

**UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD DEPARTMENT OF MATERIALS
ACADEMIC COMMITTEE (DMAC)**

DMAC 51

There will be a meeting of the Department of Materials Academic Committee at **2.00 pm** on Monday 2nd March 2009 in the **Wolfson Meeting Room**.

* Starred items will not be discussed unless requested in writing (email) to the Chair by 10.00 am Monday 2nd March 2009.

AGENDA

1. **Apologies**
2. **Minutes of DMAC 50**
3. **Shortened Minutes**
4. **Matters Arising – that are not specific Agenda Items**

DMAC 51/1

***From DMAC 50**

***Minute 7 Student Surveys** The Chairman commented that there had been a good response rate (17 of 25 possible) to the NS Survey of final year undergraduates and noted the good score for overall satisfaction with our programmes. He then summarised the key items of concern (NSS questions 5, 7-10, 15, 19 & 20), noting that earlier in the meeting the Committee had received from the Chair of JCCU helpful comments on the issue of feedback, and proposed that we should explore in more detail what specific aspects of these areas of concern were leading to the relatively poor opinions. After some discussion of the survey results, to this end DMAC agreed that the DoS should set up a student focus group. It was noted that the very poor response rate by Materials students to the OSCEQ survey meant it was of no value to us.

Action: AOT, ICS

***Item 10 Proposed Revision to 3rd Year Option Scheme** During the discussion of this item it was decided that if the revised scheme were adopted it would be timely to review our provision under the following courses: Semiconductor Devices, Optoelectronics, Electroceramics, Materials for Nanoscale Information Storage and Functional Nanomaterials. Together these comprise 36h of lectures and DMAC considered that some rationalisation might lead to a leaner, 24h variation. This would release 12h of teaching time which might, for example, be assigned to a new 3rd year option on 'Energy Materials' (likely to include a significant nuclear component). A working party chaired by Jason Smith and comprising all the lecturers who give the abovementioned courses will be set up once Faculty's decision on the revised options scheme is known.

Action: JS/ICS

Item 12 Word Limit on Part II Theses The Chairman of FHS Examiners for 2007/08 had suggested that DMAC revisit the question of whether we should reduce the word limit for the Part II theses. At its MT08 meeting DMAC declined to revisit this issue since it had only recently discussed it extensively: a discussion which led to the introduction in 2007/08 of a 120 page limit in addition to the 15,000 word limit and to the sharing of the Part II External Examiner role by both of our External Examiners. However Faculty at its MT08 meeting requested DMAC to reconsider this matter. There was detailed discussion of the accompanying paper that had been written by ICS in his capacity of Part II Organiser. Attention focussed in particular on the data in the graph of page count versus mark awarded, which showed that the

introduction of a page limit had not impacted on the distribution of marks and that although the page counts were quite variable the highest was 104, rather than pushing to the limit of 120 pages. The Committee requested that a similar plot be compiled to show the distribution of the word count before and after the introduction of the page limit and that both plots be provided to Faculty at its HT meeting. DMAC resolved to recommend to Faculty that the page limit be reduced to 100 and, subject to the distribution revealed by the word count plot, the word limit to 12,000. Action Completed (ICS/AOT)

Faculty has endorsed the recommendation. DMAC is now asked to consider the joint recommendation of the Chairmen of Faculty and DMAC that the change be brought in for those MS students who embark on the FHS in October 2009.

***From DMAC 49**

*** Minute 4 Report from the Chair of JCCU (HB) –**

i) Team Design Project Scheduling JCCU was concerned that, due to concurrent commitments in Economics and Management, MEM students were disadvantaged by the timing of the Team Design Projects, even with the expected input of 75 hours reduced from 100 hours for the MS students. JCCU enquired whether the TDPs could be swapped with the Option Modules in HT. DMAC considered that the training load on the SEMs was too high at the beginning of MT to allow for these modules to be done then. DMAC agreed to investigate further with the Economics and Management faculties to determine amount of work being set so the total workload could be considered. It was discussed that it may be possible to reduce the contribution of MEM students to 50% and reduce marks proportionately but there were concerns about further reducing the Materials content in the programme.

