

## Oxford University Department of Materials Academic Committee

**DMAC 41 Minutes of the Academic Committee** held at 2.00 pm on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2007 in the Wolfson Meeting Room.

**Present:** CRMG, KAQOR, DJHC, MRC, AJW, JMS, AOT (Chair).

**In attendance:** ICS (Secretary), Sarah Haigh (in place of JCCG Chair) (Items 1-3), Alex Zawadzki (JCCU Chair) (Items 1-3).

### 1. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

### 2. Report from the Chair of JCCG (SH in place of DA)

#### i. Access to the Workshop (DMAC 41/1)

DMAC endorsed JCCG's proposal for an advanced student user system for the Departmental Workshop. AOT will take this forward with the Department Administrator in the first instance.

**Action: AOT**

### 3. Report from the Chair of JCCU (AZ)

#### i. 1<sup>st</sup> year Introduction to Computing Practical

AZ reported that Paul Warren (PJW) had been invited to JCCU to discuss the 1<sup>st</sup> year Introduction to Computing Practical. It had been concluded that concern raised by some students that the practical contained too much material on the use of Microsoft Word was unfounded. It had been agreed that a greater treatment of error bars should be incorporated into the practical. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year representatives have been asked to present to PJW a full set of suggestions for improvement to the practical. PJW has offered to reinstate an optional Photoshop element to the practical that had previously had a low uptake.

#### ii. Macroplasticity and Mechanical Working Processes

AZ reported that students felt that the lecture handouts for the revised course were incomplete and had poor legibility; and that the tutorial questions whilst reflecting past exam questions did not reflect the current lecture material. AOT reminded DMAC that it had agreed to the new lecturer reducing the mathematical treatment of the course. AOT will explore the students' concerns with the lecturer.

**Action: AOT**

### 4. Minutes of DMAC 40 (DMAC 41/2)

The minutes of DMAC 40 were accepted.

### 5. Shortened Minutes

Consideration of confidential items to be removed from the minutes to be published on the Department of Materials Website.

## 6. Matters Arising

### \*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).

**In progress: AOT**

### \*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, and has been briefed by AOT and will produce a final version for DMAC in wk7 TT08.

**Action: AARW**

It was noted that an MPLS Divisional guidance is also being prepared.

### \*From DMAC 37

*\*Minute 4ii 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Polymers* JCCU reported that past exam questions do not reflect the lecture notes for 2<sup>nd</sup> year Polymer courses, in particular Mechanical Properties of Polymers, and that current 3<sup>rd</sup> year students intended to avoid questions on this material. AJW reported that the question on viscoelasticity on Paper 3 in 2006 had been popular and marks were not out of step with marks on questions on other courses, and thus did not reflect the concerns of the current 3<sup>rd</sup> year students. JMS noted that the course may have moved on and that past exam questions may not necessarily reflect the current course content. Subsequent discussion with HEA indicates that this is not the case. A working party (AARW (chair), HEA and BG) has been set up to review all polymers teaching in the undergraduate programme. The working party will report to DMAC by TT07.

AARW has prepared an interim report for further consideration by the working party (DMAC 41/3).

**Action: AARW**

The interim report asks whether an additional polymers related practical could be included in the course. AJW agreed, as Practical Class Organiser, to explore whether a current non-polymer related practical could be replaced with a new polymer practical and to feed back to the working party.

**Action: AJW**

### \*From DMAC 38

#### *\*Minute 7v Part II Examiners' responses to the External Part II Examiner's Report*

*MS Part II page limit* It was agreed that a detailed discussion on the issue of a page limit for theses should be held over to a future DMAC meeting.

[Note added. ICS will look at the practices for Chemistry Part II and make a proposal.]

**Action: ICS**

*MS Part II Project Management* It was agreed that the External Examiner's concerns that management of MS Part II projects was properly described for assessment should be met by ICS, as Part II Coordinator, providing guidance to students on making proper use of the fourth Project Management form which requires a free-text report. Action completed (ICS)

*MS Part II Supervisor's Reports* CRMG noted that, in contrast to Prof Derby's report, a previous external examiner had strongly guided the Examiners to remove consideration of the supervisor's report from the Part II assessment. SGR has specifically requested that supervisors are asked how much help they gave the student. AOT noted that PRW has also asked for guidance on how much time the supervisor should spend advising the student on the thesis. DMAC agreed that the supervisor's form should allow the supervisor to link the amount of help given to the student to the efficiency of a student, e.g. the student has received a greater amount of help because he has been efficient and well organised.

[Note added. Oxford supervisors of externally placed students will be requested to incorporate comments from the external supervisor.]

