

8. The Geological Society

8.1 Aims and policies

The Geological Society of London – more commonly known as simply The Geological Society – is a medium-sized professional body with about 12,000 fellows. [1] The history of the society dates back to 1807. [1]

Statement of purpose and values

The object of The Geological Society, as set out in its Charter, is: [1]

“To investigate the mineral structure of the Earth”

This is interpreted to mean: [1]

- i. “improving knowledge and understanding of the history, structure, constitution and dynamics of the Earth and its processes;*
- ii. promoting all forms of education, awareness and understanding of the Earth and their practical applications for the benefit of the public globally; and*
- iii. promoting professional excellence and ethical standards in the Earth sciences for the public good.”*

In order to achieve this object and aims, in January 2017, the society embarked on a 10-year strategy with the following purpose, values and themes. [1]

“Our purpose:

- supporting the work of geoscientists;*
- inspiring interest in the physical world; and*
- connecting science, profession and society.”*

“Our values:

All that we do is underpinned by scientific excellence, professional and ethical integrity, and quality of service. To that end:

- we strive to be impartial, authoritative, trustworthy and transparent;*
- we promote diversity, equality, inclusion and respect for others across the geoscience community;*
- we promote social and environmental sustainability, responsibility and stewardship;*
- we seek opportunities to work collaboratively, and aim to be recognised as a valued partner.”*

“Themes:

- A home for geoscience: we will promote and support the geosciences and act as the scientific and professional home for an engaged, diverse and inclusive geoscience community.*

- *Serving and supporting geoscientists: we will provide services and support for our Fellows and other geoscientists throughout their careers.*
- *Maintaining standards: we will assure high professional standards in geoscience, for the public benefit.*
- *Trusted voice: we will be the trusted voice of the geoscience community.*
- *Education and outreach: we will promote geoscience education and share our science widely, to inform public debate and to inspire future geoscientists to address the challenges facing humanity.*
- *Strengthening our organisation: we will ensure that the Geological Society remains a sustainable, resilient and thriving organisation over a generational timescale, in order to deliver our strategic aims and objectives.”*

Further detail on the society’s strategy can be found on their website. [2]

Environmental policy

One of the values of The Geological Society, as stated above in its 10-year strategy, is that “we promote social and environmental sustainability, responsibility and stewardship.” The society’s Code of Conduct also states that fellows “must take all reasonable precautions” to avoid endangering the natural environment. [3]

The society has published a range of documents on climate change. [4] It was one of 24 UK-based professional and learned societies which endorsed the joint Climate Communiqué that was published in the run up to the 2015 intergovernmental negotiations (which led to the Paris Agreement). The communiqué called on national governments to take immediate action to avert the serious risks of climate change. [5] In 2019, it undertook a range of outreach activities entitled the ‘Year of Carbon’ which included events highlighting the issue of climate change. [6]

However, among the documents published on its website, we could not find an overarching policy statement that covers the environmental impacts of the society’s activities or its members’ activities.

8.2 Investments

Size and location of funds

The Geological Society had investments worth just over £5.5 million, according to a recent annual report. Nearly £5.4m was held in tradeable assets, namely equities, bonds and property, while approximately £153,000 was held as cash. [7] All investments with a market valuation of £100,000 and above were listed in its financial statements. Breakdowns of the tradeable assets are set out in tables 8.1 to 8.3, based on data listed publicly on the asset management companies’ websites.

<i>Asset name/ details</i>	<i>Amount in named asset (£)</i>	<i>% of total investments</i>
Reckitt Benckiser / ORD 10p	202,000	3.7
Astrazeneca plc / COM STK USD 0.25 (GBP)	193,000	3.5
Vodafone Group plc / USD 0.2095238 (GBP)	193,000	3.5
Royal Dutch Shell [F]^a / EUR 0.07 SHS B (GBP)	175,000	3.2
British American Tobacco / ORD 25p	175,000	3.2
Vanguard Funds plc / FTSE 100 UCITS ETF GBP INC	174,000	3.1
UBS / ETF SICAV MSCI EMU SHARES A DIS (GBP)	155,000	2.8
Beazley plc / 0.05 GBP	149,000	2.7
IG Group Holdings plc / ORD 0.005p	138,000	2.5
Glaxosmithkline / ORD 25p	134,000	2.4
Relix plc / ORD 14.44p	130,000	2.4
HSBC Holdings plc / USD 0.50 (GBP)	127,000	2.3
Prudential plc / ORD 5p	121,000	2.2
Unilever plc / GBP 0.03111	115,000	2.1
Sage Group plc / GBP 0.01051948	113,000	2.0
Diageo plc / GBP 0.28935	111,000	2.0
Barclays plc / ORD 25p	100,000	1.8
<i>Total</i>	<i>2,505,000</i>	<i>45.3</i>

