

Oxford University Department of Materials Academic Committee

DMAC 48 Minutes of the Academic Committee held at 2.00 pm on Tuesday 2nd June 2008 in the Wolfson Meeting Room.

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

In attendance: PJM (Secretary).

1. Apologies & Welcome

Apologies for absence were received from DJHC.

2. Minutes of DMAC 47

The minutes of DMAC 47 were accepted with a slight amendment to phrasing.

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 - 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.

DMAC 48: AOT reported that the students had conducted their own survey to investigate whether or not the students would like to submit practical reports electronically. The results showed an equal split between those who would prefer to submit reports in a word-processed format and those who would prefer to continue with hand-written reports. DMAC was concerned that an electronic format could increase the risk of "cut and paste" plagiarism. DMAC also considered that there was benefit to be gained in completing hand-written exercises prior to examinations.

Whilst it was agreed that Turnitin would prove invaluable for large pieces of work, DMAC held the view that the markers could detect any similarity in reports within the year group, although admittedly not against previous years. It was agreed that any decision regarding electronic submission of reports should only be considered once further detail is known about "Turnitin". AOT advised that no update had been received from Division. CRMG will follow-up with the Proctors for details of progress with "Turnitin".

Action: CRMG

***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**

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

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 47: Action completed.]

DMAC 48: AOT confirmed that BJK had been approached with this request and had agreed to undertake this review. However, HEA had submitted an interim report following DMAC 47 in which she advised that she considered the 2nd Year Polymers material to be appropriate in content and that no changes were required. Revisions have been made to the 1st and 3rd Year material which HEA would like to review once examination results are known. It was queried whether the remit should also cover tutorial teaching and DMAC concluded that, as this was a large scale review of the Polymers material, tutorial teaching would be a part of this, together with the practical element. AOT advised that AJW had reported that the proportion of practical work involving polymers was roughly equal to the fraction of lectures involving polymers.

It was noted that the Polymers material was being taught by a team of 3: HEA, BJK and AARW. DMAC heard that students were now keener to take Polymers.

Action: BJK/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 4i Report from the Chair of JCCU (AZ): Industrial Visits (DMAC 43/2)** 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

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 48: Action completed. CJDH has arranged for this priority booking to be in place and ICS has warned Part II students of the need to plan ahead for this period.]

***DMAC 46**

***Minute 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

***Minute 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

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 48: Action completed. AOT has briefed Ljilja Ristic on our needs.]

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

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 48: Action completed.]

***Minute 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.]

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 48: Action completed.]

***From DMAC 47**

***Minute 2 Report from the Chair of JCCG – 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

***Minute 3 Report from the Chair of JCCU – 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, PJM

[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.]

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 48: Work continues to obtain the raw information to enable this. Updated synopses have been sent out to all tutors.]

***Minute 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.]

[Secretary’s Note following DMAC 48: Action completed.]

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

***Minute 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

***Minute 13 i) Report from Academic Committee (JMS) 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

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 48: Action completed.]

***Minute 13 ii) Report from Undergraduate Studies Access Advisory Panel (AOT)** The Divisional Access Office has produced a generic "Science at Oxford" presentation which staff visiting schools may find useful. AOT is to circulate this to Faculty.

Action: AOT

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 48: Action completed.]

5. Undergraduate Transcripts (DMAC 48/2)

AOT reported that the request from DMAC for further information regarding the weighting of the degree components to be included in the centrally produced transcripts had been referred to MPLS, together with the request for a more specific M.Eng. Mark Scale. However, it had been too late for these comments to be considered for the 2008/09 transcripts although MPLS advised that comments similar to those from DMAC had been received from other departments. As an interim measure, AOT had submitted subject specific text and invited comment from DMAC. Initial comments included a request for weighting factors to be rounded to 1 decimal place and for the Characterisation of Materials Module to be so called.

6. Industrial Visits

DMAC had proposed to Faculty that, with the increase in student numbers and the consequent impact on staff load, attendance at one self-organised visit should become a requirement for one of the four compulsory visits. However, AOT reported that Faculty was not keen to enforce this. There is currently a need to provide 90 places per annum at departmentally-organised visits to ensure that students may meet the attendance criteria of 4 visits, allowing that, on average, students also attend one self-organised visit. The combination of 3 departmentally-organised visits and 1 MatSoc-organised visit attended by ICS provides 96 places per annum. If student numbers go on beyond 30 per annum then this will be inadequate. Discussion followed about how best to control staff load in organising the industrial visits. DMAC was reluctant to reduce the number of visits required as they are considered an important aspect of the course when it came to professional accreditation. Experience has shown that optimum capacity is 24 on a visit so it was not considered possible to increase the numbers attending. It was suggested that repeat visits on a 2-year cycle could be arranged which would reduce staff workload to some extent.

