

THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Minutes of meeting held at Burlington House on 3 June 2008 at 2pm

Present: George Tuckwell (Chair), Andy Fleet, Mick Lee, Alan Roberts, Helen Scholes

With: Nic Bilham (Data Manager), Wendy Cawthorne (Assistant Librarian), Edmund Nickless (Executive Secretary)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Alex Carbray, Nigel Lees, Nick Rogers, Tom Sharpe (Deputy Chair), Peter Wigley and Sheila Meredith. Dorothy Payne (corresponding member) was also unable to attend.

2. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising besides those to be addressed as agenda items.

3. REPORT OF THE LIBRARY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (IMC/06/08)

The Committee noted the minutes of the Library Advisory Committee meeting held on 13 March, and the Chief Librarian's covering note. The Assistant Librarian reported that the current number of Fellows registered for remote online access to journals through the library's subscriptions was 197, and that these include a number of Fellows who are not regular library users. The Committee noted that it will not be trivial to add to the list of journals available in this way, as it takes a considerable time to reach an agreement with each publisher. It was reported that this new service has been publicised to Fellows via the website homepage, the email newsletter and *Geoscientist*. The cost to the Society of the licence to provide remote access was thought to be around 12% of the standard journal costs, in the case of Elsevier. The Executive Secretary estimated that the total amount the Society pays annually to Elsevier is around £60k.

It was agreed that this service should be promoted as a key element of the Lyell Centre, and the Committee noted the need for improved promotional literature for library products and services. There was discussion of setting a target figure for the number of users in, say, three years time. It was agreed that this should be thought about in the broader context of performance evaluation across the Society, in the context of the need to report on progress against the business plan, and that any such target should be based on what we already know about Fellows' existing onsite use of these journals (both on paper and electronically). It was observed that the setting of numerical targets can distort priorities, and that an alternative might be to set out a series of actions to grow and promote this service, with no defined target number of users. It was agreed that this issue should be considered by the staff, in light of any guidance from Council on performance evaluation more generally.

4. ARCHIVIST POST (IMC/07/08)

The Committee considered a paper from the Chief Librarian, setting out current archive priorities and projects, and proposing that a member of staff

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be recruited to oversee the archives and modern records, initially on a full time one year fixed term contract. The Committee recognised that the Assistant Librarian has been devoting considerable effort to keeping archive services running in the absence of a dedicated archivist.

The Committee felt that what was set out was sensible, but questioned whether it would be possible to attract candidates of appropriate calibre and experience to a one year post. It was agreed instead that a two year fixed term appointment be made, if possible, bearing in mind the Chief Librarian's caveat at the previous meeting that archivists qualified in handling modern records have been in short supply since the Freedom of Information Act was passed. Assuming it is possible to fill the post, the need will be reviewed after 18 months, prior to deciding what to do at the end of the contract period. It was noted that the archivist post has previously been part time, and that this has caused difficulties. It was agreed that it be recommended to Management and Finance Committee at their forthcoming meeting on 5 June that the post be made full time for two years, recognising the additional salary cost. There was some discussion of the detail of the proposed work programme for the archivist, and of the possibility of allowing flexible working hours. The Committee noted that it would be necessary to purchase a new cataloguing system for archives and modern records, but that the package identified as most suitable is modestly priced.

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5. BUSINESS PLAN 2008-2010 (IMC/08/08)

The Data Manager reported that since the last IMC meeting, the business plan had been finalised and agreed by Council at its March meeting. He explained the form and content of the plan, and drew the Committee's attention to those business plan items for which it has some responsibility, or in which it otherwise has an interest. He also reported that a Development and Fundraising Committee has been established, and will be seeking to raise sponsorship for projects such as development of the Lyell Centre and new online educational content, among other things.

It was noted that the two main items falling to the IMC constitute separate agenda items. In the context of possible future online educational modules, the Data Manager reminded the Committee that the Rock Cycle module, aimed primarily at a Key Stage 3 audience, had launched since the previous meeting. Those who had looked at it thought it was excellent. The Committee was supportive of plans to do further similar work, and thought this likely to be attractive to potential sponsors.

The Executive Secretary reported that agreements with the Yorkshire and Scottish societies to bring their content into the Lyell Collection were close to being finalised, and that we are on schedule to launch the Transactions and GEEA in September. He also reported that the Shell Lectures are webcast within five working days of each event (this will be done within three working days from 2009), and that the way in which we do this has been very well received. This will now be done also for (free) Society flagship events, such as President's Day. Content from the Bicentennial Conference will be progressively added. There was discussion of the possibility of making some audio-visual content available to Fellows only, or charging for access to content.

The Committee discussed the review currently underway to investigate the possibility of allowing remote real time participation in conferences. Helen Scholes said that the ICE have such a facility in place, and that she would provide the name of a contact there who might be willing to talk about their experiences.

