

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

Graduate Committee Meeting, 12th February, 2016, Edinburgh Business School, Heriot-Watt University

Present: Anna Clark (AC), Laura Duran (LD), Jonathon Hardman (JH), Mike Lacey (ML), Lorna Morrow (LM), Sean O'Neill (SO), Hossam Osman (HO), Jack Richardson (JR), Nick Schofield (NS -Chair), John Underhill (JU), Johanne Vad (JV)

1. Welcome and apologies

NS welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were tabled on behalf of Katy Oakes.

2. Approval of Minute dated 20th March 2015

The minute was approved.

3. Review of 2014/15 Training Academy (TA) programme and planned provision for 2015/16 and 2016/17

JU reported that the student feedback from the first year of TA courses had been used in the submission to NERC which had resulted in their decision to fund a 4th student cohort. This showed the importance of feedback, not only in tailoring and strengthening the training provision for future cohorts, but also in demonstrating the effectiveness of this CDT model. LM asked student representatives to encourage their cohorts to return the course feedback forms as industry sponsors do monitor these submissions. Industry sponsors do receive a list of student names who have submitted feedback forms after each course, but individual comments remain unattributed to encourage frank and constructive appraisal. **Action:** Student representatives

SO gave a general overview of the 2014/15 programme and it was noted that changes had been made to the 2015/16 1st year programme in response to student feedback. The Unconventionals course at Durham received particular praise. The 2015 cohort also praised the lecture/exercise format of the current Petroleum Basins Analysis course, as had the 2014 cohort.

AC reported that the Alps field trip is now being considered as an optional course in the 3rd year and that the Biostratigraphy course, offered as an optional course in November 2015, was now compulsory. It was agreed that any students in the 2014/15 cohort who now wished to take this course could take it when it runs in September 2016.

The meeting discussed the proposal of courses in the 2nd and 3rd year programmes being scheduled 'back-to-back' as this would help with planning lab work. However, the unanimous view of representatives is that having more than two consecutive weeks is not beneficial as many had found the Edinburgh/Manchester combination in 2015 challenging. There was a request that school holidays should be avoided when scheduling TA courses. LM suggested that fitting 10 weeks of training into the first year of PhD study, as well as @6 weeks holiday, is challenging. However, there was general agreement that front-loading the training provision in this manner works for the

majority of student and that developing the cohort bond provides another support group for students as they settle into their PhD studies.

Both cohorts asked that TA course dates be circulated as early as possible and it was accepted that dates for 9 weeks of the 10-week 1st year of the programme for the 2015 cohort have all been notified.

HO reported that there has been too much repetition of the background regulatory information from a number of presenters on the November 2015 Environmental Impact & Regulation course and that more should be done to ensure communication between speakers so that they focussed more on their specialism after the introductory speaker had provided the introductory overview. There was general agreement that it is beneficial to hear about a topic from different perspectives, and that this is provided by a range of speakers, but that increased co-ordination is necessary.

Action: AC to discuss with EIR presenters for 2016 course

SO raised the possibility of including more Health & Safety material in the TA programme e.g. Piper Alpha, Macondo. NS agreed to provide a day's course on this topic, and it was also suggested that CDT students involved in this area might also contribute e.g. Katy Oakes who is researching rig collapse resulting from earth movement.

Action: NS and AC to liaise with TA Committee Chair re dates and content

There was general agreement that more environmental and engineering material/courses and operational experience should be included in the programme. NS agreed to speak to Baker Hughes and Weatherfield for site visits to the test drilling rigs available in Aberdeen. JU reported that Schlumberger's test drilling site near Livingston is currently mothballed, but that discussions are ongoing regarding CDT use of the teaching facilities there. HO proposed a tour of the Schlumberger site at Cambridge and JU agreed to progress this with Phil Christie. JU reported that he is on the advisory board for the Irish Centre for Research in Applied Geoscience (iCRAG) and that there have been discussions about a joint course with CDT and iCRAG students at the core store at Iron Mountain near Aberdeen.

