

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

Graduate Committee Meeting, 21st March, 2018, The Melting Pot, Edinburgh

Present: Chris Brennan (CB), Anna Clark (AC), Stuart Clarke (SC - Chair), Laura Duran (LD), Pavlos Farangitakis (PF – via Skype), Amanda Gray (AG), Jack Lee (JL), Lorna Morrow (LM), Sean O’Neill (SO), Christina Nikolova (CN), Hossam Osman (HO – via Skype), Jack Richardson (JR – via Skype), John Underhill (JU), Johanne Vad (JV), Milena Wales (MW)

1. Welcome and apologies

SC welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were tabled on behalf of Charlotte Beasley and Mike Lacey who were due to join the meeting via Skype, and Jonathan Hardman and Katy Oakes.

2. Approval of Minute dated 6th March 2017 and update on actions

The minute was approved.

Items for CDT news webpages: Only a couple of students had submitted items for posting on the CDT website’s news pages. LM will send out monthly requests to students for copy relating to research impacts. **Action: LM**

NERC funded students in their 3rd and 4th years are contacted annually to submit a research output return via Researchfish, and each July, LM sends out a request for information to be included in the annual NERC Monitoring report due in August.

Course feedback forms: These continue to be administered electronically but unfortunately the presumed convenience of this approach over paper copies completed before leaving the course has not improved return rates. The industry partners who fund the training programme have indicated that the current return rate is only just acceptable.

Visits to operational sites: AC reported that efforts to access the test drilling rig set-up at Aberdeen University have not been successful. The Subsea Hazards course did include a day’s exercise on a research ship however.

Soft skill communications training: LM confirmed the Training Academy and Management Committee view that courses run by partner universities in these areas should not count towards the elective course day allocation in the training programme schedule.

CDT Website: LM reported that due to resource issues within the web teams at Heriot-Watt, the planned move to a more user-friendly format had not taken place. AC has implemented a Google Calendar approach for sign on to elective courses.

Annual Conference 2017: The city centre venue had largely been welcomed by students and delegates. The main feedback was to have a timed poster schedule. The student reps had organised a pre-conference event as an opportunity for the incoming cohort to meet existing students.

CDT administrative team contracts: Extensions to the employment contracts for AC and LM were successfully negotiated during 2017.

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

AC confirmed that the full 4 year training programme is now in place with only the final year Careers workshop still to run for the first time (April 2018). Courses are amended in response to student feedback so it is important to provide information back to the CDT admin team. The Subsea Hazards course ran for the first time in September 2017 and feedback indicates that more time for discussion of the exercise would be appreciated to break up the long computer lab-based sessions.

JU emphasised the importance of the 2017 cohort taking the mandatory courses when they are offered as there might not be another opportunity if there's no recruitment of subsequent cohorts.

The issues of applicability of the CDT training courses for students with a non-geology background were debated. The geoscience focus had always been clear and the environmentalists generally appreciated the breadth of experience that the CDT programme is adding to their CVs. Some flexibility around the 50/50 split of the 20 elective course day requirement between CDT and non-CDT provided courses is in place. Students should contact LM/AC with details of externally provided courses as far in advance as possible so that approval can be obtained from the Chairs of the Management and Training Academy Committees.

Mandatory course providers in the first year have been asked to include an engineering aspect in their courses as far as is possible. The Commercial Geoscience course incorporating the Pembrokeshire field trip is seen by students as an excellent course for those with an engineering background.

Members discussed the format of the final Careers workshop; a mock assessment day and talks on possible career routes from professionals in different spheres i.e. not only industry but academia, policy/government and the media were suggested. Scheduling the course in October prior to the start of the final year was also proposed as being of greater potential benefit to students as they begin the search for future employment.

Course dates are put on the CDT website as soon as these are confirmed and AC sends an email to the relevant student cohort(s). Indicative dates for the 2017/18 programme were included in the Welcome letter sent to all 2017 cohort students and their supervisors prior to their registration in September/October 2017.