Action: AOT/PJM/ICS

ii) Foreign Language Provision The Department currently funds a language option for MS students; a foundation course is studied in the first year with an assessed course continuing in the second year in place of the Business Plan. A further voluntary course is offered in the fourth year. JCCU reported that all 1st years would like the option to take a language course. DMAC considered that all 1st years should be allowed to take the language option, for which the Department would pay. However, DMAC felt it would not be sensible for 2nd year MEM students to take an additional language course, given the already heavy workload. The entry in the handbook will be revised to reflect this.

Action: PJM

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 49: DC has approved this suggestion, including the evening classes for those students whose timetable commitments prevent attendance during the day and subject to a firm commitment from the student to put in the required amount of study and attendance on the language course. However, at present registration on the evening (OPAL) courses is required in MT week 0, which is impractical for freshers. This problem will be explored with OU Language Centre.]

Action: PJM

***Minute 8 Examiners' Reports – Prelims** It was noted that on MS2 there were very few attempts to the questions on Electronic Properties, and that those were poor. It was believed that, historically, this has not been a popular area for students in examinations. As an important role of the Prelims examination is to provide evidence of understanding of the subject matter, there was some concern that preparedness for the electronic properties elements of Year 2 core papers was not being demonstrated. DMAC considered that it was not necessarily that students did not understand the subject matter, as mechanisms such as tutorials were in place throughout the course to enable tutors to monitor basic understanding, rather that

this area was less inter-related to other subject areas so, given the format of the papers, the students chose to avoid answering those questions. Having discussed a couple of possible solutions, such as splitting the papers into sections, or alternating a question on Kinetic Theory with a Physics-based question each year. DMAC concluded that further data should be established to determine the exact trend in uptake of questions before proposing any further action. Statistics from the previous four years are to be collated for this, and to identify whether or not there are similar trends in other areas.

[Secretary's Note following DMAC49: JCCU have also expressed concern about the content and speed of 1st and 2nd year Electrical Properties courses. A working group will be set up to examine Prelims and core FHS provision in this area.]

The statistics were tabled at DMAC 50. They demonstrated (i) that the low attempt frequency on Elec Properties had occurred in most MS2 papers over the last five years and (ii) that there were certain topics on the other Prelims papers for which attempt frequency was also low. DMAC agreed to consider this in more detail at a future meeting.

Action: AOT/ICS

***Minute 15 Chairman's Report**

i) Recording of practicals marks and lab attendance The improved procedures were due to be rolled out in MT 08.

In progress: AOT

[Secretary's note added after DMAC 50 – the draft procedure was sent out in early HT for comment by those involved.]

***From DMAC 47**

****Minute 2 Report from the Chair of JCCG – Access to the Department Workshop*** Following an action raised at a previous meeting, JCCG had drafted a proforma for applying for extended access giving details of the student, the supervisor, the project and an outline of planned workshop activities. JCCG will submit an electronic version of this. DMAC enquired as to the level of graduate students requiring extended access and whilst it was reported that this year the level had dropped due to the nature of projects undertaken, it was agreed that the procedure should be put in place to allow for an increase in the level of requests.

Action: DA

****Minute 8 Regulation Change: Penalties for late submission of coursework and new deadline for submission of Part II theses***

This prompted a question about the Business Plans, as some students had been penalised by Proctors for missing the deadline: these students had sent work via the internal post before they left to go on the Industrial Tour. It was agreed that an explicit statement would be added to the handbook confirming that it was the student's own responsibility to meet deadlines and when submitting work to Examination Schools this should be done in person so the work can be date-stamped. DMAC asked if the submission deadline for the Business Plans could be moved to de-conflict from the Industrial Tour. PJM is to investigate dependent timeframes with the course lecturer. AOT reminded DMAC that a change in deadline would require a regulation change through Faculty.

Action: PJM

****Minute 9 Teaching Lab Access for Research Workers*** DMAC considered the level of control that should be implemented to assist the Practical Class Technician and others in managing requests from researchers for access to the Teaching Lab. DMAC agreed that access should always be arranged in advance, that users must

provide their own consumables, and that supervisors should endorse such requests, having judged whether or not the researcher is competent in using the necessary equipment. Pre-arranged and planned access should negate the need for out-of-hours access, and access during afternoon undergraduate practicals should be actively discouraged. All usage must be subject to having satisfied the PCT that adequate training has been received. A well-equipped metallographic outfit, including resources, is available at Begbroke and when access to the teaching lab is not possible / convenient suitably trained researchers should be referred there in the first instance. A proforma is to be drafted explicitly stating these rules. Any exceptional requests and/or difficulties are to be referred to CRMG.

