

## **Proposal to change the exam/coursework weighting for Database Systems (INFR10070) to 100/0**

The Database Systems course (INFR10070) is currently assessed for 25% by coursework and for 75% by a written examination. The coursework consists in two assignments in which students are (individually) asked to write SQL<sup>1</sup> queries that comply with a given specification. Due to the high number of students typically enrolled on the course (153 in 2018/2019), the coursework is marked automatically.

This proposal seeks approval to change the exam/coursework weighting of the course from the current ratio of 75/25 to 100/0, that is, performance will be entirely assessed by means of the written examination. The coursework component will be retained, but it will only be formative and assessed for learning (with feedback).

The motivations behind the proposed change are detailed below.

*Plagiarism.* It is almost impossible to distinguish coursework submissions that are genuine and original from those that are not. This is especially the case for work that involves code in a language like SQL, because all correct solutions will have an extremely similar structure. Moreover, as discussed by our School Academic Misconduct Officer, Kyriakos Kalorkoti, during his recent LFCS lab lunch seminar, it is very hard to detect plagiarism in small pieces of work.

*Marking skew.* The coursework marks for Database Systems are typically very high, with more than two-thirds of students achieving an A grade, which consequently skews the final marks for the whole course toward the top of the scale. As expressed by our Head of School, Jane Hillston, in an email to all teaching staff on 3rd October 2018, this is a matter of concern, because it undermines the credibility of Informatics degree classifications.

*Student learning.* Overall, students tend to focus more on marks than on what they actually learning. This behaviour is exacerbated by the pressure of too many coursework deadlines. In this respect, summative assignments do not encourage student learning. Moreover, formative coursework allows for a more flexible structure in which smaller tasks (e.g., writing one or two SQL queries) can be assigned weekly and discussed openly during contact hours, in the best interests of students.

The Learning Outcomes of the course will not be affected by the proposed change. Students' ability to express queries in SQL remains a central part of the course and it will be assessed through specific questions in the written exam, where all questions are compulsory.

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<sup>1</sup> The main language for relational database systems.