7. Update on SENDA compliance w.r.t. handouts, etc.

DMAC was reminded about the timeframes previously agreed for revising teaching material to ensure compliance with SENDA. Specifically, DMAC had agreed that handouts would be re-formatted initially and lecture notes would be revised ultimately. A request for appropriate adjustments would be circulated with the request for updated synopses, together with the guidance notes on SENDA requirements. Sarah Johnson will be able to offer support over the summer with re-formatting and lecturers should be encouraged to use this resource. The central file held by PJM will be kept up to date with the revised versions.

It was reported that the examination papers were produced in accordance with SENDA for the first time this year.

8. TT MMES Collection Results (DMAC 48/03)

Ongoing statistical monitoring continues to prove that the use of younger Materials lecturers for teaching Maths has not been causing problems with the results. No concern has been reported with the Maths Prelims marks for Materials students in the last few years.

9. Advisory Study Hours (Bologna) – (DMAC 48/04)

DMAC considered the content of the guidance that should be issued to students for typical workload, such as quantifying vacation work that is demanded of students. Having confirmed that this note sets out time over and above scheduled contact time, it was agreed that the document should reflect guidance on expectation. DMAC agreed that the Part II commitment should be more like 40 hours per week, rather than 50 hours. Even though feedback suggested that practical write-ups took far longer than 6 hours, DMAC considered that the guidance should state an expectation of 6-8 hours. It was agreed that the time commitment to the TDP was likely to be underestimated as students tend to devote significant time to this but, again, the expectation should be given and weeks of more than 50 hours should be avoided. The Industrial visit commitment was reduced to 1 hour.

It was noted that revision tutorials were not currently included and the following level of guidance was agreed: for GP1-3, 8 hours; for GP4, 4 hours; no additional allowance for the Options papers. Prelims revision tutorials should allow a 3 hour class per paper (including Maths).

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

KAQOR had previously reported to Faculty and full details can be found in Faculty minutes.

11. Reports from Divisional Committees

i) Academic Committee (JMS)

The following matters were discussed at DivAc:

- DivAc endorsed the recommendation of instituting the Grad Schools, providing that concerns were noted about increased workloads and costs.
- Centrally co-ordinated skills training is to be provided, coupled with DTC's with 1st year training proposal.

ii) Graduate Studies Advisory Panel (AOT)

The following matters were discussed at GSAP:

- Roberts' Skills Training funding has been approved by Division to support a new course in Enterprise & Entrepreneurship (to be led by Prof. Dobson and Dr Lingwood.) There are also 60 places per annum available on a half-day IP workshop. Both these elements might be of interest to those students who wish to build on the introduction to IPR given as part of both the SBS's "Building a Business" course and the Department's "Writing skills, lab notebooks and IPR" workshop.

iii) Undergraduate Studies Advisory Panel (AOT)

The following matters were discussed at USAP:

- Teaching for the new Engineering Diploma starts in schools in September. [*Material removed from the minutes to be published on the Department of Materials website.*]
- A checklist of handbook content has been circulated by Division. Whilst most of the required information is already included in the Materials' handbooks, further work will be undertaken to ensure that it is all included.

12. Chairman's Report

A review of Graduate Admissions at University level has been undertaken and the consultation paper has now been released. This is likely to result in fewer gathered fields with the application deadline being the end of January. The results of consultation to determine numbers and timing of gathered fields are currently pending. Online dossiers for all applicants will be rolled out next year. Any hard-copy submissions will be scanned to make these available electronically. Single Sign-On (SSO) access has also been requested but this is unlikely to become reality this year.

13. Any Other Business

The Chairman extended thanks from the Committee to CRMG, KAQOR and JMS for their contributions during the course of their service with DMAC.

Date of the next meeting – 2.00 pm Monday 27th October 2008, Wolfson Meeting Room. The meeting closed at 3.50 pm.