

Oxford University Department of Materials Academic Committee

DMAC 49 Minutes of the Academic Committee held at 2.00 pm on Monday 27th October 2008 in the Wolfson Meeting Room.

Present: MRC, DJHC, JTC, CRMG (Items 8-17), PDN, JaMS, AOT (Chair), RIT.

In attendance: PJM (Secretary), Karleen Dudeck (JCCG Chair) (Items 1-3), Helen Boffey (HB - outgoing JCCU Chair) (Items 1-3), David Lloyd (DL incoming JCCU Chair) (Items 1-3).

1. Apologies & Welcome

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Membership and Terms of Reference

The Chair welcomed the new members to the Committee: JaMS and RIT as newly elected members, and JTC, as Chair of Faculty, as an *ex-officio* member. DMAC thanked HB for her year of service as Chair of JCCU and welcomed DL as the incoming Chair of JCCU.

AOT reported that CRMG had volunteered to be co-opted due to his position as HoD. There was complete agreement that CRMG would make a valuable contribution to DMAC. Consideration will be given at the next meeting as to whether the HoD should have *ex-officio* membership. The Committee agreed with the Chair's recommendation that the terms of reference of the Committee needed no amendment.

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 49: A correction to the terms of reference is that it is Faculty that elects a member of Graduate Panel.]

3. Report from the Chair of JCCG (KD)

KD advised that there were ongoing actions relating to the Begbroke minibus and access to the Common Room. Following the success of JCCG coffee meetings at the central site, similar arrangements are to be made at the Begbroke site. AOT confirmed that provision of wifi access and additional seating will be made at Begbroke to support hot-desking.

4. Report from the Chair of JCCU (HB)

i) Bilingual Dictionaries

Following the Proctor's tentative proposal to withdraw the use of bilingual dictionaries, HB reported that JCCU was keen to retain the option to use these. AOT restated that DMAC had previously also endorsed the use of bilingual dictionaries and Tutors' Committee had similarly been in support. However, the moderators for Prelims had noted their concerns about the use of these in the examiners' report and DMAC backed their recommendation that if bilingual dictionaries were to be used for examinations, the Examination Schools should provide these, rather than the individual.

ii) Student Representation

HB reported that JCCU felt that there was adequate provision for student representation with the current arrangements, whereby the Chair of the JCCU reports to the first DMAC of the term.

iii) Examination Preparation

JCCU were positive about the format of the guidance and considered it would be more useful than having a dedicated workshop or lecture.

iv) Team Design Project Scheduling

JCCU was concerned that, due to concurrent commitments in Economics and Management, MEM students were disadvantaged by the timing of the Team Design Projects, even with the expected input of 75 hours reduced from 100 hours for the MS students. JCCU enquired whether the TDPs could be swapped with the Option Modules in HT. DMAC considered that the training load on the SEMs was too high at the beginning of MT to allow for these modules to be done then. DMAC agreed to investigate further with the Economics and Management faculties to determine amount of work being set so the total workload could be considered. It was discussed that it may be possible to reduce the contribution of MEM students to 50% and reduce marks proportionately but there were concerns about further reducing the Materials content in the programme.

Action: AOT

v) Foreign Language Provision

The Department currently funds a language option for MS students; a foundation course is studied in the first year with an assessed course continuing in the second year in place of the Business Plan. A further voluntary course is offered in the fourth year. JCCU reported that all 1st years would like the option to take a language course. DMAC considered that all 1st years should be allowed to take the language option, for which the Department would pay. However, DMAC felt it would not be sensible for 2nd year MEM students to take an additional language course, given the already heavy workload. The entry in the handbook will be revised to reflect this.

Action: PJM

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 49: DC has approved this suggestion, including the evening classes for those students whose timetable commitments prevent attendance during the day and subject to a firm commitment from the student to put in the required amount of study and attendance on the language course. However, at present registration on the evening (OPAL) courses is required in MT week 0, which is impractical for freshers. This problem will be explored with OU Language Centre.]

5. Minutes of DMAC 48

The minutes of DMAC 48 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 - 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.

[*Secretary’s Note following DMAC 47: Action on PJM completed.*]

DMAC 48: AOT confirmed that BJG 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, BJG and AARW. DMAC heard that students were now keener to take Polymers.

