

Oxford University Department of Materials Academic Committee

DMAC 28 Minutes of the Academic Committee held at 2.00 pm on Monday 28th February 2005 in the first floor Committee Room of 21 Banbury Road.

Present: PRW, JMS, AOT. (Chair). The meeting was inquorate.

In attendance: LJFJ, MJC.

1. **Welcome:** The Committee welcomed Martin Carr, who attended the meeting in his role as School Liaison Officer.
2. **Apologies:** AJW, GT, HEA.
3. **Minutes of DMAC 27.** Since the meeting was inquorate any amendments would be sought from the absent members of the Committee via email. **Action : AOT**
4. **Shortened Minutes**
5. **Matters Arising**

Minute 4 Report from JCCU Chair:

Lecture questionnaires 1st year Elasticity / Maths scheduling – the Michaelmas term lecture list is prepared during the Trinity term. **Action: LJFJ / GT / AJW**

Practical Classes Possibility of submitting reports in word-processed format. JMS has provided a lead on information on software for the detection of plagiarism. **Action: AOT /AJW**

Minute 7 Matters Arising:

7(a)(i) Working group on paper GP3 (RIT) – In progress

7(a)(iv) Guidance on Part II theses – Initial guidance has been given to students, further guidance will follow. **Action: ICS**

[Guidance to Part II students has been sent by the Part II Supervisor and the Chair of Part II Examiners].

7(c) Programme Specifications on the Web – In progress. **Action: LJFJ**

Minute 8 Plagiarism

No comments have yet been received by AOT. **Action: DMAC members**

6. 2004 Admissions Report

The Committee discussed the statistics from this year's Admissions exercise (December 2004). The Committee noted that any PHYS2 applicants who had been offered a place were included in the OFFERS statistics, but were not included in the APPLICANT statistics. Overall, the success rate from maintained schools had dropped from an exceptional high of 83% in the 2003 exercise to 61%, however, due to the small numbers of applicants for Materials-based courses, it should be noted that a large drop in % terms can be caused by a small change in the actual numbers of applicants. The 3 year averages (2002-2004 exercises) for the proportion of applications that were successful are 69% for maintained schools, 68% for independent schools and 68% for females. The Committee also noted that the crucial figure to be improved was the number of applicants from the maintained sector, which remained relatively low. Our continuing widening participation activities, as summarised in the agenda paper from MJC below, are important in this respect and in addition we have recently commissioned an

advertisement in the 'School Leaver' magazine, which is distributed to all establishments in the UK that teach GCSE or 'A'-level .

7. Widening Participation

a) Report from the Schools Liaison Officer

The Committee received a written summary of the substantial schools liaison activities undertaken by the Department in the period April 2004 to March 2005 and the SLO (MJC) outlined the different types of activities that were run in the Department throughout the year. Some events are focussed on activities for students and others on activities for teachers.

New developments include: a new Masterclass and the involvement with Educational Studies over teacher training activities. In the latter case, a pilot scheme is underway that incorporates the teachers' Masterclasses and courses, run by the Department, into the Oxford teacher training course. If the pilot scheme is successful, it is possible MJC will develop it further and try to introduce it into other teacher training units (for example, Oxford Brookes).

The WEBSEM, in association with Prof. Cockayne and the EM Group, is also under development for use by school groups and teachers who are unable to travel to the Department. In addition a series of posters for schools on electron microscopy is also being developed. It is hoped that posters covering other Materials topics will be developed in the future..

The Committee were interested in the type of experiments that teachers and school groups experience. They were keen to ensure that all aspects of Materials Science were covered in the Open Days / Masterclasses etc. It was established there is already a good range of experiments & demonstrations; MJC is keen to develop this further but needs academics' input to develop experiments / present work etc, and is constrained by the syllabus for school experiments. PRW agreed to discuss with MJC areas of Materials Science for development, and the promotion of the course as a gateway into non-Materials-based careers.

b) Review of Widening Participation / Access activities

All the above activities are advertised to grant maintained schools, teachers and pupils; however, maintained schools were less likely to take up the opportunities. To encourage uptake, activities are often subsidised, and MJC remained positive about future uptake by maintained schools. The Committee were happy with the overall level activities aimed at widening participation and encouraging applications.

