

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

Graduate Committee Meeting, 20th March, 2015, Edinburgh Business School, Heriot-Watt University

Present: Charlotte Aldred (CA), Peter Burgess (PB - by telephone), Anna Clark (AC), Jonathon Hardman (JH), Lorna Morrow (LM), Katy Oakes (KO), Sean O'Neill (SO), Nick Schofield (NS -Chair), John Underhill (JU), Johanne Vad (JV)

1. Welcome and introductions

NS welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Graduate Committee, including PB who joined the meeting via Skype. Due to connection problems, PB was unable to hear the first 30 minutes of the meeting but then joined via speakerphone.

CA's previously arranged travel plans meant that she could only stay for the first 30 minutes so her points were taken first and incorporated into later discussions under the relevant sections.

2. Committee membership and remit

The committee membership was deemed adequate for the current size of the CDT.

Action: Members are asked to consider the attached remit document and provide comments to NS and LM by 30th April, 2015.

LM confirmed that the minutes of Graduate Committee meetings would be circulated to other NERC CDT governance committees, in particular the Management and Training Academy Committees and Industry Advisory Board. The remit allows for a representative of this Committee to attend other CDT Committee meetings to speak to a particular item on that Committee's agenda in person for example.

3. Review of 1st year Training Academy provision to date, and planned for remainder of 1st year

General feedback: Everyone has found the CDT a very positive experience and no-one regrets taking on a PhD project attached to the CDT. Although the first residential course was quite long and very soon into the start of the PhD, the break since then until the most recent course in March has made everyone keen to meet up again and put their PhD studies to one side for a while. However, having courses running for 2.5 to 3 weeks is too long and events should be broken up wherever possible.

There is general perception that the environmental course in October/November 2014 was pitched at a relatively basic level whereas the recent geology-focussed course was at a much higher level.

Action: Training Academy to address this and ensure that all background disciplines are stretched to the same degree by the various courses.

There is a need to include an engineering focus in the Training Academy schedule.

Action: To be addressed by the Training Academy Committee at its first meeting on 27th March.

Residential course delivery format: CA and others praised the lecture/group exercise format of the course just completed (Petroleum Basins Analysis – Bell/Idiz, Shell) and asked that where possible, this format be replicated for future courses.

Course feedback: Presenters must be made aware in advance that not everyone in the cohort has a geology background. LM/AC confirmed that presenters are now sent details of students' current projects and previous degree qualification and subject to help them pitch their material at an appropriate level and ensure groupings for exercise work comprise a balance of technical knowledge. Presenters also have access to student profiles on the Members' Area of the CDT website and AC/LM will ensure that contributors are directed to this site for more detailed information regarding student projects.

Reading lists sent out in advance of courses had also been helpful to give the context for the course to non-specialists in the field and the practice should be continued. There was also a suggestion that a one/two day optional course on basic petroleum geology be offered to the new cohorts of students as a refresher to those with some knowledge of the subject from their previous degrees, and to provide a solid base for non-geology graduates to work from.

SO asked that presenters be reminded that for Q&A sessions, they should repeat the question posed by a member of the student audience before commencing their answer to ensure that everyone knows what question has actually been asked.

Students would like to have a career development/reflection session from individuals covering a range of roles within the oil and gas industries and academia e.g. post-docs and early career researchers, not just managers or exploration geologists, but modellers, environmentalists and so on.

The issue of Frack Academia this week had raised the issue of geopolitics/economics and the environment and the possible consequences of interactions with the media and via social media.

Action 1: A mandatory communications course has been agreed with a provider and dates around November 2015 are being finalised. The Training Academy Committee will look at including a Question Time-style debate at one of the future residential courses, perhaps at Durham in July 2015 to include representatives from NGO's such as Greenpeace. NS also agreed to explore the possibility of a Petroleum Economics course to run at Aberdeen (Alex Kemp had been invited to speak at the EIR residential course but had been unavailable at that time).

