

Oxford University Department of Materials Academic Committee

DMAC 32 Minutes of the Academic Committee held at 2.00 pm on Monday 11th November 2005 in the Wolfson Meeting Room.

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

In attendance: LJFJ (Secretary).

1. Apologies: none. Prof. Chris Grovenor (CRMG) was welcomed to the Committee. The Committee were informed that Dr John Sykes (JMS) had been elected as Chairman of the Faculty as of Michaelmas term 2005, and was now an *ex officio* member of the Committee. It was also noted that the University had abolished Subfaculties and the Department of Materials is now also the Faculty of Materials.

2. Minutes of DMAC 31

The minutes of DMAC 31 were accepted with one alteration: in minute 8b, the paragraph was altered to read "The Management external examiner, Prof. Hendry, felt that students in straight Economics and Management were being marked 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."

3. Shortened Minutes

There were no confidential items to be removed from the minutes to be published on the Department of Materials website.

4. Matters Arising

**From DMAC 24:
Minute 11 SENDA – in progress.*

**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.

**From DMAC 30
Minute 8i - Practical Review – The end of term questionnaire is currently under construction.*

Action: LJFJ

From DMAC 31

Minute 2 JCCG Chair's Report Feedback on assessed courses. The Faculty agreed that feedback to graduate students on taking their graduate courses was required by all course lecturers. The Chair agreed to inform all staff and students.

Action: AOT

Minute 3b JCCU Chair's Report: Crystallography lecture notes LJFJ has asked Prof. Cockayne if he would be willing to hand out the lecture handouts at the beginning of the lecture course rather than the end. Prof. Cockayne agreed to discuss it with the students.

Minute 8c Prelims Examination Reports-Maths Lectures The students had reported previously that the Maths lectures were progressing at too fast a pace. This has been backed up by the lecture questionnaires. Historically the Maths course is fast-paced with a high number of topics covered relatively quickly. The Committee agreed that a Working Party should look at this issue. It was proposed that the Academic Committee's Undergraduate Panel (GT, JMS and Dr Wilshaw) should be asked to review the course in the Hilary term. The Chair also proposed to meet with the maths Convenor in The Department of Earth Sciences (Prof. Woodhouse).

Action AOT

Minute 10 Proposed Examination Regulation Amendments The Prelims regulation amendments were passed by Faculty, who voted clearly for the most severe option (DMAC 32/2). This option is now being assessed to ensure the EPSC will allow such a definite and strict regulation. If passed, the Regulations will apply to the 2006/07 first year. The Part I regulations will be assessed in Hilary term.

Minute 11 MSc Nanotechnology The HoD's response to Prof. Dobson is attached. CRMG (HoD) sympathised with the Committee's views and his letter reflected this. The Divisional General Purposes Committee agreed to the PG Certificate (as said in the letter DMAC 32/3), although the Divisional Academic Committee wished to delay the Certificate despite the clear direction from the GPC. It is expected this decision will be overturned. The HoD stressed the Department's desire to pursue the MSc only with 50:50 Departmental: Continuing Education involvement. This would be expected to bring in the funds to cover the extra staff required.

5. Examination Conventions 2005 (DMAC 32/4)

The Committee were reminded that though the Conventions were formally "owned" by DMAC, they had, as per normal practice, already been discussed by the current Board of Examiners.

a) Prelims

In Section 4, the word continuously was deleted. The year of the Nominating Committee was amended.

b) Materials Science

The year of the Nominating Committee was amended. Minor typos were corrected.

c) Materials, Economics and Management (to be ratified by the E(M)EM SC).

The year of the Nominating Committee was amended. Minor typos were corrected. The Committee reinforced the recommendation that the unratified marks from the second years sitting the Ecl examination were given to the College tutors by telephone with the appropriate caveat that the marks were yet to be finalised. LJFJ, in her role as administrative assistant to the Examiners agreed to remind the examiners of this. **Action: LJFJ**

The Conventions were accepted for the current academic year.

6. Postgraduate Year I PRS Reports: timing of reports / vivas & choice of assessors

Two issues were discussed: (i) is the timing of the report submission (week 4 in TT for vivas in weeks 5-7 inclusive) suitable; and (ii) should the choice of markers for the reports be restricted to only those supervisors with first year students, or continue as current practice and be shared amongst all Faculty members. The problem with the timing of the vivas was the heavy workload experienced by certain members of staff assisting Prelims, Part I and Part II students with revision / report writing around that time.

The Committee agreed that the current practice of sharing the marking responsibility amongst the Faculty, with the choice of marker depending on the research area that the report covered should continue.

