

Doing Geology from Snowdonia

Geoscience Wales gives a range of SME companies' access to the oil industry throughout the world, without them having to leave their beautiful North Wales base.

Many geologists were originally drawn to the subject through a love of mountains, countryside and open spaces. This is probably why, deep in the beautiful North Wales countryside, within easy hiking distance of Snowdonia, there is a surprisingly large community of geoscientists, working in many different fields.

North Wales has always had more than the average quota of geologists per square kilometre, as, apart from the obvious draw of the mountains, it is also home to a large number of quarries and mines. As the North Sea flourished, the industry expanded, with Robertson Research, now part of the Fugro Group, becoming one of the main employers of geoscientists in the region. Smaller companies were set up, as people were drawn to the area, or left a major employer like Robertson's, but made a 'life style choice' to stay in the region. But North Wales is hours by train from London, and even further from Aberdeen, the two main oil industry cities in the UK, making it both expensive and time-consuming for a small company to market itself.

This is where the multidisciplinary consultancy Geoscience Wales Ltd comes in, as Marketing Manager Anne Benfedda, explains. "By being a member of Geoscience Wales, a company or consultant has access to the marketing benefits of a much larger organisation. We promote their interests to the industry both nationally and internationally, opening up opportunities to them which might not normally come their way. We offer continuous support, including finding

them a foreign agent or helping with registration in another country."

On behalf of the members, Anne is also able to tap into various EU and Welsh regional funds, designed to attract high tech companies, jobs and educated people to more remote areas.

Geoscience Wales is a non-profit making association run entirely for the benefit of its members. It consists of nearly forty companies, ranging from experienced consultants to much larger concerns such as Chemostrat (see GeoExpro 6_08) and Egniol, which employs 150 people. There is an equally wide range of disciplines, with structural specialists, reservoir geologists, biostratigraphers, geochemists and petrophysi-

cists all represented. "We even have a company specialising in technical petroleum translations," Anne adds.

"The biggest challenge we face is to market all the companies equally, yet non-competitively. The market has been quite buoyant since we started in 1999, so it hasn't been a major issue so far, with enough work for everyone. Many of our members are primarily scientists, rather than business people, and as such are very happy to be able to concentrate on what they do best, leaving us to find them a good stream of business. And of course, it's a great advantage to have access to the expertise of the other companies."

Barrie Wells, Managing Director of Conwy Valley

Systems, describes the advantages of being part of Geoscience Wales for his company, which specialises in petrographic exploration and environmental work throughout the world. "Wales holds a special place in geology, (the geological age, Maentwrogian, is Welsh) which is part of the attraction for the large community of independent geological service companies and consultancies which has blossomed here. However, small companies find it hard to market themselves around the world, so an umbrella organisation is the key to survival. A trip to the Far East to market our niche product, Petrog, would wipe out the profit on any sales achieved. Geoscience Wales is essential to our future."



Representatives of companies in Geoscience Wales demonstrate the variety of their products at Petex in 2008. From left, James Wingfield, John Newsome (seated), Anne Benfedda, Andrew Barnwell and Richard Hatton. Seated is PhD student Ewa Szarawarska from Aberdeen University.