Action 2: JU to include information on the CDT profile in the media as part of the Induction programme to ensure that new students are aware of the interest, both positive and negative, that the CDT attracts and in turn, can be more considered in how they express their experience and understanding of the CDT model in the various forms of social media for example.

Action 3: So far links to published articles of likely interest to the CDT e.g. policy changes, new industry statistical reports, anti-fossil fuel protests, have been posted on the CDT Facebook page. However, AC/LM will now work with Heriot-Watt web team to add a Noticeboard facility on the Members' Area of the CDT website where details of articles and events can be posted and an internal discussion board set up to encourage debate.

Mentoring Scheme: CA asked about the possibility of the current cohort acting as mentors to the following cohort and JU agreed to this. The YP mentor scheme will also continue with some of the current mentors taking on a second mentee from the new cohort and hopefully some new mentors

volunteering to join the scheme. JU also confirmed that when a YP mentor 'leaves' the industry, whether temporarily or permanently, they would remain as mentors on the scheme for as long as they wished to. For example, one of the YP mentors has been made redundant this week, but had expressed a strong desire to continue as a mentor and JU is keen to support the individual through this life experience and would not wish to dismiss anyone from the CDT family.

Residential course rooming arrangements: Single rooms are the preferred option as sharing is causing some interpersonal difficulties. Even when students have expressed preferences about who they would like to share with, these have not always been accommodated. However, AC noted that it has not always been the case that when an individual has stated a preference, the other named individuals have wanted to share with that person. JV noted that being based in Edinburgh, she had not yet had to share accommodation for a residential course, but she was against preference sharing as this could create cliques within the group and she advocated rotation of roommates.

Action: AC to look at B&B guesthouse provision to a similar daily cost as the shared apartments/hotel accommodation as a possible option for those wishing a single room but there is a budget for each residential course which must be adhered to and multiple accommodation arrangements could be too time-consuming to administer.

4. Feedback to Training Academy Committee for 2nd and 3rd year provision – content, timing, format, providers, venues

Students feel that supervisors should be given greater encouragement to attend the induction of each cohort so that they gain a better understanding of the format and the purpose of the CDT. LM confirmed that all supervisors were invited to the CDT Launch in October 2014, and that they are informed by email as soon as Training Academy course dates are finalised.

Action: JU to circulate a 'statement of intent' to inform supervisors of the commitment to the CDT and the Training Academy provision that is expected from them and their students to the CDT in return for having a project included in the CDT. Members discussed the possibility of having supervisors sign and return the document but LM expressed concern that this would be seen as meaningless additional bureaucracy as there is no sanction that can be imposed if a supervisor/institution does not comply. The principal sanction is that the supervisor or university does not have projects included in future years. CDT students are encouraged to spread the word about the CDT to their supervisors and others in their departments to facilitate better understanding and buy-in to the model.

Students are also keen to have more input from government representatives and those involved in policy-making linked to the oil and gas sectors.

There was a further request to have training on recognising bias in data, how to deal with uncertainty and training in risk management included in the Training Academy schedule. SO raised the possibility of a session focussing on the Macondo Blow-out and other major oil/gas sector events such as Piper Alpha as this could encompass the topic of geohazards.

Action: Al Fraser (Imperial) has given lectures on this and Tony Gutierrez (Heriot-Watt) acted as an expert witness in the US case – the Training Academy will investigate this further.

A query was raised about Training Academy events being held at associate partners, particularly where these institutions may be research leaders in niche areas.

Action: The Training Academy Committee is charged with the responsibility of seeking out and attracting new training providers and formats and now that this committee is formally constituted and about to meet, there are more individuals involved in this task. So far HWU's focus has been to ensure that CDT students have a positive training experience and have therefore sourced and taken offers of provision on a more opportunistic basis.

JU noted that members of the Industry Advisory Board i.e. sponsors of the Training Academy element of the CDT, are keen to see the CDT students gaining more practical experience in fieldwork etc. Student feedback suggests that they are also interested in this, as well as visiting a rig and/or wellhead, and taking part in a seismic shoot.

