

E4 DTP Management Response to the Student Advisory Board Report from the 5 December 2024 meeting

1st Year Comments:

- Students advised for seminars to be tailored to the interests and needs of students for that year depending on the proposed projects.
Although a balance has to be maintained with the diversity of the speakers, an easy way to tailor seminars to the interests of students is to prioritize speakers who are involved in current projects.
Action: invite project supervisors and partners as Frontiers speakers
- Separate workshops for beginners, intermediate, and advanced.
Our approach in NMDM (which first-year students had not yet started at the time of this meeting) has been to have single workshops for cohort building but to offer activities at different levels and encourage skill sharing within the cohort. Data Science training provision is to be redesigned for E5.
Action: consider support for skill levels when designing E5 training
- Frontiers could be more focused on tips and advice on different skill sets and areas. Talks about rejections and how to deal with them. General skills for frontiers students would like to develop: dealing with supervisors and line managers, grants, fellowships, how to deal with rejection, teamwork, how to deal with challenges, how you move on from that.
Action: pass on these suggestions to Frontiers speakers.
- Experiences from different backgrounds, different cultures.
We try to get diversity in our Frontiers speakers, but it can be difficult to find people from under-represented backgrounds who are not overloaded with such requests, almost by definition. We will be happy to receive suggestions for specific speakers, or types of speakers. Indeed, we have made this step already in view of next year's series.
Action: Call to attendees for suggestions of other speakers to be invited
- Students were not sure if ECCI workshops were compulsory, and that signing up is needed, reminders might be good regarding date. Co funding communication is not very clear, not clear how much they need to deliver to the funder or how much they can change their projects.
All first-year students should attend the ECCI introduction in October. The ECCI Consultancy Innovation programme is core training but can be taken in any year. Sign up is required to know numbers for catering. ECCI and the E4/E5 support team send reminders of events.
Action: Ensure clear communication and reminders about this programme from the DTP and ECCI
- Legal discussions regarding what do the CASE partners need and can ask from students. Students were advised to reach out management for help regarding how to deal with CASE partners.

An individual legal agreement is set up between the University, the student and the CASE partner for every CASE project (this can take some time to finalize). If disagreements arise thereafter, the DTP can mediate, or we can refer students to the University Legal Service to negotiate a resolution if necessary.

Action: Make the DTP guidance on CASE studentships for supervisors available to students.

- Feedback on Firbush: wanting more time on outdoor activities, students also felt that the initial activity could be arranged differently to allow all students to feel like they could contribute to the subject they were assigned to.

Instructor-led activities at Firbush are expensive, but there are many opportunities for self-led outdoor activities. We try to ensure that the NERC grant activity is not dominated by anyone with deep subject knowledge and encourage everyone to contribute with their own perspective. We will keep this in mind for future activities.

Action: Firbush activities will be reviewed for E5.

- Students would like to see more diversity within the cohorts, from black, brown, and Asian descent. So would we! Our WP process is intended to support people from before they apply, through the recruitment process to appointment, but we also need more diversity in our applicant pools. We believe that this is best addressed by raising the profile of PhD research in environmental sciences as an attractive career path on a national level. E5 will be working with [Equator](#), which is a collaboration between professional bodies, grassroots organizations, academic institutions and the public sector working to address structural barriers and bias in Geography, Earth and Environmental Science.

Action: share details of the Equator project once it is running in E5.

2nd Year

- Students would like to have more feedback between student and supervisor, set up a form to encourage a more personal teaching relationship between student and supervisor. An idea is a form on how you would like to interact between supervisor and student that everyone can fill out at the start of each year. More feedback that can go directly to the E4 team instead to the supervisor.

Annual reviews are a responsibility of Schools rather than the DTP, but we are in close contact with the host School PGR offices and can share best practice. The Annual Review Form used by the School of Biological Sciences was mentioned as a good example during the SAB meeting. Work is going on at college level to develop a form to help setting up expectations in the student-supervisor relationship. Students and supervisors who have already used this approach for initial meetings have found it to be useful.

Action: review the SBS annual review form for ideas that could be suggested to other Schools.

- Students would like to know who the contact for students is to go to when they are having issues with supervision.

If students do not want to talk with their Advisor or equivalent because of conflicts of interest, the next place to go is their School PGR Office. If you are willing, please copy the DTP Manager into correspondence so that we are aware of issues and can help where appropriate.

Action: We will be complying with new UKRI Terms and Conditions coming into force on 1 October 2025 which include requirements that the University “must have a policy to support the efficient and satisfactory identification and resolution of complaints from Students” and that students must be “aware of mechanisms to provide feedback and resolve complaints”.

3rd Year

- Everyone was happy with the residential and the skill-based training.
We are very happy to hear it.
- Tailor social events depending on the cohorts who are attending.
We can do this if the cohorts have suggestions for how they would like social events to be tailored.
We have already made a start on this by polling students about the best time of day for each social event.
Action: invite suggestions when advertising social events