Table 8.1 – Equities held by The Geological Society^b [7]

<i>Fund name / details</i>	<i>Amount in named fund (£)</i>	<i>% of total investments</i>
UBAM / SICAV GBL H/Y SOLUTION IHD GBP	275,000	5.0
Neuberger Berman / HIGHYIELD BND CL I2 GBP	232,000	4.2
Goldman Sachs / GLOBAL HIGH YIELD PORTFOLIO	219,000	4.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>726,000</i>	<i>13.2</i>

Table 8.2a – Bonds held by The Geological Society^b [7]

Breakdowns of two of the bond funds listed in table 8.2a are given in tables 8.2b-c. We were unable to access data on the fund portfolio managed by UBAM.

^a [A] indicates companies which, in this report, are categorised as being part of the arms industry. [F] indicates companies which, in this report, are categorised as being part of the fossil fuel industry.

^b All monetary figures rounded to the nearest thousand pounds.

<i>Asset name</i>	<i>% of fund total</i>
Sprint Corp	3.0
HCA Holdings Inc	2.4
Ally Financial Inc	2.3
Valeant Pharmaceuticals	2.0
CIT Group Inc	1.9
NRG Energy Inc [F]	1.8
Frontier Communications	1.7
Charter Communications	1.7
SFR Group SA	1.7
RR Donnelley & Sons Co	1.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>19.9</i>

Table 8.2b – Top 10 holdings of the Neuberger Berman fund held by The Geological Society [8]

<i>Asset name</i>	<i>% of fund total</i>
Sprint	4.1
Hospital Corporation of America	2.4
Charter Communications	1.7
VRXCN	1.6
Altice	1.5
TITIM	1.4
MGM Resorts International	1.3
Frontier Communications Corp	1.3
Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold [F]	1.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>16.5</i>

Table 8.2c – Top 10 holdings of the Goldman Sachs fund held by The Geological Society [9]

<i>Fund name / details</i>	<i>Amount in named fund (£)</i>	<i>% of total investments</i>
Charities Property Fund / INCOME UNITS (GBP)	809,000	14.6
Alipes Fund / 2008 LP II. VALUATION	201,000	3.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,010,000</i>	<i>18.2</i>

Table 8.3 – Property funds held by The Geological Society^c [7]

The Charities Property Fund did not hold equities and bonds, but instead held commercial property. On its website, it stated that it could not adopt a specific ethical policy, but nevertheless went on to say that:

“[...]we remain sensitive to the need to maximise returns while not investing in properties whose tenants could potentially cause embarrassment to our unitholders. These would include companies whose primary business is the production or sale of tobacco, arms, pornography or involved in animal testing.” [10]

^c All monetary figures rounded to the nearest thousand pounds.

The exclusion of tenants involved in the production or sale of arms is obviously relevant for this study. However, there was no mention of exclusions on businesses that were involved in fossil fuels. Indeed, the fund's portfolio did list a number of petrol filling stations whose tenants were companies such as BP and Esso (subsidiary of ExxonMobil).

We were unable to access data on the holdings of the Alipes Fund.

In total, we were able to establish where approximately 50% of The Geological Society's investments were held. Of this 50%, approximately 7% were held in the fossil fuel industry. Regarding investments in the arms industry, and taking into account the exclusions of the Charities Property Fund, we were able to establish that 64% of The Geological Society's investments were *not* held in such businesses. However, it was more difficult to draw conclusions about whether this level was representative of all the investments as arms corporations tend to be smaller than those in other key sectors, such as energy, finance or communications, and hence do not appear so frequently in lists of 'top' assets.

General investment policy

According to a recent annual report, [1] The Geological Society's general investment policy was "to obtain an income whilst seeking to maintain the long term value of the investments in line with inflation." The investments were managed according to the society's bye-laws under the oversight of an Investment Committee.

Ethical investment policy

According to its most recent annual report, in 2018, the Geological Society adopted an ethical investment policy: [1]

"to ensure that investments are consistent with the Society's values and ethos and do not conflict with the Society's aims. Individual investments can be excluded if they are perceived to be in conflict with these requirements. The Society's investment manager is expected to display best practice in the environmental, social and corporate governance stewardship of investments held on the Society's behalf."

We were not able to find out whether this policy excluded any fossil fuel or arms corporations.

