

Oxford University Department of Materials Academic Committee

DMAC 42 Minutes of the Academic Committee held at 2.00 pm on Monday 4th June 2007 in the Wolfson Meeting Room.

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

In attendance: ICS (Secretary).

1. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Minutes of DMAC 41 (DMAC 42/1)

With one minor correction, the minutes of DMAC 40 were accepted.

3. Shortened Minutes

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

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

Action: AARW

*From DMAC 37

**Minute 4ii 2nd Year Polymers* JCCU reported that past exam questions do not reflect the lecture notes for 2nd year Polymer courses, in particular Mechanical Properties of Polymers, and that current 3rd 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 3rd 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 (DMAC 41/3) for further consideration by the working party.

Action: AARW

[Secretary's Note: Action superseded during the Long Vacation 2007]

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.

AJW has indicated to the working party that the number of polymer based practicals is commensurate with the current fraction of lecture load in polymers for 1st and 2nd year students, and that additionally the 1st year Fabrication & Testing practical includes tensile testing of polymers. He concludes that the contention that Practical Classes neglect polymers seems hard to support. He would support looking at the practicals again if the current practicals do not work or do not fit well with the lectures, or if a successful argument is made for a significant increase in polymers content of the rest of the course.

Action completed (AJW)

A paper was tabled at DMAC 42 with notes from a meeting of the working party held on 1st June 2007. DMAC considered the identified short term measures to be sensible, and expressed no concerns related to the working party's desire to move one of the 1st year polymers course out of TT.

[Secretary's Note: Following action during the Long Vacation 2007 on immediate matters by AOT, HEA has agreed to take the lead on the overall review of polymers teaching

Action: HEA]

***From DMAC 38**

****Minute 7v Part II Examiners' responses to the External Part II Examiner's Report (DMAC 42/2)***

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.]

ICS introduced a paper (DMAC 42/2) which proposed two possible options for the introduction of a page limit: (i) a combination of the current word limit of 15,000 words plus a limit of 60 pages for figures, tables etc, and (ii) a page limit of 120 pages with no word limit. The merits of each were discussed and DMAC concluded that combination of the two options was preferable: a limit of 15,000 words of text within an overall page limit of 120 pages. In response to recommendations of the Examiners, it was agreed that additional material could be added in the form of appendices, but that appendices should be excluded from the page limit and that Examiners would not be required necessarily to read and take appendices into account. AOT and ICS agreed to redraft a proposed regulation amendment for consideration by Faculty.

Action: AOT/ICS

[Secretary's Note: AOT and ICS circulated a redrafted regulation amendment to Faculty for comment. After comments were received and further minor changes made, the regulation amendment was submitted to and approved by MPLS Division and EPSC. The new regulations came into effect from 1 October 2007 (for first examination in 2008). Action completed AOT/ICS]

***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 2nd 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.

A paper was tabled at DMAC 42 as a follow up to the report made to DMAC 37. It was the unanimous conclusion of the working group that the only satisfactory route to ease the pace of lectures was to add two additional hours of lectures with no addition of further material. DMAC supported this proposal.

[Secretary's Note: Earth Sciences have agreed to this proposal. Action completed (AOT)]

***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. The proposal was considered by Faculty at its TT07 meeting and no objections were raised.

[Secretary's Note: No students responded to an invitation to attend a meeting on this matter.]

Action completed (AOT)

5. EPSC Paper on UG Projects and Dissertations (DMAC 42/3)

AOT reminded DMAC that the paper was the report from a University wide EPSC review of the use of projects and dissertations at undergraduate level. AOT noted that he had been a member

of the review committee, but that the review committee had not had an opportunity to scrutinise the report, which had been written by OLI, before its publication.

AOT brought recommendation 11 to DMAC's attention: "Supervisory bodies should have a mechanism to indicate the extent of supervisors' involvement in the project or dissertation...". It was noted that SGR, as the Chair of Part II Examiners, would be presenting the supervisor's report forms to the Examiners along with the theses, so that examiners could take the supervisor's comments into account at the time of reading the thesis. AOT and JMS are likely to be asked to respond at DivAC.

6. MEM Part II Projects

KAQOR reported that in recent years it has become more difficult to find Management Projects for MEM and EEM students. Increasingly companies are turning to internships which are not compatible with the E(M)EM projects. It may become necessary therefore for MEM students to be able to carry out internal Materials Research Projects in place of a Management Project. It was noted that EEM students are able to carry out internal Engineering Projects instead of Management Projects, but such projects are carried out in MT only and so are shorter than Management Projects which take place over MT and the preceding summer. AOT suggested that an internal Materials Project might start at the same time as the MS Part IIs and be a shortened version of the MS Part II.

