

NERC E³ DTP

Management Team response to the Student Advisory Board Report

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With reference to the Student Advisory Board Report submitted 17 Nov 2017 (attached)

Recruitment

1	<p>You said: <i>“Currently, both the written application and interview performance are considered in the final ranking. We recommend making this information available to the applicants to reduce pressure and increase transparency of the application process. In the past applicants thought that decisions are purely based on the interview.”</i> [p.1]</p>
	<p>We will include a note in the interview invitation email explaining that both the written application and the interview will be considered in the final ranking. We will also make sure this is orally specified to each candidate at the beginning of their interview by a member of the panel.</p>

2	<p>You said: <i>“we suggest considering an extension of the interview time from 20 min to 30-40 min, the former was perceived too short by some students.”</i> [p.1]</p>
	<p>Although it would be good for the candidates, we already face extreme difficulties in assembling panels for 3 continuous days of interviews. We would have to reduce the number of students interviewed, which we are not keen on doing. This would be more of a concern if interviews were the only method for evaluating candidates.</p>

Training

3	<p>You said: <i>“Most students perceive that the training becomes less structured after the first year.”</i> [p.1]</p>
	<p>We agree. This was initially intentional in order to give more space and time for both research and individual training from 2nd semester of Year 1 onwards. However, we think it would indeed fill a gap between Years 1 and 2 to have a training event in the Autumn of Year 2. We suggest that this is led by 4th years to improve cross-cohort building at the same time. <u>Please see the proposed activities table at the bottom</u></p>

4	<p>You said: <i>“[the training] may be viewed as a “distraction” by the PhD supervisor(s)”</i> [p.2]</p>
	<p>We will increase communication to supervisors regarding the mandatory DTP training.</p>

5	You said: “We recommend [...] <i>making available a list of courses attended by E3 students in the past on the E3 website – with reviews and/or email addresses to allow contact for questions about the courses</i> ” [p.2]
	<p>We think it is a great idea however we are not too sure what would be the best format for this. A simple spreadsheet would need constant updating and chasing up of people to make it useful and this cannot be the E³ DTP Manager’s responsibility. Would a shared document that everyone can update be helpful (on One Drive e.g.)? Other ways of asking feedback on training would be simply to speak to each other or use the E³ DTP generic email address that everyone can now use through Mail Out. We can also set up a Linked-In E³ DTP group for you if you think it would be a good way forward to facilitate contacts between cohorts.</p> <p>Please note that a Linked-In group cross-DTPs has been set up already so that you can get in touch with other students from other DTPs too.</p> <p>https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8601081</p> <p><i>Please see the proposed activities table at the bottom.</i></p>

6	You said: “We recommend [...] <i>extending the Training Needs Assessment (TNA), creating a student specific training plan that is reviewed annually or twice-annually with the supervisor(s) and/or a member of the E3 management team.</i> ” [p.2]
	<p>We think it is unrealistic to have TNAs every year with a member of the E³ DTP management team. This could be done more appropriately with a supervisor on an individual basis though. However, we suggest that cross-cohort TNA groups self-organise by theme and meet at least once a year. That would be the ideal time and place to discuss training and exchange training courses experience with peers.</p> <p><i>Please see the proposed activities table at the bottom.</i></p>

7	You said: “ <i>It has been suggested that activities for beginner, intermediate and advance levels are provided and that peer-support within the course is encouraged.</i> ” and “ <i>we recommend that the E3 continues to support and encourage peer-led initiatives for coding and GIS such as the Coding Club.</i> ” [p.2]
	<p>We have started to include peer-support in the NMDM sessions this year and will continue. From next year, the E³ DTP will financially support the Coding Club, which we think is a fantastic initiative and allows coping with the different levels better. We will be happy to hear about other similar students-led initiatives.</p> <p>We will also update and develop Simon Mudd’s website (moving to a DTP-specific page) and allow comments and questions to be posted.</p>

8	You said: “ <i>It has also been suggested to broaden the FiG seminars to non-GeoScience topics.</i> ” [p.2]
	<p>We have started to do so this year and will continue.</p> <p>Can we take this opportunity to say that 1st year training sessions such as NMDM and Frontiers in Environmental Sciences (Frontiers programme will change each year) are open to all years. We only ask that 2nd, 3rd and 4th years book their place in advance by emailing the E³ DTP Manager to make sure there is space for everyone.</p>

Cohort Building

9	You said: <i>"We suggest [...] a new E3 "Fun-Talks" series: three 20 min talks by E3 students not on their research topics held twice yearly (mid-term) with drinks and nibbles."</i> [p.2]
	We like the idea of an E ³ Fun Talk Series. We suggest that this is organised twice a year (November and June) on a voluntary basis (3 to 4 talks each time). We suggest that 3 rd years organise the talks with support from the E ³ DTP Manager. <u>Please see the proposed activities table at the bottom.</u>

10	You said: <i>"We suggest [...] a year-group event at the beginning of the second year."</i> [p.2]
	Please refer to point number 3.