**Action: SGR/ICS/LJFJ**

[Secretary's Note: Action completed (SGR/ICS/LJFJ).]

**\*From DMAC 39**

**\*Minute 3i Report from Chair of JCCU – 1<sup>st</sup> year Introduction to Computing practical** 1<sup>st</sup> year students feel that the Introduction to Computing practical is in need of improvement or extension, particularly in the use of Excel related to later practicals. The practical is taken by PJW who splits the cohort into two groups and takes each for one afternoon. AOT noted that there is more time available on the timetable for the practical, and that it may be possible to ask OUCS to put on an Excel course specifically for 1<sup>st</sup> year Materials students. AOT further noted that some students also say that they are being taught material that they already know, and hence there appears to be a broad range of knowledge amongst incoming undergraduates. DMAC suggests inviting PJW to a JCCU meeting to discuss the practical. Action completed (AOT/LJFJ/AZ)

**\*Minute 3ii Report from Chair of JCCU – 3<sup>rd</sup> year options class feedback** 3<sup>rd</sup> year students feel that they are receiving insufficient feedback through marking of work for options classes. DMAC noted that students often hand work in with too little time for marking before the class. The issue of size of class was discussed: DMAC felt that this should be left to the discretion of the lecturer as some options are suited to small groups and some to larger groups with longer classes.

DMAC concluded that a minimum provision of feedback should be that where work is set and required to be submitted in advance of the class then it is expected that the lecturer provides feedback on the scripts prior to the class (this may be by handing out marked scripts at the commencement of the class). The lecturer can impose a deadline for submission to allow sufficient time for feedback to be provided. AOT will prepare a formal form of words.

The following form of words is proposed:

‘Where work is set, and required to be submitted, in advance of an options class the tutor of the class will normally provide feedback on this work prior to the class; this may be achieved by handing out marked scripts at the commencement of the class, and will be subject to the work being submitted by a stated deadline.’

Action completed (AOT)

**\*From DMAC 40**

**\*Minute 9 Maths Review** AOT reminded DMAC that a Maths Review was set up because JCCU had suggested that there was an overload, but the working party had decided that no major changes were necessary particularly in light of a more positive view at the subsequent JCCU, when the relevant lecture questionnaires were analysed. AOT reported that the most recent lecture questionnaires again contain complaints that lecturers have to lecture too quickly because of the amount of material. He further reported that the Earth Sciences students are even more concerned.

AOT will meet with the Materials maths lecturers to discuss the issue, and in particular the following proposals made by Earth Sciences:

- The teaching of partial differentiation draws on thermodynamics for its examples, so could the teaching of this applied material be left to the Thermodynamics lecturer?
- Could the revision lectures be removed from the scheme to allow the main teaching to be spread out and be given at a slower pace?

AOT will also solicit feedback from current 2<sup>nd</sup> year students and from maths class teachers/tutors.

**Action: AOT**

DMAC concluded that if lecturers feel comfortable with the status quo, in accordance with the working party's conclusion, then no further action should be taken.

**\*Minute 10 SENDA (DMAC 40/7)** [*Material removed from the minutes to be published on the Department of Materials Website*] SENDA legislation requires departments to have anticipatory measures in place. The Department has a number of students with dyslexia and related disabilities [*Material removed from the minutes to be published on the Department of Materials Website*].

LJFJ noted that one of the regular complaints from students (not just those with specific learning difficulties) is that lecture handouts are difficult to read, and so compliance with the proposed Department SENDA guidance in DMAC 40/7 will be of benefit to all students and not just those with disabilities.

In the opinion of the Head of the Disability Office, the proposed guidance encompasses best practice. AOT intends to ask all Materials students with dyslexia and related disabilities for their opinions, to inform further amendments to the proposed guidance.

A detailed discussion took place and DMAC approved the proposal. AOT will take this forward.

**Action: AOT**

**\*Minute 11 General Scheme for 2007/08 (DMAC 40/8)** It was not clear how the existing options map into Block A of the new options scheme. AOT will ask SGR (originator of the new options scheme) to convene a meeting soon after the end of HT07 with the lecturers concerned to discuss the balance of material in Block A, and to report back to DMAC in TT07. See paper DMAC 41/ under item 9. Action completed (AOT)

## 7. Availability of Lecturers

AOT reported that some lecturers are not responding to drafts of the lecture timetable, and only indicating their unavailability after the final lecture list has been circulated. It was agreed that AOT and JMS should take this issue to Faculty to urge lecturers to be more helpful in the matter.

