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Who speaks for Geoscience?

The Irish example of national & cross-border-engagement.

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A global issue in relation to all sciences, including geoscience, is the answer to the question “Who can speak about this at a national level?” Often this question only arises at times of crises, for Geoscience it may be after a landslide, tsunami or volcano, when media and government bodies seek quick answers to often complex questions. It may also be a question of providing societal input at calmer times, into national strategic documents, political discourse or geoscience input into other complimentary sectors. In general responses may come from national agencies, the private sector or academia. While a national geoscience agency, such as the Geological survey may be equipped to reply, it may not be the most authoritative or best informed body, and may be limited in ability to express opinion based on their position within or funded by government. Equally a University may have the competence or niche expertise to best comment, but may not be aware of the wider ramifications of doing so. Private sector experts may be best placed to express opinions, but this may be either dismissed as not carrying appropriate weight or not having academic backing. A compounding factor may be that in geoscience, as with any discipline, numerous subgroups, associations and specialist groupings may exist, resulting in a range of voices or conflicting opinions, impenetrable to journalists or decision makers.

In 2012 the Irish Geoscience Network (IGN) was established, in an attempt to represent all geo-related disciplines and organisations on the island of Ireland, and to provide a forum for discussion, exchange of ideas, and improved communication among the extended geoscience community. The IGN is an informal network of geoscience organisations and learned societies, universities and those involved in various aspects relating to the Earth sciences in Ireland. Geoscience involvement in Ireland ranges from the amateur to the regulator spanning across a wide range of sectors, including respected and long standing bodies such as the Royal Irish Academy committee responsible for Geoscience and the Geological Survey of Ireland.

This talk will describe the approach taken to develop the IGN into an interactive forum through which common goals and opportunities are identified to allow for the successful engagement of the ‘*right*’ people. This will allow for a collaborative approach on mutual issues such as outreach, public perception, research collaborations, policy issues etc.

In turn this talk will investigate the Irish input into representation of geoscience on a global level based on pan-European and global experience. It will also investigate the ways in which the Irish example could possibly be applied as a model for cohesive geoscience communication in a global context.

