

NERC E<sup>3</sup> DTP

Management Team response to the Student Advisory Board Report

Circulated 03/04/2019

With reference to the Student Advisory Board Report submitted 21 December 2018 (attached)

Training

**Please note that we are currently working on the E4 DTP Training Plan, which we will introduce to the SAB in June. We will take the below feedbacks into consideration.**

<b>1</b>	<p><b>You said:</b> <i>“We suggest emailing students from all years with the information on when the different NMDM sessions are happening, so that people not in their first year are aware they can go to NMDM, too.”</i> [p.1]</p> <p>An email goes to each cohort in September with a summary of the training to be expected during the academic year ahead and their dates. This year, this email was sent on 11 September 2018 and included the Frontiers and NMDM programmes with the following mention “The programme of the Year 1 training changes every year and you are most welcome to attend any sessions you would find beneficial. Programme is attached.”</p> <p>We will continue to send that email in September and the information (as well as the training course programme) will also be available online in the new Administrative Section of the E4 DTP website: <a href="https://www.ed.ac.uk/e4-dtp/e4dtp-administration/for-current-dtp-students">https://www.ed.ac.uk/e4-dtp/e4dtp-administration/for-current-dtp-students</a></p>
<b>2</b>	<p><b>You said:</b> <i>“Additionally, we suggest that an email is sent out to remind people that they can also suggest training sessions, and that information should also be on the DTP page in the PGR Hub on Learn.”</i> [p.1]</p> <p>We agree that this is a good idea and will send out such an email each year. We have also now put the information on the new Administrative Section of the E4 DTP website: <a href="https://www.ed.ac.uk/e4-dtp/e4dtp-administration/for-current-dtp-students">https://www.ed.ac.uk/e4-dtp/e4dtp-administration/for-current-dtp-students</a></p> <p>Note that the above website is not on Learn. We have noticed that students have only rarely visited the DTP section on the GeoSciences PGR Hub on Learn. In addition some students have reported issues with accessing the Learn pages. Therefore we have created a new Administrative Section on the E4 DTP website which requires Ease Login access and where, hopefully, you can find DTP-related information more easily. It also makes more sense for DTP students not registered in GeoSciences to find this information there rather than on GeoSciences Learn pages (although access had been set up for all DTP students).</p>
<b>3</b>	<p><b>You said:</b> <i>“We also think that it would be very valuable to have training opportunities for careers in academia too (e.g. writing fellowship applications), especially given that &gt;80% of DTP PhD students go on to do research-related jobs.”</i> [p.1]</p> <p>The E4 DTP Training Plan will include a workshop on academia and research careers and this will be open to all DTP students. We will also work on strengthening the link between PhD students and researchers locally in each School so that PhD students be associated with Early Career Researchers and can benefit from training and events organised for them. This will likely be managed by the local Research Offices.</p>

4	<p><b>You said:</b> <i>“We are concerned about the emphasis on “student-driven” training (in both the E3 and the E4) as that poses a lot of pressure on 3rd and 4th year students to train their younger peers at a time when they are very busy and generally stressed.” [p.1]</i></p>
	<p>Our intention was not to put pressure on students, but rather to highlight to NERC that our excellent students had self-organised the Coding Club and other activities that are currently deployed in the School of Biological Sciences. That is, we have not promised “extra” activities that are not already student led, and will not be forcing anyone to run training that they don’t want to. In addition, our aim is to pay for training so that, for example, the students that had run a student-led program could pass on their knowledge to other students and actually receive some payment for this. Please note that we were delighted that the Coding Club was spun up without any input from us; it asked for and received funding from the E3, and we have not asked to steer its direction, its timing, or its frequency (since it is student led). We have no inclination to turn these excellent initiatives into things that seem like burdens on busy students.</p>
5	<p><b>You said:</b> <i>“We are also sad to see the Nature Writing Workshop go as many people thought of that as the best part of the DTP training as a whole, although we do understand it would be expensive to keep it.” [p.2]</i></p>
	<p>Nature raised the price of this workshop to the point where we would have to sacrifice a number of other activities in order to keep it running. We therefore looked at other options. The Readable Research workshop organised in January received some very good feedback and included more in the way of practical writing exercises and advice than the Nature workshop. Feedback will be reviewed by the E4 Training Management Board, which will include student representation from all cohorts, to decide on the best options for future writing workshops.</p>
6	<p><b>You said:</b> <i>“Regarding the 3MT training for 3rd year PhD students, we suggest that feedback be given in private.” [p.2]</i></p>
	<p>This was changed this year and individual written feedback was provided through confidential forms given to each participant. The collective oral feedback was kept general and emphasised the positive aspects of the presentations (we hope). We find that the DTP 3MT is a very valuable exercise which benefits all of you and we hope you would agree that we try to make this a relaxed and fun event. The main objective is to encourage you to think about how to communicate your research concisely and orally, and eventually to present at the School Heat for the University 3MT Competition. Any feedback is welcome on this new feedback system.</p>
7	<p><b>You said:</b> <u>Frontiers in Environmental Sciences</u> <i>“Our ideas for interactive sessions are: 1) debate on a set reading, 2) discussion on a ‘controversial’ topic, 3) brainstorming session (in groups or as a whole) to tackle challenges in geosciences, 4) asking open-ended questions to the group, 5) anonymous Q&amp;A (people write questions on a card, they’re shuffled and are answered by the instructor or discussed in groups).” [p.2]</i></p>
	<p>We are very grateful for your feedback and great suggestions and will take those on board for the E4 DTP Training Plan. We will certainly communicate this to the speakers and give them more guidance to make their lectures more interactive and ensure more consistency across the series. Having had a different line-up of speakers each year, we are building up a good understanding of what works best in these sessions from your feedback.</p>

