GUIDELINES FOR SETTING AND MARKING UG1 and UG2 EXAMS

This document is intended only as guidance. Policies on exam formats, alternative markers, and so on can be found at the web page entitled “Informatics Teaching Policies,” which records policies decided at the Informatics Teaching Committee.

1 Exam Format

There is no uniform format for UG1 and UG2 examination papers. However the following two principles should be applied.

- There should be no needless variation in format from year to year. If there are pressing reasons to move to a new format, then students should be made aware of the new format as early as possible in the course.
- There should be as little variation as possible in format among the Inf1* papers and among the Inf2* papers: ideally, none at all.

The ITO maintains templates and macros for question setting.

2 Exam Content

The overall aim is to get a good spread of marks, with most marks in the range 50–70, but with a significant number above and below.

In UG1 and UG2 only, a fraction of the paper, but not more than 50%, may be made up of short multiple choice questions. This is a new departure for us, and it is difficult to formulate guidance until we, as a school, have more experience of the form.

As far as the rest of the paper goes, the traditional, longer questions should be a mixture of bookwork, application/appreciation of knowledge and, perhaps, a more creative/demanding part. As a general rule, no more than 40% of the marks should go to bookwork, though some variation between questions in this regard is permissible.

Bookwork is simply rote learning. Application/appreciation of knowledge can be quite varied, and will depend on the area of examination: it might consist of problem solving, applying techniques or results learnt to new scenarios, or of critical analysis, discussing the key features of methods and contrasting them with alternatives. The creative part might, for example, involve exploring novel situations or proving small variants of known theorems. Where possible, an exam should have a range of types of question.

Care must be taken to ensure that the exam does not focus on one narrow area of the course. One should also avoid tricky questions that test, e.g., obscure
programming language features, rather than basic principles. It is very important to ensure that failure in one part of a question does not imply failure of the rest. If a part depends on a preceding one it should be possible for candidates to obtain at least some credit for the latter part, even if the preceding one was answered incorrectly: i.e., they should not face a double penalty.

The tone of the questions should be straightforward, allowing candidates to see the point without unnecessary verbiage. Humour should be avoided: it can lead to misunderstandings by candidates, who are working under very stressful conditions.

3 Sample Answers

Sample answers must be provided for each question, following the format of the question. If a part is bookwork, then start by stating this and then provide a sample answer. For the other parts, it would be helpful if the challenges involved were briefly indicated. After the answer to each part, you should indicate briefly how the relevant marks would be allocated.

In the case of essay questions, or others where various answers are possible, you could instead simply indicate the sorts of topics you expect to see discussed and the level of information you expect, again giving a guide as to how marks will be allocated. External examiners must be able to judge if the expectations are appropriate by looking at the question and the sample answer.

Sample answers have several other functions. They help you gauge the difficulty of your question when setting the exam, and they help you ensure consistency when marking it. Lastly, in case, for whatever reason, you are unavailable to mark the exam, the sample answers should be written so as to provide a good guide to any other qualified person marking the exam.

Sample answers can either be typeset using the template provided by the ITO or handwritten. They are made available to students unless you wish them not to be: in which case, please inform the ITO of your preference.

4 Marking Scripts

Every page that a student writes on should be marked in some way, if only by a tick. Whenever marks are deducted, some indication should be made, whether in words, or by a mark, such as a cross, exclamation mark or an underline; pejorative remarks should not be made. While not required, detailed comments can be helpful to the externals: such comments might point out an error or indicate missing content.

The ITO, who check all script marking, would greatly appreciate it if marks awarded were displayed in the following standard way:

- Write the marks awarded for each part of a question in the margin and write the total for the whole question at the end of the question, ideally inside a circle.
Write the totals for each question on the front of the script book and write the final percentage mark for the paper in the box headed “For Examiner’s Use” at the top of the front page.

It is most important to mark scripts within the deadlines requested; otherwise quite unnecessary last minute pressure is put on the process of preparation by the ITO for the Board of Examiners. The ITO checks each marker’s additions within the script book, sorts the scripts, and then enters the marks in the database and double checks the data entry. This procedure is robust and means that you can be confident in the marks presented to the BoE.

5 Data Protection Act

Following university guidance, students can see their marked exam scripts, on request. They do so by appointment with the ITO. Then, if they still have queries, they may request an appointment with an appropriate course organiser or lecturer. They may not make a copy of their script, or take it away.