

Minutes of the 17th session of DDE Executive Committee (EC)

Feb 25, 2026, 1300-1600 hrs CET

Summary

The DDE Executive Committee (EC) focused on reviewing recent activities and discussing strategic initiatives. The group addressed issues linked to DDE's relationship with IUGS, considering some IUGS Members' views on AI and data security, and discussed plans to declare DDE an independent organization, to be cooperating with IUGS, CCOP (Coordinating Committee for Geoscience Programmes in East and Southeast Asia) and other international organizations. They reviewed DDE's participation in the Indaba mining conference in South Africa, where initial contacts were made that could further existing DDE partnerships and create new opportunities for collaboration with African universities and research organizations. The EC reviewed the implementation of the DDE strategic framework 2025-2028, specifically the implementation of the new International Science Initiative funded by Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) with financial support for projects ranging from those that are milestone-driven to fellowship grants. The committee received a proposal to establish a new DDE Research Center of Excellence at the Frontier Science Center of China University of Geosciences in Beijing (CUGB) and invited the DDE Science Committee (SC) Chair and the EC Members to send in their comments on the proposal to the Secretariat. The EC Chair's proposal to have an in-person EC meeting in China in early April was discussed and supported.

Next steps

- Qiuming/Harvey: Nominate one new EC member (Prof. Yukun Shi) and submit materials to GC Members for ratification via email communications.
- Secretariat to revise DDE Statutes for DDE as an independent organization seeking cooperation with other organizations such as IUGS and CCOP. One proposed amendment to the current Statutes is to increase the number of Executive Committee (EC) members from six to seven. This change would be necessary if the EC plans to recruit an additional EC Member during 2026 and seek approval from the current EC Members.
- Qiuming/Harvey/Secretariat: Respond to the latest IUGS communication following DDE presentations and discussions during the IUGS-EC Meeting in Bogota, Colombia, in January 2026.
- EC Members/SC: Provide comments on the CUGB Frontier Science Center Research Centre of Excellence (RCE) proposal and raise any issues that may justify a request for additional information.
- Qiuming/Secretariat: Organize in-person EC meeting in Beijing April 2-6; prepare well ahead of time a detailed agenda and a list of participants to be invited to attend the meeting

- Qiuming/Yukun/Secretariat: Follow up with MOST regarding rapid finalization of all steps for opening calls for project proposals under the DDE International Science Initiative (DDE-ISI).
- Qiuming/Secretariat: Distribute DDE-ISI document to EC members
- Shuzhong: Finalize templates for initiating call for proposals under at least 2 of the 6 DDE-ISI programs in collaboration with others as appropriate
- Secretariat: Prepare detailed information/questions about the organization of the DDE Forum in the latter half of 2026 and enable discussions engaging EC Members via email communications.
- Qiuming/Secretariat: Review the need, and establish, if necessary, a task group for the organization of the DDE Forum.
- Qiuming/Secretariat: Discuss with Suzhou Center and MOST about funding for events such as the early April meeting which had not been included in the annual list of planned activities
- Ish/Secretariat: Write a report about DDE participation in Indaba conference and the meetings with the African Union (AU) including description of follow-up activities

Minutes of the 17th session of DDE EC

Opening of the meeting, adoption of the agenda and the minutes of the 16th session of EC

The meeting began with introductory remarks from the EC Chair (Qiuming) and the GC President (Harvey). The EC Chair provided an update on recent activities, including progress on the DDE's legal registration as an international organization and participation in various international events. Harvey expressed satisfaction with the progress of DDE in its second phase that began in 2025 and stressed the need to accelerate calls for project proposals under all 6 scientific programs. Both responded to comments and questions from EC Members and other participants. The GC President congratulated Mike Stephenson on the publication of his book on Fossils of Arabia. The session agenda (see annex 1) was adopted without any changes, with EC Chair indicating that he will discuss plans for organizing an in-person DDE EC Meeting during time allotted for discussions and Q&A under agenda item 13.

EC Members adopted the minutes of the 16th session and took note of the Secretariat's briefing on follow-up actions that have been completed and others where status and progress will be indicated under the different agenda items of this 17th session.

DDE Executive Committee Membership Update

EC Chair proposed the names of the following to be included as additional Members of EC: Professor Yukun Shi from Nanjing University, who through experience in her current role as the Deputy Executive Director of the Suzhou Center could also serve as DDE Treasurer; and Professor Yamirka Rojas Agramonte from the Institute of Geoscience in Heidelberg, Germany.

