



Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences

Department Leadership Team Meeting

Minutes

Date: **Wednesday 9th March 2022**

Part 1 Attendees;

Mike Burton (Head of Department)
Ann Webb (Deputy Head of Department)
Helena Gittins (Deputy School Operations Manager)
Bart Van Dongen (Discipline Head of Education)
Mads Huuse (Line Manager)
David Topping (Line Manager)
David Schultz (Line Manager)
Jon Pittman (PGR director)
Rhian Jones (Admissions)
Carl Jackson (PS Safety)
Rob Gardham (PS PA)
Rob Sansom (Forum Chair)
Russell Garwood (IT Director)
Luis Garcia-Carreras (Employability)
Gordon McFiggans (Discipline Head of Research)

Apologies; Kevin Jackson, Cathy Walton (Chair of EDIA committee), Katie Joy (Chair of Widening Participation committee), Scott Heath (Line Manager)

Summary Actions

Rolled over:

ACTION: (URGENT) Advertise and recruit to PDRA mentor role (MB)

New:

ACTION – chase up External Advisory Board status with Ian/Luis (MB)

ACTION: Delegate to a member of TLSE to improve content for Field Trips web page (BVD/RG)

ACTION: Check with James Allan/Steve Boulton about PGR rejected applications to see if there is consistency between previous years (RJ)

Matters Arising

The minutes from the previous meeting were confirmed.

HoD Introduction and report

Mike Burton (MB)

Teaching allocation

This has been completed despite 4th year being slightly problematic. A great job done by all staff considering the many challenges faced.

Personnel

The Data Science Lecturer position has been offered to Zhonghua Zheng.

Anna Drury has been offered a DKO position.

The Global Ecology Lecturer is being advertised currently until 29th April, and has been promoted on social media channels.

Two NCAS positions (Lecturer and Research Scientist) are also in the pipeline.

Duncan Cameron, a Sheffield professor, has speculatively approached the Dept. with an offer which is being discussed. There would need to be a renegotiated space agreement within Michael Smith to accommodate him.

Chris Jackson will be leaving the University 15th May. An exit interview will be planned. There was some discussion about the social media position to take, and if this would affect priority hires.

TLSE PS staff restructure

Whilst this new structure is being implemented, Francesca Moss is a point of contact for any queries (similar to Gemma McCabe's old role).

There was feedback about student hubs, and that the Dept. would fully support a move back to department-based student support structures.

Timescales for Semester 2 exams will be extremely tight this year.

FCM

The FCM has been rolled out with a few teething issues.

Re-categorisation of centres

We will need to reapply for all of our 'centre' statuses except the Centre for Crisis Studies.

Refurbishment

There is a plan to refurbish the teaching spaces G.33, G.12, G.14 and the Seismology lab, and also to create common rooms, probably next year for the summer.

Stepping down

There will be a stepped transition for the senior lead roles belonging to Bart, Gordon and Mike:
DHoE: Aug 2022, DHoR: Dec 2022, HoD: Apr 2023.

Reports – please refer to grouped report handout

Recruitment & Admissions Update

Rhian Jones (RJ)

Report submitted

ACTION: Delegate to a member of TLSE to improve content for Field Trips web page (BVD/RG)

ACTION: Check with James Allan/Steve Boulton about PGR rejected applications to see if there is consistency between previous years (RJ)

Accepts for Data Science are very low but Dave T confirmed this process will change.

Employability Update

Luis Garcia-Carreras (LGC)

There was a callout to the Committee for more suggestions for External Advisory Board candidates.

Teaching and Learning

Bart Van Dongen (BVD)

Report submitted

Please see report for further details.

PGR Report

Jon Pittman (JP)

Report submitted

MB raised the 4 PhD Studentships for EES in our budget. These could be done as Super GTAs to support group projects, online and distance learning MPEC. Once confirmed by Chris H this can proceed.

Director of Research

Gordon McFiggins (GM)

Report submitted

Please see report for further details.