11	You said: <i>"We suggest [...] an E3 wide end of PhD/hand-in event."</i> [p.2]
	We think end of PhD/hand-in events would be complicated to organise mainly because you are all going to submit at a different date and time of the year. We think informal hand-in events should be organised between yourselves as this is generally the case. However, we would like to have graduation events after each graduation ceremony (November and June) and suggest that these coincide with the E ³ Fun Talk Series. It will be an occasion to get together in a relaxed environment and to celebrate our graduates. <u>Please see the proposed activities table at the bottom.</u>

12	You said: <i>"We suggest [...] E3 specific writing retreats within and across years"</i> [p.2]
	We think that is a good idea to have regular one-day retreats in Edinburgh (to keep cost down for the DTP). If there was enough interest, we suggest booking a room for a day somewhere nice in Edinburgh. We will provide lunch and cater for breaks. Students can come and work on papers or theses (individual work). This will be open to all cohorts on a first-come first served basis with spaces booked for the whole day. <u>Please see the proposed activities table at the bottom.</u>

Professional Preparation

13	You said: <i>"A major concern with the PIPs is that even though the funding gets extended there is no extension of the final hand-in deadline. Particularly for students that feel pressured for time due to the nature of their project this is discouraging. We recommend an automatic extension of the final deadline matching the duration of the PIP."</i> [p.2]
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	We understand that concern however unfortunately we cannot change the PIP for this DTP. We will certainly consider this for the next bid though. Please note that the PIP is not necessarily something totally disconnected with your research. What we don't want is that you keep on working on your PhD (collecting data, writing etc.) while doing this which would not be fair on other students. We are aware that the PIP does not suit everyone; this is why it was decided not to make it compulsory.
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14	You said: <i>"some students expressed that the placements offered through the [ECCI] programme are not relevant to their fields" [p.2]</i>
	We are aware that the activities and internships proposed by the ECCI do not suit all projects and students as well, however we need to continue to offer that training which has been highly beneficial to some students already.

15	You said: <i>"we recommend the creation of alumni profiles on the E3 website (once available) to make post PhD career trajectories visible and enhance the cross-cohort network" [p.2]</i>
	We have started discussing this and it is our plan to have alumni profiles on the DTP website. More information will come to the 4 th year students once they are close to submission to get organised for that and help the DTP Manager creating those profiles. We have other ideas to keep contact with our alumni too including inviting them to come back to give some talks to PhD students during career events. NERC requires us to keep track of our alumni and collect direction data so we hope you will all stay in touch, visit us and reply to our survey emails.

Website

16	You said: <i>"there is a strong need for an update of the E3 website to include information for current students, such as listing of training courses and placements available as well as administrative details regarding funding, sick-/parental-leave and assessment." [p.2]</i>
	We share your frustration about the current DTP website, which unfortunately cannot be developed without professional help. A solution might be to create a restricted access area on the GeoSciences website so that we can put all useful information in the same place. We are going to investigate that option. Please note that there is extensive information on the PGR student handbook for all classic PhD matters and that, as RCUK funded students, your studentships are regulated by the RCUK Training Grant Terms and Conditions, which are regularly updated and available online: http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/documents/Termsconditionstraininggrants-pdf/ . You can refer to it at all times for sick leave and maternity policies, for example. However, it is always good to double check information and processes with the DTP manager or PGR office.

17	You said: <i>“and assessment.”</i> [p.2]
	Can you please clarify what you intend by “assessment”? If this refers to the PhD examination, this is fully covered in the PGR Student handbook and we run an event on preparing for submission and viva at the beginning of 4 th year.

Other items

These were emailed on 13 Nov 2017 by Jacob Assmann on behalf of the Student Advisory Board.

18	You said: <i>“Make E3 events more inclusive by providing non-alcoholic alternatives such as coffees and teas also.”</i>
	We don’t recall any DTP event where only alcohol was on offer. It is true that we don’t order tea and coffee for our drinks (that would be after 5pm) but there is always water and juice. However, it has been suggested that we could have a tea and coffee break in the middle of the Frontiers courses and we will organise this for next year.

19	You said: <i>“An extra day at Firbush would be great.”</i>
	We agree, but October is a very dense period for everyone so it seems unrealistic to get availability from academics for more than 3 days. Firbush is also usually fully booked at that time and we have been told an extra day would not be easily granted.

20	You said: <i>“Shifting the end-of-the-year event (e.g. Christmas Ceilidh) forward to avoid clashes with conferences (such as AGU)”</i>
	We will move the Ceilidh forward next year in December.

21	You said: <i>“Some students mentioned that they were notified of their acceptance later than originally advertised, this caused uncertainty and anxiety. It would be good to prevent this in the future.”</i>
	We appreciate this is a stressful process and time for applicants however there is very little we can do about delayed offers being sent to candidates on the waiting list. Such offers depend on the acceptance of others and we do our best to shorten timings after the NERC acceptance deadline has passed (mid-March) without putting too much pressure on students to make a decision. This is a time of uncertainty for us as well as we cannot move forward until candidates have responded. We will do our best to keep candidates on the waiting list updated as much as possible.

New Proposed Activities

Suggestions on which we need your views are listed below.

Please respond by the end of February so that we can move things forward!

If you feel that we have forgotten items, please tell us.

n. ref	Period	Type	Cohort	Organisation	Please tell us
3	November	Cross-cohort training decided and organised by 3 rd and 4 th cohorts (e.g. presentation skills)	2nd years	Led by 4 th years	Would year 4s be happy to organise a generic training for year 2s?
5	n/a	Way of sharing training experience	All	Input from DTP Manager and then updated by individuals	Does a One Drive shared document seem a good idea? Other ideas?
5	n/a	Linked-In group as a way of getting in touch within the DTP	All	Linked-In group would be set up by DTP Manager	Do you want this?
6	Once to twice a year	Cross-cohort TNAs sessions	All	Groups by discipline self-organise	Are you happy to self-organise or do you need us to help?
9	November and June	E ³ Fun Talk Series	All	3 rd years	Would you like it to be student-led?
11	November and June	Graduation celebration (combined with Fun Talk Series)	All	DTP Manager (with 3 rd year for Fun Talks part)	Agree?
12	Once a semester to once a month according to demand?	One-day writing retreat	All	DTP Manager	Do you want this? How often? Enough interests? Book for the full day? What frequency?
17	n/a	'Assessment'	All		Can you please clarify?