

NERC Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) in Oil & Gas

Graduate Committee Meeting, 6th March, 2017, Edinburgh Training & Conference Venue

Present: Charlotte Beasley (CB), Anna Clark (AC), Stuart Clarke (SC - Chair), Pavlos Farangitakis (PF), Mike Lacey (ML), Lorna Morrow (LM), Sean O'Neill (SO), Christina Nikolova (CN), Katy Oakes (KO), Hossam Osman (HO), Jack Richardson (JR), Johanne Vad (JV)

1. Welcome and apologies

SC welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were tabled on behalf of Laura Duran and Jonathan Hardman.

2. Approval of Minute dated 11th February 2016 and update on actions

The minute was approved with the date amended to 11th, not 12th February 2016.

Feedback forms: Students were reminded of the importance of returning course feedback forms as a means of having their voice heard as well as driving improvements to future courses for themselves and subsequent cohorts. Industry representatives currently see who has returned forms and so can make their own judgements on which students are engaging fully with the programme that industry is funding. AC/LM would like to see the current @60% return rate improved considerably. The merits of distributing electronic forms or setting aside 15 minutes in the classroom at the end of each course for students to complete paper copies were discussed. HO suggested the use of Google Docs for an electronic survey. This does anonymise the sender so the ability to track who is returning feedback is lost. Note subsequent to meeting: Google Docs was used to collect feedback on the EnvEXPO and Petroleum Economics courses and although there have been comments that the form is easier to access and use, the return rate has dropped further. A return to paper copies distributed and collected during the course will now be tried.

Internships – CDT guidance is available on the [CDT website](#) and although NERC is clear in its support of industry internships and the resulting extension to completion dates, some universities still insist on PhD completion within 4 years and do not take into account that the standard CDT project period is already 4 years. Some students have reported that for their university's annual review process, they are expected to have performed to the same level as a non-CDT student who has not been engaged in the 10 week training programme. Guidance on internships is available on the Members' page of the CDT website; a maximum of 16 weeks internship is recommended.

Visits to operational sites: AC reported that difficulties in gaining security clearance for rig/drilling sites have prevented any such visits being scheduled. Offshore visits are not possible due to the cost of the offshore safety training requirements. AC is currently in discussion with colleagues at Aberdeen University to try and gain access to onshore sites, while reports indicate that Southampton University are trying to secure access to industrial sites/vessels as part of the Subsea Hazards course.

CDT conference posters: Around a quarter of students have provided copies of their posters, generally in response to requests for information to use at the CDT stands at conferences e.g. PETEX.

Researchfish: LM reported that NERC has changed the reporting eligibility criteria and only students in years 3 and 4 of their studentships will be required to complete a research output return.

3. Review of 2015/16 Training Academy programme and planned provision for 2016/17 and 2017/18

Travel Risk Assessment: Students agreed that the course joining instructions are very useful as they can be used as evidence for risk assessment purposes when letting the local university know of travel plans. AC will remind students that they need to follow their local travel policies and complete relevant paperwork when they are attending CDT courses. AC also reported that students in future, students are required to sign the health and safety document before boarding the field trip bus as confirmation that they have read and understood the information contained therein.

2015 cohort Communications course: The cohort thinks this course should be offered earlier in the training programme as many will have an MSc poster they can use as source material. However, most universities run their own professional development/soft skill courses for PhD students and the Training Academy and Management Committees had agreed that the Training programme should not duplicate this area. It was suggested that the course could be optional, but that risks there being insufficient numbers to make the course viable. LM will check with the Training Academy Committee to ask if local university soft skills courses can count towards the optional 10 days training allocation.

Engineering/Environmental course input: Students suggested that rather than having stand-alone courses in these areas, these aspects as they relate to Unconventionals or Mature Basins for example, should be included in the research theme introductory residential courses.

Joint cohort mandatory courses: The 2014 and 2015 student cohorts had enjoyed taking the Malampaya and Business Skills courses as a single group and would like to see more of this where possible. There will be more co-attendance on optional courses as these become available to more than one cohort at a time.

2016 cohort EIR course feedback: Students still report that there is too much repetition of some material in this course. They would like to see more outlining of general environmental science areas of interest, not just as they relate to the oil & gas sector.

