

Oxford University Department of Materials Academic Committee

DMAC 47 Minutes of the Academic Committee held at 2.00 pm on Tuesday 6th May 2008 in the Wolfson Meeting Room.

Present: AOT (Chair), JMS, KAQOR, CRMG.

In attendance: PJM (Secretary), Karleen Dudeck (Current JCCG Chair), Dave Armstrong (Previous JCCG Chair), Helen Boffey (JCCU Chair) (items 1-3).

1. Apologies & Welcome

Apologies for absence were received from DJHC, MRC and PDN.

2. Report from the Chair of JCCG (KD)

- Access to the Department Workshop. Following an action raised at a previous meeting, JCCG had drafted a proforma for applying for extended access giving details of the student, the supervisor, the project and an outline of planned workshop activities. JCCG will submit an electronic version of this. DMAC enquired as to the level of graduate students requiring extended access and whilst it was reported that this year the level had dropped due to the nature of projects undertaken, it was agreed that the procedure should be put in place to allow for an increase in the level of requests.

Action: DA

- Access to the Common Room. JCCG reported that students were still seeking access to the Common Room when using resources after 5pm on weekdays, particularly for those using microscopy equipment. The access issue is complicated by the fact that the Common Room is shared by Engineering and, hence, it is necessary to gain agreement from Engineering to extend access. DMAC identified that a memo to all members of the Department was required that outlined the current rules, after which any special requests for access could be considered. DMAC noted that there was an outstanding action on Alana Davies to liaise with Engineering and to circulate a memo clarifying access levels. DMAC reiterated its recommendation that access should be as open as possible given that this is based on swipe card entry and CCTV is in place.

3. Report from the Chair of JCCU (HB)

- Disparity between tutorial support and lecture courses. JCCU reported that feedback on the Macroplasticity lecture course had highlighted that students felt that some tutors may not have been aware of the changes made to the lecture course in 2006/07. This was also felt to have occurred following changes to the 3rd year option courses, despite changes being discussed and approved by Faculty and reflected in the course synopses which are updated on an annual basis. DMAC considered that there was a need for a formal mechanism by which tutors were alerted to changes in lecture courses and tutorial sheets. DMAC concluded that once synopses have been updated, the course information, including tutorial sheets, should be communicated by PJM to the tutorial fellows. DMAC will report this to Faculty to ensure this process is fully communicated.

Action: AOT/JMS

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 47: Following investigation into the resources available through WebLearn, it is proposed that this could be used as a central repository for, initially, tutorial sheets. Further details and guidance will be circulated in due course.]

AOT confirmed that a new lecturer would be sourced for Macroplasticity next year which should help to prevent some of the problems experienced this year.

- New 3rd Year Option Courses. JCCU reported that student feedback was really positive and the Options had been enjoyed by all. Whilst some students would prefer that there was more flexibility to be able to pick and choose, it was generally accepted that the blocking simplified the arrangements. The scheduling of the classes also received positive feedback. JCCU reported that in the Characterisation of Materials module, more time to consider choice of projects based on equipment would be appreciated.

4. Minutes of DMAC 46 (DMAC 47/1)

The minutes of DMAC 46 were accepted with a slight addition to the secretary's note relating to DMAC 44, minute 11iii. This should be appended with "A collective response has been prepared by DivAC."

5. Shortened Minutes

There were no confidential items to be removed from the minutes to be published on the Department of Materials website.

6. Matters Arising - that are not covered elsewhere in the minutes.

*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.

In progress: AARW

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 47: Update from AARW – he would still like to do this but workloads have prevented him from meeting the above deadline.]

*From DMAC 37

**Minute 4ii 2nd Year Polymers* HEA has agreed to take the lead on the overall review of polymers teaching.

Action on HEA superseded

DMAC 47: DMAC considered that, as this action had been outstanding for sometime and no progress has thus far been made, and given the students' apparently sustained negative attitude towards the Polymers courses, DMAC would approach Barbara Gabrys to request that she set up a working party to address this review.

Action: PJM

***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 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

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 47: Action completed. Faculty was not enthusiastic about the imposition of compulsory self-organised visits and asked DMAC to look again at this issue.]

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

*** From DMAC 45**

*** 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 3rd 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 1st 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

***DMAC 46**

***Minute 5 Recruitment and Widening Participation** 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

[*Secretary's Note following DMAC 47: Action completed. DC recommended a 60% FTE SLO post and noted that a particular focus in the next few years will be to target state schools.*]

***Minute 8 Employment Statistics** 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

***Minute 9 Student Materials Society "Book Lists"** 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

[*Secretary's Note following DMAC 47: Action completed – access has been given to Faculty.*]

***Minute 10 OULS Electronic Resources Checklist for Materials Science** 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

***Minute 11 Code of Practice for Supervisors of PGR Students** 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.]

7. Report from Tutors' Committee

Review of 3rd Year Options – whilst primarily a positive message was received, TC favoured the provision of more choice for the students. This was covered under the main agenda item.

