

Oxford University Department of Materials Academic Committee

DMAC 43 Minutes of the Academic Committee held at 2.00 pm on Monday 22nd October 2007 in the Wolfson Meeting Room.

Present: AJW, JMS, MRC, CRMG, PDN, AOT (Chair).

In attendance: ICS (Secretary), Dave Armstrong (JCCG Chair) (Items 1-3), Alex Zawadzki (Outgoing JCCU Chair) (Items 1-4), Helen Boffey (Incoming JCCU Chair) (Item 4).

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from KAQOR and DJHC.

2. Membership & Terms of Reference (DMAC 43/1)

AOT welcomed PDN as a co-opted member of the committee for MT07 to provide cover for the absence of KAQOR and DJHC who are on leave.

It was noted that AJW's term of service on DMAC was due to end at the end of MT07, and it was agreed that an election of a new member of DMAC should be held by Faculty at its MT07 meeting.

Action: AOT/JMS

[Secretary's Note: Faculty elected PDN and JaMS as new members of DMAC to replace AJW from HT08 and one of the vacancies that will be open from MT08. Action completed (AOT/JMS)]

It was noted that the Undergraduate Panel of DMAC had not had reason to meet for a number of years, and it was proposed that the panel need no longer exist. DMAC endorsed the proposal.

It was noted that the Terms of Reference state that agendas for DMAC meetings will be circulated to Faculty, but that in recent memory this had not been the case. It was proposed that this action be removed from the Terms of Reference, but DMAC agreed that a proposal to post agendas on the DMAC web page should be put to Faculty.

Action: AOT/JMS

[Secretary's Note: Faculty accepted the proposal at its MT07 meeting. Action completed (AOT/JMS)]

3. Report from the Chair of JCCG (DA)

i. Part II Examining

DA reported that JCCG had discussed the error of fact in the Divisional Academic Committee's papers where it stated incorrectly that the Materials JCCs had expressed concern over whether a lack of positive experimental results during Part II projects would lead to poor Part II marks. It was noted that this matter had also been discussed by JCCU. Both JCCs recorded that they had no such concerns and indeed felt reassured that Part II theses were marked fairly and not penalised as a result of a paucity of positive experimental results. The Chairs of JCCG and JCCU will be writing to the Chairman of the Divisional Academic Committee to set the record straight.

ii. Access to the Common Room

JCCG had expressed its disappointment that access to the common room was now generally denied outside of 8.00 am – 2.00 pm unless individual's swipe cards had been activated for a specific purpose. AOT has spoken with the Department Administrator about the matter. The

most recent plan is that students will have access to the common room during the normal working day (8.00 am – 6.00 pm), although this could perhaps be extended to 7.00 pm. DA responded that he thought this would be acceptable to JCCG for weekdays, but that JCCG would like to have access at the weekends in addition. CRMG suggested that DMAC should press for as open access as possible to the common room given that the card swipe system is capable of logging access and that there are CCTV cameras in the corridor. DMAC supported this suggestion, and AOT will take the matter forward but requested that HoDs of Materials and Eng. Sci. first determine together a policy on this issue.

Action: AOT/CRMG

iii. Access to the Department Workshop

DA reminded DMAC that it had supported JCCG's suggestion on the introduction of a scheme for extended access to the workshop for approved advanced users. AOT reported that he had taken the matter forward, but that it has stalled at the next level.

4. Report from the Chair of JCCU (AZ)

DMAC thanked AZ for his year of service as Chair of JCCU and welcomed HB as the incoming Chair of JCCU.

i. Industrial Visits (DMAC 43/2)

JCCU had discussed three issues related to Industrial Visits: (i) concern that 2nd year students had difficulty obtaining places on Industrial Visits because they were being taken up by 3rd years; (ii) a request that the Easter Tour be regarded as 'Department Organised' visits; and (iii) that some students wanted to be able to submit reports on more than two 'Self-organised' visits.

ICS, as Industrial Visits Organiser, noted that their had been a legacy issue of students having to wait until their 3rd year for places on Department Organised visits to be available to them. This had arisen because the first cohort to be examined with Industrial Visits as coursework had not engaged with the system in their 2nd year. An additional Industrial Visit had been organised in the past to alleviate the problem and noted that the current 3rd year cohort had on average already submitted approximately 50% of their required four reports at the start of their 3rd year.