EC Members (William and Ira) stressed that since the current DDE Statutes allow for only 6 Members in the EC, only Prof. Yukun be nominated for approval by the DDE GC. Nomination of Prof. Yamirka, who will be available only after April 2026, would require revision of the DDE Statutes and their approval by the GC. The EC decided that steps for nominating Prof. Yukun as an EC Member who will also serve as the Treasurer be acted upon immediately and the Secretariat begin the work of revising the DDE Statutes. Subject to the approval of Prof. Yukun as an EC Member, the 6 Members will include 3 men and 3 women, and representatives from Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America, addressing DDE Statutes requirement for gender and geographic balance.

One EC Member (Irasema) proposed that when the DDE Statutes are revised, terms for identifying EC members be clearly specified to improve transparency and consistency.

DDE Progress Update

The GC President provided a comprehensive overview of the outcomes of the 10th session of the GC convened for 3hrs each day on 9 and 11 December 2025. He expressed appreciation for the EC's efforts and outlined the vision for the second half decade of DDE, emphasizing the need for wide range of collaborative efforts focusing on 6 scientific programs (information science, geological mapping, geological timelines and evolution, plate tectonics and paleogeographic reconstruction, earth system modelling and sustainable earth resources) and significant efforts in data sharing and harmonization. He emphasized the need to expedite the completion of formalities and processes to design, evaluate and implement the different project categories under each of the six programs as decided by the GC. The progress in completion of funding for the 6 programs and calls for proposals was discussed separately under another agenda item.

DDE and IUGS Relations

The EC Chair and the GC President reported on their participation in the 82nd IUGS-EC Session and the IUGS-Latin America meeting during 22-27 January 2026 in Bogota, Colombia. They said that while most IUGS EC Members and others attending welcomed DDE steps to address IUGS concerns expressed in the IUGS communique of April 2026, a few online participants repeated the same concerns expressed during the 81st session of IUGS in Paris in March 2025. One of them was of the view that IUGS should not be involved in AI linked initiatives, another expressed concern of DDE being predominantly supported by one country. And a third raised the issue of the potential impacts of national security laws of China on data ownership and security. Concerns regarding IUGS engagement with AI linked initiatives appear to originate mainly from non-profit subscriptions dependent IUGS Members that have their own publications.

The EC Chair informed the Members that all such concerns have been fully addressed in the DDE Report and the proposal for IUGS Affiliate Status for DDE that had been submitted to IUGS in the lead-up to the Bogota meeting. It appeared that the information provided by DDE had not been fully digested by the IUGS-EC. Following its closed session on 26 January 2026, and in response to a request from the DDE EC Chair, the IUGS Secretary General sent a letter which, while indicating that IUGS EC has provisionally approved DDE's application to be an IUGS Affiliate Organization, had repeated requests for providing explanations about the above mentioned questions. The GC President said that DDE should resubmit those documents again.

The request, in IUGS Secretary General's letter for clarification of impacts of DDE's data sharing practices on European security laws generated considerable discussion. DDE SC Chair (Hans Thybo) shared his experience about data sharing practices in Europe, and a Member of the Secretariat (Jim Ogg) gave his views based on experience in the US and his collaboration with the DDE Platform activities. Both emphasized that the Platform should facilitate data sharing by linking different existing databases and not seek that collaborators post their datasets on the Platform.

Another Member of the Secretariat (Mike) expressed appreciation for the work of the Platform team and said the Platform team and DDE Secretariat and scientists should collaborate more closely to address concerns raised about data ownership and security. There was also near unanimous feeling among EC Members and others attending that concerns raised during IUGS EC meetings, in Bogota as well as in Paris in 2025, were broad and general and lacked specific examples that could be used to understand issues and problems facing the DDE Platform or other such open science infrastructures.

The EC Chair informed EC Members that a draft DDE IP and data sharing policy document has been drafted by the Director of the Suzhou Center (Prof. Shuzhong Shen) and is currently under review. The EC recommended that the DDE EC Chair respond to the letter from the IUGS Secretary General, recalling information already provided prior to the Bogota meeting and including any additional information as appropriate. EC decided that DDE should proceed with all necessary steps to declare itself an independent organization and pursue efforts to be an IUGS Affiliated Organization. The Secretariat should begin the revision of the DDE Statutes to reflect the new identity that DDE aspires to.

