

E4 DTP Management Team response to the Student Advisory Board Report

Circulated 08/04/2022

With reference to the Student Advisory Board report submitted 1 February 2022 (attached)

1) Revisit actions from last meeting: management response

Suggestions on increasing the diversity in the DTP applicant pool

[SAB report page 1]

1	<p>SAB Suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create PhD student videos to demonstrate the variety of students that partake in the DTP (e.g. how mature students balance life, work, and study). [p.1] - PhD student videos to demonstrate day-to-day PhD life to dispel “PhD myths” <p>Thank you very much for this idea. Our proposal to the NERC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion CDT/DTP Flexible Funding Award included professional filming of 5 short videos showcasing current PhD students in their day-to-day PhD life, to illustrate the diversity of our students and help demystify PhD studies. We have just heard that his proposal has been funded and we will shortly proceed with implementing the activities we proposed. We hope to be able to record the videos between September 2022 and January 2023, and will be looking for volunteers. This also goes along a mentoring scheme involving groups of three (a high school student, an undergraduate student and a PhD student), which will run during Semester 1 of 2022-23. We will send some more details soon.</p> <p><i>See Action 1 in Action table below</i></p>
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2	<p>SAB Suggestion: Advertising more over a variety of internet sources- including less academic sites.</p> <p>The DTP scheme as a whole is currently advertised on the websites/channels below during the application period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Find a PhD (academics also have the possibility to post individual adverts for their projects) - Jobs.ac.uk (PhD section) - BBSTEM (for the last 2 years) - Twitter <p>Partners and academics also advertise the DTP via various channels of their own: local newsletter and websites, social media, colleagues and discipline-specific networks. These are not under control of the DTP and it is difficult to assess who they reach and how. We have looked at diversifying the publicity of the DTP and particularly to reach more diverse audiences but it is not that easy to find (the BBStem website is one that we now use).</p> <p>Over the last 3 years of recruitment, this is where our applicants tell us they have heard about the DTP:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td>E4 DTP Website</td> <td style="text-align: center;">31%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Find a PhD</td> <td style="text-align: center;">28%</td> </tr> </table>	E4 DTP Website	31%	Find a PhD	28%
E4 DTP Website	31%				
Find a PhD	28%				

Supervisor	17%
Word of mouth	10%
Other - Specify*	7%
DTP Partner	5%
Jobs.ac.uk	1%
GeoSciences Website	1%

*The "Other" category is mainly about research groups mailing lists and newsletters (Cryolist, VMSG list) or institution social media such as twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn

In collaboration with the university marketing team, we explore new channels for publicity every year and are always open to suggestions of networks/websites that students know and would find appropriate. Any new advertisement option would be subject to budget availability (if there are fees).

3	<p>SAB Suggestion: Regardless of the advertising site, use plain language rather than jargon to widen comprehension of how a PhD/DTP works.</p> <p>We will have a deeper review of our website and external communication with this in mind. If students spot any specific wording that needs attention, please let us know.</p> <p><i>See Action 3 in Action table below</i></p>
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4	<p>SAB Suggestion: Engaging with school children to spark their interest in environmental science and future PhD study</p> <p>There are existing schemes which work on this aspect already and a few of them are listed below. We are currently gathering the outreach opportunities available to students and will circulate once this is ready (see starter list below). It will include activities with school children.</p> <p>The E4 DTP NERC DEI Flexible Funding Award also includes a mentoring scheme which will involve trios of high school students, UG students and PhD students (see item 1)</p> <p>SCHOOL OF GEOSCIENCES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WP Primary Transitions: 30 minute online practical science lessons with Primary 7 (age 11-12) in Widening Participation Schools in Edinburgh – flexible for students in terms of content (material can be sourced https://open.ed.ac.uk/category/primary-and-secondary/second_level/ or left to student to find/design or can just be a chat / intro talk / experiment / Q&A) Support is provided by Kay Douglas - Contact: Kay.Douglas@ed.ac.uk • Geoscience Outreach course; PhD students support the development of Open Educational Resources (OERs) to schools worldwide. Full list of output: https://www.tes.com/teaching-resources/shop/OpenEd Contact: Kay.Douglas@ed.ac.uk <p>UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEAPS (Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools) is a local outreach programme that aims to raise awareness of opportunities in higher education and increase the number of students going to college or university. Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools (LEAPS) The University of Edinburgh Contact: wpteam@ed.ac.uk or Alice Smith alice.c.smith@ed.ac.uk <p>OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Brilliant Club https://thebrilliantclub.org/. The Brilliant Club is a UK non-profit organisation that aims to widen access to university for students from underrepresented groups. The Brilliant Club works with schools and universities across the UK. We mobilise the PhD community to support students who are less advantaged to access the most competitive universities and succeed when they get there. Contact: susan.forrest@ed.ac.uk
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5	<p>SAB Suggestion: The SAB was supportive of the development of best practice interview guidelines and the goal of strengthening signposting to support for current PhD students (e.g. for learning differences).</p> <p>This is ongoing. We are liaising with the disability service for advice on interview guidance for our panels. We are liaising with the GeoSciences PGR office about developing signposting to student support services. The PGR handbook includes links to these and is always a good starting point. Other schools should also have the information available on their usual communication channels.</p>
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2) Student / SAB feedback to management