EDIA

Catherine Walton (CW)
Report submitted

Please see report for further details.

IT Report

Russell Garwood (RG)
Report submitted

RG submitted a report of IT issues compiled from various surveys.

RG reported the IT Director role was complicated to navigate in a shifting landscape but going well, and it was suggested the role might become good practice in other Depts.

PS Update

Helena Gittins (HG)

Approval has been received to book some fieldwork activity outside of Key Travel.

HG will contact Gordon and Cathy to obtain a 'calendar' of when fieldwork occurs.

Carl Jackson (CJ)

The Faculty are holding first aid courses at Sackville St, staff interested should email Carl.

Lab inspections will continue over the coming week.

AOB

Rob S will be stepping down as Forum Chair and so there will be a process shortly to replace him.

Date of next meeting

Wednesday 13th April, 2pm.

DLT Grouped Reports March 2022

5. Recruitment and Admissions

2022 Entry, Undergraduate (UG) Recruitment

Both home and international applications are up on the same period last year. Overall applications are up from 592 to 661 (367 to 404 for Home; 225 to 257 for Overseas). Home offers are down on the same period last year, but this is largely due to timing of visit days for home applicants.

With the high level of applicants, we need to use all the remaining planned UCAS interview dates, with 40-50 interviewees each day: Tuesday 8 March; Thursday 17 March; Thursday 24 March. We probably have more applicants than interview slots because of not having enough interviewers, which means we will have to make some selected offers without interviews.

We are planning two on-campus offer-holder open days, Wednesday 16th March and Wednesday 30th March. The first of these is close to the capacity of 80, including 45 applicants plus their parents / supporters. The events will include taster sessions for applicants. For the 16th, we have taster sessions on basalts (led by Mandy Edwards and Alison Pawley) and clouds (led by Paul Connolly). For the 30th, we also have a session on the Gorgosaurus (Phil Manning). I am still looking for help with parent tours of campus while the students are attending the taster sessions. These events are supported by Joe Phelan and Michael Atherton, but their resources are limited because they are also supporting events and admissions in other departments.

FSE arranged an online event for Foundation Year applicants on 22nd February. There were no attendees for the EES breakout room.

We will be holding an online event for International applicants, the date of which is still to be confirmed.

Dave Topping is arranging an online recruitment event for the 2+2 programme

Jez Lloyd will soon be announcing a call to recruit more Student Ambassadors. Please encourage good students to apply for this, particularly with the planned on-campus events this semester. Also, several long-term ambassadors will be graduating this year.

2023 Entry, Undergraduate (UG) Recruitment

There will be a change to entry requirements for 2023: the Maths GCSE grade will be increased from 4 (equivalent to a C) to 6 (equivalent to a B). This change has been made in order to improve quantitative skills of our intake. It will not make a difference to most applicants, but it will hopefully address the problem areas of poor maths performance.

Planning for the University-wide Open Days is progressing (Saturdays 18th June and 2nd July). Planning for these events is being coordinated across FSE by Alison Evans. In prior Open Days we had a problem with capacity for our talks in Williamson G.03. This year we will trial holding our talks in Schuster building, where there will also be stands for Natural Science departments (Physics, Chemistry, EES). We will work to make a clear link between the talks and events within Williamson.

Explore Your Planet (EYP): Katherine Harrison is leading on the EYP programme. This is primarily aimed at showing Year 12 students (first year of A levels) how various science A levels are used in Earth and Environmental Sciences. A second virtual event for this academic year will take place on 16th March.

A meeting was held to discuss how we can promote the visibility of what is essentially our Geology degree (Earth and Planetary Science / Geology Pathway). The possibility of introducing a separate Geology degree title was also discussed. Action items for the current programme include improving the Field Trips web page, creating a "Geology at Manchester" web page, holding a dedicated Geology EYP event, and making a concerted effort to engage with schools where A level Geology is taught in the Northwest. Zabina Kosar-Ahmed will produce insight data on student numbers for geology, focussing on trends and attempting to forecast potential evolution of this discipline nationally, and on competitors' approaches and numbers.