8.3 School education programmes

The Geological Society provides dozens of downloadable resources aimed at both school teachers and pupils. Our survey of these materials found that the majority did not list any type of sponsorship, but a number involved external organisations such as the BBC, Fun Kids Radio and RGS-IBG (Royal Geographical Society, with the Institute of British Geographers). A small number listed sponsorship by fossil fuel corporations, as given in table 8.4.

Programme	Description	Sponsor
The Rock Cycle	A web-resource aimed at Key Stage 3 science pupils	Statoil^d [F] [11]
Plate Tectonics	Aimed at Key Stage 4 science and geography pupils and teachers	Centrica Energy [F] [12]

Table 8.4 – School education resources sponsored by fossil fuel corporations

However, an important source of funding for the school education work is the ‘corporate patrons’ scheme – see section 8.5 below – which involves a very high proportion of funding from the fossil fuel industry.

8.4 Events and sponsorship

The Geological Society organises numerous events each year. As part of our study, we carried out two brief surveys of the sponsors of its events as listed on the organisation’s website in mid-2017 [13] and mid-2019. [14]

<i>Event</i>	<i>Sponsors</i>	<i>Other information</i>
28th Petroleum Group Annual Dinner	BP [F], Statoil^d [F] [15]	Organised with the Petroleum Group
GSL Nottingham Careers and Industry Day 2017	Cairn [F]^e [16]	One of several career and industry days aimed at students. Sponsorship costs: £3,300 for a major sponsor to £1,320 for a general sponsor. [17]
Handling Fault Seals, Baffles, Barriers and Conduits	Midland Valley [F], Statoil^d [F], BP [F], Badleys [F] [18]	Organised with the Petroleum Group
Cross-border Exploration between UK and Norway	BP [F], Statoil^d [F], AkerBP [F], PGS [F] [19]	Organised with the Petroleum Group
Managing Risks across the Mining and Oil and Gas Lifecycle	JLT, AGR [F] , Isometrix [20]	
William Smith Meeting 2017: Plate Tectonics at 50	Shell [F] , Tectonic Studies Group of The Geological Society [21]	One of the society’s five flagship meetings [13]
Sharing an Uncertain World: Lessons in Managing Risk	JLT [22]	

Table 8.5 – Sponsored events organised by The Geological Society, mid-2017

Table 8.5 lists the 2017 events which had sponsors at the time of our survey, together with those sponsors. Of 17 sponsors, 13 were part of the fossil fuel industry. Our survey in 2019 found 15 sponsors, all of which were part of the fossil fuel industry. The most frequent sponsors that year were **BP [F]** and **Equinor [F]**. Over the two surveys, 88% of sponsors were

^d Statoil has been renamed Equinor.

^e Unlikely to be the final list. At the time of the survey, the society was still advertising for more sponsorship.

from fossil fuel corporations. It should also be noted that over two-thirds of the events did not list any sponsors.

Several of the sponsored events were organised with the ‘Petroleum Group’, a specialist group within the society. The group “is a key part of the activities of the Society, with more than 2,500 Fellows^f being members of the Group. The Group’s events generate important revenue for the Society.” [23] The Petroleum Group also appears to be the only group that has a Geological Society staff member that is specifically tasked to assist with meetings and events. [24] Importantly, according to the society’s financial statements for 2018, it received an income of over £280,000 for Petroleum Group events that year, 63% of its total income for ‘Science and Education’ activities. [1]

8.5 Corporate membership

The Geological Society has a ‘corporate patrons’ scheme,^g similar in many respects to corporate membership offered by other professional institutions. As well as standard benefits – such as use of the society’s facilities, a website listing, and invites to networking events – the marketing material makes the following claims. [25]

- *“You will be better informed about forefront scientific developments vital to your business*
- *Your staff will have access to the geoscientific information they need to perform better in today’s competitive business environment*
- *You will be investing in the science on which your business depends*
- *Your company will develop a wider network of business and scientific contacts, and strengthen existing relationships through our calendar of social and scientific/technical meetings*
- *Your company will be associated with the oldest Geological Society in the world and part of an organisation that endorses professionalism throughout the geological community.”*

The corporate patrons, at the time of writing, are listed in table 8.6. It was evident that there was a dominance of fossil fuel companies, especially those from the oil and gas industry. Our assessment concluded that 70% of the patrons were part of the fossil fuel industry, focused on exploration, extraction and/or support activities. This proportion rose for those paying the highest rates.

The fees^h for corporate patrons at the time of writing were: [26]

- Platinum: £10,000 per annum
- Gold: £7,000 pa
- Silver: £3,500 pa
- Bronze: £1,750 pa

^f 20% of the society’s overall membership. [1]

^g This was known as the ‘corporate affiliates’ scheme up until early 2019.

