

Deputy First Minister hails Lyell Centre as ‘a leading centre with bold vision to spearhead new energy evolution’

A pioneering global research centre for earth and marine science and technology based at Heriot-Watt University has been opened by the Deputy First Minister John Swinney.

Bringing together the expertise of the British Geological Survey with the academic innovation of Heriot-Watt, the Lyell Centre will ensure future generations of researchers are equipped and capable of meeting the global science and technology challenges facing the world.

Through championing innovation, collaboration and enterprise, this Scottish-based research facility is tackling some of the major issues of natural resource and energy supply and security in a sustainable way. Work underway at Lyell by world leading academics and scientists is already looking at solutions to critical global problems - from protecting coastal ecosystems, to understanding how our inland waterways will cope with future needs; from tackling the effects of climate change in Sub-Saharan Africa to finding deep-sea mining solutions that work within our global environment.

With Heriot-Watt being the first university in the UK to make a financial investment in tackling energy issues of this nature, the merger with BGS has brought to Edinburgh the only facility in Scotland where actual deep ocean floor drilling is mirrored within the research laboratories of the campus, supported by new, cutting edge analytical facilities including the largest, most advanced research aquarium in the UK.

Research at the Lyell Centre will be directed by Grand Science Challenges which will be adapted as the societal, economic and research landscape evolves and new challenges arise.

Four main Grand Challenges have been identified as part of the centre’s first strategic phase:

- Climate, life and surface environments
- Water and life in subsurface environments
- Energy from the earth
- Risk, hazards and uncertainties

Welcoming the vast potential the Lyell Centre will bring, Mr Swinney, who is also Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, said:

“By bringing environmental scientists and technologists together, the Lyell Centre sets itself apart as a leading centre for research and expertise with a bold vision to spearhead the new energy evolution and breed a new era of multi-disciplinary collaboration in land and marine conservation, geology and geoscience.

“It provides Scotland with a strong platform for solving complex challenges and aims to be at the frontline of delivering future energy needs. That is why I am proud this Government, through the Scottish Funding Council, has provided £3.5 million towards the Centre which will contribute not just to Scotland’s needs but those of the wider world as well.”

The purpose-built £21million Lyell Centre enables Heriot-Watt University and BGS to fully integrate their individual capabilities and combined inter-disciplinary expertise in land and marine conservation, geology and geoscience. Joint funders of the facility include the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and Heriot-Watt University.

Richard A Williams, Principal and Vice Chancellor of Heriot-Watt University, said, “Climate change is the greatest challenge of our time. Understanding how our planet works in order to limit the damage caused is critical going forward.

“I am confident that through our partnership with the BGS, the very existence of this fantastic new facility, and the world-leading staff we have attracted, and will recruit in the future, we will ensure that Heriot-Watt University is at forefront of the scientific advances to address this most challenging of problems.

“The work at the Lyell Centre will benefit from Heriot-Watt University’s global presence reaching out through our schools, research institutes and our international campuses in Dubai and Malaysia. I have no doubt it will become a beacon of engagement for research and education and a trusted source of impartial advice to non-academic stakeholders, policymakers and society.”

NERC, the largest funder of environmental science in the UK, is supporting BGS and the Lyell Centre through the funding it receives from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

Chief executive of the Natural Environment Research Council, Professor Duncan Wingham, said, “I’m pleased to see the enthusiasm and commitment to a shared vision for a national centre for

innovation shown by Heriot-Watt University, the British Geological Survey and the Scottish Funding Council come to fruition. The Lyell Centre will build on BGS's and Heriot-Watt's individual and combined interdisciplinary expertise, and will be one of Europe's leading centres for research and expertise in the Earth and marine sciences.

"The aim of this collaboration is to find pragmatic, evidence-based solutions to a range of critical global challenges, including climate change, how we use and develop land, and how we source minerals and deal with waste. I look forward to seeing the centre develop."

Jo Johnson, Minister of State for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, said, "With our investment, the Lyell Centre in Scotland will combine science and technology to boost the UK's world-leading research in to our environment.

"Exploring themes ranging from geology and hydrology to marine ecosystems, the Centre will use the latest research methods and technologies to tackle the planet's biggest challenges such as climate change and energy supply."

Heriot-Watt University and BGS also aim to further develop the centre's mixed funding portfolio which will be underpinned by major projects and embedded in an international strategy. As part of this, Heriot-Watt is actively recruiting senior academics to build research teams that will realise the centre's vision and research strategy.

ENDS

Notes

Heriot-Watt University is a global institution with over 30,000 students studying on its degrees world-wide. Heriot-Watt specialises in science, technology, engineering, business and design, with a particular focus on developing solutions to critical global issues, such as climate change and energy. Established in 1821, the university has campuses in Edinburgh, the Scottish Borders, Orkney and Dubai, and is investing £35 million in a new campus in Malaysia.

A recognised leader in ideas and solutions, the University has established a reputation for world-class teaching and renowned, practical, leading research. It is ranked top in Scotland and in the top ten universities in the UK for the impact of its research, with 82% rated as world-leading or internationally excellent. With roots in Scotland and a truly international reach, Heriot-Watt is a leader in transnational education and a powerful driver and engine of the economy, transforming people and the world.

The British Geological Survey (BGS), a component body of the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), is the nation's principal supplier of objective, impartial and up-to-date geological expertise and information for decision making for governmental, commercial and individual users. The BGS maintains and develops the nation's understanding of its geology to improve policy making, enhance national wealth and reduce risk. It also collaborates with the national and international scientific community in carrying out research in strategic areas, including energy and natural resources, our vulnerability to environmental change and hazards, and our general knowledge of the Earth system.

www.bgs.ac.uk

NERC is the UK's main agency for funding and managing research, training and knowledge exchange in the environmental sciences. Its work covers the full range of atmospheric, Earth, biological, terrestrial and aquatic science, from the deep oceans to the upper atmosphere and from the poles to the equator. The agency co-ordinates some of the world's most exciting research projects, tackling major issues such as climate change, environmental influences on human health, the genetic make-up of life on Earth, and much more. NERC is a non-departmental public body and receives around £330m of annual funding from the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS).

NERC's research centres include: the British Antarctic Survey, the British Geological Survey, the National Oceanography Centre, the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, the National Centre for Atmospheric Science, and the National Centre for Earth Observation.

www.nerc.ac.uk