The Field Trips web page is particularly in need of significant improvement:

<https://www.ees.manchester.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/field-trips/>

For Geology in particular, we should ensure that content for the new Italy field trip is highlighted.

2022 entry, Post-graduate Taught (PGT) Recruitment

For MPEC, applications have increased slightly over last year (345 vs 341 last year). However, there are significantly more rejects than last year: currently 205 offers vs 291 this time last year. There are currently 111 accepts vs 242 at the same point last year. There is a significant increase in Nigerian applications for MPEC on previous year (30 vs 6 last year).

For the Distance Learning MPEC, the Admissions Office is willing to process applications to this degree when the NPP1 is approved. I am not sure of the status of this currently.

For MSc Petroleum Geoscience, applications and offers are very low compared with last year and a significant number of applicants were not qualified. Applications are down significantly from last year (80 vs 138 last year; 191 in 2020). There are currently 40 offers and 17 accepts (last year there were 70 offers and 40 accepts at this point).

For MSc Geoscience for Sustainable Energy, there are currently 40 Applications, 15 Offers and 3 Accepts. A large number of Sustainable Energy applications have been rejected as degrees are not in a relevant subject. We will look into whether this can be addressed from a marketing perspective

MSc Subsurface Energy Engineering is closely related to our Geoscience PGT courses. There are currently 42 Offers and 28 Accepts for this course, compared with 7 Offers and 5 Accepts at the same point last year.

MSc Data Science (Environmental Analytics) currently has 8 Offers and 2 Accepts. There are 76 Applications, and we need to understand why the offer rate is so low.

An online Open Day for PGT programmes was held on 16th February. There was low uptake for MPEC, but better attendance for the Geoscience degrees.

Rhian Jones, Admissions Tutor

6. Employability Update

No updates.

7. T&L Update

Exams semester 1 and mark release. All processes for semester 1 units have been completed and the marks have been released. We are currently setting up a date for script viewing of semester 1 exams. All academics have been advised to set up an advisor meeting with their advisees to discuss the outcomes as soon as possible.

Programme and Unit specs. Unit and programme specs have been amended and, together with the completed interim programme amendment forms, have been submitted last week. Thanks for all input to make this possible. Due to unforeseen circumstances, mainly staffing issues, the updated 4th year had to be adjusted during the final week before submission and, although this was discussed prior to submission with the students, there are still some issues that need to be resolved. We are working on plans to deal with this but it likely means that we need to submit updated amendment forms by the end of the week.

Student Attendance. The on-campus student attendance has been low/below average since the start of this semester. To get a better picture of why this is Mike and Bart have held a series of meeting with all undergraduate year groups. These were 'healthy' discussions and already have resulted in some (new) insight (see below). We have asked all students to forward their thoughts, reasons why attendance is low and what could be done about it, to the student reps and we will discuss this further during the next students- staff-liaison meeting.

General comments made so far:

- The monitoring app is not always working (partly due to Wi-Fi problems).
- There are sessions on the timetable that are 'optional' but are still part of the attendance monitoring.
- Students forget to log in. We need to remind them more (put it on the first slide of the session).
- Students are too late to register their attendance. Extra 5-10 minutes at the end of the session would be helpful.
- Students have struggled with the transition back to being on campus. They struggle with planning their time better, travel time etc. and overall find it must harder than anticipated.
- Too much repeat between what is in the asynchronous material (video's) and discussed/presented during the on campus sessions. Students do not see the added value and do not like if this happens. We need to make sure that there is no (limited) overlap/clear distinction between these. Maybe better to have a video less and make the material removed part of the on-campus session.

Extra first sit opportunity. It has become apparent that (partly) due to Covid some students have missed exams. These students have mitigating circumstances and should be allowed a first sit at the next opportunity. Normally this is the August resit period, which may be problematic for students on the year abroad/industry/research programmes, who may need to start that year earlier. Within in the regulations there may be the possibility to do this earlier, to make sure that students in this situation can do the first sit by early July. A proposal to deal with this will be discussed during the next teaching and learning meeting.

