

Society Guidelines

- Advocacy, lobbying, campaigning and activism
- Approved December 2008

Background

The Society's Council considered the Society's position on advocacy, lobbying, campaigning and activism at the Council meetings in June 2008 and December 2008. These activities are clearly differentiated from the Society providing access to information that might better inform research or policy, or better educate the public and teachers, as an impartial, balanced, independent and authoritative source.

The discussion took note of the guidance issued by the Charities' Commission on campaigning and political activity by charities, and of the ethos, purpose and governance of the Society. The Society is not a campaigning organisation; the manner in which it has built its standing over 175 years as a learned society is by informing people through promoting, discussing and disseminating knowledge.

Under Charity Commission guidelines¹ the Society cannot exist for a political purpose, the Society cannot give support or funding to a political party, and the Society must remain independent and ensure that any involvement it has with political parties is balanced and non-partisan. Trustees must not allow the charity to be used as a vehicle for the expression of the political (personal or party political) views of any individual trustee or staff member or, by extension, any individual member or groups of members. The Charity Commission does allow political campaigning or political activity by charities but only in the context of such activity supporting the delivery of the charitable purposes of the organisation. It is a matter for Trustees of the charity to decide whether and how to engage in such activities and the processes by which to manage that engagement.

The following guidelines, formally approved by the Society's Council in December 2008, apply to the Society; to all staff; and to volunteers, Committee members, Fellows or members who are acting in the name of the Society and/or any of its branches, research groups or any other collective group within the Society.

The guidelines do not apply to individuals who have an association with the Society when they are acting in a personal and individual capacity when, for example, undertaking research, publishing, or presenting at conferences or giving a lecture.

¹ *Speaking out; guidance on campaigning and political activity by charities.* Charity Commission

Rationale

The Society is establishing these guidelines in the knowledge that advocacy, lobbying, campaigning and activism can present difficulties in a complex organisation with a wide variety of stakeholders. These activities can lead to confusion, lack of a unified voice and can run the risk of misrepresenting and potentially damaging the Society's reputation, brand and standing.

The Society's Trustees have taken the decision therefore of the need to be explicit in managing carefully and/or limiting all such activities that are undertaken in the name of the Society or any one of its many subgroups, branches and networks across the breadth of its membership.



Guidelines

1. The Society's purpose is to advance geography. It achieves this through supporting research, education and outdoor learning, public engagement and in highlighting evidence for policy. It is on this basis that the Society has charitable status.
2. The Society in its name, and through delegated responsibility to its staff and Trustees, may act as advocate for the position and status of geography in school education and in higher education, including the funding of geography teaching, fieldwork and geographical research, and geography in the curriculum. The Trustees maintain an overview of such activities within the annual operating plan of the Society and as reported at Council meetings. Delegated responsibility is devolved to the Director in managing such activities.
3. In acting as advocates for the above activities, the Society's delegated responsible staff and Trustees may choose to respond to consultations; lobby ministers, MPs and others responsible for formulating policy; commission and disseminate targeted research (resources permitting); and hold conferences, seminars and other meetings to raise awareness of the issue(s).
4. For issues of deep concern in terms of the position and status of geography this may amount to a 'political campaign' that is planned in advance, fully approved by the Society's Trustees, and monitored in its execution. The Trustees limit such campaigning to support the status, position and funding of geographical education, fieldwork and research. The Trustees do not allow the Society's work, or that of its associated subgroups, to extend to either campaigning or activism on geographical and other issues or in relation to third parties.
5. The Society's Trustees may, from time to time, consider whether the Society wishes to lend its name and weight to the promotion of particular, substantive geographical research findings that are viewed as being of wide public benefit, such as for example, research on climate change. In these instances the Society may publish a position statement that has been approved by the Society's Trustees. The purpose of such a position statement is solely to inform, making use of the Society's authoritative and independent brand. Such statements are not to be used in campaigning or activist activities.
6. The Society does not empower any branch, committee, network, research group, or other group within the Society, or any individual Fellow or member or staff member, to speak in the name of the Society or on behalf of the Society, or to represent the Society's position (or that of any Society sub-group), unless agreed in advance or requested to do so on an agreed topic by the Trustees, the Director, or any person delegated to do so by the Director. This includes speaking to the media on behalf of/in the name of the Society.

Society's Council
December 2008