

## Oxford University Department of Materials Academic Committee

**DMAC 46 Minutes of the Academic Committee** held at 2.00 pm on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2008 in the Wolfson Meeting Room.

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

**In attendance:** ICS (Secretary), MJC (items 1-6), PJM.

### 1. Apologies & Welcome

Apologies for absence were received from CRMG and PDN.

DMAC welcomed PJM to her first committee for which she will be Secretary for future meetings.

### 2. Minutes of DMAC 45 (DMAC 46/1)

The minutes of DMAC 45 were accepted with a slight amendment to minute 15 i.: JMS reported that DivAc were concerned that the cost of the proposed Science Centre should not fall upon the Departments.

### 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).

**DMAC 45:** AOT reported that MPLS had agreed to take forward his request that they ask for a progress report on this trial.

**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)** AOT reported that the Language Centre has neither provision nor funding for native English speakers. The Language Centre had informed him that colleges have funding for support of native English speakers.

AOT has suggested to Tutors that they might use the new Divisional lecture series on Energy & Climate Change as a vehicle for an essay writing exercise. In light of the Language Centre's response DMAC supported a proposal for AOT to ask Tutors via the Tutors' Committee to report on how students with weak English are supported (particularly with a view to the Department's QAA justification).

**In progress: AOT**

*[Secretary's Note following DMAC 46: Tutors have agreed to provide this information and in due course AOT will report to DMAC a summary of the provision.]*

**\*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 on CRMG now superseded**

*[Secretary's Note: Through DC, AOT has requested that a memo be issued to clarify access rules.]*

*[Secretary's Note following DMAC 46: The JCCG Chair has now spoken to Alana Davies; a memo is expected in the near future (APD actioned by DC).]*

**\*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.

**In progress: ICS /AOT**

AOT and ICS noted that if cohort sizes were to increase to 36 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**

It was noted that the Student Materials Society were organising a visit to the EM laboratories at Begbroke.

**\*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**

**\*From DMAC 44**

**\*Minute 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**

*[Secretary's Note following DMAC 46: This action has lapsed; those involved did not have time to prepare a written response. A collective response has been prepared by DivAc.]*

**\*Minute 9 GP3 Macroplasticity & Mechanical Working Processes Course Content** RIT had reported by email that he and Paul Butler (the lecturer) had met. DMAC endorsed proposals that the lecturer should make clear to the students that Part I examination questions would reflect the content of the wholly new course and that material already covered in other lecture courses should be cut from the Macroplasticity course. 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.

**In progress: AOT/ICS**

*[Secretary's Note following DMAC 46: It has been established that the tutorial questions are all related to the current lecture content.]*

**\*Minute 11iii Report from the Divisional 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**

*[Secretary's Note following DMAC 46: This action has lapsed; those involved did not have time to prepare a written response. A collective response has been prepared by DivAc.]*

**\* From DMAC 45**

**\* Minute 2 Report from the Chair of JCCG (DA) – Access to the Department Workshop** JCCG thanked DMAC for having supported JCCG's request for the introduction of a 'super-user' status for extended access to the Department's workshop. The Department Administrator and Chief Workshop Technician had rejected the proposal on health & safety grounds, but the Chief Workshop Technician will consider all requests for supervised extended use if a student can show that he/she has used all available standard hours. Although this outcome was not all that JCCG had hoped for they saw it as a positive resolution. JCCG will draft an informal proforma for applying for such extended time.

**Action: JCCG**

**\* Minute 2 Report from the Chair of JCCG (DA) – Availability of SEMs to Part II Students in HT** JCCG raised concern over the availability of SEMs for Part II students during the first three weeks of Hilary Term. Both SEMs that were normally available to Part II students had been block-booked for the new 3<sup>rd</sup> year Characterisation module during weeks 1&2, and one of them had been additionally block-booked for a regular training course during week 3. The two basic instruments were the only SEMs available for Part II use because it was not possible for Part II students to become sufficiently experienced to become approved users of more sophisticated microscopes. It was reported that a large proportion of the block-booking in weeks 1&2 had in fact been used. It was agreed that Part II students would be pre-warned of this lack of availability in future years, but that if sessions were not used during the Characterisation module then they should be made available with priority to Part II and 1<sup>st</sup> year graduate students. This might also be applied to daytime bookings in wk0 (including use for modular courses). AOT will liaise with CJDH & MRC.

**Action: AOT**

**\* Minute 9 The Use of Bilingual Dictionaries in Prelims (DMAC 45/5)** DMAC did not feel strongly about the issue of bilingual dictionaries and considered this to be a matter for the Proctors. AOT will inform the Chair of Prelims.

**Action: AOT**

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 46: Action completed.]

