



The Geological Curators Group Roadmap: 2023 – 2025

1. Introduction

At the AGM 2022, Emma Nicholls became the new Chair of the Geological Curators Group, having taken over from Sarah King. Sarah's term (2020-2022) was a period of great change, both for GCG, which became a CIO, had a committee restructure, and dealt with the devastating untimely death of previous Chair, Matthew Parkes, but also for the world which was subjected to a global pandemic.

We would like to extend a huge thank you to Sarah for helping GCG to achieve everything we did during that time, despite the extremely difficult circumstances. Thanks also go to several other long-standing committee members who stood down at the end of 2022; Emma Bernard, Zoë Hughes, and Lil Stevens. We thank them all for their time, enthusiasm, and immeasurable hard work over the years.

The next three years are an opportunity to embed, and to start to benefit from, the restructure and the changeover to being a CIO. The world has, in many ways at least, got "back to normal" after the pandemic, and the committee is keen to get an exciting and dynamic events programme up and running once again.

A roadmap is issued at the start of every new Chair's tenure, and sets out where we are and what we aspire to achieve over the coming three years. Although the Roadmap 2023-2025 was initially drafted by the Chair, the whole committee has contributed to and signed off on this document. Emma is keen that this Roadmap is not a list of things she hopes to accomplish as Chair, but rather a set of targets the whole committee intends for GCG to achieve during this tenure.

2. Current Status

2.1 A Brief Summary

Charitable Incorporated Organisation

As Sarah mentioned in her Roadmap 2020-2022, "the years leading up to 2020 were a period of modernisation for GCG, with a new website, the Box.com archive, internet banking, and the facility to accept online and instant PayPal payments for memberships and events bookings". The change to CIO, during Sarah's tenure, was also an important step forward. However, it has necessitated the need for a new bank account and subsequent

change of payment set up for members, which at present is an ongoing project. There are a few further loose ends that need tidying up in the changeover to CIO, largely to be achieved in conversation with Sarah King who has kindly agreed to be a soundboard for the committee until the process is complete. We are very grateful for her continued commitment to GCG.

Committee Restructure

Under Sarah's leadership, GCG underwent a committee restructure, with the creation of a few new roles, and at the AGM 2022 we reached a complement of 22 committee members. This includes three First/Second Stage Production Assistants and three Associate Editors for the *Geological Curator*, which are all vital to the smooth running of the journal. They are equally important and valued as other positions on the committee, however, they are not required to attend committee meetings or feed into "day to day" discussions, although they are welcome to do either, if they wish. The remaining 16 committee members comprise those which discuss and action matters arising throughout the year, and attend both committee meetings and the AGM (where possible). None of the aforementioned roles are automatically Trustee positions, of which we can have a maximum of 12, with the exception of Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. Trustee positions are 'named people', rather than 'named roles', except for the aforementioned three.

The turnover and expansion means that we headed into 2023 with approximately a third of the committee being new and understandably requiring a period of settling in to understand their roles and responsibilities. It is very positive that we now have such a large committee, and the hope is that we should be able to achieve more as a result.

The Pandemic and Events

The pandemic had a huge impact on GCG events, although we were far from alone in this. The committee galvanised to host some events online between 2020 and 2022, including each annual Symposium on Palaeontological Preparation and Conservation and our AGMs. However, the committee appreciates that in-person events are a crucial part of the GCG offer, and fully recognise we have been slow to recover, subsequently risking a loss of interest from some members, many of whom join us for the workshops, networking opportunities, and sense of community. We are extremely keen to get an exciting and varied programme of events up and running, especially for 2024 which will mark our 50th Anniversary, and we are working hard behind the scenes to achieve this.

Journal and Newsletter

Besides events, our other major outputs are the *Geological Curator* journal and our newsletter *Coprolite*. During Sarah's tenure, the decision was made to combine all journal papers into one bumper volume per annum, rather than two smaller issues, in order to provide the same volume of material whilst mitigating against the rising costs of producing the journal. We are also now able to assign DOIs to journal articles, which is an important factor for many researchers looking to publish, and should make the journal a more attractive repository for data. Having calculated the cost of supplying printed journals and mapping that onto memberships, it became clear that those receiving a digital version were subsidising those that received a printed copy. As a result, we have moved to a membership system wherein separate rates are charged for print and digital, vs digital only.

Membership

As of 16th May 2023, we had 172 individual members (142 UK, 23 overseas and 7 honorary) plus 18 institutional memberships (5 UK and 13 overseas) with an additional 45 individual members yet to pay for 2023.

2.2 A Re-Cap of Our Vision, Mission and Objectives

Vision: Geological collections thriving for science and society

Mission: Geological collections (rocks, minerals and fossils) are vital Earth heritage that help us understand the natural world. The Geological Curators Group strives to connect every geological collection with appropriate resources, knowledge and skills to thrive and positively impact science and society.

We do this by:

- supporting everyone working with and caring for geological collections of all types
- advocating the value of expertise in the care and use of geological collections, and their importance for scientific research and education
- connecting people, skills, information, and collections

Objectives: The Geological Curators Group will

- undertake proactive collections advocacy, whereby we will champion the value and relevance of geological collections, and offer assistance when collections are threatened
- share and promote best practice in geological collections curation via training, events and community networks, and create and maintain comprehensive resources, that those working with geological collections are able to access easily
- work with appropriate groups inside and outside the sector and internationally in order to increase our impact and reach – and support more geological collections, more effectively
- develop GCG financially so that it is able to grow and support more collections, and remain resilient and sustainable

Values: GCG has always been a community, run by members elected from its membership. We take pride in our goals and enjoy working hard to reach them. Geological collections enrich lives and stimulate cutting edge science.

