

THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON

EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Minutes of meeting held at Burlington House on Wednesday 27 May 2009 at 2.00pm

Present: Edward Derbyshire (chair), Mary Fowler, Lynne Frostick, Alan Lord, John Ludden, Andrew McMillan, Iain Stewart, Bob White

With: Nic Bilham (Head of Strategy and External Relations) (secretary), Sarah Day (Earth Science Communicator), Joanna Mears (Education and Training Officer), Edmund Nickless (Executive Secretary), Ted Nield (Editor, *Geoscientist*)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Iain Bartholomew, Mike Daly, Kevin Hiscock, Phil Manning, Stuart Monro, Nick Petford and Mike Ridd. Thomas Holmes did not attend.

The Chairman welcomed Alan Lord, Iain Stewart and Joanna Mears to their first ERC meeting. He thanked Ted Nield warmly for his work as secretary to the Committee over many years, and welcomed Nic Bilham to that role.

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

3. MATTERS ARISING

Alan Lord, who was appointed by the Science Committee as their representative on ERC, agreed to act as the link between the two committees, avoiding the need to identify another member of ERC to act as the reciprocal link. The Chairman thanked him on behalf of the Committee.

The Committee noted that all other matters arising from the previous meeting were identified as agenda items.

4. COMMITTEE REPORTS

4.i Report of Education Committee (ERC/01/09)

The Committee noted that complete minutes of the last meeting of Education Committee were not yet available, the meeting having taken place only the previous week. Joanna Mears introduced a summary report of the meeting. The Committee was very pleased to hear about the progress being made with regard to Lifelong Learning.

4.ii Report of Geoconservation Commission (ERC/02/09)

Andrew McMillan introduced his paper.

It was agreed that the staff should look at how reporting of consultation requests between the Society, the Geoconservation Commission and others can be streamlined, given that response deadlines are often tight. Nic Bilham said he would consult with Andrew McMillan in conducting this review.

Actions

NB/SD

The Committee welcomed the fact that the Commission had submitted a report, and agreed that this should be a standing agenda item. It also welcomed the Commission's proposal to prepare a position statement, saying what geoconservation is, why it matters, and what the Commission does. Such a statement might be published in *Geoscientist*, along with any other suitable and interesting material relating to the Commission's activities.

Ted Nield clarified the policy for inclusion of content in the printed Annual Review, noting that much of the material previously included in the Annual Report is now published online only. The policy of not routinely including reports of Commissions and Specialist and Regional Groups in the printed document was supported. The Committee noted that sufficiently interesting and newsworthy activity might be reported in this document, usually having previously been published in *Geoscientist* – the forthcoming position statement might fall into this category.

5. ACTIVITY REPORTS

5.i Report on media activity (ERC/03/09)

Sarah Day introduced her paper.

The Committee discussed the proposal that a list be compiled of Fellows who might be contacted to respond to requests from the media to provide information, be interviewed, etc. The proposal was widely supported, recognising that those on the list should be able, as well as willing, to communicate effectively. Some will perform strongly in all media, while others might be better in one medium rather than another – it might be helpful to identify those who have had some media training, although this should not be a binding criterion. Often, the level of information being sought is fairly basic, particularly when it is needed quickly, and effective communication is more important than a high level of expertise in a particular specialism. In cases where researchers are doing more in-depth background work for a programme or feature, they may want input from one or more experts in specific areas. The aim should be for the list to cater for a range of such contexts.

It was agreed that Sarah should start by identifying the areas of science about which queries are most frequently received. Initially the Committee will try to identify those who might be appropriate to help in each area. If necessary, it would subsequently be possible to cast around more widely, for example by asking particular university departments to identify people – in any case, the list will evolve. SD

5.ii Report on policy issues (ERC/04/09)

Nic Bilham introduced the paper, highlighting the various activities the Society has undertaken with regard to radioactive waste management, which has been well received by CoRWM, NDA, government departments and others. It is striking that the Society has quickly established itself as a significant player in this policy area, and we might take a similar approach to other timely topics. There was brief discussion of ongoing work to provide basic information for the public about radioactive waste management issues.

Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) was identified as an area where the Society might usefully act, following recent changes in government policy, and the ramping up of planned demonstration projects. Nic Bilham said that

an open meeting on CCS, along the lines of the October 2008 meeting on radioactive waste management, might be held towards the end of the year. Again, this would be aimed at a broader audience than just the geological (or even a scientific) community, and would seek to put the basics of the science in the context of the political process. Given the complex regulatory challenges, this might be of interest to some lawyers. Lynne Frostick pointed out the important role Regional Development Agencies may play, and was optimistic that she would be able to get her local one involved. The Science Committee will be kept informed of plans for any such meetings aimed at raising public awareness and bringing in non-geological audiences. They may also wish to consider organising a research meeting relating to CCS.

NB

6. SIR PETER KENT LECTURE (ERC/05/09)

Nic Bilham reported that the annual Sir Peter Kent Lecture, which ran successfully for some time, has not taken place for several years. Initially focused on applied science, it subsequently addressed policy issues.

The Committee agreed that the annual lecture should be revived, starting in November 2009. Coming a month before the Copenhagen summit, it would be timely to address an aspect of climate change. It was agreed that a date should be fixed as soon as possible, and that David King, the recently retired government Chief Scientist should be asked if he would speak – he might speak more freely than anyone currently in office. The Committee was asked to think about who might be invited if King were unavailable. Crispin Tickell and Ron Oxburgh were identified as potential candidates.

NB

NB

7. INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE / IYPE (ERC/06/09)

Nic Bilham introduced the paper, which brings together a number of apparently disparate strands. A unifying theme is that the institutional settings referred to are potential vehicles for international 'big science' programmes, which the ERC has a wish to stimulate. Annexes relating to particular institutions and projects were introduced by their authors.

John Ludden commented that his note (Annex B), written prior to ERC's cancelled February meeting, has been somewhat overtaken by events. He has been asked by a subgroup of IYPE to prepare a paper on the scope to launch a global geoscience initiative as a legacy of the year. He has done this on the basis that IYPE's science programme has not been successful and that IYPE itself should be wrapped up at the end of the triennium. UNESCO has expressed an interest. A planning meeting will be held at Burlington House in July, involving the sub-group of the IYPE Board, along with key representatives from bodies such as EGU, EAGE, etc, to try to give substance to what this initiative might be. Subsequently, a town hall meeting will be held at the GSA Annual Meeting in October, and the hope is to launch a programme in conjunction with UNESCO at EGU in 2010. It is important to involve the environmental sector, and the project might be launched in conjunction with International Polar Year and other similar 'years'. The challenge is to lever money, rather than just moral support, for science – something IYPE did not manage to do. Geoscientists risk missing out on the impact and influence other communities generate through high profile international projects, but there is scope to rectify this. It was noted that although the IYPE's own science programme did not get off the ground, it was instrumental in revitalising IGCP.

The Chairman highlighted a couple of items in his IGCP-UK annual report (Annex A), sent to IUGS and UNESCO. The confusion over annual report deadlines for project leaders is now resolved. He was also pleased to report

that his previous concerns about the possible dismantling of IGCP have proved unfounded, and that the initial response to the new structure has been heartening, with an increased level of applications (as reported in Annex E). He reported on discussions with IGCP about the scope for 'big science' projects within their structure. Their view is that they might accommodate one such project, but they are concerned about resourcing.

The Chairman also told the committee about establishment of the International Research Centre on Karst in China, following successful IGCP projects on various aspects of karst. Discussions are underway in China about setting up a similar institute in some other area of geoscience which has been similarly successful in the IGCP. The fact that such centres attract funding is a particular strength.

Edmund Nickless reinforced the point that IYPE must come to an end, and that there is no appetite to continue it. There is general enthusiasm to see a meaningful legacy, but no clarity on what that might be. The IYPE Board as a whole seems keen to spend significant amounts of money on celebratory events, taking away potential funding from projects involving young people such as the Young Earth Scientists Congress, and from possible international science programmes. He felt that IYPE is not capable of delivering a vibrant science programme, and that the GSL should now end its involvement with IYPE and work instead with other societies in North America and Europe, UNESCO and other science unions, to establish what interest there is in an international science programme. This process would start with a conversation among scientists, followed by discussions with possible national and international funding agencies.