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6. DEVELOPMENT OF THE LYELL COLLECTION AND CENTRE
(IMC/09/08)

The Data Manager reported that the Lyell Collection development and marketing plan is well advanced with respect to GSL owned and published content. Estimated subscription levels over the planning period are intentionally conservative. Further work will be done to assess whether content from other publishers (e.g. other regional UK societies) might be suitable for inclusion in future. The Executive Secretary confirmed that the prices of the various subscription packages will be kept under review as further content is added and the market develops – considerable sensitivity will be required, and the Society does not wish to be seen to be behaving in the same way as some commercial publishers.

Regarding the Lyell Centre, the Committee agreed that the Data Manager should draw up a costed development plan, in discussion with the Chief Librarian. The Data Manager pointed out that costing some of the projects under consideration is not as straightforward as is the case for adding content to the Lyell Collection, where the pricing structure is known and understood.

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It was suggested that the Millennium Atlas could be put online straight away, as the Geological Society is thought to have the residual publishing rights. It was agreed that this should be added to the Lyell Centre (rather than the Lyell Collection), once it is confirmed that we have the right to do this, and assuming there are no technical impediments.

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In general, it was agreed that proposed developments to the Lyell Centre be assessed against several criteria, including cost, ease, usefulness, the possibility of generating income, and the delivery of public benefit. Dependencies should be identified, particularly with regard to working with third parties. The plan should prioritise possible development projects against these criteria. The main determinant of whether the more significant high priority developments can then go ahead is likely to be whether sponsorship can be raised, although some smaller items (such as putting online the Millennium Atlas) depend mainly on staff time and possibly increased hosting and maintenance costs, and may be achievable without external funding. The development plan will identify such items.

The Committee discussed the proposal to geo-tag the papers in the Lyell Collection with latitudes and longitudes, so that they could then be searched and displayed via the Lyell Centre GIS, in a similar way to that in which it currently searches and displays the library map catalogue and index data. The Committee felt that some users would find this development very useful and attractive, and the Executive Secretary reported that BP had expressed an interest in it, particularly as they would like to develop a similar system to allow them to search sets of their own documents. However, the number of users who would really value this development could be too small to justify its cost, which would probably be in six figures, and the Committee requested that further work be done to try to assess the extent to which this would deliver real benefit to users. Several members of the committee commented that there is a trend towards making more data available in this way. Mick Lee reported that similar developments are underway at BGS, and it was agreed that they should be consulted before the Society makes any decisions. It was suggested that we might start to geo-tag our own publications independently of GeoRef, which has historically done this, if suitable mechanisms and formats could be agreed, and the Executive Secretary said he would discuss this with the Director of Publishing.

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Some thought that a higher priority should be to start to deliver map data (rather than just catalogue and index data) through the GIS. This could be done in one of two ways. We could selectively scan our own library map holdings, and serve up image data, but this would be expensive and time consuming, and the content we could make available would be constrained by copyright considerations. Alternatively, and probably more realistically and usefully, we could work with third party data providers such as the BGS and USGS to make available some of their data via the GIS, if such organisations were willing to work with us in this way, recognising that there would still be considerable cost to the Society. Increasingly the primary form of map production is vectorised data, and these are likely to be much more useful to end users than scanned images. Mick Lee pointed out that it would be sensible to investigate whether there is potential to use the 1:1,000,000 data being made available via the BGS-led One Geology portal in this context, and recommended that we look in particular at the Google Earth type interfaces which BGS is working with. It was agreed that the Society should initiate discussions with BGS regarding their plans, what data might be made available, and possible licensing arrangements. It was reported that Richard Hughes of BGS has agreed to join IMC, making him an ideal person to approach initially. There was discussion of whether the Society should sell (or supply under licence) others' data, or simply aim to be the first port of call for those seeking such data, directing them on to the appropriate source. In considering this question, we should consider the additional value which might derive from being able to view through the same interface data aggregated from more than one source, as well as strategic and commercial factors. It was noted that there are several possible models for 'delivering' third party data, and the Committee agreed that we should not rule out any, initially.

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The Executive Secretary invited the Committee to identify any additions to the list of possible projects set out in the paper. Mick Lee suggested photographic collections. It was reported that the Society has archival images, but does not have a geological photographic collection besides the existing online photo library. The Data Manager pointed out that a limited number of archival images were made available on the old website, but have not yet been transferred to the new one. This will be done in due course, and the new archivist may wish to make more images available in this way. The Committee agreed to send any further suggestions to the Data Manager, who reported that all review groups would have to report to him by mid-August, prior to preparation of papers for the September meeting of Council.