Timetabling. Minor update to last month's reports. Data is collected and Earth support is checking this. As soon as we have a timetable the teaching team will check this to see if all data (units) required is included etc. An important aspect is that we will need to make sure that we have all the information

in the timetable by the end of May latest since after that date the information will be handed over to the central team and making changes will be more complicated.

Projects related workloads for 2022. No update. Students have until the first of April to select a project

8. PGR Update

Admissions and recruitment:

Latest admissions data shows that we have so far received 152 applications (38 H, 114 OS), which have so far converted into 28 offers (5 H, 23 OS), and 15 accepts (2 H, 13 OS). These numbers are down slightly from this time last year, with overseas application numbers down the most.

There continue to be some system performance issues with the new PGR applications system – specific reasons for these issues have not yet been identified, and the SEP technical teams are trying to understand the cause. Please encourage staff to contact the admissions team if they experience any issues at all at the earliest opportunity so that we can give the technical team the information they need to try to identify the cause. In particular they need:

- Error message received
- Date and Time of error
- Action being performed when error occurred (e.g. opening application, opening dashboard, opening document)

There was an on-campus PGR Open day on 23rd February where we had a stand and I gave a presentation on PGR opportunities in the department. Overall number of attendees to the whole event was low but it was useful preparation for more on-campus events in the Autumn.

All three of our nominations put forward for President's Doctoral Scholarship interviews were successful. We have also been successful at getting two MADSIM DTP studentships into the department (out of six) – these are collaborative studentships with Maths. The first round of nominations for the Dean's Doctoral Scholarships are now being assessed by the department ahead of nominations to Faculty next week. There will be a second round of Dean's Scholarships in May. Selection of STFC and BBSRC DTP applications are currently on-going ahead of interviews this month.

A call for PGR Teaching Associate (PGRTA) Scholarships will be launched this week with a closing date of 27 May. Four nominations will be allowed per Department with 20 available in total. Due to student visa regulation requirements, they will only be offered to Home students. The structure supports the PGR to research and teach beyond what a GTA would normally do, and also provides support for training and development. The scholarship will provide a salary and stipend (approx. £26,500 per year) and PGRs will complete the NAP light programme. These can be completed as 50/50, 60/40 or 80/20 part time duration as appropriate.

SEP PGR updates:

As part of SEP, the university is moving towards its final PGR structure, where each faculty will have a Doctoral Academy that will cover the full lifecycle of PGRs and there will be a physical space in Engineering Building A. The DA will also work closely with the central PGR team. This week new PS management structures for PGR will begin, as was reported on [StaffNet](#). There will also be some software changes implemented in April including a pilot of a new registration process, which is aimed to improve the student experience and reduce manual intervention from staff.

PGR stipends:

There have been some further complaints due to delays in stipend payments. Some of these issues are due to the way that the registration and stipend payments system is organised and are not delays in error but short delays that occur at the start of each year. But some delays do seem to be in error and we are investigating with finance the reasons for these issues.

Jon Pittman

9. Research Update**DHoR Report Mar 2022; 9/3/22 Gordon McFiggans****Technical Review**

Workshops: Meeting arranged with head of workshops, Stuart McIntyre on 16th March, to discuss DEES workshop provision with one academic and one PS representative from each Research Group.

Small capital: Refreshed ranked list sent for SoNS ranking.

Large capital items (internal): central support for ESEM. Alternative route through co-funding for NERC bid for EPMA. Suggested that IRMS capacity was best served through national capability.

NERC Large capital call: Deadline yesterday at 16:00 for internal process – decisions for the 2 institutional bids to be developed by 15th March. NERC deadline . FLT co-funding sought for EPMA – Margaret Hartley coordinating bid.