Training Decision Tool

[SAB report page 2]

6	<p>SAB Comment: Some training opportunities are not generally available to E4 students. Consider the option of updating the training log template so that students can signpost the topic of training and whether it would be available to others.</p> <p>We will update the Training Log with this option.</p> <p><i>See Action 6 on the Action table below</i></p>
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7	<p>SAB Comment: The data input step may become cumbersome each year. Consider an option of students providing more input directly, either through updating the training log, or directly into the decision tool. This would also enable a wider breadth of activities (e.g. social science training) to be included.</p> <p>The format of the Training Decision Tool (Prezi presentation) cannot be easily edited by everyone. However, the list of training attached to the Prezi presentation can be shared and edited by students directly. We will explore the possibility of doing that and track the edits so they can be reported on the Prezi presentation.</p> <p>For the next DTP, we will try to include some IT budget to design an online training record system into which students can directly input their data. Ideally, there will also be a way to make the (anonymised) information on training available to everyone and searchable. This would avoid collecting TNAs every year and ease reporting and accessibility of the training information for all the students.</p> <p><i>See Action 7 on the Action table below</i></p>
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8	<p>SAB Comment: Consider sharing a more high-level list of where to look for trainings (e.g. institute websites or helpful twitter accounts) along with the training decision tool</p>
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	<p>There is a starter list for training provision on the E4 intranet pages Training The University of Edinburgh (bottom of page) but the list could be extended indeed. We will look at doing this and will find a way of adding it to the Training Decision Tool or other means of circulation. Again, we will likely rely on students to tell us the training sources they know about to save time and effort.</p> <p><i>See Action 8 on the Action table below</i></p>
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Extended Frontiers

[SAB report page 2]

9	<p>See the SAB report for details on the options suggested by the students</p> <p>There was a second attempt for this Extended Frontiers Series following the suggestions from the SAB, to be organised in Spring 2022 around a cross-disciplinary theme. Only one topic was suggested (“Ecosystem Restoration”) and we are now in the process of inviting speakers on this topic. We aim to have two Extended Frontiers sessions in June, and we will gauge interest for further Extended Frontiers in future years during this time.</p>
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Second year Writing Workshop

[SAB report page 2-3]

10	<p>See the SAB report for details on the feedback received by the students who attended this training in January 2022</p> <p>We feel that the feedback is overall negative for this workshop and are examining other options to deliver this training next year (e.g. CEH has a course on “How to write highly cited papers” which has been positively received by some students in the past), including consideration of topics that the SAB has suggested that students would find useful.</p> <p>We have also met with the RPMG course leader (generic training for PhD students in GeoSciences) and discussed overlaps of content with the E4 training. While some of the content (e.g. paper structure) was indeed duplicated (but delivered by two different academics: Kyle Dexter and Isla Myers-Smith), the content regarding the scientific publication process (including reviewing etc.) does not appear to be duplicated, so we will still aim to deliver this training (or will direct students at IAD training which include workshops on publication such as ‘An Introduction to Copyright and Publishing’ or ‘Writing for publication’). We will also look at including some training in writing grants and funding applications.</p> <p><i>See Action 10 on the Action table below</i></p>
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First year training feedback

[SAB report page 3]

11	<p>SAB comment: The 1st year cohort raised some concerns with the diversity and inclusion training that was offered. It was noted that these sessions should be in person (where possible) and that a different speaker be invited to lead the session for the next year.</p>
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	This training is part of the GeoSciences generic PhD training (RPMG) which all E4 GeoScience students must attend (non-GeoSciences students are most welcome to attend too). It is organised by the GeoSciences PGR office. Your feedback has been reported to the RPMG course leader and duly discussed. The GeoSciences PGR office will find another speaker to deliver this training. If students have any suggestions of speaker, please get in touch with the PGR office directly at pgrsupport.geos@ed.ac.uk
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12	SAB comment: The 1st year cohort raised some concerns about the RPMG's required research plan for GeoScience students. It was suggested that a slightly different research plan and timeframe be proposed.
	This again is part of the GeoSciences generic PhD training (RPMG) which all E4 GeoScience students must attend (non-GeoSciences students are most welcome to attend too). It is organised by the GeoSciences PGR office. This feedback has again been reported to the RPMG course leader in the GeoSciences PGR office. Any feedback on the RPMG course should be directed at the PGR office: pgrsupport.geos@ed.ac.uk

13	SAB comment: Recommendation: start NMDM with a short 15-30 minute presentation about the topic at hand
	We will relay to the NMDM speakers and check they are happy to include this.#
	<i>See Action 13 on the Action table below</i>

Other

[SAB report page 3-4]

14	SAB comment: Students raised an interest in having more qualitative methods sessions included in the DTP training (e.g. introductions to using surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc., as a research tool).
	We will add a 7 th session to the NMDM course on qualitative methods.
	<i>See Action 14 on the Action table below</i>

