This is a summary of the petition that 130 students, of which 88 were Third Year students, signed between Wed 01/04 and Fri 03/04.

The great majority of students believes that the current examination schedule is problematic and inefficient as it is hugely counter-productive in terms of quality of learning and long-term memory retaining.

In particular:

- Students have to cram an unreasonable amount of material because of the expectation that they should be able to go through 6 to 10 exams on largely unrelated topics while also working on coursework, SDP, their honours project and so on. Cramming has been frequently shown to be an extremely poor studying technique for creating long-term memory1.

- Most of the inter-term workload is formed by coursework.

- The majority of exams makes up for between 60-100% of the whole grade, with the distribution greatly shifted towards the high end (that is, the majority of the courses have a 3:1 exam/coursework weight ratio). It is clear that the evaluation is clearly focused on short examinations holding a great amount of credits percentage.

- The stress produced by the end-of-term cramming/revision period often debilitates students to the point of them crying, becoming sleep-deprived or getting severely depressed. University is supposed to be an environment for creative thought and focused learning, not a unhealthy survival game where the strongest (and/or the luckiest) win.

- This system creates two kind of courses - the S1 courses with (supposed) long-term memory learning and the S2 courses that have to be examined during the same academic semester. We don’t see a strong sound argument that would support such imbalance (unless we were to argue that first semester courses are more important than second semester courses. At the moment it’s simply not the case, and given our modular system it seems unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future).

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We recognise that changing the current system poses difficult problems, but we believe reaching a compromise between the students and the staff is in the best interests of the School of Informatics.

There are several ways we could alleviate the problem. We could for instance:

1) Simply examine all S1 courses in December, like most Schools in our University do.
2) Allow for lecturers to choose when to examine students. Moreover discourage a delayed examination unless there are actual reasons for it. Examples of such arguments could be:
   a) Course holds 20 credits and needs more revision time;
   b) A good percentage of the curriculum is shared with a S2 course;
   c) Student feedback clearly indicates that students would like the examination to happen in May.
3) Split examination so that all 20 credits courses are examined in May and 10 credits courses are examined at the end of their respective semesters. The School of Math has successfully done so for a couple of years and feedback has been generally positive.
4) Leave exam schedule as it is, but bind exam weighting to a maximum of 50% of the entire courses credits to allow for fairer distribution of effort and credits and a more relaxed examination period.

After polling students, we believe that a great majority of them would be happy to split the examination as to have 2 to 4 exams in December and the remaining in May, and several courses don’t seem to benefit at all from having a longer revision window (See typical third year courses such as PI, LP, DBS and SEOC). This belief is widely spread between all years including postgraduate students, who come here expecting a fair evaluation and are met with a system they largely disagree with. Students are in fact not told that they will have to go through a much more stressful examination in Honours and Postgraduate years during either orientation, open­days or even non­honours years.

Increasing coursework weight (and therefore decreasing exams weight) would also take away most of the stress that students are subjected to during the Spring revision period. We note that often coursework is poorly balanced in terms of time and energy requirements and should already be weighting far more than what is already the case; we also believe that simply reducing the workload, as opposed to increasing the weighting, might actually mean also reducing the amount of continuous feedback, resulting in a poorer learning environment.
Further Notes

• Students have been complaining about the situation for over 5 years: they have presented pages and pages of documentation in favour of splitting the exams period, they have given an *almost excessive* amount of unanimous feedback, they have ignited a debate last year which resulted in a unilateral staff-only vote “in favour of leaving the current exam system in place”.

• Students saw neither changes nor any particularly transparent response from the teaching staff. Given the effort of the students who put so much work in clarifying and writing down information and feedback about the issue, it seems the School should aim to have a better way to communicate TC and BoS decisions to students.

• Informatics at Edinburgh has got one of the lowest undergraduate student satisfaction rate in the country.

• A good number of students incredibly manage to pass through this stressful exam system. This proves that the university selection before first year is extremely skewed towards admitting exceptional students, but gives very little insight on anything else.

• To accommodate Large Practicals, we propose to shift the LPs deadlines to some week in January to allow people to study for exams and finish their projects when returning to university after the holidays.