Action: JU/AC are currently pursuing an opportunity for students to spend time at the Schlumberger trial rig and seismic testing facility at Livingston, near the Shale Oil Gas Museum at Almond Valley Heritage Centre, to be included perhaps in the October Annual Conference course.

Students have enjoyed the social events organised during each course e.g. bowling night, ghost bus tour and are keen for this to be repeated e.g. ceilidh. There is also a suggestion that branded polo shirts be commissioned and offered to CDT students.

Action: AC will follow this up with Nick Ward, and will liaise with those organising future Training Academy events to request that they include a social event in their timetable.

5. Annual Conference

Members discussed options for the format of the annual research conference at which the first cohort will present their project results so far e.g. 5 slide presentation, poster, combination of the two, and that it will probably need to be held over two days.

Action: Student representatives will consult with the rest of the cohort over the next two weeks' of the residential course in Manchester and feed back the results through NS.

6. Internships

JU confirmed that Total in particular is very keen to offer internships between years 3 and 4 of the studentship. Other industry sponsor companies are now also showing interest. There are issues to resolve regarding the need for a Temporary Suspension of Studies, resulting in the suspension of stipend payments and what expenses will be covered. Members discussed the possibility of the internship being an alternative to the five week training commitment in Year 3, and whether the internship should be considered more as a work placement.

Action: Student representatives to canvas opinion amongst the cohort to see how much interest there would be in an internship scheme and attitudes towards payment.

7. Any Other Competent Business

JU reported that NERC have expressed interest in CDT students writing a blog about their CDT experience linked to NERC's own website.

Action: LM to investigate whether this is specific to the CDT in Oil & Gas or is a request made to all NERC DTP's as well as the CDT.

Date of next meeting

The Committee can meet informally at any time, but the next official meeting will be held either during the Unconventionals course in Durham, or no later than at the time of the Annual Conference.

APPENDIX 1

Feedback from students following their discussions with Graduate Committee student representatives during Unconventionals residential course, Manchester, 23rd March – 7th April 2015

Whilst waiting to give our final presentations in Manchester, we found the time to provide feedback from the committee meeting to the rest of the Oil & Gas CDT. We've made a list of the main points that were addressed/brought up.

End of Year Presentation

General consensus is that the best format would be to have posters with a conference booklet briefly describing our topics.

Third Year Internship

Everyone agreed that an internship in third year counting towards our course requirements is a good idea. Concerns included: Ensuring it is earlier in third year so that it doesn't clash with the beginning of fourth year; People would like to have the choice between taught courses and internships as long as everyone can be accommodated within their choice.

Future Courses

The structured taught courses where regular exercises build on what we have learnt throughout the day worked well (e.g. Shell). Manchester followed a less structured format that wasn't as effective. It has been mentioned several times that a governing body (i.e. Lorna and Anna having more involvement?) overseeing the course curriculum at different universities may work as the lack of communication between Manchester and the CDT was disappointing (didn't build upon criticism from the Environmental Impact course).

The expectation from Manchester was that they would adapt some of their master's courses to fit within the CDT format. This may have been more effective than trying to create an entirely new program (advice for future centres?).

A week together for everyone to discuss our projects, spend time together without the course requirements was suggested. May be nice as currently we don't have much time to talk with other students researching similar topics.

Currently the balance is more towards industry and, as discussed in the committee meeting, a research focus for future training centres would be appreciated.

We've asked people to get in touch with their ideas for future courses. Two suggestions everyone agreed on were;

A course in engineering

A course in the downstream/production sector

Miscellaneous

Again, communication between the CDT and host universities was brought up. Especially the need to ensure that, e.g., 9 month reports or Fieldwork don't clash with training courses.

Invitation of, for instance, DECC representatives to the end of year presentation may increase the potential for collaboration between PhD students and the government.

It may be nice to have an open day where prospective students are invited to talk to current students about the CDT and their projects.

Who should people make contact with to be included in the NERC blog? There was interest from around 10 people.

Finally, as much advance notice for courses should be given. People were concerned about planning upcoming field seasons.

Thanks again for being so open to feedback