

THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY of LONDON

EXTERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF MEETING #38

BURLINGTON HOUSE 23 OCTOBER 2008

Apologies

Mary FOWLER; Lynn FROSTICK (LF); Iain STEWART (IS); Kevin HISCOCK;
Iain BARTHOLOMEW; Dave SANDERSON; Bob WHITE; Mike DALY;
Edward DERBYSHIRE (ED - Chair); Edmund NICKLESS; Judi LAKIN.

Present

Nick PETFORD (NP, Acting Chair); Andrew MacMILLAN (AM); John
LUDDEN (JL); Ted NIELD (TN Secretary); Sarah DAY (SD)

Meeting commenced 1300hrs.

1. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed without alteration. TN noted two outstanding actions on himself and EN. These would be completed as time permitted. JL observed that he had promised LF that he would convene a high-level executive meeting and reported that these arrangements were in progress.

2. Chairman's Report

In ED's absence, TN reported that Iain Stewart, Professor of Geoscience Communication at Plymouth University, had joined the ERC. ERC also noted that this would have been DS's last meeting as he had now been succeeded by Dr Stuart Monro. ERC welcomed Dr Monro's appointment.

Alan Lord (Science Committee) has expressed a desire to act as observer at future ERC meetings, and Tony Watts has approved. ERC approved this action. His first meeting will be on 5 February 2009.

Reciprocally, ERC should now nominate an observer to attend meetings of the Science Committee. ERC declined to do this at this meeting as only three members were present and none volunteered. TN said he would canvass the ERC membership by email **Action TN**

3. Honorary Fellowship

TN presented his paper, circulated to ERC a week earlier. One comment had been received, from Mike Daly, approving the paper.

JL said that he felt that in addition to removing the artificial limit of 100 the overseas requirement ought also to be dropped. While he felt that it was important for the Society to have overseas connections that had the potential to be useful, he felt it was unlikely that overseas Honorary Fellows could be expected to do very much. UK Hon Fells could be “leaned on” to greater effect. Also, it should be made explicit that recipients need not be scientists at all.

AM said that he felt the Presidential Committee proposed in the paper should be able to operate within permissive guidelines and not straitjacketed by too many conditions – he supported JL’s point. He also thought the numerical limit should be removed, as long as this did not lead to a financially damaging rush of promotions!. TN assured him that the paper’s suggestion to remove the cap stemmed from the belief that 100 people of the quality required to be Hon Fells probably did not exist in the world.

All agreed with the need to increase geographical spread among the “overseas” honorary fellows as opposed to “domestic” - a distinction suggested by JL but on reflection downgraded to an “internal” designation only, which might be useful for the guidance of the secretariat. JL said he felt that the need for overseas Hon Fells to be generalists (industrialists, politicians, media folk etc) and not restricted to academics, was even more important.

The idea that the Fellowship Department should maintain closer links with Hon Fells, through a Presidential letter or six-monthly newsletter specifically tailored for Hon Fells, drew wide support.

The Committee **agreed** with TN’s suggestion that he now prepare a shorter paper for Council, outlining the policy (amended in the light of discussion above), which should then go to Council with ERC’s endorsement.

Action TN

4. Council Strategy - Sarah Day progress report

The paper outlined the progress to date made by SD in making contacts within and outside the Society, establishing working links with the Publishing House, and listing the Government responses, press releases and press conferences she had organised during the past month and a half. Media coverage had already begun to accrue, and she referred the members to that evening’s *Leading Edge* programme (BBC R4), which would include a report of

the recent conference on sub-surface sediment mobilisation, and specifically its session on the LUSI mud volcano, Indonesia.

SD also said that, having interviewed a few scientists over the recent weeks, she would like to explore the possibility of compiling a monthly Society podcast, covering issues in the news at the Society, and trailing forthcoming conferences using interviews with scientists. These podcasts could also be archived in the Education/Careers area, as they would provide useful insights into the sorts of jobs geologists do, and would portray them in a favourable light – so they would have a legacy use as well.

