

An eventful year at the AGI

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Over the last three years, the pace of change in the GI industry has accelerated. These changes are being driven by a number of forces. The most important of these is the rapid convergence of different information media, most notably the web and wireless telephony. This convergence is leading to a demand for geographical information and geographically enabled applications from a very rapidly growing market. The same technologies as well as GPS and increasingly affordable digital aerial photography, and space imagery are helping to generate geographical data at an unprecedented rate.

None of this would matter if there were no demand for geographically enabled services. However, the Government's modernisation agenda demands a range of geographically enabled services, such as the more efficient buying and selling of houses that is driving NLIS (the National Land Information System). At the same time, the mobile phone operators are looking to location-based services to create new markets and to help justify the massive investment in 2.5G and 3G technologies. Elsewhere in government, agencies such as the Office for National Statistics are responding to the need for information to support initiatives such as neighbourhood renewal by building new, free services on the Internet such as the new Neighbourhood Statistics Service.

There has never been a better time to be in the GI industry, the job market is buoyant, and the demand for good graduates outstrips supply. In order to support this growing and dynamic industry the AGI has had to grow and adapt. Our mission is to 'Maximise the use of geographic information for the benefit of the citizen, good governance, and commerce'. We have found that this mission could not be furthered without substantial additional resources in the AGI, most notably personnel. Despite much good will from RICS it proved impossible to find additional space in their Great George Street Headquarters. This led to a search for new premises and a move to offices in Farringdon Road early in the year.

The new location has allowed an expansion of the AGI secretariat. The most important appointment, a permanent New Media Manager, has been made possible through generous funding from a number of our members. This will make our aspirations to develop the AGI web site into a one-stop-shop for information on the GI industry a reality. Another important development has been the generous secondment, by Ordnance Survey, of a full-time Events Manager, who is helping us develop our successful program of events around the country. Negotiations are approaching a final stage for the AGI to absorb AskGIraffe, a GI Metadata and data integration service, founded by the National Geospatial Data Framework Board and funded by NIMSA (National Interest Mapping Service Agreement) funds. This development will expand the secretariat by a further three and a half posts.

The AGI's successful partnership with CMP, to co-ordinate the national GIS exhibition and the AGI Conference, which was assured by the signing of a new contract last year, continues to benefit the wider GI community as well as the two organisations involved. This year's conference has attracted many highly prestigious speakers from both within and beyond the GI industry. The willingness of senior figures in government and commerce to participate in the conference is yet another sign of the increasing importance of the sector.

The AGI's influence extends to regional branches in Scotland and Wales and discussions about forming a Northern Ireland branch are progressing well. An important development at the end of last year was the formation of a Local Government Special Interest Group (SIG). Local Government is becoming ever more important as a producer of geographic information as well as a user, particularly in relation to initiatives such as the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG) and the National Land Use Database (NLUD). The SIG gives a collective voice to those involved

in the GI aspects of local government work and has already organised a number of very well attended meetings to help inform colleagues about developments.

The end of last year also saw the formation of the GIS in Schools SIG, to demonstrate the AGI's commitment to the role of GIS in education. The other SIGs include Address Management, Crime and Disorder, Coastal Zone Management, Europe, Health and Environment. The Special Interest Groups are vital to the Association to ensure that our programme includes up to date and relevant material on pressing issues. The SIGs contribute greatly to the programme of events and their role in the Association is being recognised by bringing in new arrangements for their co-ordination.

The AGI's reach extends beyond the United Kingdom. Around the world, but particularly in Europe, the AGI is seen as a model of what a national GI association should be. Ian Masser, the AGI sponsored candidate was elected to a second term as President of EUROGI (the European umbrella organisation for national GI associations) and the AGI is also separately represented on the EUROGI Executive Committee. EUROGI is important for two reasons; firstly, it allows the co-ordinated lobbying of governments throughout Europe. Proposed policies, which have already been tested and shown to work in another country, are much easier to 'sell' to one's own politicians than completely fresh ideas. This is particularly so when issues of national competitiveness or government efficiency are involved. In addition, certain aspects of the GI industry are being co-ordinated or regulated at the European level. European decisions have been vital in funding the continent's contribution to the global navigation satellite system, which will augment the existing GPS system in the near future. Similarly, regulations, such as the data protection laws, which affect geographical information, are increasingly being formulated at a European level.

The rapid changes in the industry, and the AGI's response to the many challenges these pose, demand a great deal from the volunteers on Council, the many AGI committees, and the permanent secretariat. The AGI was saddened by the sudden death, in a mountain walking accident, of Shaun Leslie our last director. Shaun did much to build the AGI into an organisation able to meet these challenges and he paved the path for a full-time director, Mark Linehan, to take on the expanded role of the Association. However, Shaun and Mark, as well as the Association as a whole, have benefited enormously from the indefatigable and constantly enthusiastic support of our Deputy Director, Gayle Gander. Sadly, for the Association, Gayle's career aspirations are taking her on to new challenges in the industry after a very distinguished ascent up the AGI ladder. She will be very much missed.

This year's sourcebook reflects the vibrancy of a growing and successful industry. The AGI cannot accomplish its mission without your support; however, by furthering our mission we can support you. This has always been the nature and the role of the AGI, long may it continue.