AOT noted that the Easter Tour was not regarded as a Department Organised visit, because there was an unlevel playing field as participation in the Easter Tour was dependent on ability to pay, and that the marker of the Industrial Visits reports (The Industrial Visits Organiser) did not participate in the Easter Tour.

AOT reminded DMAC that the limit of two Self-organised visits was put in place as the best compromise between ensuring a level playing field and allowing flexibility for students to fulfil the exam regulations given that insufficient places could be made available for all students to complete four reports on Department Organised visits. ICS further indicated that the historical data, and data for the current 3rd year cohort indicated that on average students submitted reports on only one Self-organised visit, and thus there was no evidence of significant demand for more than two self-organised visits.

DMAC concluded that in future all students should submit one, and be encouraged to submit two reports on Self-organised visits. The Exam Regulations and Course Handbooks will be updated accordingly.

Action: ICS/LJFJ/AOT

AOT and ICS noted that if cohort sizes were to increase as the Department desired, then it would be necessary for additional Department Organised visits to be put in place. CRMG agreed to explore with PJD whether an annual 'Begbroke' visit could be put in place that included spin-out companies and BegbrokeNano as a commercial enterprise.

Action: CRMG

ICS indicated that if the newly inaugurated Student Materials Society organised visits that included sufficient numbers of students, and at a convenient time in his diary, then he would be willing to attend and the visits could then be regarded as Department Organised for assessment purposes.

ii. Options Courses & Introductory Lectures

JCCU requested that an introductory lecture is provided at the beginning of the 3rd year to put options courses into context and to show the interrelationships between individual lecture courses. DMAC agreed that a lecture of this nature was not necessary because (i) there was a clear description of the options scheme and individual courses in the course handbook and lecture synopses; (ii) students entering their 3rd year should be sufficiently acquainted with materials science to be able to put individual courses into context by themselves; (iii) the options scheme is not drawn up for courses to be highly interrelated; (iv) Tutorial Fellows are best placed to advise students on their options choices; and (v) students have historically sampled courses early on. It was also noted that the Department had already organised an introductory lecture to the new Characterisation and Modelling modules. AZ agreed that not all students will necessarily have read the course literature. DMAC requested that JCCU advise students to read the course handbook and synopses and then to discuss Options with their College Tutors.

Action: AZ/HB

AOT agreed to give a 15 minute lecture on the structure of the new Options scheme to the current 3rd year students if they decide they need it after having read the course literature. JCCU should inform him if such a lecture is desired.

Action: AZ/HB

AOT noted that it was reported from the IAP discussions that students would like similar overarching introductory lectures at the beginning of the 1st and 2nd years. DMAC were sympathetic to this request and a specific proposal is to be drawn up for discussion by DMAC in HT08. CRMG agreed to give these lectures.

5. Minutes of DMAC 42 (DMAC 43/3)

With one minor correction, the minutes of DMAC 42 were accepted.

6. Shortened Minutes

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

7. 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** HEA has agreed to take the lead on the overall review of polymers teaching.

Action: HEA

*** From DMAC 41**

***Minute 8i Proposed Arrangements & Timetable for New Y3 Options Paper 2 (HT): 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 completed (AOT/LJFJ)

***Minute 10i Report from the Tutors’ Committee (LJFJ): 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

***From DMAC 42**

***Minute 8ii Graduate Studies Advisory Panel (AOT) 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.

It is not yet clear how robust the embargo process will be. Discussions are ongoing.

**Minute 9 Chairman's Report* AOT is consultation regarding upgrades to audio-visual equipment in the lecture theatres and other rooms used for teaching.

Upgrades are currently in progress in all the rooms and will be completed during MT07 after which a training course will be arranged.

8. Examiners' Reports (DMAC 43/4)

i. Part I and Part II MS

No points were raised for discussion.

ii. Part I and Part II MEM

No points were raised for discussion.

iii. External Examiners' Reports

No points were raised for discussion other than those raised in DMAC 43/5 in item 8.iv below.

iv. Draft Response to Examiners' Reports (DMAC 43/5)

(a) General Comments

- *[Material removed from the minutes to be published on the Department of Materials Website]*
- Internal Examiners' reports from Management and Economics were still awaited.
- It was encouraging that, other than due to errors in examining of GP4, no scaling had been necessary.

