



NERC CENTRE FOR DOCTORAL TRAINING (CDT) IN OIL & GAS

GUIDANCE FOR STUDENTS AND SUPERVISORS

The following notes are to be read in conjunction with the Student Handbook for the relevant entry cohort. The guidance is intended to provide clarification of the commitments that are expected of students and supervisors when they join the NERC CDT in Oil & Gas.

Length of studentship and training commitment

NERC CDT studentships, whether funded directly by NERC or match-funded by the host institution, are of 4 years' duration. The programme of PhD study consists of 3.5 years' research and 20 weeks' of training, spread over the first 3 years of the studentship and which is a mandatory element of being part of the CDT. However, the additional separately-funded training commitment is currently split over 10 compulsory weeks in Year 1, followed by 5 weeks of modules in each of Years 2 and 3. The first year mandatory course programme, with indicative timings, comprises:-

- 2 day residential induction course - late October/early November
- 4 two-week residential courses in each of the 4 CDT themes – early November (following induction course), late March/early April, late June/early July and early September
- 1 week residential course on Petroleum Basin Analysis – early March
- 3 day residential communications course – October

Actual dates for these courses will be advised to students, supervisors and academic CDT contacts at each institution by the CDT Management at Heriot-Watt by email as soon as these are confirmed. Any amendments or updates will also be communicated immediately by email. Dates will also be posted on the Training Academy section of the NERC CDT website at <http://www.nerc-cdt-oil-and-gas.ac.uk/members.html> and students and supervisors are asked to use that website to confirm dates and arrangements for courses, as well as to access course information handbooks and training materials linked to the courses.

Years 2 and 3 comprise a minimum of 2 weeks of mandatory courses/field trips each with students choosing the balance of training week allocation from a list of optional courses. The CDT Management intends providing a list of the courses available in the following session (commencing in October each year) by the preceding August so that students are able to make their choices.

Students and supervisors are expected to make strenuous efforts to commit to this training schedule as a requirement for joining and successfully completing the NERC CDT model. If the training commitment is not upheld by the student and/or supervisor, an application for the removal of funding may be made to NERC. It is understood that there may be occasional conflicts of timing in respect of field trips necessary for a student's individual project or extreme personal circumstances for example. In such cases, students are required to complete the mandatory course when it is offered again in



subsequent years. If a student is not able to complete a mandatory course during their programme of study, the CDT Management and Training Academy Committees shall have the discretion to allow the student to make up the training allocation by means of undertaking additional optional courses or withholding the CDT's accreditation of the training programme.

Transcripts and Geological Society accreditation of CDT Training Academy Programme

In order to be able to say on a CV that a student was a member of, and successfully completed, the NERC CDT in Oil & Gas, the student must have undertaken the full 20 weeks (equivalent to 100 days) of training during their studentship. The Geological Society has accredited the CDT's training programme for a period of six years from October 2017 and only students with the full 100 days' complement will be able to apply for Chartered Geologist status.

In addition, only students who have completed 100 days of training approved by the CDT Training Academy Committee (including externally provided courses) will receive a certified listing of the courses they have attended with any absences from mandatory courses also recorded. If they have not completed the training element of the CDT, the student will still graduate with the doctorate qualification from their host institution but no certified training programme listing will be provided and the individual will not be deemed part of the CDT cohort graduating from the scheme.

Cancellation charges

Regretfully, we have had an increasing number of instances, across all cohorts, of students leaving courses early, or withdrawing at short notice prior to the start of a course. The Training Academy not only incurs costs for these cancellations, but it is discourteous and reflects poorly on the student, their university and the CDT in general as many presenters give of their time for free and do not even claim expenses. This goodwill is swiftly eroded when students do not conduct themselves in a professional manner in relation to courses. Students are expected to give their full attention while in attendance and to provide as much notice as possible of any course clashes or withdrawal. Standard cancellation charges for accommodation, catering, transport and other costs incurred will be applied and recouped from the relevant university. Universities have the discretion as to whether cancellation charges are taken from the student's RTSG or its own funds.

Optional Courses

In the first two or three years of the CDT's operation, it may not be possible to provide a full list of optional courses covering Year 2 and 3 of each cohort's training programme in advance of the start of the second year of study as contributors may offer a new topic at short notice, or different themes may emerge during the course of the CDT's operations. However, there will be sufficient choice for students to pick options that are of specific relevance to their project or that will expand their core skills and knowledge of topics that will benefit their overall career development and general employability within the oil & gas sectors. Students and supervisors will plan together which optional



courses provide the most benefit to the student's research and career development, also taking into account the work plans of both the individual student and the overall research group as appropriate.

If a student has undertaken the full 20 week training commitment and the CDT training schedule subsequently includes a course of particular interest, there is the option of using the RTSG allowance to attend the module.

Use of Research Training & Support Grant (RTSG)

Each CDT studentship, whether NERC or institution funded, includes a £5k p.a. allowance for Research Training and Support which must be given as a direct benefit to the individual student. It must not be used as part of general funds to support the research group in which the student sits for example.

