Report by the E3/4 Student Advisory Board, following meeting 10th Dec 2020

Agenda items
1. Revisit actions from last meeting: management response
2. EDI
3. Recruitment process ideas
4. AOB

1.Revisit actions from last meeting: management response

Training
- We appreciate the management team flagging to students through email (SR) and Training Needs discussions (KD) that students can suggest training at any time.
- 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 Drybrough, so it could expand on this.

Frontiers
- Diversity of speakers: We understand it is challenging to reflect all aspects of diversity in only five sessions, and that it is not possible for Frontiers to tackle the issue of diversity in academia as a whole. It is important to retain the option for PhD students to attend Frontiers in any year, so that they might benefit from a diversity of speakers over time. Another benefit of this is that clashes with teaching commitments in a given semester will not prevent a student from attending Frontiers/NMDM outright.
- The overall feedback from first years regarding the Frontiers module was good. Almost all of the speakers included an interactive element which kept students engaged even though the sessions were held on Zoom. The most successful sessions were those in which the speaker had prepared discussion points and utilised breakout rooms for smaller group discussions before reuniting the whole group and opening up for general questions. Future speakers should continue to be encouraged to incorporate interactive elements.
- 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.

2. EDI (referring to letter)
1. Transparency on recruitment process and criteria
- The SAB generally feel that there should be greater transparency on the DTP recruitment process/criteria for applicants.

- Recommendation: publish an application flow chart online and flag to applicants. The following points are some of the areas which could be clearer:
    - 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.

2. Publication of demographic data
- We understand that there are limits on what can be published online (i.e. there needs to be sufficient data that individuals are not identifiable). Currently data collected for E4 cohorts does not reach this minimum. It is envisioned that in future the DTP will have collected enough data to publish some.
- Reluctance was expressed in highlighting only the positive aspects of the demographic data (once fit for publication); however, we acknowledge that the potential unintended consequences of publishing everything requires careful consideration. Suggest that data could be put in a wider context, with narrative, where appropriate.
- The goal is to highlight PhDs as a viable career: showcasing potential jobs after PhDs would be valuable.
- 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.')

3. Panel/boards diversity
- Acknowledge that this is a wider issue than the DTP, but something that is tracked.

4. Unconscious bias training:
- 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. Recommendation: Other check-in points for sufficient supervisor training to be identified.
- 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. Recommendation: DTP to confirm that all (DTP) students have access to unconscious bias training.
- Recommendation: Seek opportunities to discuss EDI topics as a DTP- for example during residentials. Of particular value would be sessions including staff and students together.

3. Recruitment process (referring to email):

- **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.
- 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?

4. AOB
- On behalf of all DTP students, the SAB would like to thank the DTP Management for excellent communication throughout the pandemic. It has been helpful and timely, and the extra efforts undertaken are appreciated.
- 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?
- 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.