

# The Earth Science Education Forum (England and Wales)

## Minutes of the twenty-sixth meeting

Held at the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining, 1 Carlton House Terrace, London, at 1.30 p.m. on Monday 10 December 2007.

**Present:** Allan Rogers, Chairman  
Chris King, Co-Chairman (and Earth Science Education Unit)  
David Bailey, Secretary (British Geological Survey)  
Cally Oldershaw, ESEF(EW) Executive Officer (Association for Science Education)  
Martyn Bradley (Geology Trusts and UKRIGS)  
Susan Brown (Geologists' Association and Rockwatch)  
Chris Carlon (Anglo American)  
Derren Cresswell (Mineral Industries Research Organisation)  
Peter Jones (UKRIGS and University of Derby)  
Andy Lee (Natural History Museum)  
Judith Mansell (Royal Geographical Society with Institute of British Geographers)  
Ian Mercer (Gemmological Association)  
Colin Osborne (Royal Society of Chemistry)  
Andy Rankin (Committee of the Heads of University Geoscience Departments)  
Peter Warren  
Toby White (Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining)  
Sarah Whittle (Natural History Museum)  
Dawn Windley (Earth Science Teachers' Association)

### 1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from representatives of the following organisations: the Geographical Association; Geological Society of London; the Institute of Physics; the Learning, Teaching and Skills Network – Geography Environmental and Earth Sciences; the National Stone Centre; STEMNET.

### 2 Chairman's introduction

Chairman welcomed everyone. He reminded members that the meeting would be followed by the Christmas meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Earth Science at which Chris Carlon would speak on 'Minerals Geoscience — Myths and Reality'. He intended to discuss the future and funding of the Forum under a later Agenda Item.

### 3 Minutes of the twenty-fifth meeting, 19 June 2007

The minutes of the twenty-fifth meeting with minor amendments were accepted as a true record. D Bailey to upload a copy to the ESEF(EW) website. **Action: D Bailey**

### 4 Matters arising

*[Numbers in square brackets are paragraph numbers from the minutes of the previous meeting.]*

- 4.1 [4.3] *International Polar Year*: The All-Party Parliamentary Earth Sciences Group (APESG) meeting had taken place.
- 4.2 [4.4] *Geological Society 'first destinations' survey*: CK reported that the Geological Society had now carried out a 'first destinations' survey but that the results had yet to be fully interpreted and published. Initial indications were that there were about 1000 new graduates in geological subjects each year and about one-third of all students (graduates and post-graduates) go on to follow geological careers at the end of their education. However, interpreting the data was not simple, partly because the data were collected in January when many students were still unclear about what they would be doing when they left university. Also it is hard to define an 'earth

science' degree. Higher education institutes offer up to 300 degrees which include an earth science component, but this can be combined with an unlikely subject. Schlumberger need 900 graduate employees this year globally. There is a shortage of experienced geologists.

- 4.3 C Carlon recommended a recent paper by Steve Roberts (Southampton University) on this subject. He would send an electronic copy to D Bailey for dissemination to Forum members.

**Action: C Carlon/D Bailey**

- 4.4 A Rankin said that about 20% of earth science graduates would go on to study for a post-graduate qualification.

- 4.5 Chairman said that he would speak to the officers of the Houses of Parliament about the possibility of holding a follow-up conference to that held in 2004. D Bailey mentioned that GEES would be holding a conference on 'Employability and Employer Engagement in the GEES Disciplines' in July.

**Action: Chairman**

- 4.6 [4.9] *Rockwatch book*: S Brown reported that one response to the request for contributions had been received from Forum members. Generally the response had been good.

- 4.7 [5] *WJEC GCSE Geology — proposed withdrawal*: C King reported that WJEC will continue to run the Geology GCSE. The specification will be changed and there is a short deadline to accomplish this. The existing specification will run until 2010 when the new one will come into force. There is no commitment to offer the GCSE for a specified period, but it is hoped it will continue indefinitely. For the first time in any subject, WJEC will pilot electronic assessment for one of the papers. Chairman expressed satisfaction that this matter had been resolved and said the Forum should seek ways to stimulate a potential market for the GCSE.