DDE in Africa

EC Members were informed of the increasing range of activities that DDE was participating in supporting geoscience in Africa. The Secretariat reported DDE's participation in the Indaba mining conference in South Africa, from 9 to 12 February 2026, led by Prof. Shuzhong Shen. Recalling that Indaba is the largest, annual African mining event the Secretariat described visitation to the DDE booth (frequent visitation by attendees during the first 2 days) and attendance of the DDE technical session on 10 February (50-60 from those attending Indaba).

DDE Suzhou Center and the China Africa Development Fund (CADF) signed an MoU during the technical session that is open to all interested African institutes who wish to collaborate with DDE to promote geodata and AI linked initiatives for sustainable development Africa. DDE Suzhou Center and Secretariat and some Members of the Nanjing University who were also in attendance had discussions with the Deputy Director and a staff member of the Department of Science and Technology on developing collaboration under a framework agreement established, in 2025, between South Africa's Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation and China's Ministry of Science and Technology.

DDE Suzhou Center and Secretariat and Members of the Nanjing University Team also visited the African Union Office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and had initial discussions with senior officials responsible for research, education, technology and innovation for developing cooperation, including the possible signing of an agreement between AU and DDE, for

promoting AI and digital technology aided research and education with several African Universities.

The EC Chair requested the Secretariat to prepare a detailed report covering outcomes of the DDE team's Indaba and AU visits and share it with all concerned by posting on the DDE web.

DDE International Science Initiative Overview

Prof. Yukun presented an overview of the DDE International Science Initiative (ISI), which, with funds from MOST in November 2025, aims to boost DDE's international reputation through financial support for projects under six programs (see "DDE Progress update" described earlier in this report for the titles of the 6 programs) from 2025 to 2028. The initiative will support three types of research projects plus a fellowship grant: (i) milestone-driven, (ii) integrative and (iii) frontier projects, and Fellowships. Milestone projects, each with funding amounting to \$1.4 million over a 3-year period, shall be the project category that will receive highest level of funding. Integrative projects are foreseen to receive up to \$ 450,000 and frontier projects a maximum of \$ 200,000, over a 3-year period. Fellowship grant allocations could reach up to \$ 80,000 during the first year of implementation. Given that it is the first round of calls for proposals at funding levels much higher than what DDE received during its first 5 years, invitation for project proposals for the geological mapping and Earth timeline programs will be pilot tested before the other programs. The pilot programs are expected to refine and establish a standardized template for future calls for proposals under all 6 programs. The templates for the two pilot programs are expected to be ready for release soon. The EC Chair instructed the Secretariat to share the final version of the DDE ISI document with EC Members, DDE SC Chair and others attending as soon as possible.

The DDE SC Chair requested that when project proposals are to be evaluated by DDE SC members, time allocation provided for evaluations should be reasonable and not be excessively short.

New DDE Research Centre of Excellence (RCE) Proposal Review

The EC Secretary General (Ish) introduced a proposal submitted by the president of the China University of Geosciences Beijing (CUGB) to establish a DDE RCE at the Frontier Science Center of China University of Geosciences Beijing. The proposal submitted to the EC Members and the SC Chair, only 2 days before the EC session on the 17th of February, was a revised one based on earlier feedback provided by the GC President, EC Chair and the Secretariat in November 2025.

The EC Chair provided detailed information about the existing center, including its establishment in 2022 with Ministry of Education support, its faculty and governance structure, and its complementary role to other Chinese DDE RCEs in Suzhou and Zhejiang (previously Hangzhou). He also outlined the benefits the RCE could bring to DDE, including leadership involving highly reputed scientists, access to digital tools and potential for producing high-impact publications and expanding global reach.

The GC President observed that the growth in the number of DDE RCEs clearly indicates appeal of DDE to scientific institutions; however, he called for discussions on the role and functions of RCEs and how they could contribute to the implementation of DDE Strategic Framework for

2026-2028 and the projects that are expected to be implemented as foreseen in the DDE-ISI document.

The EC members and the SC Chair agreed to review the proposal and send their comments to the Secretariat.