## 5. Recruitment and Widening Participation

### i) Schools Liaison Officer Annual Report (MJC) (DMAC 46/2)

This report was based on the 4-monthly reports to Gatsby. MJC highlighted the key points from the last year:

- The masterclasses and one-hour talks are ongoing and proving popular. There are some additions and new talks available only in the Chemistry Department due to equipment requirements.
- The residential courses were, as ever, oversubscribed but had been postponed due to accommodation issues within the Colleges due to conferences.
- The IOP were proving to be the main customers for the teacher CPD courses.
- The outreach website providing information for schools is now live but pending approval for accuracy of the scientific data.
- Results from the recent UG induction survey were proving largely consistent with previous years.
- There is a significant fall in numbers applying to attend open days. The four in March have been reduced to three and these are only half full. There is not too much concern about this as there is high attendance at other events so this has been attributed to market saturation. Schools, generally, are cutting back on attendance at open days.
- In future, there will be a conscious effort to identify and contact schools with science clubs, both at secondary and primary level.
- The Symposium for Schools Liaison Staff in Materials HE Departments is in its third year and continues to be well received.

Given the imminent end to the Gatsby project, the future of the school liaison activity needs to be considered. AOT will take this to CRMG/APD and thence to DC.

**Action: AOT**

MJC reported that he had recently circulated a request for projects from the Nuffield Science Bursary Scheme and encouraged responses, highlighting their value.

## ii) Widening Participation

It was reported that the Headstart programme tended to attract about 2/3rds of its audience from independent schools, with the majority of masterclass audiences also being taken up by independent schools. This may be due to the additional support and flexibility offered by these schools. University aspiration events tended to be attended by state schools.

## 6. Admissions Report 2007 Exercise (DMAC 46/3)

Applications from state maintained schools were still low and below the average for the last five years. However, this group presents a good success rate of admission. This was considered to be a positive message to send to state school teachers to encourage applications from strong candidates.

It was noted that the application rate from “Other” applicants, such as overseas schools, had increased but the success rate was lower. This was due in part to some applying with the wrong qualifications and, for overseas interviewees, tutors being less inclined to accept a student they had not interviewed unless that student was high on the ranking list.

It was also noted that as well as the number of applications going up, the quality of intake was also increasing gradually.

DMAC recognised that it was desirable to be able to track progress/outcome against admissions statistics and noted that, while this was not an urgent need, and whilst it was not currently practicable to extract useful data identifying these students’ achievements, it should be possible in the future using OSS and the database being compiled by AOT.

Annex 4 outlined the scheme for the re-allocation of students’ 1<sup>st</sup>-choice college which was employed this year following a high number of applicants to Trinity.

Annex 5 outlined a new scheme for open offers in which a number of colleges participated this year, whereby colleges may underwrite more than the number of places they have available, to balance any possible withdrawals. It was considered that in time this scheme could lead to all 36 currently available college places being filled each year compared to the present typical intake of 30.

DMAC discussed the effect of the quality/number of Phys 2 candidates on admissions to Materials. There is no consistent effect year on year as the Physics applicants have different criteria.

## 7. Degree Class Statistics (DMAC 46/4)

The University has reported a persistent gender gap for the number of 2i’s and 1<sup>st</sup>’s awarded, although this is not too evident in Materials. There is a small gender gap in the total of 2i’s plus 1<sup>st</sup>’s in MS but once MEM and MS statistics are combined there is an insignificant gap.

There has been a concern at Division that the Department awards a greater proportion of 2ii’s than other MPLS departments. Again, once MEM and MS are combined, the results equate to much the same as for the Division and the University. DMAC therefore had no significant concern. Nonetheless this will be brought to the attention of the Examiners who may wish to be aware of this when making decisions for borderline cases.

**Action: AOT**

*[Secretary’s Note following DMAC 46: Action completed.]*

DMAC noted that the proportion of 1<sup>st</sup>'s is comparable to MPLS and greater than the University as a whole. The number of 1<sup>st</sup>'s awarded in 2007 was particularly high so there is a need to monitor the trends in time.

**8. Employment Statistics (DMAC 46/5)**

A survey of graduates taken 6-months after graduation was considered. It was noted that the report did not include any statistics for MEM students. There was concern that the statistics showed a rate of 29% unemployment; in previous years 0% has been recorded in this category. The issue was raised as to whether or not the questionnaire had been revised leading to different types of responses being elicited from the leavers.

AOT will contact tutors to see how accurate these statistics may be, particularly regarding unemployment, as tutors are generally aware where their students end up.

**Action: AOT**

**9. Student Materials Society "Book Lists" (DMAC 46/6)**

It was reported that the Materials Society have created a very good website, with useful resources, which could be a good advertisement for the Department. Full website access was restricted to members only, including AOT as the "Senior Member" of MatSoc. "Book lists" have been devised which detail specific targeted reading for individual questions from tutorial problem sheets. AOT had considered that this could potentially damage the students' ability to develop research skills and has discussed his concerns with the Chair of MatSoc.