It was DMAC's opinion that there is probably enough flexibility within the current regulations to allow for the availability of Materials Project when occasionally an MEM student is unable to be placed for a Management Project.

7. Report from E(M)EM Standing Committee (KAQOR)

KAQOR reported that Engineering Science is restructuring the Eng. Sci. course, but there appear to be no significant knock-on effects for MEM presently.

8. Reports from Divisional Committees

i. Academic Committee (JMS)

JMS reported on the following issues:

- The Department's response to the EPSC Review of Materials had been accepted.
- The Prelims regulation change regarding 1st year practicals was an ongoing matter. AOT noted that Faculty has given him permission to talk with Richard Stone (Eng. Sci.) to develop a coherent variation to the Division's suggested most severe penalty (similar to that originally proposed by DMAC).
- The allocation of Clarendon Scholarships was devolved to Divisions this year, and the scheme had worked reasonably well. The proposal for next year is for a move towards a quota for departments (likely to be 1 for Materials), which will allow Department's to make offers as early as they like. If a scholarship were to be turned down by an applicant then that scholarship would be moved into a Divisional pool. The latter process may be a route for the Department to pick up an extra scholarship in any one year.

ii. Graduate Studies Advisory Panel (AOT)

- DivGSAP had been briefed on the forthcoming Institutional Quality Audit (2009). A key feature of the audit would be Quality Enhancement. Postgraduate programmes will be included for the first time, and it is thought that this is one area that the auditors will drill down into.

- A new Foreign Office vetting system is being introduced for all non-EEA overseas students. Supervisors will be required to write short project descriptions for this process. The new system may affect 07/08 late starters.
- Electronic Theses. EPSC has approved a mandatory requirement (with effect from October 2007 starters) for all PGR students to supply an electronic copy of their theses for archiving. It will be possible to place an embargo on access to all or parts of the e-thesis.

iii. Undergraduate Studies & Access Advisory Panel (AOT)

- It was agreed that there will be a minimum English language requirement for undergraduates (IELTS level 7.0 overall and 7.0 in all four components). This level lies between the higher and lower levels for postgraduate students.
- MPLS Divisional JCCU. Division still want the proposed Divisional JCCU to be a fully constituted committee. Departments are against this approach, and would prefer the Divisional JCCU to be an informal forum for the exchange of ideas and best practice.

9. Chairman's Report

- AOT reminded DMAC that AWE were discussing with a number of universities the possible provision of CPD for their staff. AWE has not been able to meet the Department's criterion of providing our minimum requirement of funding for one full-time Department Lecturer to manage the provision. This matter will go no further.
- During the recent Industrial Advisory Panel (IAP) meeting the panel had a private lunch with students, and asked the students to identify a number of items that they found particularly positive or negative about the course. The panel had found it easy to extricate positive feedback, but had to push for negative responses. Positive feedback included: the tutorial system, a small and friendly Department, the Department Library, the all-round education, the Industrial Tour and Industrial Visits, the existence of JCCs, the absence of 2nd year exams. The negative feedback included: poor support for Summer Placements, poor feedback from JCCU to students, the course was too focussed on metals, more places were needed on Industrial Visits, the course would benefit from a more scene-setting introduction, the course needs to include more on engineering relevance, the sequencing of the course could be improved, handwritten practical reports, marking of practicals is inconsistent, the Department website needs improvement, and there is a need for instruction on computer programming.
- AOT is in consultation regarding upgrades to audio-visual equipment in the lecture theatres and other rooms used for teaching.
- ICS was asked to report on the introduction of a JCC and skills training for postdocs. The JCCP has been inaugurated (Chairman Sergio Lozano-Perez). The JCCP will have a formal Chairman and Secretary, but meetings would be open for all postdocs to attend. APD, as Department Administrator, will attend as necessary. The JCCP will meet four times per year, and will report to DMAC via the HoD once per year.

ICS and LJFJ have met with providers of skills/careers training from around the University: John Kirwan (OUCaS), Cecilia White (OLI) and Alison Trinder (MPLS Divisional Divisional Postgraduate Skills Training Officer). ICS and LJFJ are now determining where holes exist in current provision of skills training suitable for postdocs. Alison Trinder has attended a JCCP meeting to seek their opinions and needs in order to help her develop provision from a Divisional point of view.

10. Any Other Business

There was no further business.

Date of the next meeting – 2.00 pm Monday 22nd October 2007, Wolfson Meeting Room. The meeting closed at 4.24 pm.