

E3/E4 DTP Management Team response to the Student Advisory Board Report

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With reference to the Student Advisory Board report submitted 29 January 2021 (attached)

Revisit actions from last meeting: management response

1	<p>SAB Recommendation: Develop a DTP training module on disinformation in science, how to approach/deal with it and how to reach out to the misinformed rather than dismiss. Some aspects of this are believed to be covered in the training given at Dryburgh, so it could expand on this.” [p.1]</p>
	<p>Agreed. In future years, we will try to integrate a session on this into Dryburgh’s schedule. This year, we felt we had enough content already and were worried about screen fatigue. Thus, to give this material to students who missed it this year, we are developing and will run an independent training session on this in the autumn.</p> <p><i>See Action Summary Table</i></p>

2	<p>SAB Recommendation: Consider whether one or two Frontiers-style sessions (possibly additional to the in-person sessions) could be held via Zoom in future years. This would allow a greater geographical diversity of speakers, and might offer opportunities for collaboration with other DTPs/organisations. It would also allow those students with clashes to watch recorded discussions. This format could be built on to include roundtables or debates, and deliberately offered to students in all DTP years.</p>
	<p>Agreed. The CMB has proposed extending Frontiers in Environmental Sciences with additional online seminars in semester 2 to address the diversity of speakers (geographical but also in terms of equality and diversity of speakers). These would be talks rather than lectures but could include debates in the end. We will welcome suggestions of speakers from students and will circulate a call for speakers suggestions in Spring. This seminar series will be open to all DTP/PhD students to allow cross-cohort interaction as well.</p> <p>Frontiers will continue to be offered to students in all DTP years.</p> <p><i>See the Action Summary Table</i></p>

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Transparency on recruitment process and criteria

3	<p>You said: The SAB generally feel that there should be greater transparency on the DTP recruitment process/criteria for applicants.</p>
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	<p>SAB Recommendation: publish an application flow chart online and flag to applicants. The following points are some of the areas which could be clearer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Applicants complete the application to the supervisor who has a specified project, whereas the interview is then focused on securing funding for that project. ○ The supervisor candidate selection step is opaque (or unknown) to applicants. In particular, how is bias (conscious or otherwise) minimised in this step? ○ There was some confusion among new students based outside the School of Geosciences regarding their PhD start date - conflicting information was given by their home schools and the DTP. If not on the flow chart, this could be addressed by emailing new students based outside of Geosciences in advance of starting.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) This year we created a new webpage with detailed information on our selection process. Selection Process The University of Edinburgh It includes a flow chart describing the different stages of the selection process. This flowchart has also been used during three online sessions we ran for applicants between October and December 2020, which attracted ~70 bookings each (~40 attendees each). Some current DTP students also attended those sessions. b) We think it is a strength of E4 that we review but do not select/limit the projects that are submitted and advertised. This means that, with more than 140 projects on offer, the funding is linked to a candidate rather than to a specific project. We feel this gives more equality of chances to applicants to secure a studentship. c) The supervisor nomination stage has also been clarified to candidates on the above webpage. Supervisors and interview panel members are required to complete unconscious bias training before selection. We have added a Widening Participation panel from this year to scrutinize each stage in the selection process. d) We are not aware of any confusion around start dates. The E4 start date is flexible and usually discussed at the offer stage (the start date would be on the offer letter). However, E4 has its induction and start of training in September and students who are not able to start in September would be strongly encouraged to attend those events so that they don't miss out on training and cohort-building events etc. We also have some students registered in Biology whose induction events are organised in October rather than September. This does not prevent Biology students from starting their PhD in September. We agree that these are cases for confusion but we usually communicate extensively with students in these situations.

Publication of demographic data

4	<p>SAB Recommendation: Where possible (legal), the DTP publishes applicant and cohort data with critical commentary and an action plan to address shortcomings. (E.g. 'The gender diversity of our cohorts is representative of society, but BAME students are underrepresented. We plan to do X, Y, Z to address this.')</p>
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	<p>As discussed at the SAB meeting, we need to be careful on what data we publish. For example, data on a limited number of individuals (e.g. a DTP cohort) would not comply with confidential data protection requirements. We also don't want to discourage applicants from categories that are under-represented in our DTP.</p> <p>We propose that, once this year's recruitment process is completed, our Widening Participation panel will look at the available data we have on our applicants and cohorts and make recommendations to the Recruitment Management Board which will be shared with the SAB.</p> <p><i>See the Action Summary Table</i></p>
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Unconscious bias training

5	<p>You said: "For supervisors: We have concerns that the training on Learn can be skipped through and is not monitored. We understand that supervisors have to refresh training in person every five years."</p> <p>SAB Recommendation: Other check-in points for sufficient supervisor training to be identified.</p>
	<p>We now require supervisors to confirm that they have completed unconscious bias training in writing when they propose applicants for shortlisting. The E4 DTP Recruitment Procedure document includes links to other resources in addition to the training on Learn.</p>

