Introduction to Java Programming - distance learning (IJP-DL)

Response to student feedback in 2017/18 course survey

These comments cover both the distance and on-campus version of the course, because they are very similar - although a couple of points are only relevant to one or the other delivery mode:

- I do recognise the difficulties that complete beginners face with this course - this is emphasised on the course homepage, and it is important to understand the extra effort that is required. However, many (most) beginners do pass the course and succeed in writing a real application - which is a great achievement. This year, we are exploring some introductory sessions, and additional exercises for beginners - other suggestions and feedback would be welcome.
- The philosophy of the course is explained on the course website. In particular, practical programming takes practice - it cannot be learned from lectures. The wide scope of the material, the breadth of student experience, and the desire to provide as much support for practical work as possible, also make it infeasible to provide more (meaningful) lectures in the time allocated to the course. I would love to be able to lecture on the "big picture" as well, but it isn't going to fit in the time!
- The 100% assessed practial work is essential to assess the practical nature of the course content and learning outcomes. It is unfortunate that this can sometimes inhibit discussion of the assignment exercises between students (and demonstrators). We are planning to add more (un-assessed) practial exercises which can be discussed more freely. Other suggestions are welcome.
- MSc level students are expected to be able to manage their own learning and motivation. I do not want to enforce mandatory sessions, or incentivise attendance.
- I very much welcome discussion and feedback from students - if someone is not finding the textbook useful, for example, I'd be happy to discuss why this might be.
- Lab attendance for the on-campus students fluctuates and is hard to predict. This makes it difficult to schedule and justify additional demonstrators.
- I understand the distance students' desire for more engagement and communication. We did attempt to foster more community by setting up a student-led Facebook group, in addition to the online discussion forum, but there was virtually no take-up. I'm not sure what more I can do to help with this - once again, suggestions very welcome!

Paul Anderson, September 2018