The Committee, after much discussion around the date of submission agreed that the Chair should examine the possibility of the reports being submitted in week 2 with the vivas being similarly moved. This date was chosen as it is late enough for the report (a progress report with

research aims & objectives) to have some substance but early enough for remedial action to take place if required. It also allowed sufficient time for information on assessed courses and colloquia attendance to be collected. Other dates, such as during the Long Vacation were discussed, but these were discounted due to the difficulty of getting staff together outside full term. The Chair expressed concern over implementing the change for the current year because very firm instructions had already been issued to the PRS to hold the current Friday afternoon dates free for these vivas. However, the Committee indicated strongly that unless there were insurmountable logistical problems it wished for the change to be introduced for the vivas in TT 06.

Action: AOT

7. Steelmaking Lectures – information embedded in AIK (1st year Thermodynamics) and PSG lectures (2nd year Engineering Alloys) (DMAC 32/5)

Profs. Grant and Kirkland have met and agreed the following actions:

Prof. Kirkland continues to teach the blast furnace as previously in his Thermodynamics course. He has provided PSG with his lecture notes.

On the basis of these notes, PSG is extending his Engineering Alloys lecture course to include the steel-making processes that follow from the blast furnace, drawing on where appropriate, the background thermodynamics to show how the concentration of some of the key elements used in steels are controlled. Consequently, many of the aspects relevant to steel-making previously contained in Extraction Metallurgy are now accounted for, with an appropriate reduction in volume and considerations for consistency.

This is supported by the attached lecture synopses.

The Committee agreed to these changes, with the caveat that the Examiners need to be reminded of this change for future years.

8. Report from Tutors' Committee (JTC)

The TC approved the new reporting scheme for Options courses.

The Third Year "Mock Finals" Collections ran well this term.

The TC agreed to the following changes to the Admissions criteria, to be implemented in the for the next prospectus as suggested by AOT: standard offers will be "at least AAA"; applicants are required to have Maths at A2 level, and one of Physics or Chemistry with the subject not provided at A2 level recommended at AS level, further maths and Design and Technology remain helpful; applicants will be assessed on academic ability and potential; a guidance on the minimum English language requirement, to be identical to the higher graduate entry criterion, was accepted. 18 Physics2 applicants will be interviewed in the 2005 Admissions exercise.

9. Report from EMS Standing Committee (SGR)

There were no items to report.

10. Report from the E(M)EM Standing Committee (KAQO'R)

Statistical Methods in Economics will continue to be available but the Committee need to observe the Economics options as many are only available if lectures are taken in the third year rather than in the Part II year, when they are examined. The advice to MEM students remains to take such Options only if present in Oxford during the whole of their fourth year. The SC also discussed the role of the industrial representatives on the Committee.

The Department of Engineering Students representatives raised the issue of EEM students gaining lower marks for projects than straight Engineering Science students. The discussions with the SC remained ongoing. The External Examiner for Economics had also highlighted the possibility of a first being awarded for lower overall marks in E & M as opposed to EEM / MEM. The Department of Economics representatives clarified that this difference was due to

the method of awarding the final degree using the preponderance system rather than an average overall mark.

11. Chairman's Report

- i. **EPSC Departmental Review** The Department will be reviewed by the EPSC in early Trinity term, This review occurs every 6 years. For the undergraduate section of the review, it is expected the Department will be able to submit the Accreditation paperwork. The Committee were asked to suggest possible external panel members. The following names were put forward:

Industrial members: Alan Begg and Dr Geoff Armstrong.

Previous External Examiners: Prof. Goringe (retd), University of Surrey; Prof Windle, University of Cambridge; Prof. Greer, University of Cambridge.

International members: Prof. Linn Hobbs, MIT.

Other members: Prof. Goodhew, University of Liverpool.

- ii. **CETL Summary (Preparation for Academic Practice)** The internal workshop for new Maths Class tutors was well-presented and exceptionally well-received. The demand for it was high and all participants gave the workshop excellent feedback. Two attendees from the Department are due to attend the Department of Engineering Science workshop on Class teaching and will report back to the Chair on this. At a Divisional level workshops will be held on delivering lectures. It is hoped that there will also be one held in conjunction with the OUCS on the use of new technology for teaching.

AOT, as the Department of Materials CETL Coordinator, will also be organising a workshop for new tutors (including graduate students). He informed DMAC that a volunteer will be needed to lead the workshop. The effort involved in setting this up will be recognised by payment of a one-off honorarium. Mentors will be needed for students who undertake tutorial work.