6	<p>You said: "For students: Unconscious bias training is only required for T&D- though not tracked. Geosciences EDI committee runs workshops, but it is unclear whether non-Geos DTP students can access this."</p> <p>SAB Recommendation: DTP to confirm that all (DTP) students have access to unconscious bias training.</p>
	<p>All PhD students are strongly encouraged to attend the university Unconscious Bias training which is an online course, accessible through Learn (self-enrol). This is part of the generic school induction package information, but it is true that we don't track attendance on this training. We agree that such an important topic would benefit from being emphasised and appropriate training should be provided. Therefore, we are currently developing an EDI and Unconscious Bias training session in collaboration with GeoSciences PGR that will be available for all students on the DTP. This session will run this academic year or in the coming Autumn. This training will be compulsory for all DTP students from now on and recorded in the Training Log.</p> <p><i>See the Action Summary Table</i></p>

7	<p>SAB Recommendation: Seek opportunities to discuss EDI topics as a DTP- for example during residential. Of particular value would be sessions including staff and students together.</p>
	<p>This is a good idea and we will look at ways to incorporate such discussion in each of the residential courses.</p> <p><i>See the Action Summary Table</i></p>

Recruitment process

8	<p>SAB Recommendation: Set up a designated email address for applicants to email with questions for current students, which could be jointly managed by Stephanie and a few DTP students to ensure that queries are signposted correctly. There should be a call for volunteers each recruitment round. An FAQ page could be developed based on previous queries.</p>
	<p>A FAQ for applicants is being planned for the next recruitment round, based on questions received during the online sessions for applicants.</p> <p>We feel that we have made good progress on communication to applicants this year through the website content which has been developed (Selection process and EDI webpages) and the online sessions.</p> <p>With regards to an email address which applicants could use to reach out to current students, while the idea sounds good, we are unsure what the workload would be to manage such an inbox and are worried that it could be too great on a few volunteers each year. The applicants have the opportunity to meet with current students during the interview days (and this is always much appreciated) but we agree they might have questions beforehand.</p> <p><i>See the Action Summary Table</i></p>
9	<p>You said: “We acknowledge that the Management Board would like to increase visibility of the SAB and are concerned that SAB participation drops off as cohorts progress through their PhDs. We will consider how involvement could be encouraged and are happy to collaborate to improve, though it would be important to manage the time commitment from each member. It could be helpful for SAB participants to rotate each year?”</p> <p>We are keen to encourage visibility and involvement of the SAB. Membership can rotate if that helps, but we should also maintain some overlap in membership from one year to the next.</p>

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10	<p>You said: “Students shared disappointment at the lack of training that NERC will now be providing; their schedule had been diminished before the pandemic and is now non-existent. We believe their last advertised advanced training course was in early 2019. Is the Management Board aware of any plans for NERC to provide virtual courses? If not, could the DTP provide additional training to replace the gap left by NERC?”</p> <p>NERC centres continue to provide training and have adapted their training for online delivery (e.g. UKCEH). What NERC has not done since 2019 is to have a call for funding that enables DTPs to provide additional training. We noted disappointment with this in our annual report to NERC and can raise it again during the monitoring visit on 2 June.</p> <p>We are aiming to provide training sessions that students have requested (e.g. around unconscious bias, disinformation in science). We have not fed anything up to NERC yet on requested training, however, because there has not been sufficient demand from students for training on a specific topic where NERC would be best placed to deliver the training.</p>
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11	<p>You said: “Though it is understood that COVID is driving significant uncertainty, the first year students are unclear on training opportunities for the rest of the year. The cohort would be particularly keen to rearrange the missed Firbush residential.</p> <p>As regulations allow, we are planning some in person activities during the replacement for Firbush that will run in mid-May. We also plan to run an away day or short trip away for the current first year students to take place in the autumn semester (separate from a Firbush residential for the new incoming students).</p>
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Summary of Proposed Actions

item	Action	Timeframe / when	How
1	Organise a training on Disinformation / Include Disinformation session in the Dryburgh residential course	Autumn 2021 / Next Dryburgh residential 2022	
2	Set up a Frontiers seminar series extension: online talks from diverse speakers	Semester 2 of academic year 2021/22	Email students to suggest names of speakers in Spring.
4	Look at how to publish demographic data on applicants/cohorts	To be discussed at next RMB in June	Publish relevant data on the E4 website
6	Set up an Unconscious Bias/EDI training, compulsory for all DTP students	By Summer 2021	Via the GeoSciences PGR Office
7	Think about incorporating EDI activities in residential courses	Starting with the next residential course Spring 2021	
8	Create a FAQs for applicants	For the next recruitment round (November 2021)	To be published on the E4 website when applications open

If you have any questions on this document, please email the E3/E4 DTP Manager stephanie.robin@ed.ac.uk or the E3/E4 DTP Director: richard.essery@ed.ac.uk.