The committee endorsed this approach, on the understanding that GSL would not formally pull out of IYPE, at least before planned activities wrap up in mid-2010. It was felt to be important that the Society's activities with regard to national science programmes, primarily overseen by the Science Committee, are integrated with those concerning international programmes, which hitherto have been the responsibility of the ERC. It was therefore agreed to ask the Science Committee to consider what themes would be most usefully addressed through an international science programme (recognising that these discussions can only shape the UK's input) as a matter of urgency, given the tight timetable (initial discussion in July, further development at GSA in October, discussions with funders over the following few months, and a possible programme launch at EGU in 2010). ERC will retain an interest, and is keen to work closely with Science Committee. It was agreed that in the short term, the Chairman should communicate directly with Philip Allen, as incoming Science Secretary, possibly in the margins of President's Day on 3 June. John Ludden said he would be happy to speak to Philip if he wants more background.

ED/NB

Possible themes identified in discussion were: deltas (a large multidisciplinary project is already being developed by USGS); seismology (there is an existing international 'programme', in which the UK is active, but some questioned whether there was much genuinely new ground to be broken); and the global mapping of (sub-surface) water (this could be attractive to UNESCO, for whom Africa is a priority, but some of the committee felt that politics rather than lack of physical supply is at the root of water availability in developing countries).

A possible concern on the part of UNESCO is that money generated for a new programme might be absorbed by big rich countries - its focus is on education and knowledge transfer, consistent with IGCP's concern to engage developing countries. It was noted that these nations, along with rapidly

industrialising countries such as China, see UNESCO as a valuable window on the world, and are likely to embrace well targeted programmes. UNESCO sees IGCP as being somewhat ad hoc – effectively just a collection of (fairly modest) projects.

John Ludden mentioned a NERC-sponsored forward look at geoscience planned for later in the year, facilitated by GSL, focusing on the younger generation of Earth scientists. In time, this process might provide input to the UK agenda for such international programmes.

Edmund Nickless updated the Committee on how the YES Congress is progressing. The challenge is to build the group of young geoscientists and policy makers attending from nations other than China. It is expected that a further similar meeting will be held at IGC34 in Brisbane in 2012.

The Committee noted the invitation from the Spanish IGCP National Committee regarding a meeting in September 2010. It was agreed to defer substantive discussion – for now, Nic Bilham will act as contact point.

NB

8. GSL RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER BODIES (ERC/07/09)

Nic Bilham introduced a paper setting out some key relationships with other organisations (not intended to be exhaustive), and some thoughts about the basis on which new relationships should be established and existing ones developed. He asked the Committee to think about the particular role of the ERC in building strategic relationships, given that the other committees manage relationships with other organisations in their own areas of responsibility. Edmund Nickless asked the Committee to focus on what the priorities should be. Some relationships will largely look after themselves, for example those relating to publishing where there is a joint commercial interest, but new collaborative work will place demand on limited resources.

The Committee recognised the need to prioritise. While collaboration with others has often been somewhat ad hoc in the past, this should now be driven by our strategy. This could mean re-examining the case for some existing relationships. The Committee felt it would be useful to see the list of relationships mapped against the strategy, to see which strategic objectives they address. Important relationships missing from the current version will be added, along with bodies with whom there is scope to do more (e.g. AGU). This document will also suggest lead committee responsibilities. ERC cannot (and should not) manage all relationships with other organisations, but has an important coordinating role.

NB

A major question currently facing the Society is how broad its scope should be – for example, how much of the environmental community it should seek to cater for. It is recognised that we have sometimes lost out in the past, for example over climate change, because of an overly narrow view of what constitutes geoscience. About 60% of Fellows work on broadly environmental issues, but their needs are not as well served as those of other Fellows. We should not engage in turf battles, but must recognise that we face competition – for example, from the RGS on environmental science, and from CIWEM in terms of professional needs – and this should be a factor in determining how we try to work with others. Lynne Frostick reminded the Committee of the importance of the Joint Associations, such as the British Society for Geomorphology, which is sponsored jointly by GSL and RGS.

There has been a tendency for geoscientists to limit themselves to involvement in the science, and to shy away from directly addressing social and policy issues. At the same time, the growing scope of Earth sciences,

and the need to attract the interest of students and others, potentially jeopardises the health of core disciplines. It is therefore essential that we take an active role in policy issues, and communicate more effectively the vital role of core geoscience skills in addressing them. The Committee recognised the rapid progress made since Council endorsed this new approach, and that fears of negative reactions from Fellows so far appear unfounded.

It was noted that EGU has been successful in attracting atmospheric scientists, etc, but not geologists (especially those from the UK), so geology is losing visibility in this broader community. The Science Committee is charged by Council to look at whether GSL can sponsor a symposium at EGU. It was suggested that they might discuss with the French and German geological societies doing so jointly – this will be raised with Philip Allen.