Staffing priorities: no update on previously ranked list. Feedback solicited from RGLs on potential environmental microbiologist and analytical biochemist applicant to EE.

Research Finance challenges: Meeting with Petri Uola, Head of UoM Research Finance 17th Feb to clarify approaches to address immediate NCAS problems and broader cradle-to-grave ownership of projects. Several well-acknowledged problem areas and assurance that these were on the radar.

Wellcome visit: visit from Director of Wellcome to Nancy and Colette on 10th March to present the new Wellcome strategy. Slides solicited from DEES health-related researchers included in the UoM high level presentation.

10. EDIA

At the recent EDIA Team meeting on 25th February following issues came up to bring to the attention of DLT.

1. Welfare Champion. Carl Jackson joined us to talk to us on the concept of a 'Welfare Champion' and to discuss what role EDIA should play in this.

Information from Carl: Issue of staff/student welfare has come up at Health & Safety committees and based on discussions at Faculty level there is a request for a named representative from the department. This person would be a 'Welfare Champion' who staff and students could reach out to for welfare advice and this champion would attend quarterly Faculty meetings to discuss welfare issues.

Note: Mike (Burton) wondered on the best route for this so asked Carl to talk with EDIA Team.

Response from EDIA Team: We fully support and recognise the need for the University to provide welfare support for staff and students. However, large concerns were raised regarding this 'volunteer' position as outlined below:

- i. This could likely be a lot of work and it seemed to be asking someone to take on additional workload burden. It was not clear to us what was expected of this person and we would suggest it would be more appropriate to make this a formal role with a job description outlining the tasks involved and the workload attached.
- ii. We would be interested to hear how this new committee fits into the Faculty Structure? How will recommendations from this committee be used? Is there any senior leadership involvement?
- iii. Is this one role or actually two different roles i.e. for staff and for students. In DEES the latter role for students has effectively been fulfilled by Mike Turner.

Carl said he would take this information back. We will update as more information received.

2. Seminars by interviewees for academic roles. At the departmental forum and at the Feb 2022 Dept. leadership meeting (DLT) the issue of whether interviewees for academic posts should give seminars was discussed with a few staff expressing that they would like to see public seminars included as part of the recruitment process (we note that they used to be, but about 3 years ago the practice in the Dept appears to have changed and at least the last two academic hired have not had a seminar as part of the interview process). The alternative point of view at DLT was posed by Head of Dept that there might be an EDIA issue. We understood that this concern was considered to be the case when people are being interviewed from external universities and they wish to keep this private. On discussion the EDIA Team agreed that in the interests of transparency that it would be beneficial for interviewees for academic roles to give public dept-wide seminars as part of the interview process. In terms of giving privacy for people who do not wish it to be known that they are applying for a post we considered that this was not in itself a reason not to give a seminar and this might be best handled by asking seminar attendees to not discuss this widely, or simply by not telling people that the seminar was related to a job interview. We considered where possible the audience should be able to contribute their opinion to the interview panel (i.e., direct to the interview panel chair), but there would need to be a good EDIA presence on the panel to ensure they discount any biased contributions from the seminar audience. **We request HoD to consider taking this request forward, i.e. that candidates for academic posts give public departmental seminars, including for current applications, notably the one on data science.**

3. Need for social events. There was a lot of discussion about the need to organise more regular social events, particularly coffee. This has been pre-empted to some extent by Mike's weekly coffee invite. We now have two postgraduate student volunteers who are willing to re-institute a social committee. We will ask other members of the department, ideally from a range of positions to join them. Cathy will follow up on the previously proposed Happy Hours which have been postponed due

to Covid. Carl indicated we should be able to go ahead with these now provided the appropriate risk assessment is in place and will send Cathy a copy of appropriate risk assessment to work form.