<b>8</b>	<b>You said:</b> <i>NMDM “We further suggest making the sessions ‘opt-in’, with a minimum attendance (e.g. three sessions) so that people can choose the practical sessions most relevant to them. There was a request to include statistics training as a part of the course (e.g. an introduction to Bayesian statistics).” [p.2]</i>
	Thanks again for your feedback and suggestions. We are currently discussing how to transform the NMDM into an opt-in training within E4. We agree that this system would be preferable and simply need some unobtrusive way to ensure that attendance is recorded and that we continue to have regular cohort meetings in the first year (so probably there will be more than three sessions required). We receive a number of suggestions for training in topics such as Bayesian statistics and advanced modelling that will be very useful to some but not all of the cohort, so we will be considering how best to support optional training

<b>9</b>	<b>You said:</b> <i>NMDM “Regarding the statistics training, a solution would be to have the NMDM staff and tutors remind the DTP students that they can get that statistics training by attending Coding Club that is partly supported by the DTP.” [p.3]</i>
	We can definitely emphasise the link between NMDM and Coding Club through a better coordination of the sessions and communication around training dates and content. The DTP will still support Coding Club and its development and thank you for all of you who have been involved in this. We very much value this peer-learning opportunity.

<b>10</b>	<b>You said:</b> <i>“There was a suggestion to collaborate more with the mathematics department and offer training that can help people learn some of the key math behind statistical analyses. Another suggestion for external involvement included having more input from software developers, and at the sessions that discuss potential career paths, data science and scientific software can be covered, too.” [p.3]</i>
	We take those suggestions on board, thank you very much. The School of GeoSciences has run software carpentry courses in the past and we will try to better advertise those to DTP students. Statistics training and consultancy is available through our BIOS partners, but we will have to seek feedback on why an exploratory session that they ran for us was attended by only one student.

<b>11</b>	<b>You said:</b> <i>“We suggest that when students have to send in their training reports each year, they also get a link to a OneDrive spreadsheet (or whichever other format works) for the training/funding opportunities they know of or have done, together with a column that allows to give brief feedback (i.e., whether we would recommend to other students).” [p.3]</i>
	We think this is a good idea and we will send the links to both shared spreadsheets to complete together with the Training and Research Output Log request each summer. In the meantime, both spreadsheets (Training and Funding opportunities) are available to update online on both the new Administrative Section of the E4 DTP website and the PGR Hub Learn Pages. At the moment there are held as shared documents on OneDrive to allow everyone to access and edit them.

## Cohort Building

<b>12</b>	<b>You said:</b> <i>DTP Social Events “To improve, we suggest inviting supervisors along, and perhaps splitting the event in two if booking a room for that many people is not possible, or moving the event to a large enough room.” [p.3]</i>
	Supervisors are always invited to the DTP Social Events. So far, we have not refused anyone coming as numbers have always been manageable for the room size we had booked. If this happens, we will consider moving to a bigger room. We encourage our students to ask their supervisors to come along to these events.

## Professional Preparation

<b>13</b>	<b>You said:</b> <i>“Some students said they are not taking up the PIP opportunities exactly because they feel like they cannot afford to lose that much time from their PhD. We again recommend an automatic extension of the final deadline matching the duration of the PIP.” [p.3]</i>
	<p>The 2 DTP optional schemes PIP and PDS which allow an extension of stipend are an integral part of the DTP training plan to give you opportunities to develop your network and prepare your career within your PhD, hence they don't give extra time. This is a NERC rule: we cannot extend the PhD beyond 4 years and for this reason the system will stay the same in E4. If it is any consolation we agree entirely with your position but are constrained by our funders. However, those schemes are optional (contrary to other DTPs) and can also be split up (e.g. you can do only 1 month) which already gives flexibility.</p> <p>To be more detailed about conditions imposed upon us: the maximum deadline of a PhD to be completed is 4 years (this is both a University and RCUK regulation). Any extension of that period will affect completion rates (which are a potential issue when reporting to NERC) hence extensions should only be for exceptional circumstances and cannot be linked to “normal” DTP activities. Most of the PhD studentships cover 3 years only (which is the duration of the prescribed period) and the DTP already offers another 6 months of stipend to cover part of the writing up period in 4<sup>th</sup> year. Remember that you can submit any time in 4<sup>th</sup> year however both PIPs and PDS must be applied at least 2 months before the end of your stipend and submission must be delayed until the end of your funding as NERC does not allow continued payment of your stipend once you have submitted.</p>