ED/NB

9. COUNCIL BUSINESS

9.i Honorary Fellowship (ERC/08/09)

The Chairman reported that Council agreed in January to change the procedure for nomination and election of Honorary Fellows, but that this has not yet been implemented. The suggestion that Carmen Virgili be nominated was therefore brought to ERC initially, in line with existing procedures.

The Committee considered a proposed process for nominating and electing Honorary Fellows, fleshing out the broad principles agreed by Council. This process is more transparent and less cumbersome than the existing one, and brings practice into line with the regulations. It was agreed that the Awards Committee should be charged with generating and fielding nominations, rather than set up a new Presidential Committee.

There was discussion of whether it is preferable for the Fellowship to have the opportunity to comment on nominations after Council has approved them for election (as at present), or before they are considered by Council (as proposed). It was agreed to try the proposed procedure for the time being. It was agreed that the question of when to notify potential Honorary Fellows that they have been nominated needs careful thought, particularly given that we now hope they will take on an ambassadorial role, and that nominees should be given the opportunity to decline the offer of Honorary Fellowship without embarrassment to themselves or to the Society.

EN/NB

The ERC will retain a strategic interest in Honorary Fellowship, and may wish to put forward names. It was therefore agreed that this should be an agenda item at least once a year, and that discussion of what we might ask recently elected Honorary Fellows to do for the Society should be remitted to a later meeting. The Committee was asked to give this thought, recognising that appropriate roles will vary between individuals.

It was agreed that the proposal that Carmen Virgili be considered for Honorary Fellowship should go to the Awards Committee initially, and that if it was agreed that a formal nomination proceed, this should be handled under the new procedure.

9.ii Regional Groups governance (ERC/09/09)

Nic Bilham introduced the Regional Groups governance report, which has been approved by Professional Committee and Science Committee. He outlined how Fellows are allocated to Regional Groups, and the mechanisms available for Groups to communicate with their members. The Committee felt that effective communication by the Groups should be strongly

	encouraged, and noted that the wish to do this and to spread best practice among the Groups was an important driver of the review.	
	The Committee wholeheartedly endorsed the report, and Nic Bilham agreed to convey their thanks to Martin Culshaw and the rest of the working group for doing an excellent job.	NB
9.iii	Influence and policy engagement in Europe (ERC/10/09)	
	Nic Bilham reported that Council had asked ERC to consider this issue. He encouraged the Committee to think about how GSL relationships in Europe should be shaped by the longer term wish to build policy influence at that level. It was agreed that the mapping exercise outlined at item 8 should include current and potential policy related activity in Europe, and that this should inform substantive discussion of this issue at a later meeting.	NB
	John Ludden reported that European national geological surveys cooperate on lobbying and other activities at this level, and that it is hoped to formalise this arrangement through formation of a European geological survey.	
9.iv	Presence in emerging markets and communities (ERC/11/09)	
	Again, this is a potentially major long term issue which Council has asked ERC to consider initially. Historically there has been enthusiasm to 'do something', but no clarity about what this should be. Council has agreed that developing a clear rationale for engaging in particular communities and markets, such as India, China and Eastern Europe, is a necessary pre-condition for developing particular proposals.	
	It was agreed that this should be a major agenda item at the next meeting.	NB
10.	ERC WORK PLAN	
	It was agreed that Nic Bilham should draw up a draft ERC work plan for the coming year, for consideration at the next meeting, recognising that resources (including staff and committee time) are limited. This will be reviewed at each subsequent meeting during the session.	NB
	To allow sufficient time for substantive discussion of one or two strategic issues at each ERC meeting, it was agreed that routine reports and as many other papers as possible should be taken as read, as happens at Council.	
11.	ANY OTHER BUSINESS	
	Iain Stewart asked whether there is any formal GSL connection with the UNESCO Earth Science Education in Africa initiative. The Chairman said that while there is no formal link, he is an <i>ex-officio</i> member of the Natural Sciences Committee of the UK National Commission for UNESCO, and therefore receives information on such projects. It was suggested that this might be brought to the attention of the Education Committee.	NB/JM/ED
12.	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
	Dates for the coming session will be circulated shortly. It was agreed to look again at the start time for ERC meetings - this might revert to 1.30pm, with a view to finishing before 4pm.	