

Speaking up for geoscience

Use of Earth's resources comes at cost. Still, we must exclaim the benefits provided by geology-related industries, argues **Mike Simmons**



The Petroleum Group recently held a provocative meeting on 'Communicating Geoscience'. It was a pleasure to be in the company of colleagues who are passionate about explaining geology to a wide cross-section of society, from politicians and policy makers, to everyday curious laypersons. An important target for outreach is those at schools and universities—we need to encourage the development of a new generation of geoscientists. This is critical, not just to further our academic understanding of Earth, but to encourage students to take up a career in a geology-related industry.

In conversations with students, I am conscious that many find little appeal in the prospect of a job in industrial geology, be that in the oil and gas sector, mineral mining, waste disposal or engineering geology. Many perceive these industries as being in terminal decline and 'dirty', being either directly or indirectly responsible for environmental damage. The general public and mass media often hold similar views. Admitting to being an industrial geologist can feel no better than admitting to being a sociopath or other such undesirable!

Take pride

No credible geologist would deny that society's use of Earth's resources can have negative impacts. One of our tasks as geologists is to better understand those impacts and minimise them. But geological industries also bring huge benefits to society. The provision of energy is progressively lifting the world's population out of poverty. In the last twenty years, 1.6 billion people have been given access to electricity for the first time, mostly from conventional, non-renewable energy sources. This means that 87% of the global population now has access to electricity. We should take some pride that geological industries can positively impact the quality of people's lives. We should also remember that we need conventional energy

to develop renewable energy technology.

Without shying away from the complex environmental challenges geology-related industries face, we must communicate the positive messages from these industries. We are good at communicating the *wonder of geology* and there is a ready appetite to hear about dinosaurs, volcanoes and other spectacular geological phenomenon. But what about the *benefits of geology*? Who is speaking up for these and who should?

Speak up

Those of us working in industry can and should do our bit. But our voices are not always heard, perhaps because of an assumption that we have an agenda, either for ourselves, our employers, or our industry. We need an impartial, independent voice. I appeal to the Geological Society to be that voice—not to be apologists for the negative impacts, but to communicate what geology-related industries positively bring to society and how challenges are being dealt with. Ironically, 2018 was the Society's 'Year of Resources'. Their 'Geology for Society' document produced in 2014 was a good first step, but needs to be built upon.

Society will need geologists for the foreseeable future. We must ensure that people understand why and encourage students to consider careers as industrial geologists. The Society and industry have long had a mutually beneficial relationship. Let us work together to ensure that continues.



Mike Simmons is Technology Fellow for Geosciences at Halliburton Landmark; e-mail: Mike.Simmons@halliburton.com

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MIKE SIMMONS