The Committee was taken with this idea – particularly because it had the potential to reach a different and younger demographic than our traditional avenues of communication, and urged SD to pursue it with their blessing.

5. International matters

The Committee noted ED's written reports.

Under 7a, ED reported that he had received an email from Iain Stewart outlining details of an informal meeting of IGCP representatives held at UNESCO at the end of September. The subject of the meeting was the execution of the science programmes in the biennium 2008-2009. As such, the addressees were (i) the UNESCO officials involved in the IGCP, (ii) the members of the IUGS Executive Committee, (iii) the members of the IGCP Scientific Board, and (iv) Sospeter Muhongo - former Chair of the IGCP Scientific Board (and now chief of ICSU's South African office).

It appeared that UNESCO was poised to change its overall attitude toward its science programme. Henceforth, all UNESCO activities would adhere to a series of guidelines outlined by an *ad-hoc* review committee. Most guidelines were very similar to those that recently inspired the reform of the IGCP. However, UNESCO's Deputy Director-General Marcio Barbosa had hinted at the closure within a few years of several smaller scale UNESCO activities, *particularly those not focused on specific issues*.

Considering what happened to the IGCP a few years ago (in the form of an independent review, it may be that the IGCP will again be considered for termination, in spite of the efforts we (led by the ERC Chair) made to revive it.

The major emphasis in the proposed lines of research for the 2010-2011 science budget - as outlined by UNESCO Bureau of Strategic Planning - will be "Earth System Science for sustainability and disaster preparedness". ED said that this provided ample room for Earth science, but it cautioned that strategic areas of our expertise (earthquake, tsunamis, landslides) have been

appropriated progressively by other divisions of UNESCO or were being pursued mainly by programmes other than the IGCP (e.g. water).

In conclusion ED wrote that IS would keep ERC up to date as this process unfolds.

JL said this report underlined the need for IGCP resources to be focused along strategically important lines as soon as possible, concentrating on big themes with obvious societal relevance. His suggestion was a series of research projects centring on the geological problems of land use in deltaic regions, especially cities. AM agreed and said that a similar project might centre on the co-location of major population centres with earthquake zones – such as Tehran.

6. AOB

The Committee noted that there was confusion over the DONM, variously reported as 3 and 5 February. TN said he would check and clarify by email. This is now done. DONM is fixed for **February 5**.

AM noted that the meeting was thinly attended and drew a parallel with the Conservation Commission, which struggled to convene a reasonable number of its representatives in one place. GCC was therefore considering alternative modes of operation – including using telcons at BH, videoconferencing facilities elsewhere, or combining their meetings with an attractive and useful event to act as a double incentive to travel. He also reported that the newsletter *Earth Heritage* was facing an uncertain future because its costs had risen to a level that was threatening its sustainability. The editors and owners were considering other mechanisms of delivery – possibly web delivery – for the future.

TN introduced a paper from the Education Committee, tabled by Judi Lakin. ERC was asked to **read the paper** and report their reactions to the proposals it contained within the next two weeks. The proposals were, in short, that the UK should participate in the forthcoming International Earth Science Olympiad (IESO) by supporting a UK team in Taiwan. TN explained that the IESO had originated in South Korea, where a national ESO had a long and successful history. This had been expanded to ASEAN nations of late and the organisers had offered to make it global as their contribution to IYPE.

TN, though the Chair, asked ERC to consider the proposal, which had received the backing of the Education Committee, in the light of likely costs – particularly at a time when investment income of the Society was falling. The costs of supporting a UK team in the far east did not currently figure in a budget that was already being cut. The question of obtaining potential commercial sponsorship at a time of credit squeeze was also thorny.

Action - All

7. DONM

5 February 2009, Burlington House, 1300.

There being no further business the meeting was closed at 1435.

ENDS