**Action: AOT/JMS**

*[Secretary's Note: Action completed (AOT/JMS) at the meeting of Faculty in TT07.]*

## 8. Proposed Arrangements & Sample Timetable for New Y3 Options Paper 2 (HT)

### i. Sample Timetable Including Options Classes (DMAC 41/4)

AOT reported that Tutors were concerned that they were not currently receiving sufficient feedback on their students from Options Classes, that they did not know if students were handing in written work, and that perhaps some Class Teachers were not taking reporting on classes seriously. The Tutors' Committee were unanimous that they would like Options Classes to be timetabled rather than for lecturers to make their own arrangements with students.

After some discussion DMAC agreed that the principle of timetabling Options Classes according to the proposed scheme was sound, but had some concerns regarding its implementation including:

- Consideration of students' other commitments.
- A short turnaround in marking of classwork.
- Tutors' preference for spreading work throughout the term.

DMAC requested that AOT and LJFJ look at the possibilities of (a) including additional late afternoon classes to aid flexibility, (b) putting more classes into the following term to provide a more even spread of workload, and (c) timing classes to give lecturers one working week for marking.

**Action: AOT/LJFJ**

### ii. Examination Rubric

DMAC voted by a clear majority to adopt the following rubric:

“Candidates should answer three questions, two from one section and the third from either of the remaining sections”.

Guidance to this effect will appear in the Exam Conventions, the FHS Course Handbook and, as required, will be published by the Chair of Faculty by Monday of week 8 of the Trinity Term preceding the year in which the examination is taken.

### iii. Selection of Options Blocks

DMAC agreed to the proposal that the choice of 18 hour Options Blocks should not be constrained across examination papers, e.g. students studying blocks A & B in Michaelmas Term should not be prevented from studying a combination of blocks A & C or B & C in Hilary Term. However, it was also agreed that a paragraph should be included in the Course Handbook indicating that the recommended pattern is to study the same two Blocks in each term and that students should discuss any alternative with their College Tutor.

## 9. Exam Papers for the New Options Modules (including specimen papers)

DMAC agreed:

- (a) Each 18 hour block should have a designated 'leader' with the responsibility of consulting the other lecturer(s) and providing the Examiners with draft questions which cover the block

of cognate material in a coherent and balanced fashion. The Examiners should seek 3 draft questions per 18 hour block.

- (b) The specimen paper should be made available to the students who will sit the examination in TT08 by Christmas 2007.

AOT will inform Faculty of these arrangements.

**Action: AOT**

[Secretary's Note: Action completed (AOT) at the meeting of Faculty in TT07.]

## **10. Report from the Tutors' Committee (SGR/LJFJ)**

### **i. Writing Skills (DMAC 41/5)**

DMAC noted that five Materials colleges/tutors have some provision for writing skills training, and would like to see all Materials colleges/tutors to provide some form of training such that the students' ability to articulate a well structured, coherent scientific argument is enhanced. AOT will look into what provision, if any, the Language Centre has for more basic English language skills, as DMAC identified a lack of such skills in some cases.

**Action: AOT**

## **11. Report from the EMS Standing Committee (SGR/LJFJ)**

The EMS Standing Committee has drawn up a draft proposal of Part II courses for 2007/08 to accommodate the changes in the Dept. Materials Options courses. The draft proposal was tabled for information at DMAC 41.

## **12. Reports from Divisional Committees**

### **i. Academic Committee (JMS)**

There were no matters reported.

## **13. Chairman's Report**

AOT briefed DMAC on several current issues not covered elsewhere on the agenda:

- Teaching Awards Scheme. The University's Teaching Awards Scheme will run again this year.
- Prelims regulation changes. Discussions (related to failure of coursework) are ongoing. The MPLS Division has put a proposal to EPSC and has asked EPSC for clarification on some issues.
- MPLS Divisional JCCU. A proposal has been made to initiate an MPLS Divisional JCCU. The Divisional Academic Committee was not supportive of a formal Divisional JCCU, but a forum for JCCU chairs will set up instead. The forum will be for JCCUs to share best practice, and to allow the Division to gain a greater global view for TQA.
- AWE modular training courses. The Department has been approached by AWE to see if we could offer a series of modular training courses in metallurgy for its staff. Discussions are ongoing.
- EPSC Review. The Department has now received the report on its 2006 EPSC Review. CRMG, JMS and AOT are drafting the Department's formal response, which will be presented to Faculty for information.
- UKCME student learning experience. The UK Centre for Materials Education (UKCME) is conducting a national student learning experience review.

**14. Any Other Business**

There was no further business.

**Date of the next meeting – 2.00 pm Monday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2007, Wolfson Meeting Room.** The meeting closed at 5.00 pm.