

13.5 Training Needs Analysis of European Students

1. Introduction

1.1. Citation from Aqua-tnet project description:

“In order to fully understand the needs and challenges for Students in the AQUA-TNET domain, this WP will design a survey and carry out a sector wide analysis. The data will be analysed and a report will be produced identifying current practice with regards to training, mobility, generic skills and CPD. Conclusions and recommendations on how interaction can be improved, in particular with AQUA-TNET will be disseminated across the network. The results will be fed into the DEV work packages and protocols for interaction will be established where possible.”

1.2. Citation from WP13.1 “Minutes of the WP13 – Student Association - Start-up Stakeholder meeting”

The core group members suggested that instead of making an additional questionnaire to assess the training needs analysis of European Students we could use the results from the several questionnaires produced by the other WP’s to make a report. This report would have a focus on students’ views, using their responses to the questionnaires. In case we identify some gaps, we could then make a short questionnaire to students in order to complete the report. Lena will contact the managers of aqua-tnet to check if they agree.

Up to date (March 2010), it has not been possible to work with the DEV WP survey results. Therefore it was agreed to process other available data sources for a training needs analysis.

2. Methodology of sourcing information

2.1. Aquaculture Europe student forum, August 2009, Trondheim, Norway

As described in deliverable 13.9 “Student Forum at EAS Meeting” around 40 students participated in the EAS-SG student forum during the AE2009 conference in Trondheim, Norway. The forum was followed by a general assembly of EAS-SG, open to all attendees of the forum. The session was closed with a social event, including free drinks and beverages provided by the EAS and NTNU (venue hosts). During all the aforementioned activities, forum attendees were interviewed.

2.2. Facebook Group

WP13 members repeatedly posted adequate calls (here: postings) on our open-to-all facebook group (European Aquaculture Society Student Group, <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=39637154114>) to stimulate group members to give their unbiased opinion and point-of-view on their personal training needs situation.

2.3. Direct contacts to EAS-SG

Students and young people from Europe and worldwide make abundant use of the EASSG website and email-contact service (www.eassg.org, info@eassg.org). These correspondences were analyzed for statements referring to training needs.

3. Results

3.1. Aquaculture Europe student forum, August 2009, Trondheim, Norway

The workshop presentation on “Planning and managing your PhD program” by Prof. Gavin Burnell from University College Cork, Ireland, stimulated a subsequent discussion on two aspects of planning skills. Some workshop participants could see a potential benefit in visualizing the “ups-and-downs” in motivation and productivity during the course of a long-lasting project to get a better feeling for “where I’ve been” and “where I’ll go”. The definition of milestones (not only in terms of results or manuscripts, but more holistically including aspects of personality building and networking within the scientific community) was found to be highly effective. Secondly, Mr. Burnell highlighted the personal relationship between PhD and supervisor and its qualitative changes throughout the project. Despite the difficulty to generalize the social component of this relationship, most workshop attendees agreed that “hard times” (i.e. stressful periods prior to milestones and final submission) are easier to compensate, if both sides have a well-developed communication. The specific needs for supervision



can be spotted in a continuum between “micro-management” and “let go” and can only be mutually satisfied if both sides are upfront on their expectations and their possibilities.

The presentation by Catarine Martins from Wageningen University, Netherlands, on “Stand out of the crowd with a great poster presentation” revealed a substantial interest of all workshop participants (actually not limited to students) to learn more about the theory of cognitive reception of poster presentations and the tips and tricks to make them look really good. After the introductory presentation by Mrs. Martins, workshop participants were partitioned among groups and assessed selected poster presentations from the conference to apply the newly learned techniques and skills. The overwhelmingly positive feedback on this exercise gave a good indication on both the quality of Mrs. Martins presentation and the overall need for this kind of soft skill.

During the social event and in several individual correspondences the following became apparent:

- For most workshop participants, this has been the first international conference. Students were uncertain about how to adequately participate in the official program (“Can I go to every session?”) and how to approach presenters and (other) scientists (“I did not dare to ask a question after the presentation/approach him or her in the next coffee break”). Teachers and trainers are strongly suggested to either practice these simple things in a role-play during a soft-skill seminar or to facilitate students’ frequent participation in international conferences from a very early stage.
- Submitting a poster or an oral presentation to a conference requires “a proper piece of science” from the submitting author/scientist. Students’ point-of-view is that they seldom have the opportunity to produce such a product well in time before a conference, because the deadline for submission is usually 6 month before the actual event. Besides facilitating the participation in conferences, it is suggested to the organizers of such events, to consider a dedicated student-project /-work session during their event with (almost) no deadline requirements.

3.2. Facebook Group

A strong need for language training skills can be extracted from the cumulated facebook group feedback. 99 % of the correspondences within the facebook group are in English, even though only a minor proportion of the members originate from an English-tongue country. This results in the exclusion/demarcation of members with insufficient English language skills.

It is suggested, to include the training of simple written modern English into language training courses in order to familiarize students with this particular language and to stimulate participation in web-based social networks.

Another training need is strongly interlinked with the actual characteristics of a social network environment like Facebook. The platform is being used for both private and professional networking, usually by using the same membership-account.

It is the group moderators’ opinion that the far reaching implications of this blending between privacy and professionalism are not sufficiently deliberated by some members.

3.3. Direct contacts to EAS-SG

Students approaching the EAS-SG directly via the website and the EAS-SG office email-address in general had a specific request (“Contact to somebody in a certain country/field of expertise” or “wish to become a member”). As the EAS-SG is not offering training and/or teaching, it is the EAS-SG’s opinion, that students do not see the EAS-SG as a potential source for information on training and teaching. This raised the question to us, if students have a good overview of the training and teaching area? Does a student realize the difference between a University, a Research Institute and third-party provider?