

Oxford University Department of Materials Academic Committee

DMAC 31 Minutes of the Academic Committee held at 2.00 pm on Monday 24th October 2005 in the Wolfson Meeting Room.

Present: KAQO'R, AJW, GT, HEA, JMS, AOT (Chair).

In attendance: LJFJ (Secretary). To Chan and Semjon Terehov, outgoing and incoming JCCU Chairs respectively, and Kat Smart, Chair of JCCG attended for Items 1-3.

1. **Apologies:** none.

2. Report from the Chair of the JCCG (KS)

The Chair of the JCCG had only one issue to raise concerning the end of year JCCG questionnaire for graduate students. The only negative item from the JCCG end of year questionnaires was the lack of feedback that students received from their assessed courses. It was agreed that students taking 3rd year undergraduate Option courses normally received suitable feedback. However, students taking the specific postgraduate lecture courses regularly do not have their work returned or any information on their mark(s) until the first year vivas. The Chair of DMAC agreed to ask lecturers to return marked work with feedback direct to students. An email will be sent letting students and lecturers know these minimal requirements.

Action: AOT

3. Report from the Chair of the JCCU (TC)

- a) **New Fourth Year Representatives** The fourth year MS and MEM students have been canvassed for two new representatives. [*Secretary's note: Melissa Holden and Ralph Hitchman had volunteered for the JCCU and JCCG respectively*].
- b) **Questionnaires** The first year representatives asked that Prof. Cockayne gave out the lecture handouts at the start of the lecture rather than at the end. The JCCU Secretary agreed to ask Prof. Cockayne. **Action: LJFJ**
- c) **Best Lecturer Competition** Prof. Grovenor was voted best lecturer for the academic year 2004/05. The prize will be presented at the Freshers' Party in 5th week (see below).
- d) **Freshers' Event** Jenni Tilley is organising this event for Friday of 5th week. The senior staff representative will be Mrs Paula Topping, the Practical Class Technician.
- e) **Industrial Visit Reports** The JCCU were concerned that the number of industrial visits available to current 3rd years would not cover the number of 3rd years who need to attend 2 or more visits before Trinity term 2006. The JCCU had also requested an increase in the number of self-certified visits to ease this. It was noted that DMAC had recognised and previously addressed this problem at its second TT 05 meeting (DMAC 30). Hence, DMAC reminded the students that new guidelines regarding the IVR were in operation for current 2nd years. The updated guidelines required students to submit a report for every visit attended and would ensure that a mix of 2nd and 3rd year students would be able to attend each trip. Also, an additional visit will be put on for the current 3rd years who were not provided with a visit in TT 05. The matter would be looked at again next year.
- f) **Industrial Tour** The 2005/06 tour will be to Toulouse, France. The itinerary is still being drawn up but is expected to include Airbus Industrie. The tour organiser is Semjon Terehov. Unfortunately, Prof. Grant has had to withdraw from attending the trip so a new senior staff member was being sought to accompany the students.
- g) **New Chairman** Semjon Terehov has been elected as the new JCCU Chair from HT 05.

DMAC thanked To Chan for all his work as JCCU Chair and in his planning, with Katie Moore, of the industrial tour to Beijing.

4. Welcome & Membership and Terms of Committee

The Chair of DMAC welcomed the Committee to the start of the new academic year. The terms of the Committee were reviewed and accepted. The Committee were canvassed for suggestions for a replacement (*vice* Cerezo). It was agreed that a member of the Department's professoriate should be sought. The Chair agreed to ask Profs. Cockayne and Kirkland to consider standing for election by the Subfaculty. **Action: AOT**

5. Minutes of DMAC 30

The minutes of DMAC 30 were accepted with one alteration:

- *Minute 8ii.* The maximum word limit for practical reports was changed from 3000 to 2000 words.

6. Shortened Minutes

7. Matters Arising

**From DMAC 24*

Minute 11 SENDA – in progress. A wheelchair accessible workbench has been sourced and ordered for the Undergraduate Teaching Lab. When not required for wheelchair users, it can be used as a writing desk for TAs /SDs.

**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. **Action: AOT**

**From DMAC 27*

Minute 7 Matters Arising:

7(c) Programme Specifications on the Web – PS have been updated and are being reviewed before publication online. **Action: AOT**

From DMAC 30

Minute 8i - Practical Review – Chairman's Report from Subfac & PCO & Student Feedback

The end of term questionnaire is currently under construction. **Action: LJFJ**

Marking guidance for SDs and updating practical protocols on length of report - this is ongoing all protocols will have word limits reduced to an absolute maximum of 2000 words.