- 4.8 [5.11] *Conference Study Group*: P Warren said that he had not yet attempted to define the remit for the Study Group. It was necessary first to establish what questions the Forum wished to address.

- 4.9 [12.2] *International Year of Planet Earth*: C King reported that the formal launch of IYPE would be held at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris in February. It appeared there would be no central funding for projects in the UK. C Oldershaw reminded the Chairman that there was an action to ask the Chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group to hold an event to celebrate IYPE on Tuesday 11 March. Chairman said that he would take this forward and seek sponsorship from industry.

**Action: Chairman**

- 4.10 A Rankin noted that Bristol University, with backing from the Geologists' Association and funding from Shell had made available five excellent talks on earth science subjects for use in schools. The talks can be downloaded from [www.earth4567.com](http://www.earth4567.com).

## **5 Threat to funding for University Adult 'Open Studies'**

- 5.1 M Bradley explained that university extramural studies provided evening classes, helped recruit people into geoconservation and helped train science teachers who need to teach so earth science under the National Curriculum (e.g. physics and chemistry teachers). The Minister (John Denham) had written to universities indicating that funding for adult education classes would only be available for students who did not already have a qualification equivalent to that offered by the class. This could mean the end for extramural studies in universities. A consultation had been promised on 1 December but nothing had been seen yet.

- 5.2 A Rankin said that individual Vice-Chancellors could choose to cross-subsidise adult education classes if they wished, using other funding streams. I Mercer said that the Birkbeck College alumni website would be a useful source of information. Many Birkbeck students would be affected as they already had a degree.

- 5.3 Chairman asked whether the universities would take a lead in responding. M Bradley said that the Vice-Chancellor at Warwick University had been lobbying. Chairman said he would like to meet with the Minister if it could be arranged and asked M Bradley to forward a copy of the letter. Other Forum members could lobby on behalf of their organisations if they wished.

**Action: Chairman**

## **6 Finance report**

- 6.1 Chairman suggested that this would be a suitable Agenda Item to discuss the Forum's funding. He noted that SESEF receives grants and is able to fund staff. ESEF-Cymru is moving towards a similar situation. In England there was a lack of funding; two days per week would be sufficient to work the Forum up as a project.
- 6.2 T White asked whether there was a need to do more than meet as a group to exchange information. Chairman explained that tasks such as organising conferences or study groups need someone to coordinate them and that this needed time and resources. P Warren agreed that resources were not really necessary if the group focused on exchanging information but that funding would be needed if there was a desire to make an impact with parliament.
- 6.3 T White said that the job specification for an executive officer would have to be well specified. Chairman said that Forum members could construct a job specification if the Forum wished to pick up and act on some of the issues that had been discussed. C King said he felt that the Forum fulfilled a useful function: information sharing was vital, as were the links with parliament. Chairman reminded members that the Forum provided the administration for the All-Party Earth Sciences Group which allowed opportunities for close liaison with parliament, but also required a lot of organisation.
- 6.4 I Mercer asked if it was possible to identify the causes taken up or lost that the Forum had been involved in. D Cresswell asked if organisations had been invoiced for subscriptions. A Rankin pointed out that CHUGD was largely voluntary although the General Secretary receives an honorarium; members are charged a fee and membership has extended beyond the universities (e.g. BGS and the Geological Society). Even a £50 annual fee would cover basic administration costs for the Forum if all the listed member organisations paid.
- 6.5 Chairman said that a voluntary subscription of £50 had already been agreed; members could pay more if they wished. So far only five members had paid, but contributions ranged from £50 to £1000. C King suggested that the letter inviting members to pay subscriptions should be recirculated. **Action: C Oldershaw/D Bailey**
- 6.6 It was agreed that the Forum should continue as a networking group and pursue extra activities if the funding became available. P Warren noted that the link to the All-Party Group provided a unique opportunity for the Forum. Chairman reminded members that the All-Party Group was not sponsored and could promote earth sciences without being accused of acting for other interest groups or organisations. All MPs were given notice and about 100 were sent a transcript of the meeting.
- 6.7 After some discussion it was agreed that funding at the level of about £10k pa would be sought which should be sufficient to employ an administrative officer for one day a week. Forum members would be asked to contribute a minimum subscription of £100 and industry contacts would be approached for more substantial contributions. C Oldershaw to write to members again asking for subscriptions, mentioning the target and giving the option of paying more than the minimum subscription. **Action: C Oldershaw**
- 6.8 A Rankin suggested that the Forum should also contact organisations such as the Mineralogical Society of Great Britain, Institute of Civil Engineers, British Micropalaeontological Society, Wardell Armstrong, oil and gas companies and mining companies, especially those that spoke at the Geological Society careers day in November. C Carlon agreed to provide a list of mining company contacts. The ESEF leaflet should be included so potential new members could see the aims of the Forum. Members were asked to forward to C Oldershaw or D Bailey nominations for organisations to be contacted. **Action: C Carlon / members**