<b>14</b>	<b>You said:</b> <i>“E3 is taking on board the idea to create alumni profiles on the E3 website to make post-PhD career trajectories visible and enhance the cross-cohort network, and we are looking forward to seeing that come to life.” [p.4]</i>
	Alumni profiles are indeed planned for the E4 website. However, alumni profiles will be subject to the willingness of finishing students to provide information (we send a Student Case Studies form to all submitted students) and agreeing to it being published online, which might not be accepted by everyone. We also aim to have alumni coming back to speak about their post-PhD destinations. We hope that you will all help us with keeping in touch with our alumni when your turn comes.

## Website

<b>15</b>	<b>You said:</b> <i>“We suggest adding a sentence on the official E3 website under the training tab to say that for more information, current students should go to the PGR Hub on Learn.” [p.4]</i>
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	<p>The website is still a (major) work in progress which goes slowly mainly because of lack of human resources. The E3 DTP website will be taken off line soon and all DTP-related information will be on the new E4 DTP website <a href="https://www.ed.ac.uk/e4-dtp">https://www.ed.ac.uk/e4-dtp</a> which now contains a restricted access section with extensive administrative information for current students (see item 2 above). The content of this section is the same as the PGR Hub Learn pages' one but is more easily accessible (we hope) to all DTP students (including non-GeoSciences). We are aware that changing the place of this information 3 times in a short period of time may have caused some confusion but we hope this final location will work better by being more accessible and suitable to everyone.</p>
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<b>16</b>	<p><b>You said:</b> <i>"We want to specifically highlight the unprofessional look of the current E3 website that people, including potential employers and collaborators, see when they google our names or the DTP."</i> [p.4]</p>
	<p>Now that the DTP website has migrated to Edweb, we have 2 options for the student profiles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They will link to the student's profile page on the relevant school's website – which we understand is a problem for GeoSciences students as the Geosciences profiles are not satisfying at the moment (this is an issue which is regularly addressed with IT and does not seem to find a quick fix). Please note that all students still have the possibility to build their own webpage through the Uni Blogging service <a href="https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/">https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/</a> and the blog home page can be linked to their profile.</li> <li>- We will create new student profiles on the E4 website (if preferred to option 1). This will take time and add workload to the DTP Manager as students will not be able to create or update these independently and all updates will have to go through the DTP Manager.</li> </ul>

<b>17</b>	<p><b>You said:</b> <i>"We also suggest sending a reminder email to students about the E3/E4 DTP twitter account – if they add the twitter handle, we can retweet whenever students are presenting, have published papers, etc."</i> [p.4]</p>
	<p>We can send such an email and regularly remind students to use the E3 DTP handle. Not all students use Twitter, but we agree that Twitter is a good way to celebrate achievements.</p>

<b>18</b>	<p><b>You said:</b> <i>"We suggest creating a "list of expertise" that includes the area of expertise of both staff and PhD students, so that when PhD students need help on something, they can find that list on the PGR Hub and contact the relevant person."</i> [p.4]</p>
	<p>This is a good idea and we can create and circulate such a document which will probably be available on the E4 DTP website in the same way as the shared Training and Funding Opportunities Spreadsheets are (via OneDrive).</p>

## Summary of Proposed Actions

<b>n.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Timeframe / when</b>	<b>How</b>
<b>2</b>	Email all students to let them know they can suggest generic training at any time.	Start of the academic year	Email
<b>3</b>	Research/Academic Career workshop to be organised within E4 and access to training courses on e.g. how to write a fellowship application or academic CV.	Next academic year or asap	Workshops organised by Career Service/IAD/local Research Offices
<b>11</b>	Email links to shared training/funding opportunities documents to all students each summer together with the Training and Research Output Log request.	Annually in June	Email
<b>14</b>	Alumni profiles on the E4 DTP website	Summer 2019	E4 website development
<b>15</b>	E <sup>3</sup> DTP website to be removed	asap	E4 website development
<b>16</b>	Student profiles (according to the chosen option)	Starts Summer 2019	E4 website development and IT
<b>17</b>	Email students with a reminder of the E3 DTP Twitter account existence	Start of the academic year	Email
<b>18</b>	Create and circulate a list of expertise	asap	Email + online