15	SAB comment: The 2nd year cohort suggested some additional training topics they would be interested in: how to make the most of a conference, guidance for applying to grants and funding as a PhD student (such as for access to HPC facilities), public speaking, structuring conference talks, networking within your field, finding collaborators for specific projects to fill skills and knowledge gaps, and more team/cohort building exercises.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IAD has some workshops on Communication and Impact and Public Engagement that include tools on conference attendance and public speaking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public Speaking, Networking and Engaging ○ Communications Toolkit for a Public Audience ○ Creating Impactful Public Engagement ○ Dialogue: Public Engagement Beyond Public Lectures! ○ Storytelling Techniques for Effective Communication

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Facilitation skills for public engagement ○ An Introduction to Public Engagement ○ Designing Effective Slides ○ Presenting with Ease – Presentation Techniques ○ Presenting with Ease – Delivering Presentations ○ How to design an effective conference poster ○ Presenting with Ease (online) ○ Effective Conference Posters (online) <p>IAD overall have a quite extensive workshop offer and it is easy to attend their workshops when it suits you. Workshops by theme The University of Edinburgh</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an IAD workshop on 'Finding Funding for Your Research', but we will be looking at delivering new training on grant/funding/facilities applications as part of our revised Writing Workshop in year 2 (see item 10) • On networking, collaborations and closing knowledge gap, this feels like a hard topic to pin down but we will ask our year 3 residential (Innovation and Impact) speakers to address this if they can. • We are looking at providing more time and space for cohort building activities during our residential courses in year 2 and 3. The ideal solution would be to add a day or half-day, but we find that attendance residentials in year 2 and 3 is not great, so would adding more time away be well received or increase absenteeism?
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16	<p>SAB comment: Concerns have been raised that there is no official compassionate or bereavement leave scheme offered to PhD students. This means that compassionate or bereavement leave is taken as unpaid leave, annual leave (however these are only options if paperwork can be faced) or eats into funding. Due to the nature of a PhD program (a limited salary and time constraints) these can feel like limited options. It is worth noting that members of staff receive up to 10 days paid leave for the loss of an immediate family member and 5 days for other circumstances.</p> <p>There is indeed no paid compassionate leave for PhD students in the UKRI T&Cs, this is something that has been flagged out a few times recently and we will report this feedback to NERC.</p> <p>In the meantime, UKRI-funded students have a paid sick leave allowance (up to 3 months in every 12-month period) and there is the possibility of using it to help in cases where a longer leave is necessary.</p> <p>One of the difficulties of a PhD studentship is that it runs monthly for a limited period of time and on limited funds. The consequence is that any extension can only be processed by month and so any time needed that is less than one month cannot be considered officially. This can be viewed as a lack of flexibility, contrary to an employment situation, but on the other hand still provides some leeway to students (for example, we will not request any proof of sickness for a few days off and your stipend will continue).</p>
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Different schools might be approaching this differently, but in GeoScience this is what we tell students who face bereavement situations:

- Take the time off that you need to spend with family
- There is no need to declare annual leave as this is not annual leave
- Your stipend will continue (this is not unpaid leave)
- If you feel you need more than 2 weeks off then we can process sick leave – we need a sick note from a doctor to support the sick leave pay. We interrupt the PhD clock for one month but the stipend continues.
- If you are back to work within 2 weeks then we do nothing. You will have lost some time, but the chances are that you will have caught up by the end of your PhD if it is only 2 weeks, and if you have not then we can request an extension (but again one month minimum) and look at funding options.

In any case, it is very important that we are made aware of such cases as soon as possible. It is not possible to process sick leave retrospectively, so we need to know as soon as you stop working for more than 2 weeks for any reason so we can advise on options and provide support appropriately.

Non-GeoSciences students can request information from their school PGR office and look at local policies. They can contact the E4 DTP manager if there are any issues with this in their school.

See Action 16 on the Action table below

Summary of Proposed Actions

item	Action	Timeframe / when	How/Who
1	Student videos (as part of the E4 DTP NERC DEI Flexible Funding Award)	1st semester 2022/2023	PhD students will be invited to volunteer for this scheme
3	Review website and external communication content and look for jargon terms	Summer 2022	SR
6	Updating the Training Log template so that students can signpost the topic of training and whether it would be available to others.	Summer 2022	SR
7	Put the Training Decision Tool Activity Spreadsheet on teams for shared access to allow students to update it directly	Summer 2022	SR & KD
8	Develop the existing list of training providers and opportunities and add it to the Training Decision Tool	Summer 2022	SR & KD
10	Writing Workshop Year 2 overhaul with inclusion of session on grant and funding applications	Autumn 2022	KD
13	Check with NMDM speakers that they include a 15-minute introduction to the method in their first session.	June 2022	KD
14	Add a 7 th session to the NMDM course on qualitative methods	June 2022	KD
16	Report to NERC the feedback about the absence of formal compassionate leave policy for PhD students	Asap	SR

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.