

## Oxford University Department of Materials Academic Committee

**DMAC 44 Minutes of the Academic Committee** held at 2.00 pm on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2007 in the Wolfson Meeting Room.

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

**In attendance:** ICS (Secretary).

### 1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from KAQOR and DJHC.

### 2. Minutes of DMAC 43 (DMAC 44/1)

With one minor correction, the minutes of DMAC 43 were accepted.

### 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 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 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Polymers*** HEA has agreed to take the lead on the overall review of polymers teaching.

**Action: HEA**

**\* From DMAC 41**

***\*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 43**

**\*Minute 3ii Report from the Chair of JCCG (DA): 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**

**Minute 3iii Report from the Chair of JCCG (DA): 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.

AOT further reported at DMAC 44 that he had met with the Department Administrator and the Chief Workshop Technician who together objected to JCCG's request on the grounds of avoiding loose supervision of the use of equipment which requires extensive formal training. It is now apparent that the Chief Workshop Technician runs an informal scheme whereby if a student needs additional access to the workshop then he will make time available, but in his view students generally do not use the time which is currently available to them. AOT will inform the Chair of JCCG and will report back to JCCG formally in HT08.

**Action: AOT**

[Secretary's Note: Action completed (AOT)]

**\*Minute 4i Report from the Chair of JCCU (AZ): Industrial Visits (DMAC 43/2)** Following a discussion on Industrial 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**

**\*Minute 4ii Report from the Chair of JCCU (AZ): Options Courses & Introductory Lectures** Following a discussion on introductory lectures to the 3<sup>rd</sup> year 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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**

*\*Minute 8iv Examiners' Reports (DMAC 43/4): Draft Response to Examiners' Reports (DMAC 43/5)* 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**

**5. Prelims Examiners' Reports & Examination Conventions (DMAC 44/2 & 44/2a)**

CRMG, as Chairman of Prelims Examiners, reported that there had been a good number of good scripts, but disappointingly one failure. He did not think that an apparent step increase in the number of distinctions between 2005 and 2006 was a result of easier papers: there had been a similarly high number of distinctions in 2004. The results of the Maths paper were a little worse than those of the Materials papers, but similar to the previous year. The Maths results of the Earth Science students had not yet been received for comparison.

A draft of the 2007/08 Prelims Examination Conventions was tabled (DMAC 44/2a). No amendments had been recommended, and they were accepted by DMAC.

**6. Sequence of Lectures for GP3 Microplasticity and Related Courses (DMAC 44/3)**

DMAC approved the proposed new schedule. LJFJ is asked to check whether rescheduling of these courses would cause any knock-on problems with other courses.

**Action: LJFJ**

*[Secretary's Note: LJFJ does not believe that the proposed rescheduling of Microplasticity, Tensors and Elastic Behaviour will cause any significant timetabling problems. Action completed (LJFJ)]*

**7. Undergraduate Exchanges (DMAC 44/4)**

DMAC considered the paper on MPLS Divisional consultation on undergraduate exchange schemes. The committee concluded that Materials could not currently take part in any more schemes, but would consider taking part enthusiastically if any centrally administered (including funding) schemes were established.

**8. MPLSD Draft Comments on EPSC Draft of Section 2 of the University's Briefing Document for the Institutional Auditors in 2009 (DMAC 44/5)**

It was noted that MPLS Division requires comments by 9<sup>th</sup> week of MT07. A working party comprising AOT, CRMG and JMS will consider the paper in detail and draft a response.

**Action: AOT/CRMG/JMS**

It was DMAC's view that the interface between the Colleges and the University (Departments & Faculties) is likely to be a key issue of the Institutional Audit.

**9. GP3 Macroplasticity & Mechanical Working Processes Course Content**

RIT had reported by email that he and Paul Butler (the lecturer) had met:

"Paul and I had a wide ranging and constructive discussion in which we agreed on what the main problems perceived by the students were and how they might be addressed. These included the fact that the students were worried because they could not necessarily answer questions from previous years having been to Paul's lectures, so we agreed that this year Paul would make clear to the students that the questions set for Part I would reflect the content of Paul's wholly new course rather than following the format of previous years which was relevant to Glyn's course. We also discussed the volume of material covered and what was desirable (in general terms) by way of content. We identified several areas (e.g. basic elasticity) that were

already covered in other courses which he could cut out from his macroplasticity course to free up more time for the rest of it.”

DMAC endorsed these proposals. It was noted that the content of the tutorial question sheet had not apparently been addressed. AOT and ICS will follow up on this specific issue.

**Action: AOT/ICS**

## 10. Report from E(M)EM Standing Committee (ICS)

- Project placement reporting for tutors. ICS had raised the issue of Materials tutors’ concerns that they had no form of progress report on their MEM students whilst they were carrying out their Business Projects. The Said Business School have introduced this year an interim report form which has gone to the students to complete first, and will then go on to the academic supervisor for comment, and then back to the Business School. They had not considered sending those reports on to the Materials tutors. Given that SBS do not know who the Materials (and Eng. Sci.) tutors are, they have agreed to send the completed forms to the Materials and Eng. Sci. Academic Administrators for forwarding to tutors. It was unlikely that they would be received by until late November or early December, but SBS have agreed to start the process earlier next year.

