

Informatics Large Practical (ILP)

Response to student feedback in 2019/20 course survey

We have taken note of the feedback from students in this course survey, and have the following comments in response.

- We were very encouraged to read that many students liked the freedom which the ILP course gives to students to take ownership of the project and to design their own solutions to the problem which is specified for them. We feel that it is important that students get this experience of taking ownership of a project before they move on to larger projects such as the System Design Project and the Honours/MInf Project next year. As several responses noted, the final report is a very important part of the project, giving students the opportunity to reflect on their decisions and to explain their designs.
- We received suggestions to have more variation in the project such as allowing choice of programming language, or to choose between a command-line application, a web-app or a mobile app. We have considered allowing more variety in the project but it seems to make fair assessment impossible: the students on the course would not all be facing the same level of difficulty and the markers would be trying to judge whether making a fair attempt at a difficult task was worth more or less than doing an excellent job on an easy task. When contrasting a web-app or mobile app against a command-line application there are aspects of the project (such as the user interface) which have no equivalent in the command-line version, making comparisons between the two even less certain. For these reasons we set the same task for everyone to do so that the differences in their results are related to their level of skill, not which task they chose to do.
- We noted the suggestion to have a lecture on building and using Maven projects. We think that this is a very helpful suggestion and will try to incorporate this into next year's lectures.
- Several people pointed out that in previous years the practical had involved creating an Android app. We found that too much time was being spent on getting Android Studio and the Android emulator installed on people's laptops instead of working on the software development aspects of the project. In addition, Android Studio is a very resource-intensive application, making development on a standard laptop difficult. These were our reasons for moving

away from Android development and we consider this to have been a good decision.

- Finally, many students recommended starting work on the project early and working on it consistently week-by-week. We very much agree with this advice, which should make your experience of the Informatics Large Practical more enjoyable.

Stephen Gilmore and Paul Jackson, 7th August 2020