The Committee were informed that the Mathematics Department were introducing Pre-Course mathematics teaching for those students without further mathematics A level. The Committee felt that why this material may be helpful there is no evidence of need or demand from applicants or fellows. The Committee would have preferred to have a drop-in centre set up to offer help throughout the academic year.

8. Chairman's Report

c) Subfaculty

- **Examination Regulations amendment:** declaration of Part II thesis length. Approved. *[The amendments have been made to the Grey Book and will be in place for Part II student starting in Michaelmas 2005.]*
- **New 3rd year options scheme:** approved. The Committee noted that the Characterisation block had not been assigned marks. Fifty marks were recommended, in line with the TDP.

However, this item will be discussed at DMAC 29, when it is hoped the meeting will be quorate. **Action: AOT**

- **Election of AJW to DMAC:** approved by subfaculty.
- **Submission of examination questions – Meeting deadlines & culture change:** the Subfaculty encouraged stricter guidelines plus a consensus effort to change the culture in the Department regarding the late submission of examination questions. Subfaculty has decided that the default position on responsibility for setting draft questions lies with the lecturer who lectured to the main cohort being examined, even when that lecturer is on sabbatical in the year of the examination. Alternative arrangements must be approved by the HoD. The HoD is responsible for informing the relevant people of their responsibilities, plus notifying Examiners and the Deputy Administrator (Academic) of any changes to the default position. The Chair agreed to discuss this recommendation with the HoD. **Action: AOT/HoD**

d) **Other Matters:**

- Access to teaching laboratory computer room. [*Students have been notified to contact Simon Aldworth for keys.*]
- SENDA (from DMAC 24) – in progress.

9. *Report from the E(M)EM Standing Committee

- a) **A strategy discussion** was held, in which Industrial members of the Committee participated. No major points were raised, but the value of project management training was noted and it was commented that students would benefit from guidance in realistic project costing.
- b) The Said Business School are considering making **changes to the ‘Introduction to Management’ paper** taken by MEM students. The E(M)EM SC will be kept informed of all such changes.

10. *Report from EMS Standing Committee

No items to report.

11. Report from Divisional Academic Committee (GT)

No items to report.

12. Report from Divisional Undergraduate Studies Panel

- a) **Strategy Green Paper.** The panel discussed this but the formal reply will be through the Division via the Divisional Academic Committee and General Purposes Committee. The following points were made:
 - i. Teaching: the Panel felt that there was a danger of too much change, too often, and suggested a minimum of 5 years between major changes.
 - ii. Size / Shape: the Panel felt that the overall decrease in undergraduate numbers should not be allowed to restrict local developments. Better coordination between Departments and Colleges is required.
 - iii. Admissions: the panel felt that if a more vigorous overseas recruitment effort was to be made then it had to be accompanied by bursaries.
- b) **Report of Working Party in Academic Career Management**
 - i. Recommends adoption of “points system” for administration workloads on academic staff.
 - ii. Efforts should be made to reduce teaching load, including the use of graduate students as teaching assistants and post-doctoral researchers. (CETL will drive this forward).

iii. The panel asked “how do we minimise bureaucratic load whilst retaining an acceptable level of democracy?”

c) **c) Examination Conditions**

Efforts are being made to improve exam scheduling.

13. Report from Divisional Graduate Studies Panel

- a) Graduate Admissions: numbers of applicants are significantly lower across all divisions, ranging from a 2 % drop to a factor of 2 down.
- b) **QAA Review of Graduate training.** This will be done initially by a questionnaire in December 2005, and follow-up visits if necessary. The Reports will be due in June 2006.
- c) **Postgraduate Skills Training.** Two issues were discussed: (i) use of funds for language training and (ii) MPS-based UK Grad School for all research students.
- d) **Part-time external DPhil** route under consideration.

14. AOB

There was no other business.

The meeting closed at 4.10 pm.

The date of the next meeting is Monday 9th May at 2 pm in 21 Banbury Road Conference Room.