8. Regulation Change: Penalties for late submission of coursework and new deadline for submission of Part II theses.

As the vested interest of students “on course” regarding the Proctors' regulation introduced in 2006 covering late submission of coursework is due to expire, there is an opportunity for a more severe, explicit penalty to be introduced in line with the recent recommendation of Chairmen of Examiners. DMAC considered this together with a linked proposal for an earlier deadline for submission. An earlier deadline would assist internal administrative processes and increase the likelihood of the external examiners receiving the theses by the weekend. DMAC considered that 12 noon on Thursday would be a better submission deadline, particularly if Examination Schools would be able to accept submissions on the Saturday.

It was generally agreed that a penalty of 10% should be applied for the first day the work is late but views differed about whether each subsequent day should also incur the full 10% penalty. DMAC considered that a penalty of 5% would be more appropriate for subsequent late days. DMAC also considered that, to minimise ambiguity, the wording should be changed to read “for each day or part day that the work is late”. The change in submission deadline will need to be referred to Faculty for approval as a regulation change so Faculty's opinion will be sought with respect to the penalty.

Action: AOT

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 47: Noting (i) that the Exam Schools did not have formal provision for accepting coursework submissions on Saturdays, and (ii) the necessary timescale if Part II reports were to be received by the external examiners on the Friday of week 7, Faculty has decided that the submission date should be noon on Wednesday of week 7 TT.]

This prompted a question about the Business Plans, as some students had been penalised by Proctors for missing the deadline: these students had sent work via the internal post before they left to go on the Industrial Tour. It was agreed that an explicit statement would be added to the handbook confirming that it was the student's own responsibility to meet deadlines and when submitting work to Examination Schools this should be done in person so the work can be date-stamped. DMAC asked if the submission deadline for the Business Plans could be moved to de-conflict from the Industrial Tour. PJM is to investigate dependent timeframes with the course lecturer. AOT reminded DMAC that a change in deadline would require a regulation change through Faculty.

Action: PJM

9. Teaching Lab Access for Research Workers

DMAC considered the level of control that should be implemented to assist the Practical Class Technician and others in managing requests from researchers for access to the Teaching Lab. DMAC agreed that access should always be arranged in advance, that users must provide their own consumables, and that supervisors should endorse such requests, having judged whether or

not the researcher is competent in using the necessary equipment. Pre-arranged and planned access should negate the need for out-of-hours access, and access during afternoon undergraduate practicals should be actively discouraged. All usage must be subject to having satisfied the PCT that adequate training has been received. A well-equipped metallographic outfit, including resources, is available at Begbroke and when access to the teaching lab is not possible / convenient suitably trained researchers should be referred there in the first instance. A proforma is to be drafted explicitly stating these rules. Any exceptional requests and/or difficulties are to be referred to CRMG.

Action: AOT

10. Review of New 3rd Year Options Arrangements and Programme

DMAC reviewed the arrangements for the 3rd year Options as the new structure has now been in place for a year. Feedback was collected from various sources including JCCU, Tutors' Committee and the SD's of the Characterisation and Modelling Modules. JCCU was very positive and has provided constructive suggestions about the sample set selection in the Characterisation of Materials module. DMAC was supportive of the suggestion that extra time be allowed for the selection of sample sets. There were mixed feelings from the students about the individual lecture choices, some advocating more flexibility and others valuing the blocking. Tutors' Committee has stated a desire to offer students more flexibility in the choice of subjects. AOT offered to explore the further breakdown of the options, e.g. offering blocks of 12 hours with students taking 3 blocks out of 4/5. Whilst more choice for the students was generally advocated by the academics, this paradoxically could lead to less choice in examinations. It was agreed that statistical monitoring should be done on the examination questions to identify which questions the students tend to answer. Tutors should also be able to advise how many students attend the lectures and the associated classes.

The Characterisation and Modelling Modules had a limited number of returns on feedback questionnaires but both anecdotal and JCCU feedback was very positive. DMAC wished to congratulate the course organisers on two highly successful courses. From feedback received from the course organisers, capping the number of students to 15 on the Characterisation Module was suggested due to the demands placed on the demonstrators and the time allowed for equipment. It was generally felt that the Characterisation model benefitted other parts of the course whereas the Modelling Module had not obviously fed into other areas. However, it was noted that with the new modellers coming in, more modelling Part II projects may be on offer in the future which would address this. DMAC concluded that it was not appropriate to cap the numbers on the Characterisation Module.