*[Secretary’s Note: Reports were sent to Materials Tutors at the beginning of 9<sup>th</sup> week of MT07.]*

- Placement briefing for 2<sup>nd</sup> years. SBS have introduced a briefing for E(M)EM students on applying for project placements at the end of their second year, in order that they have practice and boost their CVs for applying for their Part II Business Project Placements. This briefing had been held in the middle of October, but it had become apparent that MEM students had not been told about it. SBS had agreed to arrange a second session for MEM students.

*[Secretary’s Note: On questioning 2<sup>nd</sup> year MEM students, it appears that the repeat session may not have been held. This matter will be raised at the next meeting of the E(M)EM Standing Committee.]*

- New Economics arrangements. Economics had informed the Standing Committee that there was a mistake in the new Examination Regulations for the new Economics exams. The Economics, EEM and MEM FHS regulations refer to the PPE FHS regulations. The PPE regulations state that the new scheme comes into effect for 1st examination in 2010, but for E(M)EM it is actually for 1st examination in 2009. Economics are drafting a letter to the E(M)EM students to inform them of the necessary correction.

*[Secretary’s Note: The letter has been sent to current 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year MEM students by Economics, and has been reinforced by Materials by email.]*

## 11. Reports from Divisional Committees

### i. Academic Committee (JMS)

- Certificate/MSc in Nanotechnology courses. MPLS Division has been in discussion with Continuing Education and Prof Dobson about the possibility of MPLSD taking ownership of these courses. Take up of the courses has been low and MPLS will not be taking ownership of them.
- Divisional Graduate Schools. A working party has been set up to look at the possibility of establishing Divisional Graduate Schools. The working party’s brief excluded the introduction of an additional tier of administration. AOT noted that Directors of Graduate Studies had expressed at the Divisional Graduate Studies Advisory Panel the opinion that

there was no value in having Divisional Graduate Schools in institutions, such as Oxford MPLS, with large research bodies in each department.

- Teaching and learning space needs. This issue is ongoing. AOT and CRMG will draft input to the Division.

**Action: AOT/CRMG**

## **ii. Graduate Studies Advisory Panel (AOT)**

### **(a) Proposal for the Establishment of Divisional Graduate Schools**

See minute 11i.

### **(b) Other**

There were no other matters to report.

## **iii. Undergraduate Studies Advisory Panel (AOT)**

### **(a) Research-Teaching Nexus**

The University is putting together evidence for the importance having active researchers / scholars as teachers, to combat apparent government views that the link is not important. The MPLS Division requests departmental comments by 1<sup>st</sup> wk of HT08. A working party comprising AOT, AJW and JMS will consider the matter further and prepare a response on behalf of Materials.

**Action: AOT/AJW/JMS**

### **(b) MPLS Lectures on Energy Science and Climate Change (DMAC 44/6)**

There will be six lectures are aimed initially at 2<sup>nd</sup> year MPLS undergraduates, plus four cross-divisional introductory lectures. DMAC would like to be able to encourage Part II Materials students to attend the lectures, and were also of the view that this series of lectures would be a good subject for an assessed course for Materials graduate students. The lecture series could be considered for inclusion as a 2<sup>nd</sup> year Supplementary Subject sometime in the future.

DMAC felt that the lectures for MPLS students focussed on Energy, and suggested that if the cross-divisional introductory lectures were clearly aimed at Climate Change then more MPLS students would be attracted to the full lecture series. AOT will raise this suggestion.

**Action: AOT**

### **(c) EPSC Notes of Guidance on Undergraduate Learning and Teaching (DMAC 44/7)**

To date no EPSC notes of guidance on undergraduate learning and teaching have been available. DMAC were concerned by the definition of the purpose of the tutorial as described in the bullet points of paragraph 3.11 of the paper, but felt that the indented summary of the purpose of the tutorial was appropriate.

### **(d) Other**

There were no other matters to report.

## **12. Chairman's Report**

- The Chairs of JCCG and JCCU have now written to the Chairman of the Divisional Academic Committee, in response to an error of fact in recent Divisional papers, to state that students felt assured that MS Part II theses were marked fairly and not penalised as a result of a paucity of positive experimental results. A copy of the letter was circulated at the meeting.

- A question has been raised concerning mitigation for sudden failure of one of the six laptop and six desk top computers used to run equipment in the Teaching Laboratory. It was noted the Department's IT policy is to replace its computers on a four-yearly cycle, but IT has insufficient budget to include these 12 computers. It was agreed that a spare laptop is required as an emergency replacement. AJW reported that IT has a spare laptop available and that interfacing it with the Teaching Laboratory equipment is being looked into. AJW will inform DMAC if this solution proves to be inadequate.

*[Secretary's Note: AOT has updated PJW on this issue, and PJW is also looking into it.]*

- AOT will hold an informal straw pole on the trial of timetabling options classes. It was DMAC's opinion that there was insufficient evidence to date for comment.

*[Secretary's Note: Following the straw pole it was decided to continue with central scheduling of classes in HT.]*

### **13. Any Other Business**

There was no further business.

**Date of the next meeting – 2.00 pm Monday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2008, Wolfson Meeting Room.** The meeting closed at 4.21 pm.