Co. Clare field trip 2017: AC confirmed the course was cancelled due to low take-up. There is often a relatively short window of opportunity for field trips due to weather conditions and the availability of teaching staff. For some areas e.g. Co. Clare, Skye, accommodation needs to be booked a year in advance but tutors are often not able to commit to teaching this far in advance.

CDT Website: Students find the lay-out of the course scheduling on the website difficult to follow. LM reported that the website is due to move to a new platform and that this will be taken into account in the re-design. Use of Google Calendar which students can sync to was suggested. AC is exploring this as an option.

Annual Conference 2017: Students asked that the 2014 and 2016 cohorts present posters with the 2015 cohort giving at least one presentation on their project. LM confirmed that there is currently an expectation that 2014 cohort will present their final research results at the November 2018

conference. As the usual Heriot-Watt conference venue is undergoing refurbishment, it is likely that the 2017 conference will be held in a city centre venue. 2016 cohort noted that it is difficult for the incoming cohort to know who is in their group. Student reps agreed that they would facilitate a get-to-know event for the 2017 cohort on the evening before the conference.

Final 4th year course: This is at the early planning stage and will likely consist of a 3 or 4 day residential course based at a large country house, covering careers advice, interview practice and a field trip. The suggested scheduling was February 2018 but students requested that as many companies begin their recruitment activities in September, the course should run in October/November 2017.

4. Feedback on CDT Guidance to Students and Supervisors document, in particular course attendance and etiquette

There has been an increase in the number of students cancelling course attendance at short notice, or absenting themselves early from courses, or engaging in extensive, non-course related screen activity during courses. This is disrespectful of the course contributors who are often providing their time, experience and materials at no charge, as well as to the companies who fund the CDT's training programme. It was agreed that both students and supervisors will be asked to sign the Guidance for Students and Supervisors document as an informal contract indicating their commitment to uphold the principles and aims of the CDT.

The student representatives agreed that they would email their own cohort with some course etiquette ground rules, using peer pressure encourage improvements. It is recognised that inattention and non-attendance reflect badly on the individual, their cohort and the CDT as a whole. It was agreed that instances of repeated activity should be notified to the individual's principal supervisor.

5. Review of Young Professional (YP) mentoring scheme

The YP scheme is valued and for many the relationship has been beneficial in terms of their research and personal development. However, it is possible that the existing process of linking up mentors and students so that neither party has attended the same universities or is working in a similar area may have hindered some students and mentors from establishing a relationship.

A move to a more open scheme where student and mentor profiles are available on the CDT Members' page allowing people to identify and develop areas of common ground was suggested and approved. LM will now contact mentors to ask for their agreement to this approach. LM will continue to monitor uptake of the scheme to ensure that no single student or mentor is monopolising attention.

6. Any Other Competent Business

The CDT Admin team would like to see more student-led reporting on the CDT website and encouraged students to write blog-style reports with photos on courses for inclusion on the News & Events page.

Fruit rather than biscuits was requested for break-times

There was a request for mixed accommodation when students are staying in apartments. AC agreed this could be offered but that some students required/preferred single-sex accommodation for cultural or personal reasons. AC offered to trial an 'opt-in' system in future for those who are happy to be in mixed accommodation when in multi-bedroom apartments.

Access to local sports facilities was requested. The on-site facility at Heriot-Watt does offer guest membership, as to most professional gyms. However, it is unlikely that complimentary access can be provided.

Students reported some difficulties with obtaining guest internet connections at certain venues and requested that these details are notified more widely.

NERC indicated during 2016 that CDT funding was now regarded as a one-off opportunity to address a priority training need and therefore the partnership is not eligible for renewal. John Underhill is exploring other funding opportunities in order to maintain the current CDT, but NERC has also recently announced 8 studentships in a new CDT either in Freshwater bioscience and sustainability or Environmental science underpinning the sustainable future of the energy sector. **Note subsequent to meeting:** *The Chancellor announced in the Spring budget that a further 1,000 PhD studentships are to be distributed across the UK Research Councils so this might represent a new funding source.*

Students asked for clarification on the end dates of current contracts for AC and LM and offered whatever help they could to bring about extensions.

SC brought the meeting to a close at 7 p.m. and thanked everyone for their constructive comments and discussion.