Action: NS and JU

As regards the optional course programme, AC reported on the balance between the number of courses available and ensuring the sufficient numbers of students take up the course to make them viable.

AC reported on the current procedure for students registering for the Nautilus Open Access optional courses as the company is now only giving 6 weeks' prior notice of spare places on courses that CDT students have indicated they are interested in attending. Unfortunately Nautilus is also having to cancel some courses at short notice and have indicated that there would be no reimbursement of travel costs already incurred by a student in this event.

4. Annual Conference, 7th November 2016

Student feedback indicated that the poster presentation format had not been entirely successful. JU also noted that the sessions would have benefited from more experienced chairing to ensure that audience expectations were managed and questioning was appropriate to the 1st year level of reporting on early research results.

JV and LD reported on the format of MASTS conferences where posters are presented on screens and students talk to the poster rather than having set presentation times. In order to accommodate the increasing number of students who will be presenting at each conference, it was suggested that this be spread over two days with themed sessions. Students are keen to have equal exposure for their work and there is still a concern that those presenting on the second day may not achieve the same audience numbers.

The 2014 cohort requested the opportunity for each cohort to report to the conference on the achievements of the year just gone and this was agreed. The cohort also asked for assurances that all students are expected to present and this was affirmed by JU, LM and AC.

The meeting agreed that an archive of posters be kept by LM/AC on their own personal directories as evidence of the CDT's activities for current and future funders. Posters will not be hosted on the CDT Members' Area webpages and will not be passed on to any 3rd parties without prior consent from authors. **Action:** LM to request pdf copies of 2015 conference posters

5. Internship procedure

Because universities are judged on PhD completion rates, some are reluctant to agree to a suspension of studies for the purposes of undertaking an internship. NERC has also not been clear about the possibility of extension to the period of study to cover work placement opportunities. Any student undertaking a placement should expect to have their stipend suspended for the period of the internship. JU noted that it had been hoped that the industry sponsors would come forward with internship opportunities, but that the current economic downturn is having an adverse effect on such placements. LM/AC reported that the TA Committee had agreed to support students in their individual attempts to obtain an internship, but that the CDT was not in a position to arrange internships directly. **Action:** LM to contact NERC for guidance on their extension to studies policy

AC reported that Kate Gormley, who had facilitated arrangements for the 2015 EIR course, is progressing discussions regarding internships at the Underwater Centre, Fort William.

6. Proposed policy on Training Academy course attendance and optional module selection

Members agreed the policy and sought assurances that those missing mandatory courses are expected to attend these when they are next offered.

Student representatives proposed that a 'contract' covering the current Supervisor and Student Guidance document should be given to the student to seek the signatures of all project supervisors to ensure that they are all aware of the CDT TA commitment. **Action:** LM to draft document

LM noted that all CDT partners have agreed to students' attendance on the TA programme as a pre-condition for receiving the NERC studentship funding so theoretically, this funding could be put at risk if their CDT student(s) do not attend the TA programme.

LM noted that each student will receive a 'transcript' on completion of the TA programme showing all courses attended and whether these have mandatory or optional status.

It was also confirmed that if an individual had completed the full complement of optional courses, they could undertake additional courses if places were available. Any marginal costs of attendance would also have to be met from the student's RTSG allowance.

7. Any Other Competent Business

LM reported on NERC's move to use Researchfish as the new means of collecting information from students with at least one year of study behind them regarding their research outputs e.g. presenting at meetings/conferences. Students can update their record at any time throughout the year, although there is a submission window for the previous year of 1st February – 10th March 2016.

Action: Some students have received an email about the Researchfish requirement, but LM agreed to email NERC-funded students to remind them of the submission deadline. LM will also confirm with NERC that only students in receipt of funding from the NERC studentship grant are required to make this submission rather than all CDT students.

NS and JU mentioned upcoming conferences for and will forward details to LM for circulation to CDT students.

NS thanked all members for their attendance and helpful contributions to the discussions.