

UK MINERALS FORUM

MSc COURSE IN HYDROGEOLOGY AT BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY

Note by the Chairman

At the UKMF meeting on 19th November Nick Horsley referred to a recent letter from academics at Birmingham University seeking support for their campaign to halt the proposed closure of its MSc course in hydrogeology. This is attached below.

Hydrogeologists are important in the design, environmental assessment, and permitting (through planning and environmental consents) of mineral workings. Without evidence that proposed extraction will not have unacceptable impacts on groundwater through abstraction, dewatering and/or pollution, or in adding to flood risk downstream, permissions cannot be given that would be free from successful legal challenges. Similar considerations apply to the plan-making process, in the allocation of sites for mineral development, or their inclusion in areas of search or safeguarding. Hydrogeological assessments are relevant to many of the organisations represented on UKMF; industry, planners, environmentalists and the Environment Agency.

Perhaps the most high-profile case in recent times where hydrogeology was a potential material consideration was the proposed extension several years ago of Whatley Quarry in Somerset, about 15 miles south of Bath. It was necessary to establish, partly through hydrogeological assessment and investigation, that the extension would not disrupt or halt the operation of the historic hot springs at Bath.

Leaving aside the natural concern of academic staff faced with the possible loss or reduction of their jobs, I don't think it is possible to know whether the closure of this course would in due course definitely lead to a shortage of expert hydrogeologists available to advise on future mineral extraction proposals in the UK. However, any reduction in supply in theory adds an element such risk.

There is insufficient time to take your views about whether UKMF should send in its own representations, but if you wished, and were authorised, to do so on behalf of your parent organisation the contact details are given below. Ideally by end-November.

Lester Hicks: Chairman

Hydrogeology at the University of Birmingham

We are very sorry to say that the College of Life and Environmental Sciences has proposed to “disinvest” in research and teaching in hydrogeology at the University of Birmingham. Issues that have been made public are that the Hydrogeology MSc Course will be closed after the current cohort complete their studies and all the hydrogeology academic and research staff are undergoing a “formal consultation process”. We are not allowed by the University to disclose any more information at present.

This has come as a shock to us all, as we believe we have a vibrant, active and internationally respected research group, and both this group and the MSc Course are very strong in numbers and financially. We are told that the proposal has been approved by the University and will be implemented unless new information presented during the ongoing 60 day formal consultation period is sufficiently persuasive to change their minds. It would be a considerable help to us if you, personally and where appropriate on behalf of your organisation, could write a letter in support of continuation of hydrogeology research and teaching at the University, including any comments you may have on the importance of hydrogeology educationally and as a research field, locally, nationally, or internationally. Clearly if you are happy commenting on one of these areas only, this would still be of great use to us. If you would like to discuss any aspect of our work, please contact one of us.

If you are willing to write, could you address the letter to one of the following:

1. Professor Sir David Eastwood, Vice-Chancellor, cc. Professor Myra Nimmo, Head of College of Life and Environmental Sciences and Pro-Vice-Chancellor;
OR

2. Professor Myra Nimmo, Head of College of Life and Environmental Sciences and Pro-Vice-Chancellor;

OR

3. ‘To whom it may concern’, and send to John Tellam who will then forward it.

In all cases a copy to us would be useful when compiling our response to the proposal. **Though the consultation period continues until 20th December, a letter before the end of November would be helpful.**

Thank you for your continuing support!

Best wishes,

Prof John Tellam (j.h.tellam@bham.ac.uk; +44 121 414 6138)

Dr. Alan Herbert (+44 121 414 9130)

Mr. Michael Riley (+44 121 414 6163)

Dr. Michael Rivett (+44 121 414 3957)

Dr. Stephanie Handley-Sidhu (+44 121 414 6172)

Ms. Lindsay McMillan (+44 121 414 6139)

Addresses for representations:

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Birmingham B15 2TT: vc@bham.ac.uk

Professor M.A. Nimmo, Head of College, College of Life and Environmental Sciences,
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