## **7 Executive Officer's report**

7.1 C Oldershaw reminded members that they could propose discussion topics for consideration by the officers of the All-Party Group. The next meeting of the Group would be held jointly with the All-Party Groups for Underground Space and Engineering at 6 p.m. on Tuesday 22 January. The title would be 'Shanghai and Beyond'. Forum members were invited to let Cally know if they would like to attend.

7.2 Provisional dates for future meetings in 2008 (both Forum and All-Party Group)

- Tuesday 11 March (All-Party Group topic will be International Year of Planet Earth)
- Tuesday 17 June
- Tuesday 14 October
- Tuesday 9 December (Christmas meeting of All-Party Group)

Provisional dates for ESEF-Cymru meetings in 2008:

- Tuesday 18 March
- Tuesday 10 June (at National Botanic Garden of Wales)
- Tuesday 7 October
- Tuesday 10 December (Christmas meeting)

One of the ESEF-Cymru meetings will be at Techniquet in Cardiff with the ASE.

7.3 ASE's Outdoor Science Working Group have published a new report setting out standards for the future. Copies were available for download from the website, or in print from Cally from January. C King said that a core recommendation is that every secondary teacher training course includes some outdoor work.

7.4 C Oldershaw told members that C King had written an article in Primary Science Review and would be organising three days of earth science workshops at the ASE Annual Conference on 3-5 January.

## **8 ESEF(EW) website ([www.esef.org.uk](http://www.esef.org.uk))**

8.1 The ESEF(EW) website had been updated and new pages containing information about ESEF-Cymru and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Earth Sciences had been added. They would be uploaded early in 2008 once the officers had approved the new changes.

8.2 Members were reminded to forward information about their educational resources and events to D Bailey for inclusion on the website. **Action: All members**

## **9 SESEF update**

Nothing to report. C King reminded members that SESEF had an Executive Officer funded by Scottish Natural Heritage equivalent to three days per week.

## **10 Government policy issues**

Nothing to report.

## **11 Annual Conference**

No progress. P Warren reminded members that, if the bid for charitable status was renewed, the Forum would be required to hold an AGM and publish an Annual Report.

## **12 Potential collaborative projects**

12.1 A Lee reported that the NHM was launching the Real Earth Science project to support the teaching of secondary earth science through museums. Manchester, Oxford and the Hancock Museum are already involved. The programme will run over three years and cover onsite education in museums, online resources and initial teacher education and CPD. The NHM will be working nationally and in partnership with some Forum members and Science Learning Centres. The project would begin in September 2008.

### **13 AOB**

- 13.1 P Warren recommended a lecture on primary education by Robin Alexander on the Weavers website ([www.weavers.org.uk](http://www.weavers.org.uk) or [www.fishhall.co.uk](http://www.fishhall.co.uk)).
- 13.2 A Rankin reported that the number of entrants to universities had gone up about 6% across the whole sector. There was good news for physics (+10%), chemistry and geology (both +9%) which had above average increases and had bucked the recent decline. Other subjects, such as forensic science (-5%), had seen a relative decline in popularity with new students.

### **14 Date of the next meeting**

The next meeting was scheduled for **1.30 p.m.** on **Tuesday 11 March 2008** at IOM<sup>3</sup> in 1 Carlton House Terrace [NB see Agenda Item 7 for other provisional dates].

David Bailey, 31 January 2008