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7. CRITERIA FOR EXTERNAL RESOURCES INCLUDED IN THE LYELL CENTRE (IMC/10/08)

The Committee considered the wording suggested by the Data Manager in his paper. This was agreed, with some minor modifications:

- Amend the last sentence of the preamble to the bullet points to make clear that it refers to links to third party resources, not to resources hosted by the Society, and to reserve the right to consider other factors, so that it reads: 'In assessing whether links to third party resources should be included in the Lyell Centre, the Society's staff and Information Management Committee consider a number of factors, including the following:'
- Add a bullet point indicating that the management of these links must be practical and affordable, and another stipulating that linked resources must meet reasonable standards of functionality and presentation

The intention at the previous meeting had been to draft a set of criteria which would not be published – rather, in the event that the Society turned down a request to include a third party resource in the Lyell Centre, and that this decision was challenged, it would be possible to provide a statement setting out our policy. However, the Committee agreed instead that the criteria should in fact be published alongside the list of external resources. This will indicate that the Society welcomes suggestions of suitable third party resources, without significant risk of an unmanageable number of submissions. It will also make clear the difference between this (quality controlled) set of links, and links pages of the kind found on most sites.

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There was discussion of the way in which content is organised within the Lyell Centre, and how future content (including links to third parties) should be organised. It was noted that all book and journal content sits within the Lyell Collection, which is a constituent part of the Lyell Centre – albeit a dominant one which also has an identity of its own. The other data sets currently within the Lyell Centre are the library catalogue and Map GIS. Any books and journals added to our online resources in future, whether initially published by the Geological Society or by others, will be added to the Lyell Collection. Other significant tranches of content, for example archive material such as the Murchison notebooks and correspondence, could be designated as other defined ‘collections’, should this be thought appropriate. It was agreed that the set of links to third party resources within the Lyell Centre should not be designated a ‘collection’. It was noted that there are links to external sites and resources from other parts of the Society’s website – this was not considered problematic, particularly given that displaying the criteria for including links to third party resources in the Lyell Centre will indicate their special status.

8. HORIZON SCANNING: PROJECTS PLANNED BY OTHER ORGANISATIONS (IMC/11/08)

The Data Manager reported that Derek Siveter had approached the Society to ask that we provide a link to a collection of early geological literature which has been scanned for inclusion in the Oxford Digital Library. This project has not featured in the Committee’s horizon scanning discussions, but the Executive Secretary said that it is suitable for linking from the Lyell Centre, under the newly agreed criteria, and this was agreed.

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It was also reported that the Virtual Seismic Atlas had launched. Alan Roberts said that it was an excellent and extensive resource, and it was agreed that a link to it should be included in the Lyell Centre. The Committee noted that the Geological Society is credited as a partner in the project, on the strength of our providing permission to use a number of images on the site. The Data Manager agreed to let Alan Roberts know when the Virtual Seismic Atlas is listed in the Lyell Centre, so that he can inform Rob Butler.

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Regarding the Encyclopedia of Life, the Committee agreed that it is of very high quality, and is extensive, but felt that its focus is not sufficiently geological to justify linking to it from the Lyell Centre. It was agreed that the Committee should continue to monitor its progress in its horizon scanning discussions.

The One Geology project does not yet provide access to many data. The Committee agreed that the Lyell Centre should link to it once there is sufficient content there.

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It was noted that DEAL is now a subscription-only site, a change imposed by UKOOA, which is no longer willing to support its costs. As a result, there are few data available free of charge, and with regret the Committee did not think it an appropriate resource to which to link.

Helen Scholes reported that Rory Mortimore's project had stalled somewhat, and changed direction. The Committee agreed to keep a watching brief on the project.

It was also agreed that the Lyell Centre should link to the main BGS geoscience data page, and to pages on the NASA and USGS websites through which their public access data can be accessed. It was suggested that the Data Manager also look at whether any suitable resources are available from the JNCC, and from the European and North American seismological data providers (recognising that the USGS may be the best global source). The Data Manager pointed out that further staff time could be put into a more comprehensive search for data resources suitable for inclusion, and that the costs of this should be recognised, although they would be modest. Such activity might therefore be identified as an attractive early win in the Lyell Centre development plan, and should be included in the list of suggested projects. It was agreed that the list of links should not be allowed to grow too long, and that it would be preferable to add to it slowly in order that its character not change unintentionally. Particular thought will have to be given to weighing the relative legitimacy of including resources and projects which differ greatly in scale.

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The Committee felt that while we would expect reciprocal links in some other contexts, for example in the case of links to other key geoscience bodies from the Society's homepage, we should not ask those whose resources we link to from the Lyell Centre to reciprocate, as our purpose is to identify the best resources which meet our criteria, irrespective of whether the organisations or individuals responsible for them also publicise the Society's data resources.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Data Manager reiterated that Richard Hughes had agreed to join the Committee, and reported that he had also asked Will Watts to join. Will works for the Scarborough Museums Trust, and was one of the main coordinators of the Rotunda project. He is also on the Council of the Yorkshire Geological Society. It was agreed that membership of the Committee more generally should be discussed at the next meeting, recognising that there has been no turnover since the Committee was established two and a half years ago, and that some thought should be given to succession planning and the range of members' expertise and experience.

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10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Data Manager reported that dates had not been fixed for the forthcoming session, and said he would agree these with the Chairman. Subsequently, meetings were scheduled for Wednesday 22 October at 10.30am, Monday 16 February at 2.00pm and Tuesday 19 May at 2.00pm.