (4)** The Society had commissioned a consultant to report on the Society's marketing and promotional activities. This is expected soon, and one of the items covered will be the sale of publications from Burlington House.
- 4 **Report from the Publishing House.** Paper PMC/08/08 was noted.

Neal Marriott reported that *Petroleum Geoscience* had been launched in GeoScienceWorld on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> October.

Recent communications from Accucoms, who handle the European marketing for the Lyell Collection, suggested that librarians were nervous about their budgets, even those that have already been fixed. However, the rate of subscriptions renewal is ahead of where it was expected to be (perhaps they are spending their money while they have it). It was also noted that many US universities are funded by endowments, and would therefore be affected by the stock market problems.

GSW subscriptions had reached 308 by the end of the second quarter. There are about 100 institutions in developing countries in the Lyell Collection free-access scheme.

The September management accounts were not yet final, but Publishing House sales income was looking somewhat better, partly due to the sale of the PGC5 DVD to PESGB.

Neal Marriott was asked if he thought staffing levels at the Publishing House were sufficient to handle the extra work entailed in the Lyell Collection. He said that the Publishing House production team had been running with all stops pulled for some time, and it is important that new projects can be properly managed alongside existing Special Publication, book and journal commitments without disruption to schedules.

In an ideal world there was probably scope for an extra post to enable the full range of print and electronic projects (including the addition of new content and services to develop the Lyell Collection) to be comfortably handled. However, the 2009 budget was being finalised, and creation of such a post in the current economic circumstances was not possible. Careful attention is being given, though, to how best to handle workloads in the medium term and Neal Marriott will work with staff to make any necessary changes to production procedures.

The impending overview of the Society's marketing activity will also need to be considered in relation to its impact on marketing activities at the Publishing House.

There was a rumour that GSA was thinking of setting up its own citation index, which Neal Marriott will follow up. Other Earth science societies with book series might also be interested in joining (e.g. IAS). If such a project went ahead, they should be encouraged to consider a longer period for the IF as two-years was too short for the geosciences.

NM

Neal reported that he was investigating HighWire's "publish-ahead-of-print" options for the future, a feature said to be popular with authors and readers. This would be a good option for thematic sets and books, where the organised authors would not have to be held up by the slow ones.

5 **NISO standards for manuscript status.** Paper PMC/09/08 was noted.

6 **Online-only journals for Fellows.** Paper PMC/10/08 was noted.

Edmund Nickless said that publishers were able to post announcements in GSW and that the Advisory Council had asked the Board to review its policy regarding advertising. The Society could include announcements or advertising in the Lyell Collection if it wished – the facility was there.

It was suggested that Neal Marriott prepare an article for the January *Geoscientist* about the transition from print to online delivery, explaining the consequential changes and giving comparisons with what other Earth science organisations do.

NM

7 **JGS development.** Paper PMC/119/08 had been circulated.

Rob Strachan, the Chief Editor, was happy with the proposal. He reported that copy flow was healthy and the rejection rate had increased due to editors being firmer with marginal papers. It was not known if the rejection rate was different across different subject areas, but it would be easy to work this out from the individual subject editors' rejection rates. It was known that some rejected papers end up in *Geological Magazine*.

AH/  
RAS

The Journal had increased the geographical coverage of the editorial board by appointing Advisory Editors in China, South Africa and Arabia.

Jim Marshall had commented by e-mail that the editors should ensure that the material appeals to a diverse readership – there is currently is a strong emphasis on tectonics and crustal geology, and very little in soft rock or applied geology. In any given 6 month period it would be good if everyone felt there was at least one review and perhaps one set in an area that was at least partially relevant to them. Rob would ask him for suggestions.

RAS

Development of journals should take place in the context of the Lyell Collection as a whole, and it was concerns over the long-term future of Special Publications that had initiated this exercise.

The PMC recommended approval of the plan to Council.

NWR/  
EN

It was suggested that similar development plans be prepared for all the Society's journals. Mike Winter would start work on a QJEGH review for discussion by PMC in 2009.

NM/  
MW

8 **Key publishing issues: five year view.** Paper PMC/12/08 had been circulated.

*1 Open Access.* This has been a threat on the horizon for some time, but doesn't seem to get any closer. The Society currently has 'green' status with SHERPA, which satisfies most funding bodies. There does not seem to be any enthusiasm from authors, but the definitions are becoming clearer. There is no value in being a leader in the field, but the Society should continue to keep abreast of developments.

*2 Economic downturn.* Events had moved on somewhat since the paper was prepared, and 2b would now be rated '1: very likely, may already be happening in part'.

The Society has five income streams:

Fellowship dues – income currently balance costs; possible cancellations as people feel the economic pinch (though there is also the argument that in difficult times people are more likely to maintain their professional credentials).

Investment income – will certainly drop.

Conferences – number of room bookings might drop and number of delegates attending conferences could drop as employers cut back on non-essential expenditure.

Publishing – books sales are showing a decline. Cuts in university grants and the availability of student loans will have an impact..

Corporate Affiliates – income would drop as a result of mergers and acquisitions.

It would be easy to cut expenditure in areas that don't offer immediate returns, but this could be counter-productive in the long term, especially when the recovery begins.

The marketing of the Lyell Collection is very focused – concentrating on libraries where there is a good chance of making a sale. Moving to a subscription model is good – it means that there is money up front, rather than costs up front in the single title model.

The Publishing House should concentrate on its core strengths in this difficult time, and be more cautious before committing to projects. We should also be prepared to pull the plug on accepted projects that start to look weak for any reason. However, it is important to maintain 20 or more titles per year.

*3 Electronic publishing.* The Publishing House was in a transition period where the costs of both processes must be borne. The PH was keeping abreast of development in print on demand (digital printing), where the quality was improving all the time. It was important to manage the transition to online-only carefully, as we could alienate customers and authors if it moves too quickly. It could be that the decision is made on a book-by-book basis (e.g. history of geology titles might continue to sell in hard copy for much longer than, say, tectonics titles).

It was possible to identify users making an unreasonable number of downloads from the Lyell Collection. HighWire Press suggested that a polite letter usually solves the problem. There are also early plans to implement the Shibboleth access control software that makes it undesirable for people to share their passwords.

It was suggested that these broader issues of online publishing be included in the *Geoscientist* article.

NM

*4 Centralised purchasing.* The Society needs to ensure that it has appropriate mechanisms to deal with this. There can be advantages where some partners would

not consider a subscription on their own: four reduced-price licences could be better than one full-priced one.

Accucoms were experienced in handling such arrangements.

*5 Regional catastrophe.* It was important to consider these scenarios. The Society was formulating a business recovery plan.

9 **Any other business.** There was none.

10 **Date of next meeting** will be Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March in the morning; the annual Publications Reception would be in the evening.