NERC requires proof that every student affiliated to the CDT, irrespective of the source of funding, has made use of this annual allowance (£20k in total) by the end of the 4 year studentship. There is no compulsion on the full £5k p.a. being spent in a single year and the allowance can be carried forward to later years in order to support a particular field trip or conference that is seen as essential for an individual's project. This may mean a departure from the host institution's standard financial process regarding the allocation of RTSG and the spreading of annual expenditure across more than one year of a studentship, or between financial years as many universities work with a financial year-end of 31st July whereas student registration runs from October – September.

The decision on how to spend the RTSG allowance across the life of a studentship is a matter of discussion between the supervisor and student in the first instance. Students and supervisors work together to plan expenditure of the RTSG across the full 4-year study period to ensure the greatest benefit to the student's research and career development.

For guidance, the Research Council UK regulations state that 'the RTSG is a contribution towards costs incurred in training research students e.g. the provision of consumables, equipment, travel, etc. It is not intended to relieve the host research organisation/university of any part of its normal expenditure.' In other words, there is an expectation that a basic level of infrastructure is provided by the host institution (i.e. suitable office with desk space, stationery, phone, computer and so on). If enhanced computing capability or specialised software is required, for example, this can be charged to the RTSG, but the costs of a basic computer with standard Microsoft or statistical applications or similar loaded onto it cannot.

The CDT Management is currently asking universities to use the RTSG allowance to pay students' costs to travel to and from the various Training Academy events. However, although we cannot at present give any guarantee, we hope that by the end of the first full year of training provision, when we see how much this totals, we may be able to reimburse these costs, either in full or by making an equal contribution to each student from the Training Academy funds. This would then free up the RTSG for



students to use on attending other courses, purchasing data, specialised equipment/software necessary for their research, going to conferences or project-specific field trips and so on.

Each university is required to send the CDT Management a breakdown of the RTSG spending for their student(s) in the previous 12 months. This is to allow Heriot-Watt to pass back to each institution the relevant amount of the RTSG allowance incurred by students in receipt of direct NERC funding from the NERC CDT grant that Heriot-Watt holds. In the case of CDT students supported by university-matched funding, Heriot-Watt requires this information in order to be able to demonstrate to NERC that the match-funded students have been treated equally and have received the £5k p.a. RTSG allowance at the end of 4-year studentship.

Once students and supervisors have agreed on items to be funded from the RTSG allowance, they should claim these expenses from their host institution using that organisation's standard claims process and guidelines. The host institution then provides an annual RTSG expenditure document to Heriot-Watt, in arrears, in order to reclaim these costs from the NERC grant if applicable, or as evidence of RTSG spend in respect of match-funded students as outlined in the paragraph above.

Amendments to PhD projects – titles, abstracts, supervision

It is accepted that amendments to the approved project title, abstract, supervision arrangements and the like may become necessary as the PhD research progresses. However, the CDT has a duty of care towards NERC and the students to ensure that the project description remains within the remit of the CDT and is a viable research experience for the student. Supervisors and the lead CDT academic contact at each partner HEI are therefore requested to notify the CDT Manager of any such changes in a timely manner using the [Project Amendment Request Form](#) available on the CDT website.

The project amendment form will be reviewed by the CDT Awards Committee which approved the initial project submission. This will provide continuity and also facilitate an assessment to be made by a cohort with an understanding of the complete CDT project portfolio. The Awards Committee's focus will be purely on the welfare of the student and the ability of the amended project description to deliver a body of original, publishable work that is worthy of the PhD qualification. If concerns remain after the review of the amended project description and reference to the full CDT portfolio, the Awards Committee reserves the right to seek further clarification from the project supervisor.

It is fully expected that this process of stakeholder engagement will resolve any outstanding concerns to the satisfaction of all parties in a timely manner and ensure that the new project description satisfies the requirements of the CDT's remit and student experience. In the unlikely event that a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached between all parties, including NERC, consideration will be given to the removal of the project from the CDT listing and future access to the CDT Training Academy programme and NERC funding (if relevant) would be denied.



This is clearly a last resort position as indicated by the Terms and Conditions specific to the NERC CDT in Oil & Gas grant, 'NERC expects all institutions and individuals involved in the delivery of a studentship to place paramount importance on the interests of the students when making decisions about the transfer of funding'. The host academic partner retains control of the project and the student remains at all times under the supervisory and regulatory process of their registered institution which retains responsibility for ensuring the successful graduation of its student.

PhD Acknowledgements and Data Confidentiality Agreements

All CDT students and supervisors are reminded of the need to acknowledge the support of all bodies, organisations and individuals who provide funding, data, software, equipment, access to fieldwork or otherwise contribute towards the PhD study. A template text for use by CDT students for their presentations and publications is available on the CDT Members' Area webpage under [Guidance Documents](#).

It is also imperative that the confidentiality of data is respected, and students and supervisors must ensure that all interested parties have been consulted and made aware of any publication or presentation so that authorisation is in place. This includes the need to consult with country-specific regulators who may be the ultimate owner of a particular dataset as well as operating companies who hold licences and seismic companies who acquired the data.

Updated 17/11/17