The Committee were reminded that this work amounted to the basic level training (Stage I). The programme will expand into Stage II training for a selected group of students. It was hoped that more money for equipment etc would be found to support this.

- iii. **Roberts Skills Training Programme** Years 1-3 are now fully funded and the University / Department is expected to provide 2 weeks of training per year of the DPhil. The Chair tabled document DMAC 32/6 outlining the training so far. The Committee were pleased with the range of training offered.
- iv. **Report from the Subfaculty (now Faculty)** The Faculty were content with the level of guidance to students on plagiarism and on the literature review given in the Graduate Handbook. Supervisors will be reminded of the need to guide students on this matter. Following this, the Committee discussed other areas that supervisors may need reminders re. their responsibilities towards supervising graduate students. After much discussion over the availability of courses / information to staff, both new and old, the Chair and CRMG agreed to adapt the EPSC Graduate Supervisors' Guidance Handbook into a short Departmental document. CRMG, as HoD, was happy to ask all staff to accept the guidance as standard practice on the acceptance of a research student. **Action: AOT / CRMG**
- v. **Undergraduate and Postgraduate Admission Statistics** As shown in DMAC 32/6, the overall trend for both UG and PG admissions is an increase in the number of students admitted.
- vi. **IOM3 / Engineering Council Accreditation Exercise** Both the Materials Science and MEM courses successfully passed the accreditation exercise. The panel were particularly impressed with the quality and enthusiasm of our students. Two minor points were raised:

the Panel wished for more effort to be taken to place MEM students in Materials-related environments during their Part II management project; and that the Department should continue to strongly encourage students to take voluntary summer placements in industry.

- vii. Gatsby School Liaison Activities** An additional £156 k has been awarded by the Gatsby Foundation towards the schools liaison activities. This amounts to nearly £500 k over 5 years. Two new part-time posts, plus an extension of the technician assisting Martin Carr, have been introduced to further develop classroom resources for use in schools. The Department will be networking with other Materials Departments within the UK to share good practice.

12. Reports from Divisional Committees

i. Academic Committee (GT & AOT)

Week 0 (GT) The major item for discussion was the launch of the MSc in Biomedical Engineering by the Department of Engineering Science. There is a new HoDivision: Prof. Keith Burnett.

Week 6 (AOT) The Chair of the DivAC was Prof. Robin Devenish. The Committee discussed the Bologna Process (the unification of European higher education awards, undergraduate 3 years: MSc, 2years: PhD, 3 years). Queries remain as to how the 4-year undergraduate Masters programmes will fit into this system; the fourth year needs to be 12 months.

Three reports were also discussed. The Burgess Report is a national report on measuring and recording student achievement. The report covers replacing the classification system with a pass / fail / distinction or a straight percentage, plus the use of credits per year of full-time education. A national Department of Education and Science report on improving undergraduate admissions is looking at moving the admissions exercise to March and to keeping back a small proportion of places for post-qualification applicants in August. The internal Lankester report on undergraduate admissions has just been received, and will cover proposed wholesale changes to the Oxford admissions process.

An “academic assistantship” scheme for post-graduate students was discussed. This scheme does not have any University funding attached to it and would need to be college-funded. The IAUL have produced a Graduate Course Experience questionnaire, but only gross statistics were available. Overall the report was largely positive, only 11% of post-graduate research students are dissatisfied, and satisfaction was strongly correlated with the presence of only one supervisor.

ii. Graduate Studies Advisory Panels (AOT)

This Panel meets before the Div AC and feeds directly into it. The panel examined the EPSRC report on postgraduate training strategy proposals. The report seeks to be “more responsive to demand from employers” and “may seek to utilise unused capacity through redirection of resources, concentrating funds at institutional level”. The report looks at the DTG funding. DMAC agreed that it would be unsatisfactory to link this small amount of money, that is at present available for blue skies research, to employers’ needs. AOT agreed to write to the Divisional Secretary flagging up these concerns. **Action: AOT**

[Note added: following the meetings of Divisional Board & GPC this matter is being taken forward by the HoD’s office]

All Divisions are likely to be asked by the University to reduce projected growth in postgraduate student number projections. It should be noted though that in the previous year the Pro-Vice-Chancellor agreed the University would not turn away funded studentships.

- iii. **UG Studies Advisory Panel** had no meeting this term

13. Any Other Business

There was no further business.

Date of the next meeting – 2 pm Monday 30th January 2006, Wolfson Meeting Room. The meeting closed at 4.48 pm.