Dept. of Geology & Geophysics / School of Geosciences
King's College
Aberdeen
AB24 3FX
Scotland, UK

Tel: +44 (0) 1224 272 000
Email: geology@abdn.ac.uk
Web: www.abdn.ac.uk/geosciences/departments/geology/

21 July 2025

Professor Michael Lockwood, President, Royal Astronomical Society
Professor Jon Gluyas, President, Geological Society of London

Copies to: The Rt Hon Lord Vallance KCB FRS FMedSci FRCP HonFREng, Minister of State for Science, Research and Innovation; Graeme Dey MSP, Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans

Re: Closure of geophysics degrees in UK universities and the strategic importance of geophysics expertise

Dear Professors Lockwood and Gluyas

We are writing on behalf of the University of Aberdeen and its School of Geosciences in response to your letter of 9th May 2025 regarding the closure of geophysics degree programmes in UK universities and the wider strategic importance of maintaining geophysics expertise.

We fully endorse the concerns articulated in your letter and welcome your leadership in raising this issue. Geophysics is a discipline of fundamental national importance, underpinning capabilities in energy transition, environmental monitoring, national resilience, and industrial strategy.

The Role of Aberdeen in UK Geophysics

The University of Aberdeen has a distinguished legacy in geophysics education and research, with particular strengths in seismology, tectonics, applied geophysics, and subsurface energy. Our graduates and staff have made substantial contributions to academia, government, and industry both in the UK and internationally.

Like many institutions, we face increasing pressures due to declining undergraduate enrolments, cost constraints, and structural challenges. Nonetheless, we continue to invest in geophysics research and are exploring new delivery models, interdisciplinary offerings, and applied programmes to maintain expertise in this crucial area.

Strategic & Economic Importance

Geophysics is central to addressing major 21st century challenges, including:

- The exploration and management of subsurface energy resources, including geothermal energy, hydrogen storage, and carbon sequestration.
- Natural hazard risk mitigation, environmental monitoring, and infrastructure planning.
- Critical mineral exploration vital to the UK's energy transition.

- Climate change science, net zero policy implementation, and national security.

As highlighted in your original letter, geophysicists are in high demand, yet UK training pipelines are contracting. Aberdeen, as a hub for energy and net-zero innovation, is well-positioned to support national efforts to retain and grow geophysics capacity.

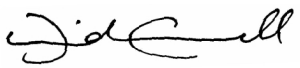
A National Response is Urgently Needed

We echo the call for:

- Recognition of geophysics as a Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subject (SIVS).
- Targeted support to ensure the continuation and renewal of geophysics programmes in key institutions.
- National coordination to promote student awareness and progression into geophysics careers.
- Refreshed capital and teaching infrastructure investment, akin to the Joint Infrastructure Fund.

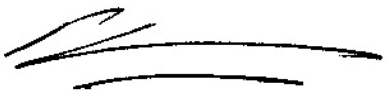
Without such action, we risk the irreversible loss of a discipline that is foundational to many of the UK's industrial and scientific goals. The University of Aberdeen stands ready to collaborate in any national working group or initiative designed to secure the future of geophysics education and expertise.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. David Cornwell
Senior Lecturer in Geophysics, MSc Geophysics Programme Director, School of Geosciences

Professor Dave Muirhead
Head of School, School of Geosciences



Professor Peter Edwards CITP FBCS FIET FRSA
Acting Senior Vice-Principal