Action: AOT

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 49: Faculty were informed at the meeting in MT08. A proforma is to be drafted.]

***From DMAC 43**

***Minute 4i Report from the Chair of JCCU (AZ): Industrial Visits (DMAC 43/2)**

CRMG agreed to explore with PJD whether an annual 'Begbroke' visit could be put in place that included spin-out companies and BegbrokeNano as a commercial enterprise. Action lapsed.

***From DMAC 37**

***Minute 4ii 2nd Year Polymers**

DMAC 48: AOT confirmed that BJG had been approached with this request and had agreed to undertake this review. However, HEA had submitted an interim report following DMAC 47 in which she advised that she considered the 2nd Year Polymers material to be accurate in content and that no changes were required. Revisions have been made to the 1st and 3rd Year material which HEA would like to review once examination results are known. It was queried whether HEA's remit should cover tutorial teaching and DMAC concluded that, as HEA was conducting a large scale review of the Polymers material, tutorial teaching would be a part of this, together with the practical element. AOT advised that AJW had reported that the Polymer practicals were on a suitable pro-rata scale to fit with the lectures.

It was noted that the Polymers material was being taught by a team of 3: HEA, BJG and AARW. DMAC heard that students were now keener to take Polymers.

Action: BJG/HEA

***From DMAC 32**

***Minute 11iv Report from the Faculty: Guidance to Supervisors** AOT and CRMG will adapt the guidance from the EPSC. Andrew Watt, as part of his CDF duties, will assist in taking this forward, has been briefed by AOT and will produce a final version for DMAC in wk7 TT08.

In progress: AARW

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 47: Update from AARW – he would still like to do this but workloads have prevented him from meeting the above deadline.]

***From DMAC 27**

***Minute 4 Report from JCCU Chair:**

Practical Classes Possibility of submitting reports in word-processed format. JMS has provided a lead on information on software for the detection of plagiarism. AOT is investigating its use and attended a half-day workshop on plagiarism in June 2006. AOT noted that EPSC has now produced some guidance on plagiarism.

AOT reported that the University is now trialling plagiarism detection software called "Turnitin" in two departments (Law and Computing).

DMAC 45: AOT reported that MPLS had agreed to take forward his request that they ask for a progress report on this trial.

DMAC 48: AOT reported that the students had conducted their own survey to investigate whether or not the students would like to submit practical reports electronically. The results showed an equal split between those who would prefer to submit reports in a word-processed format and those who would prefer to continue with hand-written reports. DMAC was concerned that an electronic format could increase the risk of "cut and paste" plagiarism. DMAC also considered that there was benefit to be gained in completing hand-written exercises prior to examinations.

Whilst it was agreed that Turnitin would prove invaluable for large pieces of work, DMAC held the view that the markers could detect any similarity in reports within the year group, although admittedly not against previous years. It was agreed that any decision regarding electronic submission of reports should only be considered once further detail is known about "Turnitin". AOT advised that no update had been received from Division. CRMG will follow-up with the Proctors for details of progress with "Turnitin".

Action: CRMG

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| 5. Admissions Report – 2008 Exercise | DMAC 51/2 |
| 6. Schools Liaison Report (Including Access and Widening Participation Work) | DMAC 51/3 |
| 7. Degree Class Statistics | DMAC 51/4 |
| 8. Employment Statistics | DMAC 51/5 |
| DMAC's attention is drawn particularly to the employment statistics in Fig.3 on p.3 of paper DMAC 51/5. | |
| 9. *External Examiners' Reports | DMAC 51/6 |
| 10. Review of Collaborative Provision | DMAC 51/7 |
| 11. Lecturing Commitments | |
| 12. PGR Assessed Courses | |
| 13. Report from the E(M)EM Standing Committee (KAQOR/ICS) | |
| 14. Reports from Divisional Committees | |
| (i) Academic Committee (AOT) | |
| (ii) Graduate Studies Advisory Panel (AOT) | |
| 15. Chairman's Report | |
| 16. Any Other Business | |
| 17. Date of the next meeting – 2.00 pm Monday 11th May 2009, Wolfson Meeting Room | |

The meeting is scheduled to end at 5.00 pm.