CIPR

Excellence Awards 2025

Entrant company name: **British Geological Survey**

Entry title: **BGS: Quake it off**

Category: **STEM Campaign**

While the British Geological Survey receives considerable attention in times of crisis (earthquakes, sinkholes, landslides etc), we often struggle to break into news agendas with positive examples of our research. We also face significant challenges in taking highly specialised subject matter and translating it into content which engages younger audiences with STEM research.

To overcome this, we identified that tying our science into a prominent cultural event would act as a hook with journalists, providing a narrative which could bring the value of our geoscientific research to life.

The media team were tasked with securing a tactical engagement with the media that would be able to meet the following objectives:
• bring geoscience to life among previously unengaged audiences;
• ensure the story combines 'passion' and 'impact' around the subject of geoscience;
• help challenge misconceptions about geology and geoscientists;
• deliver strong ROI on investment (staff time only), measured through performance metrics, reactive engagement and sentiment.
• achieve more than 100 pieces of coverage across local and national media

To achieve these objectives, no external cost/paid media/agency fees would be available and there would be no use of paid media.

In June 2024 the Taylor Swift Eras Tour came to the UK- a cultural phenomenon which would sell over 10 million tickets. Taylormania was here, and the British media was insatiable in its hunt for new lines to cover her concerts.

It was in this environment that a scientist causally mentioned that the opening UK concert in Edinburgh had been picked up on a BGS seismic monitoring station six miles away. It was immediately recognised that this would resonate across newsrooms– the challenge now to translate complex seismology into an easily accessible narrative.

It became apparent that the seismograph data resembled audio waveforms and depicted the story of each event– peaks in earthshaking energy matching with her most popular songs. Through this, BGS could translate the intangible into the highly visual. The in-house media team wasted no time in preparing a streamlined press release, far more visual than house style, and created a simple set of key messages pre-agreed with senior managers to allow speedy deployment. Contact lists were created that brought science correspondents and active contacts together with a separate list of culture and arts writers– to allow for a broader sell in.

It was recognised that to enable broad engagement with a science-related story, a ready-to-deploy package of assets should be offered to journalists at the most opportune time in the news cycle.

Firstly, two young and self-confessed Swifties within our Seismology team were armed with prepared lines and permission to otherwise speak with freedom to ensure authenticity and dispel perceptions of geologists as 'old men with beards'.

To empower journalists to convey the concepts with ease, BGS graphic designers created simple visuals with clearly labelled data points marked against what songs prompted the activity– all cleared for reproduction and marked with BGS logos for brand recognition purposes.

With a clear angle, strong supporting assets and a compelling narrative, it was now timing that would be key to maximising results from the media engagement. After debate, it was decided that waiting for the next UK leg of the tour would catch journalists hungry for new lines for an ongoing story. Under an embargo which would lift on the morning of Tay Tay's first Liverpool gig, the media team sold in the release with existing contacts and untested culture and arts correspondents.

The press release was a genuine marriage between scientific expertise and storytelling, including a catchy headline (Quake it off: Taylor Swift concerts shake Edinburgh), playing heavily on the power of the pun.

The press release included:
- a breakdown by event to differentiate energy produced and create competition
- simple quantifications of ground movement to act as a clear data point for journalists to focus coverage around
- a breakdown of data by song to demonstrate which were most 'seismic'

Ahead of the embargo lifting there was significant interest from journalists and spokespeople had a number of interviews prebooked– while their diaries were cleared to enable further engagement should it be requested.

Driven by pan-network coverage from the BBC (prominently on the homepage for the day), a Sky News reporter live from outside Murrayfield Stadium and extensive features in several UK newspapers, demands for further interviews flooded in– quickly enabled through use of pre-prepared Swiftie spokespersons and the media pack repurposed for follow-up coverage.

These requests increasingly turned international, with dawn in each time zone bringing a rush of new coverage and social media engagement, as the genuine passion of our experts for both Taylor Swift and seismology captured the imagination of audiences and allowed a culture-defining moment to be viewed through an entirely new lens.

In terms of metrics, the campaign achieved:
• Over 2,726 pieces of media coverage
• 18 broadcast interviews in 48 hours
• Coverage in 75 countries (by descending volume: US, UK, Italy, Canada, Australia, France, Ireland, India, Romania and Hungary)
• Stories published in English, Italian, Spanish, French, Hungarian, Romanian, German, Greek, Portuguese and Indonesian
• 18,500 BGS's social media engagements
• 638hrs total watch time on BGS-produced accompanying social media video; and
• Inclusion in several 'best stories of 2024' media wraps (ITV / Financial Times US / Daily Mirror)
• Staff time costs were estimated at £1780

The most pleasing outcomes from this campaign were the inclusion of many of our key messages in the coverage, the promotion of BGS' role as the UK's national earthquake monitoring agency to a wide audience and the demystifying of the science of energy/movement through a relatable and engaging example. Promoting the expertise of young and enthusiastic scientists also helped to challenge misconceptions about geology and geoscientists.

Feedback through our social media channels confirmed these outcomes. Please see supporting materials for evidence.