Informatics Taught Programme Review 2015
Executive Summary

The Taught Programme Review (TPR) of all of our undergraduate and postgraduate teaching is conducted every five years and forms an essential part of the School’s work to maintain the standard and quality of our teaching. The next review will be conducted on 25th and 26th February 2015 with a two-day visit by a panel of internal and external reviewers. The panel includes staff members from elsewhere in the University and beyond, as well as a student representative. Based on a portfolio of documentation submitted by the School early in January, the review team will discuss all aspects of the School’s teaching with a broad range of Informatics staff and students, and produce a report with a series of “commendations” and “recommendations”. The School is obliged to respond to these recommendations in writing and take action as we judge necessary.

The core of our submission to the TPR is an Analytical Report of around 40 pages that describes key aspects of teaching in Informatics and also addresses a specific list of remit items identified by the University, the College, Informatics teaching staff, and our students.

The rest of this paper gives a brief overview of the range of the School’s teaching covered by the review, and the opening pages of the report. These give an outline of the report content, details of the specific remit items, a summary of consultation carried out prior to the TPR, and information on actions taken following the previous TPR. The full Analytical Report is available online to members of Informatics teaching staff at http://www.inf.ed.ac.uk/teaching/tpr-analytical and to student reps on request.

Overview of Teaching Activities in Informatics

The School of Informatics is the largest centre of computing research in the UK with over 100 academic staff and a consistently outstanding record in both research and teaching. We currently teach 613 undergraduate and 164 taught postgraduate students on programmes in Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence, Cognitive Science, Software Engineering, Informatics, and Design Informatics. We offer a broad range of degree programmes that involve combinations of these areas with outside subjects, and allow a great deal of flexibility for students to transfer across programmes. Informatics students work together across programmes as cohorts “by year”, grouping horizontally rather than vertically; reflected, for example, in the students’ own organisation of Facebook groups for each graduation year.

We have established in the School a comprehensive teaching management structure, supported by a highly professionalised teaching administration unit (the Informatics Teaching Organisation — ITO), that delivers a learning experience characterised by high academic standards, a breadth of effective student support mechanisms, and a research-oriented outlook to teaching. Our portfolio of more than 100 taught courses across a very broad range of topics offers students an unparalleled level of student choice. Our strengths in research enable our students to be taught by research leaders, and to benefit from an intellectually highly stimulating academic environment. We are one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse schools in the University of Edinburgh — our students come from over 70 countries, and our academic staff come from 20 nations. The School is one of only two UK departments in the subject area to hold a Silver Athena SWAN award, recognizing our commitment to advancing women's careers in our discipline. Our exceptional survey scores of 94% in the area of equality and diversity attests to our broader commitment to equality and diversity. We regularly
receive accolades and prizes for our teaching excellence, and have a strong 90% overall satisfaction ratings at the National Student Survey (NSS).

*Michael Rovatsos and Ian Stark — February 2015*