

**Speech by Mr. Noel Dempsey TD, Minister for  
Communications, Marine and Natural Resources for the  
Launch of the National Geoscience Programme at the Royal  
Irish Academy on 21st February 2007.**

I am delighted to be here at the Royal Irish Academy to officially launch the National Geoscience Programme, 2007-2013.

This Academy is all-island in scope and independent in its advice, two qualities that make it extremely valuable.

And over the years we, in this Government, have been fortunate to be able to rely on all of you in the Academy for knowledge and guidance.

So I believe that it is of added benefit to have the National Geoscience Programme published jointly by the Academy and the Geological Survey of Ireland.

The Geological Survey of Ireland, or the GSI, is a Division of my Department and is the national geological agency and a key component of the national science system.

I have encouraged GSI to take a leading role in developing the geoscience sector – a sector that has not been explicitly recognised until recently.

I want our science strategy to position Ireland as an international centre of excellence by 2013.

I also want to see geoscience as an inherent component of that innovation-driven culture.

We have provided €33 million for geoscience in the National Development Plan 2007-2013. This will really benefit the implementation of the National Geoscience Programme, which has been crafted to give geoscience the scope to continue to make a real difference to so many aspects of Irish life.

By driving a strongly focused knowledge and research agenda, this Programme will improve our understanding of how our planet works.

Its research agenda targets energy, environment, marine and infrastructure issues, which are all central to the success of the NDP itself.

It envisages an all-island geoscience graduate scheme, which will provide key modules on a networked basis and will be influential in ensuring the success of the programme.

I regard the all-island basis of this programme as an important dimension for Government. With the current positive signals on the re-establishment of institutions in Northern Ireland, we want to promote this type of North-South collaboration, where we share skills and experience.

Geology does not stop at political borders and this is very evident in the close cooperation between the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland and GSI.

We see it as critical for increased mutual understanding and sustained economic competitiveness.

There is no doubt that the National Geoscience Programme will have a major impact on GSI and the way it delivers its information and services.

We recently announced that GSI will make its data available free of charge to customers over the Internet.

This open access, in itself, will be a major challenge, but I am convinced that it will promote the maximum use of GSI's data, both in Ireland and abroad.

It will lead to new developments in the knowledge economy and facilitate an increased research agenda for new discoveries and economic benefits.

I am also announcing, today, a new Scheme of Research Awards as a practical mechanism for driving the implementation of the National Geoscience Programme and in particular stimulating research capacity.

The new *Griffith Geoscience Research Awards* will honour Richard Griffith the celebrated geologist and engineer, who lived from 1784 to 1878 (94 years).

I am making €3 million available this year to initiate the Scheme and a significant feature of the awards is the establishment of the open access in GSI and the development of an all-island graduate school system in geoscience

Next year is the UN International Year of Planet Earth. I believe this will give both GSI and the Academy, key players in Ireland for this promotion, an ideal platform to promote geoscience among the Irish community and I believe we can be a shining example of what can be achieved in this area.

In launching the National Geoscience Programme and the new Awards, I would like to thank the officers and staff of the Academy and the GSI for their participation and support for programme.

While this Government's NDP embraces plans at local and regional level, it also includes plans for the many and varied specialist areas that contribute to improving the quality of all our lives.

That is why we have included substantial funding and commitment to science and we place a great emphasis on geoscience as we know that the return will be vast over the coming 7 years.

Thank you.