We

- are inclusive: everyone is welcome to contribute to shaping our organisation and delivering our outcomes.
- empower people in their jobs, and careers and interests, to be able to look after geological collections to the best possible standard.
- draw on the impressive knowledge and expertise of our community to develop professional and trusted advice and resources.

- are forward looking, and use our networks alongside the strength of our membership to remain relevant to the wider sector, enabling a strong voice for collections and the people who work with and care for them.
- are transparent and accountable in our governance and activities.

3. Looking Ahead – 2023-2025

At the start of a new ‘captain’s tenure’, be it GCG or elsewhere, it feels customary for them to lay out a plan of change, often with the intention of making their mark in the Charity’s history books. However, having put a lot of thought into the Geological Curators Group’s present state (outlined above), Emma feels strongly that what GCG needs to prioritise above all other ambitions is delivering on current targets, re-establishing and cementing our position as a trusted specialist group, and delivering on an offer that makes us both greatly desirable and excellent value for members.

The following section identifies three types of target; primary proactive outputs, primary reactive outputs, and additional.

3.1 Outputs and Targets

The primary proactive outputs of the Geological Curators Group at present are:

- Online and in-person events (meetings, field trips, collections visits, networking opportunities, workshops, training, etc)
- Annual *Geological Curator* journal
- Quarterly *Coprolite* newsletter
- Regular social media content via Facebook and Twitter
- Regular blog articles
- Resources in the Member’s Area of the website
- Collections Map
- Lost and Found

The primary reactive outputs of the Geological Curators Group at present are:

- Supporting collections at risk and museums under threat
- Responding to public consultation documents
- Combining with the Geological Society and other partners to issue statements

Additional targets for the 2023-2025 period include:

- Complete the CIO changeover
- Embed the new committee structure
- Celebrate the milestone 50th anniversary
- Publication of *The Care and Use of Geological Collections*
- Establish a structured bursary scheme

- Facilitate discussion of a rebrand, evaluating responses from both members, as well as non-members from within our community, exploring all options and concluding whether it will grow our membership to the betterment of geological collections
- Support and facilitate collections management amongst the ‘amateur’ community, with an emphasis on documentation and heritage planning
- Consider ways to improve the environmental sustainability of the GCG by analysing, monitoring and working to decrease our carbon footprint

How to achieve these targets will form the bulk of committee discussion going forward.

3.2 The Care and Use of Geological Collections

In Matthew’s Roadmap 2017-2019, he expressed the committee’s desire to publish an updated version of *Guidelines for the Curation of Geological Materials* (1984). The creation of any major output requires not just resources, but also opportunity. In 2022, an opportunity was recognised by Emma Bernard for GCG to take on writing the second volume of the Geological Society of London’s *Geoscience in Practice* book series, to be on geological curation. A proposal from GCG for the text book *The Care and Use of Geological Collections* was accepted by the Geological Society in spring 2023.

Although the format will be different to that outlined by Matthew in his 2017 roadmap, this project affords us an opportunity to provide a version of the long-awaited update of *Guidelines for the Curation of Geological Materials*. If the book can be sufficiently detailed as to serve as an update to this volume, it will be an honour to fulfil Matthew’s goal, one which he would no doubt have contributed to a great deal, if he was still with us. There is currently the hope that the book will be published in 2024, for the 50th Anniversary. However, if it hits the shelves in 2025, marketing for it can still be part of the anniversary celebrations.

4. Conclusion

The top-level goals for the next three years are:

2023

- Embed the new committee structure, get new members up to speed, identify and facilitate any training required
- Establish a sustainable routine of delivery, to achieve all primary proactive outputs (outlined above) without delays on deadlines or periods of inactivity
- Establish a diverse events programme, including but not limited to an online offer for those less able to travel to in-person events
- Plan for our 50th Anniversary
- Use evaluation tools to determine whether rebranding, or not rebranding, will have the greatest positive impact on collections care (garner feedback on the question – why are those working or volunteering with geological collections not members of GCG?)
- Conclude the CIO changeover

2024

- Continue to deliver on established targets (just six words, but not a small undertaking)
- With the membership offer now excellent value for money, coordinate a membership push
- Mark the 50th Anniversary in a suitably spectacular way
- Establish and launch the new bursary scheme
- Publish *The Care and Use of Geological Collections*
- Support and facilitate collections management amongst the ‘amateur’ community, with an emphasis on documentation and heritage planning
- Identify new opportunities to consider for 2025, based on capacity

2025

- Succession planning (although most posts are renewed annually so this should always be in the back of our minds, not just at the end of the Chair’s tenure)
- Drive to diversify committee
- Expand global audience and offer
- Act on any new opportunities identified over the last two years, as capacity allows

The Geological Curators Group is here to serve our community, and so the opinions of our members are very important to us. If you would like to submit any feedback based on this document, please email the Chair, Emma Nicholls (chair@geocurator.org) and/or the Secretary, Lu Allington-Jones (secretary@geocurator.org), or write to us at the following address: Dr Emma Nicholls, Oxford University Museum of Natural History, Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PW.