Action: BJG/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

***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

***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.]

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 49: Faculty has been informed and reminded of the importance of submitting copies of lecture material to the DAA's office. Action completed.]

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

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

***From DMAC 48**

***Minute 11 Reports from Divisional Committees**

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.]*

8. Examiners' Reports (DMAC 49/3)

i) Prelims

AOT highlighted that the Chair of Moderators had reported concerns about arrangements for candidates with special needs and the use of bilingual dictionaries. The latter issue confirmed the view held by DMAC that, whilst these should still be made available, bilingual dictionaries should be provided by Schools. This view will be included in the formal response DMAC makes to the Division on the matter of bilingual dictionaries.

It was noted that on MS2 there were very few attempts to the questions on Electronic Properties, and that those were poor. It was believed that, historically, this has not been a popular area for students in examinations. As an important role of the Prelims examination is to provide evidence of understanding of the subject matter, there was some concern that preparedness for the electronic properties elements of Year 2 core papers was not being demonstrated. DMAC considered that it was not necessarily that students did not understand the subject matter, as mechanisms such as tutorials were in place throughout the course to enable tutors to monitor basic understanding, rather that this area was less inter-related to other subject areas so, given the format of the papers, the students chose to avoid answering those questions. Having discussed a couple of possible solutions, such as splitting the papers into sections, or alternating a question on Kinetic Theory with a Physics-based question each year. DMAC concluded that further data should be established to determine the exact trend in uptake of questions before proposing any further action. Statistics from the previous four years are to be collated for this, and to identify whether or not there are similar trends in other areas.

Action: PJM

ii) Part I and Part II MS

No points were raised for discussion.

Part I and Part II MEM

No points were raised for discussion.

iii) External Examiners' Report

The reports from the Materials Science External Examiners had not been received. However, neither External Examiner had given any prior indication of any areas of concern detected during the examination process.

iv) Draft Response to Examiners' Reports (DMAC 49/4)

a. General Comments

- It was noted that Prof. Derby would be submitting his final report as his term has finished. He will be replaced by Prof. Jon Binner from Loughborough University.
- DMAC recalled that there had been delays in receiving reports from Prof. Greer in previous years which had caused some concern. However, DMAC wished to record that he was a very good and thorough examiner.
- The final versions of internal examiners' report for Economics and Management were still awaited.

b. Section 1 Summary of major points

- It was encouraging that no scaling had been necessary to any papers.
- DMAC concluded that an Honours pass should continue to be awarded on the basis on the average mark, rather than requiring an Honours pass on each individual paper. This matter will now be taken to Faculty.

Action: AOT

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 49: Action completed: Faculty has endorsed DMAC's recommendation.]

- Although the examiners had proposed the move to anonymous marking of coursework, DMAC did not consider this to be practicable for the Modelling and Characterisation modules. Indeed DMAC judged that it could be detrimental for the coursework to be anonymous as reports would then be required outlining any problems or extenuating circumstances that should be considered. The benefits of anonymous marking would not then outweigh the additional work required. Whilst the Business Plan could be submitted anonymously, given the small percentage of marks concerned, DMAC considered that the current arrangement should continue and all coursework should bear the students' names.
- There was extensive discussion about whether or not viva voce examinations should be held for the Part I examinations for borderline candidates. Last year, as a pilot, the examiners had made use of the regulation permitting vivas at Part I. Although no candidates were considered borderline, in practice it would have been extremely difficult to receive marks in time to consider the need for a viva (due to the timing of the Introduction to Management paper). DMAC recognised that it was necessary to be consistent from year to year in deciding to hold vivas, for equity to the students. After careful deliberation DMAC agreed by a majority vote that it should be recommended to Faculty that the option to hold vivas at Part I, and at Part II for MEM, be dropped. Borderline cases should instead be decided by consideration by the examiners of the candidate's profile developed over all FHS assessments.

Action: AOT

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 49: Action completed: Faculty has endorsed DMAC's recommendation.]

9. Exam Conventions (DMAC 49/5)

- i) The definitions of the terms "anonymous" and "blind" in the context of marking have been made explicit.
- ii) The previously agreed amendment to the regulation regarding the penalty for the late submission of coursework has now been included.
- iii) Direction on marking has been given to address any instance of short weight.
- iv) It is stated that the examiners will not mark in excess of the prescribed number of questions. DMAC agreed that it should be clarified that the questions will be taken in numerical order if a student does not complete the cover slip.

