

From our readers

MATERIALS DEPARTMENTS ARE FACING UP TO EDUCATION AND RECRUITMENT CONCERNS

To the editor—I wish to comment on your January editorial¹, *A matter of survival?*, about university education in materials science and engineering (MSE). In particular, to challenge your assertion that the subject is not now being taught as “a coherent and single discipline”.

Many academic departments round the world do in fact teach MSE in just that way. Professor Merton C. Flemings of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has written at some length about this very approach² and the two of us have written a detailed overview³ of materials education in the USA and Europe, with particular emphasis on the idea of teaching a coherent and single discipline. The MIT faculty, in particular, are in the process of preparing textbooks that span the various categories of materials.

The difficulty of attracting enough students to the discipline is in no way specific to MSE; a number of other scientific disciplines have just the same problem.

I also want to challenge your assertion that countries such as Japan, France and Germany have no dedicated materials departments in their universities. In fact, these countries all have such departments, and in most cases these reveal the fact in their names, but it is true that they are often more specialized than the big ‘anglo-saxon’ departments, and so some of them do not cover the complete spectrum. All this is discussed at some length in the overview by Flemings and Cahn³.

It may well be that the correct solution to the problem of numbers in MSE lies in the secondary (high) schools, and much attention is currently being paid to this aspect. I would urge you to open your columns to an in-depth debate on the whole problem of recruitment within MSE.

Professor Robert Cahn

*Department of Materials Science and Metallurgy, University of Cambridge, Pembroke Street, Cambridge CB2 3QZ, UK.
e-mail: rwc12@cam.ac.uk*

1. *Nature Mater.* 2, 1 (2003).

2. Fleming, M. C. *Annu. Rev. Mater. Sci.* 29, 1–21 (1999).

3. Flemings, M. C. & Cahn, R. C. *Acta Mater.* 48, 371–383 (2000).

nature materials Call for correspondence

Nature Materials would like to give our readers the opportunity to discuss subjects that are of broad interest in the materials science and engineering community. We are therefore pleased to welcome contributions to our Correspondence section. This section will publish letters that can be either linked to primary research articles, editorials, commentaries and News and Views published in *Nature Materials*, or discuss other topics of widespread interest to the community. The emphasis is on brevity (less than 400 words), topicality and widespread interest, and the journal reserves the right to edit letters to highlight the most interesting aspects. References, if absolutely necessary, should be restricted to five or fewer. *Nature Materials* seeks to promote discussion of issues relevant to materials science research and invites insightful, provocative and polemical correspondence.

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