It was questioned if the modules would be better placed in MT, rather than HT. Although this had been a previous comment from a Part II student and ordinarily Part II students would not be taking these modules, it was also considered that, given previous issues of restricted SEM access, moving these modules may help relieve SEM demands. However, it was noted that a previous action had already addressed this problem, leading to priority on SEMs being given to Part II's and Y1 PGRs during working hours (when not in use for the Characterisation Module) in the period from week 0 – week 2 of HT09 onwards. Another advantage of moving these modules to MT could be that new graduate student modellers could attend.

DMAC's view, however, was to leave the scheduling as it stands as there was no particularly strong evidence to support changing this.

Overall, DMAC considered that Faculty would be pleased with the generally positive response to the current structure and proposed that changes to the existing arrangements should not be considered until after another year.

11. Student Transcripts – Subject Specific Texts

The University is working towards generating a centrally produced academic transcript. This will allow for a small section for inclusion of subject specific texts intended to help people external to Oxford understand the transcript. Upon reviewing the specimen transcript, DMAC considered that inclusion of a “weighting” column after the result (mark/grade) column would help to identify the significance of the mark in terms of the overall degree. With regard to the subject specific text, DMAC’s view was that this should be used to further describe the 8 month research project and the Team Design Project. It was also considered useful to be able to identify which assessments were not examinations.

It was also noted that the Mark Scales should state explicitly that the Undergraduate programmes include the integrated Masters for MEng. AOT is to investigate through MPLS the possibility of having a more specific MEng Mark Scale.

Action: AOT

[Secretary’s Note following DMAC 47: Action completed. Division was sympathetic to these comments but indicated that changes were not possible for 2008/09. Hence AOT has submitted course specific text which describes the weighting.]

12. Report from EMS Standing Committee (AOT)

The Committee did not meet as there was no business to consider. The next meeting will be in MT 2008 to receive the examiners’ report on EMS Finals Part II.

13. Reports from Divisional Committees

i) Academic Committee (JMS)

The following matters were discussed at DivAc:

- Research Teaching Nexus: the list of Part II publications is no longer produced. JMS is to send a request for supervisors to provide details of publications by Part II students in the last 5 years

Action: JMS

- Doctoral Training Centres: following EPSRC’s call for new DTCs, outline bids were to be submitted to EPSC which, if successful, would have a major impact on doctoral training in the Division.
- External Advisory Committees: there is no longer a requirement for these to meet every year.

ii) Undergraduate Studies Access Advisory Panel (AOT)

The following matters were discussed at USAP:

- The Divisional Access Office has produced a generic “Science at Oxford” presentation which staff visiting schools may find useful. AOT to circulate this to Faculty.

Action: AOT

14. Chairman’s Report

Teaching Award Scheme: the scheme will run again this year. An email will be sent out to invite participation and/or nomination.

Student Number Planning: for the period 2008/09-2012/13 the Divisional quota has been set at 5000. This reflects a constant number for undergraduates, a slight growth in PGT and 15% growth in PGR. This would lead to a cumulative growth to 5,320 by 2012.

Transfer and Confirmation of Status. AOT reported that Division are tightening up on the Transfer and Confirmation of Status process, driven by the concern in worsening completion statistics previously reported. More focus is to be placed on milestone reporting. As the Department already has a good structure in place, it is meeting the minimum requirements. However, this approach will impact on the Confirmation of Status, which in future must be addressed 6-8 terms in (i.e. just after the 2nd year). Confirmation of Status is now to include a 2 page report from candidate outlining research achievements to date (a literature review will not suffice) and set out plans for submission of thesis. This report is to be assessed and, for our Department, AOT proposed that the supervisor should be one assessor, with the DGS the other. DMAC considered that this report, together with existing progress and project management reports, should provide sufficient evidence for recommendation. AOT proposed that he draft a proforma for this report with suitable headings. DMAC agreed although cautioned that care should be taken in the design of the proforma to avoid quashing any enthusiasm and recommended that, as well as listing publications, details of goals candidates were on track to achieve should also be elicited. The milestone reporting approach was pending final approval by EPSC and Division and DMAC was keen that, once approved, the Department should use as much of our existing structure as possible in satisfying the new requirements.

Action: AOT

National Students' Survey. AOT reported that a letter was sent to students early in Trinity Term to encourage completion and PJM had sent a reminder of the importance of completion to achieve good returns and hence more meaningful data.

QAA Template. AOT confirmed that the QAA template had been completed and submitted and enquired if DMAC would like this to be circulated to the Committee. DMAC considered that review by the Chairman of Faculty was sufficient.

15. Any Other Business

There was no further business.

Date of the next meeting – 2.00 pm Monday 2nd June 2008, Wolfson Meeting Room.

The meeting closed at 4.20 pm.