A quiet revolution – new structure for the British Geological Survey

On 3 April, the British Geological Survey implemented a new, and radical organisational structure. The BGS, one of the oldest publically funded scientific institutions in Britain, or indeed the World, has reinvented itself, and is ready for the 21st century.

'The BGS provides the nation with essential information about the land, its petroleum, mineral and groundwater resources, natural hazards, and the impacts on the environment of pollution and waste' says Executive Director, Dr David Falvey. 'We must be prepared to deliver a responsive, professional and worthwhile service to the UK community, fully justifying decades of investment in our strategic research'.

The BGS has been operation for 165 years and places four goals at the centre of the corporate ethos.

- developing an integrated, applied strategic research programme that addresses the central issues of sustainability.
- delivering cutting edge, user-relevant, scientific research
- making an identifiable contribution to National economic and environmental wellbeing
- strengthening the existing standards of professional excellence and enhancing the career development of the staff.

The process of restructuring the BGS has taken just over two years, with the initiative arising within the organisation. Following his appointment in January, 1998, David Falvey selected a strategy taskforce of young staff members, drawn from across the organisation, to crystallise their view, and those of the staff and customers of the BGS, on the future direction, and response to customer needs.

This new vision was discussed throughout the BGS, its Board and key customers, debated, consolidated and then, at the final stage, agreed by the BGS's parent body, the Natural Environment Research Council. No money was spent on management consultants. 'We have some very smart people in the BGS' pointed out the Executive Director, 'The underlying goal was to get some focus on the expressed needs of the community we are meant to serve, and express that as a new programme direction.'

By the summer of 1999, plans were in preparation and teams were created to organise implementation. Three key areas were identified for special attention — organisational structure, human resources and the programme structure. With six months to go, the changes began, from the top downwards, with each cascading layer influencing the next.

On the third of April 2000, the new BGS structure became fully operational and, subject to a few inevitable teething troubles, on track for the 21st century.

The new programme strategy is focused on customer outcomes; providing solutions and results to address specific needs. The NERC's and the government's needs have been clearly marked out, and the BGS is making a major contribution to three of five key areas. These are natural hazards, resource management, and pollution and waste. The BGS also contributes to the understanding the impacts of global change, with a minor contribution to biodiversity issues.

The new structure is based on the classic management matrix, with three operational directorates, supported by three service and support directorates. A key new support function is the Marketing, International and Corporate Development Directorate.

Rebalancing the allocations of Science Budget to Core Programme, and separating work, or project management from the deployment of staff and scientific facilities was complex. It was imperative that the cohesion of the organisation was reinforced, while reducing the potential for duplication and waste. It was understood from the outset that the key asset was the staff, and their welfare and development were made a priority.

'It has been a challenging and exhilarating year,' says David Falvey. 'We need a confident and cohesive organisation, maximising resource utilisation, and meeting the nation's needs. I believe we now have the structure in place to do it, and the undoubted will of the staff to give it the best chance. One cannot ask for more!'

Tim Cullen, BGS © NERC

Professor John Lawton, Dr David Falvey, Julia Durbin and Professor Allan Rogers MP at the communications workshop in February.

Communications workshop

More than 30 people from all over the NERC were guests at a BGS-wide communications workshop held at the BGS headquarters in Keyworth in February.

The morning session was led by Julia Durbin, Head of Radio Science for the BBC. Julia used a variety of entertaining and educational methods to illustrate the extremes of scientific offerings made to the BBC. She took the opportunity to explain the needs of the future.

In the afternoon, Professor Allan Rogers MP, the only geologist in government, discussed political liaison and the responsibility of science organisations in engaging in two-way dialogue with parliamentary and other political decision makers.

The group were joined by Professor John Lawton, NERC's CEO and Dr David Falvey.

Earthwise Information System

The BGS has introduced the Earthwise Information System (EIS) to offer a cohesive corporate communications facility. Evolving from the old Press Office structure, EIS will be developed and implemented in the next few months

with the cooperation of the BGS-wide media liaison network.

EIS is a method of allowing users to access rapidly current events from any part of the BGS.

The EIS Network will trawl the entire BGS organisation to find out exactly who is doing what and for whom. This information will be updated regularly. A series of information sheets will be made available electronically, and by hard copy, to media, politicians, academics, educators, customers and anyone else interested in Earth science. Each of these briefing notes will link to deeper scientific levels and, ultimately, to the expert voices who can offer explanations and presentations appropriate to schools, media academics or anyone else. Of course, commercial confidentiality will be respected.

The concept was discussed with staff in February, when Professor Allan Rogers MP – Fellow of the Geological Society and the BGS's political advisor, and Julia Durbin, head of BBC Radio Science, addressed a meeting at the BGS.

In the past it was usual to post press releases to the newspapers in the hope that someone would be interested in the news. But the concept has become outdated, (even the word 'press' was coined several hundred years ago and excludes the broadcast media), and the days of the press release are numbered.

The BGS Executive Director, Dr David Falvey, adds 'Electronic fact-gathering and dispersal is the key to our future communications, and will enable us to have one cohesive voice modulated according to the audience to whom it speaks.'

When fully implemented, EIS will enable users to access, quickly and easily, the target information they require, whilst allowing them to reach the entirety of detailed, background material.

For further details of the system, and a user note explaining how it operates, contact:

Hilary Heason at the BGS, Keyworth
Tel: 0115 9363497
email: h.heason@bgs.ac.uk

Science Week

Over a three day period between 22nd and 24th March 2000, nearly 900 junior schoolchildren, their teachers and helpers visited the BGS's headquarters at Keyworth to take part in the Rock and Fossil Show, the BGS's main contribution to National Science Week. During their two-hour stay, they were able to examine some of the BGS's outstanding rock, fossil and mineral specimens and find out about the history of our planet and the importance of geology in our everyday lives. The activities were structured around a quiz sheet and a member of BGS staff was on hand to guide each group of children and ensure they got the most out of the event. In addition, participants were encouraged to 'baffle a boffin' by bringing their own geological finds and treasures for identification by a BGS expert.

Fossils featured large in the event. A display, *Life through the ages*, featured a diverse range of specimens from ancient algae to mammoth molars *via* dinosaur dung. A talk on *The life and times of Planet Earth* highlighted the landmarks of evolution. Children were able to create and take home their own fossil rubbings and sepia tinted fossil photographs. A fine selection of rock and mineral specimens, again from the BGS collections, was used to explain how geological materials are used in everyday objects all around us; and a talk, *Geology on the breakfast table* explored this theme further by challenging the audience to find geological connections with their cornflakes. A demonstration on drilling provided a rare opportunity to examine rocks from deep beneath our feet and an even more profound view of the Earth's interior was given in *Inside the Earth* a display illustrating the structure of the Earth. As usual, everyone was keen to roll up their sleeves and try their hand at panning for 'gold'. Each participant left clutching a soggy, but precious (if not priceless) sample.

BGS Internet Shop

The BGS's Internet Shop is now on-line at www.british-geological-survey.co.uk Geological maps, guides, books and reports, educational and leisure products can all be bought on-line. World Minerals Statistics digital datasets and the National Archive of Geological Photographs are also featured. Many new digital products will be available soon.

Tim Cullen, BGS © NERC

Two young visitors learn the finer points of gold panning at the BGS's annual Fossil and Rock Show at Keyworth, part of National Science Week, March 2000.