4. Staff will be reminded of the opportunity to join the University mentoring scheme either as a mentor or mentee.

11. IT Report

Past:

I recently compiled this overview of IT issues from an EES perspective with input from Emma and Kofi, drawing on conversations over the last six months, and a range of different surveys:

- At the moment there is a lack of support for high level computational teaching - these are things that fall under the Research IT remit, but research IT do not support because it is teaching related. Includes:
 - Access to clusters for teaching - currently using local servers or AWS with no IT support
 - Lack of investment in computing (hardware, software and support) for teaching purposes
- We face issues with packaging and software report:
 - Requests have to be placed ~6 months in advance whereas the cluster we're teaching on is dictated by timetabling, which is normally only finalised the week before term
 - Requests placed on time (i.e. with 6 months notice) still end up being actioned on the ~first week of teaching
 - In some instances software has not been installed in time for delivery - an example is a request that was placed in April 2021, numerous machines failed on first teaching resulting in a class not being delivered with social distancing, and then the Professor teaching the class reporting they "boot each and every one of the 54 machines in the cluster and checks each one manually, finding 6 machines not properly set up and a further 4 with hardware problems, equal to ~20% of the machines in the cluster not being useful for teaching at the beginning of term."
- We have no actual IT provision policy - for the last 9 months (despite multiple requests for one), the policy document on the Manchester website points towards the website, which has guidance, but no actual policy. As a result, those staff and students that require e.g. workstations for research that cannot be conducted on HTC/HPC (e.g. 3D visualisation) get conflicting advice from ITS as to whether they are entitled to a computer capable of conducting their research, whether they have to pay a top up above the service catalogue for a suitable machine, or whether they have to fund it 100%. Our PGR students especially report problems with purchasing both computers and peripherals, and don't know where to turn.
- Numerous staff in EES report that IT tickets are taking months to be resolved, and that tickets are completely lost and never actioned in ~10 - 25% of cases.
- This compounds already existing inefficiencies in the system - for example, EES staff and PDRAs in particular report that to maintain admin rights for their machines that are required for specialised lab software to update, they have to request admin rights on a rolling three month basis. These

tickets typically take multiple chases over the course of a fortnight to action, and a significant proportion of them are lost, and thus multiple tickets are required. PGR students have also reported to us that they face recurring issues installing and maintaining any specialist software required for their projects.

- This is coupled with the difficulty finding topics in the support portal (for instance, direct links to the topics then default to the landing screen after signing in - such as the link on this page <https://www.itservices.manchester.ac.uk/ourservices/popular/purchasing/work/staff/single/> and actually finding articles on particular topics is challenging given its interface) means that many EES staff report preferentially phoning ITS and queueing rather than trying to raise a ticket. This has led to the suggestion for that a dedicated ITS phone line to support higher-level (research) issues in particular would be a valuable addition.
- There are numerous areas such as those highlighted where there are obvious issues that have had knock on consequences throughout our activities, and before this point there has been no ability to feed back directly to IT services - RJG has tried to raise these general issues before via tickets, but these have been ignored. We need a mechanism by which we can highlight the challenges we face. We need to have a structure by which EES is able to feed back more regularly and directly than a yearly survey. We have multiple people in a position to provide detailed and hopefully useful feedback on the challenges we face, and we would like to be able to engage to help improve these services.
- In terms of teaching provision, the teaching team has noted the following sticking points - they would like the University to:
 - Make sure that IT and AV equipment (facilities) in centrally timetabled teaching facilities work, that all required cables and connectors (e.g. preferentially HDMI, but some of our teaching spaces are still running off VGA) are present, and that all software is up to date.
 - The team notes that logging in on shared teaching space PCs should be quick, but often takes 10-15 min when used for the first time. This causes unnecessary delays and often means that (first) sessions cannot start on time.
 - The Wifi/Eduroam outages across campus have provided significant challenges.
 - All of these points could be improved by testing prior to the start of teaching.

Future:

- The above has now been passed on to both Chris Hardacre, and the head of ITS, and I hope that given moves towards consulting regarding digital infrastructure and also the issues we face with ITS, there may be some scope for improvement in some of these areas. This hopefully addresses the key challenge I identified in the January ITS report.