

**NERC Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) in Oil & Gas**  
**Graduate Committee Meeting, 27<sup>th</sup> March, 2019, Edinburgh**

**Present:** , Anna Clark (AC), Stuart Clarke (SC - Chair), Pavlos Farangitakis (PF), Amanda Cunningham-Gray (ACG), Denis Fraga (DF), Tom Gibson (TG), Jack Lee (JL), Lorna Morrow (LM), Christina Nikolova (CN), Sean O'Neill (SO), Jack Richardson (JR), John Underhill (JU), Jonathan Wilkin (JW)

**1. Welcome and apologies**

SC welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologies were tabled on behalf of Charlotte Beasley, Chris Brennan, Laura Duran, Jonathon Hardman, Mike Lacey, Katy Oakes and Johanne Vad. Short introductions were given by those present to welcome the new Committee members representing the 2018 entry cohort.

**2. Approval of Minute dated 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018 and update on actions**

The minute was approved.

**Items for CDT news webpages:** LM advised that she emails students in February as part of the ResearchFish submission process, and in June for the NERC Annual Report, to request details of publications, posters, and other research impact indicators, achievements and so on. She also forwards details of non-CDT elective course provision every fortnight on average so there are plenty points of contact to prompt students to send details of news items for inclusion on the website. AC will set up a central spreadsheet where students can provide links to their publications and she will then transfer these to their student profile on the Members section of the CDT website.

JU highlighted the importance of official recognition of the NERC CDT in Oil & Gas in all publications so that these could be cited as evidence of the impact of the CDT. LM confirmed that guidance on correctly acknowledging the NERC CDT is available as template texts on the Members' Area of the CDT website. SC asked that the guidance be highlighted to the 2018 cohort and a reminder sent, with the NERC and CDT logos, to all students.

**Action: LM**

**3. Review of 2017/18 Training Academy programme and planned provision for 2018/19, including Annual Conference on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2019**

AC reported that the new Machine Learning course which ran in November 2018 had been over-subscribed and had received positive feedback so the intention is for this course to run again in October/November 2019. She is in discussions with Rob Butler at Aberdeen regarding a new elective Carbonates field trip to Sicily and JU is discussing the content of a Geophysics course with staff at Cairn Energy. The latter course will probably not be offered until 2020 however.

The CDT's Industry Advisory Board had noted at its recent meeting in January 2019 that feedback for the Mature Basins course indicates that the course is not delivering the outcomes expected by the students. AC confirmed that Manchester is making changes to the organisation of the teaching material this year in response to the feedback received in 2018.

The final year Careers course will run for 5 days in the 2018/19 session and will cover preparation for career opportunities in academia and industry, as well as a day's session on translating research into business start-ups. The timing of the course during the final year when many students are already well into job application process was discussed and it was suggested that it be brought forward. However, there was also a recognition that the timing in May/June gives the course a suitable 'finale' feel with an entry cohort coming together for the last time.

It was suggested that a one or two day introductory course to industry operations (exploration, development, decommissioning) and job roles would be helpful in providing context for subsequent training. AC will investigate possible providers including Oil & Gas UK and AGR Tracs, both of whom were thought to have run this type of course.

The Annual Conference is scheduled for Friday 1<sup>st</sup> November in the Sheraton Hotel in Edinburgh City Centre. The posters will all be grouped in one large lobby area which is on the same level as the student presentation break-out rooms which should help the flow of delegates and ensure all students see some footfall to their posters. It was agreed that timed poster presentation slots would be retained in the programme, but there was also a recognition that delegates would wish to talk to students at other times during the poster sessions so chairing of these would need to be 'light touch'. It was agreed to include a short buffer time between the end of presentation sessions and the start of poster sessions to allow delegates to collect coffee/tea as those scheduled for the first slot found their time was often curtailed as delegates had been delayed.

JU reported that the conference will be opened by Paul Wheelhouse, MSP and Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands and that the opening presentations will once again be short with the majority of the day devoted to the students and their work. LM will contact students after the summer to propose additional invitee names to ensure that there are delegates with interests in all the research being presented. For reasons of security and cost, named invitations must be sent by LM and students should not issue general open invitations.

Student representatives at the 2018 meeting had proposed that the conference include a Best Poster/Presentation competition and this was agreed subject to it being organised by the students. This proposal had not been acted upon for the 2018 conference and Committee members agreed that the quality of posters and presentations was already high and nothing would be served by creating a competitive element to the event. However, it was suggested that delegates be provided with a comments form detailing each poster and encouraged to give feedback on defined topics such as layout, content and presentation style. Forms would be anonymous and would be collected by the CDT admin team with comments passed on to individual students thereafter. **Action: AC/LM**

#### **4. Update on CDT Course Attendance Policy and Procedure, including transcript record**

AC reported on the difficulties caused by cancellations and individuals deferring their attendance on mandatory courses e.g. subsequent years' classes sizes become too large and the course has to be scheduled to double-run, but then further cancellations mean the course could have been run just once, so additional costs have been needlessly incurred, clashes of mandatory courses occur and students develop a backlog of training into their writing-up time. Spare places are offered to other cohorts if the course is stand-alone and doesn't depend on students having completed an earlier mandatory course. It is also possible for students of other NERC CDT/DTPs or non-CDT students from

our partner universities to take up spare places on a paying basis. Dates for the vast majority of courses are provided many weeks and indeed months in advance and yet there are still a relatively high number of late cancellations. Students and supervisors are urged to do their utmost to ensure attendance on mandatory courses with the relevant entry cohort.