International, regional and national events that DDE will participate in during March-June 2026

The GC President informed the EC members that DDE will be represented at the following events: (i) PDAC – the world’s Premier Mineral Exploration and Mining Conference in Ottawa, Canada, 1-4 March; (ii) 61st meeting of the Nigerian Mining and Geosciences Society (NMGS), in Oyo, Nigeria, from 22 to 27 March; (iii) CCOP Steering Committee in Brunei, Dar-es-Salam from 6 to 8 April, and (iv) EGU 2026 during 3-5 May.

DDE Forum

The EC Chair recalled that after the first DDE “kick-off” meeting in February 2019 and the UNESCO Paris DDE Forum in November 2022, there has been no event where many of the DDE GC, EC and SC Members, WTGs and RCEs and other partners could come together. Hence, it is now timely to organize a DDE Forum in 2026. The Secretariat informed the EC Members that during initial discussions on the Forum organized by the Suzhou Center in the last quarter of 2025, there was agreement for funding the organization of such a Forum in 2026. The DDE Forum could be organized around the time other big international events are convened in China; for example, the ISC Conference in October 2026 as pointed out by one of the EC Members (Ira).

Following further comments and discussions, EC Chair agreed to provide details for the organization of the Forum – venue, dates, program, call for papers etc., soon. He may set up a small task group to develop these details.

An in-person EC Meeting in China

Under the item on general discussion and Q&A, the EC Chair proposed that an in-person EC meeting be organized as soon as possible and proposed early (1-5) and later (10-15) April 2026 dates as possible options.

One EC Member (Ira) said that she will not be available for the whole month of April due to other commitments; others agreed to the early April dates. One international member of the Secretariat (Mike) also indicated his unavailability due to other commitments.

Following further discussions on the need for urgently finalizing calls for project proposals under the DDE 2025 MOST funding allocation, organization of the DDE Forum and other issues it was agreed that a hybrid meeting with as many of the EC Members attending in-person be convened in China. One member of the Secretariat raised the problem of funding for such a meeting since it has not been foreseen in the list of planned activities for 2026. The EC Chair said that DDE Governing bodies should be able to decide and convene such unplanned events and that he will discuss the matter with MOST and others concerned to make necessary arrangements for the meeting.

EC Chair informed all attending that they will be informed about further details of the early April meeting in the next few days.

AOB

One EC Member (Anna) indicated that establishing communications with Geological Society of London and other groups that appear to be concerned with DDE's work and its impact on data ownership and security issues is worthy of more targeted efforts.

CLOSING OF THE MEETING

The EC Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions to the discussions and declared the 17th session of DDE EC closed.

ANNEX 1

Agenda of the 17th session of DDE EC including list of EC Members and others invited to attend.

17th SESSION OF THE DDE EC

25 February 2026, 1300-1600 hrs (CET)

Zoom Link: <https://umn.zoom.us/j/92909447047>

Participants:

DDE EC

Qiuming Cheng, EC Chair

William Cavazza, EC Member

Anna Nguno, EC Member

Irasema Alcantara-Ayala – EC Member

Natarajan Ishwaran – EC Member

Ex-Officio participants

Harvey Thorleifson – President, DDE GC

Hans Thybo – Chair, DDE SC

Invitees attending

Suzhou Center – Shuzhong Shen and Yukun

DDE Platform – Linshu Hu

DDE Secretariat – Mike Stephenson, Jim Ogg, Juxin Shen, Chao Li and Li Lingyu

GEG Office at CUGB - Zhengjie Zhang

Provisional Agenda

1. Opening by EC Chair
2. Adoption of the Agenda
3. Adoption of the Minutes of the 16th session of EC (8 December 2025)
4. Briefing on implementation of follow-up actions deriving from the 16th session of the EC.
5. Identification of 2 new Members for the DDE EC
6. Presentation of GC Chair on the 10th session of the DDE GC on 9 and 11 December 2026
7. Report on DDE participation in the (i) 82nd session of IUGS EC in Bogota, Columbia, 24-25 January 2026, and (ii) IUGS Latin America meeting in Bogota, Columbia, 22-23 January 2026
8. Report on DDE participation in Indaba 2026, Cape Town, South Africa, 9-12 February 2026
9. Implementation of the DDE Strategic Framework 2025-2028, including funding for new research projects
10. Discussion on the proposal to establish a DDE RCE at the Frontier Research Center, CUGB, China
11. Presentation on DDE participation in international, regional and national events during March-June 2026.

12. Organization of the DDE Forum in China in the latter half of 2026.

13. Discussion and Q&As on any of the agenda items

14. AOB

15. Closing by the EC Chair