DMAC were not particularly concerned and felt there may even be a positive aspect in encouraging students to refer to texts, rather than relying on lecture notes. However, there was concern that Faculty did not have full access to the website. AOT/JMS will present this to Faculty.

**Action: AOT/JMS**

**10. OULS Electronic Resources Checklist for Materials Science (DMAC 46/7)**

The librarian responsible for MPLS students had developed and circulated this aid to literature searching. DMAC considered that the format of the document implied that this was a checklist for personal use. AOT proposed to report to the librarian that, while the list of resources was valuable, the search checklist was unnecessary and that students should keep their own record. DMAC felt that the checklist did not reflect how real literature searches were conducted and endorsed AOT's proposal.

**Action: AOT**

This prompted the issue that supervisors needed to be able to guide new researchers to review skills training. AOT will send the relevant pages from the handbook out to supervisors and the Part II Organiser so a steer can be given as to suitable skills classes.

**Action: AOT**

**11. \*Code of Practice for Supervisors of PGR Students (DMAC 46/8)**

It was reported that this has been approved by the Divisional Board. AOT highlighted that there is now guidance on normal maximum supervisory load, equivalent to six full-time students. Following extensive debate about whether Part II supervision should be included, it was confirmed that this was for PGR students only but there is a valid issue about whether Chemistry and Materials Part IIs should be included.

A distinction between Part II and PGR was noted: there is a duty to provide projects for Part II whereas supervision of PGR is largely a matter of choice. To address the issue of load for Part

IIs, and associated funding concerns, it was agreed that a poll would be taken ex-committee to see if a mechanism for funding and fair allocation of Part II supervisors could be devised.

**Action: AOT**

*[Secretary's Note following DMAC 46: DC has agreed a procedure for Part II funding. A note on this will be circulated in due course.]*

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

ICS reported that the Business School, in addition to the newly introduced mid-term reports, had also compiled end-of-project questionnaires for the E(M)EM students.

The statistics for the Introduction to Management proved disappointing for the E(M)EM students with few achieving more than 70%. It was noted that E(M)EM students receive 8 tutorials as opposed to the 16 that E&M students receive. It was suggested that this data is sent to Materials Examiners for consideration when reviewing the examination marks.

There was some concern about behavioural issues of two students during the 2007 Management Project. The Standing Committee is to reflect on whether there are circumstances in which students may not be placed externally, and if there is potential for disciplinary sanctions to be applied to recall the student to Oxford to complete their project.

Some concern was voiced about project placement in 2008 given the current financial climate but the SBS was not overly concerned and the process is in a similar position to that of last year's.

There are 29 E(M)EM students of which 5 are MEM. Although it is still early in the interview process 5 students, including 1 MEM, have already been placed.

## **13. Reports from Divisional Committees**

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

The following matters were discussed at DivAc:

- Termly supervisors' reports on PGR students: Online reporting will be introduced for MT08.
- Engineering are experimenting with a new scheme to include 2<sup>nd</sup> year examinations. It was noted that most courses in MPLS now have 2<sup>nd</sup> year examinations. DMAC noted that this issue is periodically discussed.
- In future, external examiners are to receive reports from previous external examiners.

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

The following matters were discussed at GSAP:

- Graduate School: the working party has not yet reported but, although generally the DGSs are not keen, the working party sees merit in establishing a graduate school.
- There is increasing concern about the completion rate in DPhils within the Division. For those who started in 2002/03, 55% took 4 years and 70% took 5 years. This compared with 73% and 60% completing within 4 years for each of the previous 2 years. There is increasing need to look at this issue as Oxford has the worst completion statistics in the Russell Group. Partly for this reason, procedures for confirmation of status are to be tightened up. There remains a need to identify if there is a particular problem e.g. failure, students leaving, taking longer to write up, etc. GSAP are to report back.

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

There was no new business to report.

**iv) Academic Audit Committee (AOT)**

There were concerns about the degree award statistics, with the high proportion of 2ii's.

**14. Chairman's Report**

As requested at a previous meeting, AOT and ICS have examined the availability of training in Computer Programming: OUCS offer 3 courses but none seem particularly relevant. It was decided to wait for the new modellers to start so they could consider if such training was needed and, if so, where and how it would fit in the General Scheme.

QAA audit: it was reported in the THES that the QAA are piloting the use of students as full members of their panels when auditing universities.

The University has published its draft Strategic Plan which has been circulated via the Gazette. AOT noted that he would be happy to discuss any specific issues at DMAC and invited the submission of any such issues for the next agenda.

*[Secretary's Note following DMAC 46: None received.]*

**15. Any Other Business**

There was no further business.

**Date of the next meeting – 2.00 pm Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2008, Wolfson Meeting Room.**

The meeting closed at 5.10 pm.