4. 2018 Annual Conference

JU confirmed that the 2015 cohort will give oral presentations, along with any students in the 2014 cohort who were not able to present at the 2017 conference due to extensions to their period of study to accommodate internships for example. All other cohorts, including 2014 entry students, will present a poster.

Feedback at the meeting indicated that the external presentations at the start of the conference should be curtailed to allow more time for posters and presentations. Delegate and student

feedback from the 2017 conference asked for timed poster sessions or a speed-interview schedule. Students in the environmental science theme noted that there are few delegates from this background who are invited/attend the conference, and that the location of their posters at the 2017 conference further hampered the interest they received. AC and LM assured members that the location near to one of the catering stations should have ensured footfall to that part of the foyer and this would be looked at carefully for the 2018 conference. LM asked for the environmental scientists to provide delegates' contact details so that invitations could be sent out to them.

Action: Environmental Science students

Members discussed a proposal to introduce a Best Poster Competition and it was agreed to look at this further but only on the basis that the competition is student-led. **Action: Student reps**

The conference should also highlight the next steps to employment of the 2014 cohort.

5. Update on CD Course Attendance Policy and Procedure

A policy of charging students for non-recoverable costs due to course cancellation was implemented after the March 2017 meeting. Wherever possible, the CDT administrative team try to find replacement attendees to minimise the cost. It is not possible to give cancellation deadlines as, for example, sometimes accommodation is booked as non-refundable due to the considerably discounted rate this attracts.

6. Review of Young Professional (YP) mentoring scheme

The lack of mentors with an environmental science background was noted, making the scheme less attractive to some students. The current model of students and YP mentors being free to contact one another at will is still bedding in and it's not clear that students in the new cohort, in line with previous cohorts, see the need or understand the purpose of the scheme. Previous cohorts have been assigned a designated mentor which has given students the impetus to contact their mentor, but this been only partially successful. It was proposed that the 2017 cohort be asked if they would like a mentor assigned to them, and LM will then source someone for them. **Action: LM**

7. Final CDT transcripts and Geological Society of London accreditation

LM reminded the meeting of the decision of the Management and Training Academy Committees, and the Industry Advisory Board, that only students completing 100 days of agreed training will receive a transcript of their CDT course attendance. This transcript will also include the Geological Society of London's logo and wording to confirm that the CDT training programme is GSL accredited.

8. Any Other Competent Business

There are student reports of supervisors using their individual CDT RTSG funds in support of other researchers within the research group. LM confirmed that all universities are asked to provide annual RTSG expenditure reports for all CDT students registered at that institution, irrespective of whether they are funded through the NERC doctoral training grant or university match-funding, as a pre-condition to being reimbursed for the RTSG element of the NERC grant studentships. LM follows

up on any items which do not clearly link to the individual CDT student and there have been instances when these have been removed.

There are differences between institutions in terms of subsistence claims policy, what is regarded as standard equipment provision and so on. It is therefore difficult to be prescriptive as to legitimate uses of the RTSG budget but guidance is provided on the CDT website at <http://www.nerc-cdt-oil-and-gas.ac.uk/images/documents/2014/guidancenotes/NERC-CDT-Guidance-RTSG.pdf>. Universities are expected to provide basic infrastructure to allow you to work on your project e.g. desk, phone, standard computing hardware and software packages. As regards the latter items, this could be either a desk PC with standard Microsoft package, or a laptop if you prefer to hot desk for instance. If you have a desk PC but need a laptop in order to be able to work effectively in the field, or need a specialised software package or additional computer memory to be able to run the package to process your data, those are then items that you and your supervisor could justify using your RTSG to purchase. JU encouraged students to report instances of potential RTSG misuse to him and LM as specific details would be needed in order to try to resolve the matter. He reassured everyone that the matter would be handled sensitively, while realising that students might still be reluctant to come forward in case it had an adverse effect on their relationship with their supervisor. Each university has its own supervision policy which will include procedures for tackling poor supervision relationships, as well as Complaint policy that could also be used.

Sean O'Neill stated his interest in continuing to be involved with the CDT as an alumni.

SC brought the meeting to a close at 7:15 p.m. and thanked everyone for their constructive comments and discussion.