A new system of set-time periods for students to ask the PCT to sign off practicals has been arranged.

8. Examination Reports 2005

a) **Part I and Part II MS- no report has been received from the external examiner for MS/MEM Part II**

Overall, the Committee welcomed Prof. Derby's comments and would draw them to the attention of the new Part I Chair (Dr Assender). The Part I marks were good this year. However, the Part I external examiner, Prof. Derby, did raise the issue of scaling / adjustment of the Part I marks in his report. It was agreed that given the small cohorts of students, that the

Examiners should not necessarily expect an average of 65% per paper every year and that the Conventions should be altered to reflect this. (The Conventions will be assessed in DMAC 32).

Prof. Derby also passed comment on the relative difficulty level of different Option courses. The Committee felt that it was important to stress that different courses build on different levels of prior knowledge, so that whilst it may appear that certain courses were easier than others, in fact similar levels of effort are required to understand each course. Additionally, the Committee felt that the introduction of the new Option courses will further counteract this perception and improve the 3rd year course significantly. This comment was also drawn to the incoming Part I Chair's attention.

The Committee noted that a greater range of marks had been successfully used in the marking of Part II theses. The Part II external examiner, Prof. Windle, has yet to submit his completed report.

b) Part I and Part II MEM - no report has been received from the external examiner for MS/MEM Part II

It was noted by the Committee that the formal review of these reports would take place within the E(M)EM Standing Committee. The comments relating to the Materials content of the course were addressed during the discussion of the Materials Science reports.

The Management external examiner, Prof. Hendry, felt that students in straight Economics and Management were being awarded marks according to different scales as compared to the EEM / MEM students and that the classification boundary for a first was lower in E & M than in EEM / MEM. It was agreed to verify this practice at the E(M)EM SC. It was noted though that no scaling was applied to the M & E papers. **Action: LJJ**

c) Prelims

9. Report from the Working Group on General Paper 3

The Committee received the paper from the Working Group on Paper 3, headed by Dr Richard Todd. In the discussion surrounding the paper a number of points were raised, one of these being that rather than shortening the length of lecture courses, it would be better to keep the courses the same length but to remove certain topics. It was also noted that since this paper had been initiated a number of changes had taken place, including the complete overhaul of the Tensors course by Dr Jason Smith, significant changes to the year 1 elasticity course, and that changes to the course implemented over the previous 3 years were now fully on stream, and the marks for paper 3 this year were inline with other papers. Consequently, it was agreed to take no further action but to continue to monitor the situation. RIT's report will be drawn to the attention of the relevant 2005 Part I examiners. The Committee thanked Dr Todd for his hard work on the review.

10. Proposed Examination Regulation Amendments

11. MSc Nanotechnology (with Continuing Education)

The Chair tabled the associated paperwork (DMAC 31/X) which had previously been circulated via email. The Committee were asked to feedback any comments on the academic content of the MSc to AOT via email by the end of week 3. The academic content had been developed by Prof. Peter Dobson, Dr Victor Burlakov, Dr Christiane Norenberg, Dr Alison Crossley and Dr Jeremy Sloan.

The Committee were informed that, if the MSc were to go ahead as described, Prof. Grovenor has agreed to chair the Standing Committee and to act as an examiner, which were the main Departmental duties if the MSc were to progress. Given this, only one more internal examiner would be required. During much discussion on this topic, the Committee raised the view that overall the MSc and associated PGCert appeared to be beneficial developments but felt that whilst participation with the MSc was voluntary, due to the limited teaching and examining resources within the Department, it is possible that staff would feel pressured to participate. Additionally, it was noted that this commitment would have to be within the University's standard consultancy allowance, which may interfere with more research-centred business. There were further concerns over the accessibility of practical equipment to MSc students, with much of the Department's core facilities already being employed at near-full capacity.

Given these views, the Committee felt that if the MSc had been developed along more standard MPS models with more Departmental involvement, which may enable specific staff to be recruited to assist in both the teaching and the administration of the MSc, it would be more inclined to support it. However, as it has not, it feels that the current teaching staff resources could not support the MSc in addition to the Department's current courses.

The Chair of the Committee agreed to inform the HoD on DMAC's position. **Action: AOT**

The meeting closed at 6.10 pm. The remaining (unstarred) items on the Agenda will be brought forward to the next meeting.