Education Committee has requested a review of the penalties to be applied for non-attendance at vivas, with a view to imposing a less extreme penalty. DMAC considered that the maximum penalty of a mark of zero for the element of assessment in question should be retained for Part II. AOT will communicate this to MPLS.

Action: AOT

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 49: Action completed]

10. *Lecture Synopses (DMAC 49/6)

Synopses with significant changes were approved by Chair's action during Long Vac. AOT reminded DMAC that in future it was intended that updated tutorial sheets would be posted to WebLearn and tutors would be notified once these were available.

11. Student Representation

AOT summarised an OUSU paper which was looking for student representation on all teaching committees. AOT reported that this had been taken to JCCU, JCCG and Tutors' Committee who had agreed that the current model works well, whereby the Chairs of JCCU and JCCG report to the first meeting of DMAC each term. DMAC wholeheartedly agreed that the current system should be maintained as this was a sensible use of the students' time as the representatives only attend to discuss the issues they raise, rather than for the whole 3-hour meeting.

12. Report from the Tutors' Committee (AOT)

- The process for transfer to or continuation on the MEM programme was discussed and the course handbook will be updated to give guidance on how to progress.
- Senior Tutors had proposed that where students had been suspended for non-disciplinary reasons, the student should be banned from the University altogether. Education Committee considers that these students should still have access to some facilities.
- In this year's admissions exercise up to three open offers may be made following last year's successful pilot with one open offer. This will potentially lead to close to maximum numbers (as restricted by teaching lab equipment).
- Tutors are pooling their reading list to develop a consistent and accessible reading list for all Materials students.

13. Report from EMS Standing Committee (PJM)

This was the last meeting of the Standing Committee as the course has now finished. The examination results for the last candidate were presented and considered.

14. Reports from Divisional Committees

i) Academic Committee (AOT)

- A sub-committee of Council has been established for student number planning purposes. PGR numbers may be allowed to grow a little where previously there was a cap in place.
- The language centre has circulated a paper recommending that all undergraduates have the opportunity to undertake a foreign language course and such study should be recognised by inclusion in the degree mark or by certification in the degree transcript. Following the earlier discussion with the Chair of JCCU, DMAC had agreed to funding foreign language courses for first years but this became problematic for the second year MEM students.
- Education Committee are encouraging a formal audit trail for approval of minutes from academic committees by the HoD. As DMAC had earlier agreed to invite the HoD to join DMAC this audit trail had been reinforced. It was noted that it was already in place since DMAC reported to Faculty, of which the HoD is a member, and the DoS, who chairs DMAC, reports to the HoD.
- Written agreements for collaborative provision, such as Part II projects, which tie down both parties to their respective commitments, are under review to be implemented in the forthcoming year.

15. Chairman's Report

- i) Following discussion over the summer, a better system has been devised for recording practical marks and attendance. This will assist in providing accurate information to Tutors. This will also address the comment made by the Chair of Moderators for Prelims that he was not happy with the lack of transparency in the mechanism for applying penalties. This will be rolled out in MT.

Action: AOT

- ii) There will be changes to the Schools Liaison team as Dr Martin Carr will be leaving us in the New Year. A plan for his succession is in place.
- iii) Following the decision to meet with undergraduates and research students/postdoctoral researchers in alternating years, the Industrial Advisory Panel met with a group PGR/PD researchers who as usual gave generally very positive feedback about the Department. The PGR/PD group advised that they would like more proactive careers advice, more free time for thinking and more common-room access. There was some concern over stipend differentials between DPhil sponsors and some students had reported that they were discouraged from finishing early by supervisors. DMAC considered this to be of particular concern given Oxford's current statistics in completion rates within the Russell Group. DMAC were reminded that, while the completion rate for Materials was consistent with the average for MPLS with 55% completing in 4 years, the rates needed to be improved as there were wider implications than lack of funding for the students.

16. Any Other Business

There was no further business.

Date of the next meeting – 2.00 pm Monday 24th November 2008, Wolfson Meeting Room. The meeting closed at 5.20 pm.

[Secretary's Note following DMAC 49: The meeting to be held on Monday 24th November was cancelled; the date of the next meeting -2.00pm Monday 2nd February 2009, Wolfson Meeting Room.]