

Engage!

In the fight to encourage more students to take up geology, Regional Groups are key, says **Catherine Kenny**



The bleak future of the study of geology has been well documented, with geoscience departments globally reporting a decline in student enrolment (see *Geoscientist* 29 (8) September 2019 for more). There are plenty of initiatives underway to turn things around, but it can feel hard to see how one geologist can make a difference. As a Fellow of the Geological Society – and particularly as a member of your Regional Group – there are lots of ways you can help.

The North West Regional Group

The committee of the North West Regional Group spend a lot of time trying to engage as many different people as possible with geology. We have a mailing list of 904 people and an absolutely massive area to cover, stretching south to north from Staffordshire to Cumbria and west to east from North Wales to the Pennines. We try to move our lectures around the region, and select subject matter from as many different areas of geology as we can. And if lectures are not your thing, maybe you can try a field trip: last year, we organised five trips all over the region, at weekends and evenings.

But it's the engagement of the younger generation that is the real issue. Geology is all but gone from the school curriculum, hanging by its teeth in year 3 of primary school. Children spend less and less time outside; playing in the foundation trenches of your local building site or mucking about in your local quarry like we used to in the 70s is now (rightly) Frowned Upon.

Children are just not encountering the natural environment as much anymore. And if they don't know about it, they can't get interested in it, they don't think about studying it, they can't recognise it as important, and, worse, they won't protect it as it becomes increasingly threatened by modern

life. The study of geology is more important than ever, as the general populace slowly comes to the realisation that we are playing real-life Minecraft on Survival Mode, with the monsters switched on.

A many-pronged approach

The North West Regional Group is trying a many-pronged approach. Last year, at the pre-school upwards level, we organised a child-friendly lecture and trip around the Manchester Museum on the theme of pliosaurs (see the NWRG Autumn 2019 Newsletter <https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/Groups-and-Networks/Regional-Groups/North-West/Newsletters>). For A level students, there is the Schools Challenge (<https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/geochallenge>). In March 2019 we ran a

careers event for degree course students, hosted by the University of Manchester. Speakers from local companies described their own career pathways in geoscience, and also had a stall to chat to students and hand out information. We ran a "speed networking" event as part of this, where students could talk directly in small groups to volunteer graduates at early stages in their careers.

Students from all over the region attended and obtained a useful insight into the range of careers available and the skills required.

All these things take time, and a lot of volunteers - as speakers, competition judges, networkers and organisers. We are truly grateful to all those that took part - we all need to get involved to sway the current crisis. If you can help, contact your regional group. In the words of Jean-Luc Picard: Make It So.

Catherine Kenny is Secretary of the North West Regional Group, a Consultant Geologist and School Science Technician, with a husband, two children, a house in various states of disrepair and six cats. (Don't ask about the six cats.)



SOAPBOX CALLING!

Soapbox is open to contributions from all Fellows. You can always write a letter to the Editor, of course, but perhaps you feel you need more space?

If you can write it entertainingly in **500 words**, the Editor would like to hear from you. Email your piece, and a self-portrait, to sarah.day@geolsoc.org.uk. Copy can only be accepted electronically. No diagrams, tables or other illustrations please.

Pictures should be of print quality – please take photographs on the largest setting on your camera, with a plain background.

Precedence will always be given to more topical contributions. Any one contributor may not appear more often than once per volume (once every 12 months).

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CATHERINE KENNY