(b) Section 2 Part I MS/MEM: Prof. B. Derby

- It was agreed that paragraph 2 of section 2 of DMAC 43/5 should be amended such that blind double markers of each question should check that each has recorded marks for all parts of the question and check each other's arithmetic. A further sentence should be added to the effect that the practice of double initialling each page of the script will be continued.
- It was agreed that the examinable material referred to in paragraph 4 of section 2 should include course synopses, lecturers' problem sheets, and all material covered in course handouts of any type with exceptions as stated in points (i) and (ii) of that paragraph.
- It was agreed that the email informing students of non-examinable material referred to in point (ii) of paragraph 5 of section 2 should be sent by the Chairman of Examiners rather than by the course lecturer. It was further agreed that a third point should be included in this paragraph stating that lecturers must not discuss with candidates what material is or is not examinable.

(c) Section 4 Further Points

- Under section 4, DMAC had no further comments to make for the response to the Examiners' reports.

The issue of setting penalties for late submission of Part II theses was raised incidentally. AOT, after discussion with RIT (2006/07 Chairman of Examiners) and AC (current Chairman of Examiners), will prepare a proposal for possible implementation in 2008/09.

Action: AOT/ICS

9. Exam Conventions (DMAC 43/6)

DMAC considered whether the definition of examinable material should be included in the Exam Conventions. AOT reported that RIT (2006/07 Chairman of Examiners) and AC (current Chairman of Examiners) preferred for the definition to be included in the letter from the Examiners sent to students with the Exam Conventions: DMAC concurred.

10. Report from the Tutors' Committee (JTC/AOT)

AOT reported that there was not a consensus across colleges regarding how Economics and/or Managements tutors recommend whether a student that was admitted to MEM should continue on MEM following prelims.

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

There were no matters to report.

12. Reports from Divisional Committees

i. Academic Committee (JMS)

- Graduate application fee. All applicants will be charged a fee of £25 this year whether they are applying on-line or via the traditional paper route. Concerns had been raised about affordability for poor students. Some members had felt that DPhils attracted very few frivolous applications and so the fee ought not be applied to DPhils. DMAC agreed that if departments are given a choice for the next academic year then Materials will push for removal of the fee, although it was recognised that the Division is likely to push for a common approach by all MPLS departments.
- Clarendon Scheme. Although more money is now available, Materials will still receive only one scholarship in the provisional allocation.
- Divisional JCCs are going ahead. They are being referred to as Joint Consultative Forums, but it was noted that they will have terms of reference that include minutes and reporting lines.
- A Divisional review of teaching space is under preliminary discussion. DMAC concluded that the substantive issues of such a review are likely to be matters for discussion by the Department Committee.

13. Chairman's Report

- A proposal was raised at Divisional Academic Committee for a Divisional appointment to provide teaching for maths bridging and maths access. It is proposed that the cost of 1.5 days per week of the appointment should be top-sliced across the Division. DMAC recommended that the Department's response should be that such top-slicing should be applied to departments on the basis of student numbers.
- A 10-year review of the Student Counselling Service is underway. Any comments on the service should be submitted by 12 November 2007.
- EPSC is introducing a register of people that have been trained to teach (tutors, Teaching Assistants etc.). The MPLS Division would further like for all people that take up casual teaching duties to have received basic level training, but recognise that tutorial provision is a matter for colleges. AOT noted that Physics tutors have bought in to such an idea.
- The Prelims regulation change regarding failure of coursework is still ongoing. CRMG has yet to discuss the matter with the HoD of Engineering Science.

- Materials Options classes are being scheduled centrally during MT07 as a trial. AOT will take soundings on the success of the trial for DMAC 44. A decision on running the scheme for HT08 will be taken at the end of MT07, with a full review in TT08.

14. Any Other Business

There was no further business.

Date of the next meeting – 2.00 pm Monday 19th November 2007, Wolfson Meeting Room. The meeting closed at 5.29 pm.