^h Figures do not include VAT.

In 2018, The Geological Society recorded income of approximately £99,000 from corporate affiliates. [1] Using the figures above, together with the list of companies in table 8.6, we estimate that The Geological Society annually receives about £77,000 from the fossil fuel industry as payment for corporate affiliation.

<i>Affiliate level</i>	<i>Organisation</i>
Platinum	BP [F], Chevron [F]
Gold	Atkins, Equinor [F], ExxonMobil [F], Dana Petroleum [F] , Radioactive Waste Management, RioTinto [F], Schlumberger [F], Total [F], Tullow Oil [F]
Silver	Cairn [F], ConocoPhillips [F], Halliburton [F], srk Consulting [F], Neptune Energy [F]
Bronze	Anadarko Petroleum Corporation (UK) [F], Anglo American [F], Blue Water Energy [F], C & C Reservoirs [F] , Cardinal Resources, Condor Gold, Cornish Lithium, CGG [F], CNOOC [F], ENI UK [F], ERC Equipoise [F] , Fasken Martineau, Getech [F] , Hogan Lovells, Ikon Science [F], INEOS Upstream Ltd [F] , Norton Rose Fulbright, PGS [F], Premier Oil [F] , Ramboll UK, Reabold Resources [F], RPS Energy [F], Sasol [F] , Scotgold Resources, Siccar Point Energy [F] , Tarmac, Terrafirma Search, Tellurian [F] , Toro Gold, Vinson & Elkins, Wood Mackenzie [F]

Table 8.6 – The Geological Society’s corporate patrons, 2019 [27]

8.6 Other corporate links

The Geoscientist is The Geological Society’s membership magazine. [28] We surveyed issues – from January to December 2016 – to assess the level of advertising from corporate sources that it carries. The magazines assessed ran a large number of adverts, the majority of these being to promote society-organised events. Hence, we assumed these adverts did not attract external income for the society.ⁱ However, a small number of adverts were for external organisations or events. Of these, our survey indicated that nearly 90% were for the fossil fuel industry. Costs for printed adverts in the magazine ranged from £1,125 for a quarter pages to £3,025 for outside back cover. [29]

8.7 Overall assessment

Reviewing the information in this case study, we have given The Geological Society the assessment as shown in tables 8.7a and b.

In terms of transparency, The Geological Society performed well compared with the other professional organisations in our study. It provided the most detailed data on its investments in its financial publications. However, this data still covered only half of those assets, signifying that the whole sector needs to achieve a greater level of openness. The society also published a high level of data on the other areas of interest to this study.

ⁱ It is worth noting that many of these events were sponsored by fossil fuel companies and therefore prominently display these companies branding. These events are discussed in section 8.4.

While The Geological Society has made a number of encouraging statements on climate change, we could not find a policy statement that covers the environmental impacts of its activities or members' activities. This is of serious concern given the role of geologists in exploring for new fossil fuel resources, thus undermining efforts to tackle global climate change. The society announced a new ethical investment policy in its 2018 annual report – although we were not able to determine if this would lead to the exclusion of any fossil fuel or arms corporations from its investment portfolio.

	<i>Investments</i>	<i>School education programmes</i>	<i>Events</i>	<i>Other</i>
Involvement with arms corporations	Low	None	None	None
Involvement with fossil fuel corporations	Medium	Medium	Very high	Very high

Table 8.7a – Corporate involvement ratings for The Geological Society

	<i>Ethical issues covered in this study</i>
Positives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher levels of publicly available information on its corporate links • No financial links with the arms sector in most of the assessed activities
Negatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extensive financial links with fossil fuel corporations across the areas assessed, especially corporate membership and events sponsorship • No overarching environmental policy • Some investments in the arms sector likely

Table 8.7b – Positives and negatives for The Geological Society

We could find no direct evidence of financial links between The Geological Society and the arms sector. However, the lack of an ethical investment policy coupled with important gaps in the available data on investments (see section 8.2) suggest that such links could be present at a significant level.

Concerning financial links between The Geological Society and the fossil fuels industry, we found these to be extensive. The dominance of the fossil fuel industry in the society's corporate patrons scheme – with nearly 70% of members being part of the sector – and among its event sponsors raises serious concerns. Financial data also showed that the society has significant investments in this sector. Although there appeared to be little direct involvement of the fossil fuel industry in the society's school education programmes, a key source of funding was the corporate patrons scheme, which as mentioned, was dominated by industry.

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