AC was asked about the possibility of setting up a Google or Outlook calendar in order to allow students to access course dates easily in a different format from that already available on the Members' page of the CDT website. The calendar could also allow AC to advertise indicative dates for courses before these are confirmed. AC agreed to the proposal and will set up a system on both platforms to determine which one offers the best functionality. **Action: AC**

LM reported that only two members of the 2014 cohort had not managed to complete the 100 day training programme and would therefore not receive an official CDT record of their course attendance. The CDT Management Committee, Training Academy Committee and Industry Advisory Board had all agreed that because of the accreditation of the CDT's training programme by the Geological Society of London (GSL), an official record would only be provided to those who complete 100 days of approved training. For the same reason, total absence from a mandatory course would also be recorded to satisfy the GSL requirement on clarity of what material an individual has covered. The majority of the programme (80 days) comprises mandatory courses so students only have to find 20 elective days, up to 10 of which can be by providers external to the CDT's programme. The process for gaining approval for the inclusion of externally provided elective courses is set out in the Course Attendance Policy and Procedure document available on the governance section of the CDT Members webpages. The CDT studentship duration was set at 4 years to take the 100 day training requirement into account so students still have the standard 3.5 years available to their PhD studies, and this time includes training opportunities. Most requests for the inclusion of externally provided elective courses have been approved provided they meet the criteria set out in the policy document above. This includes courses that the student and supervisor can demonstrate provide additional skills useful to the individual's chosen career development path. Members noted that the emails advising individuals of their current training attendance status are very useful.

## 5. Review of Young Professional (YP) mentoring scheme

Members discussed the pros and cons of the different approaches to the mentoring scheme which have been adopted within the CDT so far i.e. central allocation of mentor to mentee or self-directed by mentors and mentees via CDT website profiles. The first method had not proved satisfactory for a number of students and mentors but there has been little feedback on the mentor/mentee contact since people were given the freedom to make the contacts with whoever they thought would be helpful, or who they might be able to help. The annual mentor networking event has attracted fewer and fewer mentors with the Annual Conference being the more popular event for mentors to attend. LM will print the mentor conference delegate badges in a different colour so it is clearer to students who the mentors are.

Most of the 2014 cohort graduates have expressed willingness to become YP mentors and SO'N offered to lead on developing the CDT alumni community involvement and activities. **Action: SO'N**

## 6. Any Other Competent Business

**Use of RTSG:** Different universities have their own policies regarding legitimate RTSG expenditure but the CDT is happy to reiterate its support for the use of RTSG to buy standard field equipment and clothing. There are HMRC tax implications for this and students should be aware that any items bought using RTSG remain the property of their University. In some instances, it has been possible to come to an arrangement at the end of the PhD period to purchase items as second-hand, or the university may write the asset off and effectively donate it to the individual. There is also currently no common policy on when a student stops holding registered student status and can legitimately continue spending their RTSG budget e.g. submission of initial thesis, viva date, submission of final corrected thesis. The newly-formed UKRI organisation is looking at harmonising the different terms and conditions which had been employed by the different Research Councils to provide clarity to universities. Students and supervisors will be updated as soon as UKRI makes this decision but in the meantime, local terms and conditions at each participating university will apply.

**Female participation:** Representation on the CDT Committees and in contributors to the Training Academy programme reflect the male gender bias in academia and industry in the geoscience/engineering/environmental science sectors. However the composition of the CDT student cohorts demonstrates a much higher female participation than in the sector generally which indicates that there are opportunities for future change. It takes time to achieve the senior level appointment, which tends to allow individuals greater freedom to organise their time and authority to make/convey decisions on behalf of their company, and it may well be some years before there is a more even gender balance but the CDT team of John, Lorna and Anna continue to seek out and encourage female course contributors and committee members.

**Social Media accounts:** The pros and cons of a CDT Twitter account were discussed and it was agreed that AG will conduct a survey of the student body to canvas views on the remit of the account and student representatives who will have editing rights to oversee the content. **Action: AG**  
The CDT Admin team will consult with the CDT governance committees thereafter on the proposal.

**E-Thesis submission:** Many universities are moving towards electronic thesis submission only, although there are still examples of universities requiring the single-sided, double-spaced printed format. The CDT promotes the move towards e-thesis submission, but has no mechanism or authority to make this mandatory as thesis submission procedures are discretionary to the awarding organisation.

**Open access publication:** This is an ongoing global debate throughout the academic sector. Certain publishers charge large amounts for access and universities often negotiate a bespoke deal for their students. Open access is mandatory for research funded by the UK Research & Innovation body e.g. NERC, EPSRC etc. and universities also receive some money from these bodies to pay for access to other research.

**CDT Committee Membership:** AG asked whether the 2017 cohort could seek to appoint a replacement for Milena Wales who had represented the cohort prior to her leaving the CDT. It was agreed that the cohort could elect a new representative. Members also discussed whether and how students could be informed when one of their peers leaves the CDT. It was agreed that it is a personal decision of the individual student whether they want to contact their fellow cohort

members to let them know they had left their PhD studies and that CDT management should respect the privacy of individuals.

SC brought the meeting to a close at 6:20 p.m. and thanked everyone for their constructive comments and discussion. JU gave a vote of thanks to all past student members of the Committee for their service in representing their respective cohorts during the course of their studies.

DRAFT