

Informatics Large Practical (ILP)

Response to student feedback in 2020/21 course survey

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

- First, many thanks to the students of the 2020/21 academic year for all these detailed and incisive comments. We are always very appreciative of the student feedback that we receive each year and do what we can to act on the suggestions to improve the course when it is offered in the following year.
- In the 2021/22 academic year the course will again be an individual practical with a significant programming component. We will again be using the Java programming language for the practical so the comments which suggest revising Java are very relevant. You can do this with a Java textbook, or by reviewing the Inf1-OOP course materials, or by following one of the many on-line tutorials which are available for Java. You will notice that many of the comments from the students who took the course last year urge you to start work on the practical early so you can be ready to do that by revising your Java knowledge before the course starts.
- As was the case last year, the practical is designed so that you can complete it on a laptop or your home computer. There is no necessity to use the DICE platform to develop your project and at runtime the project depends only on some lightweight services which you can run on your own machine. The practical is set up in this way in order to allow it to be completed by any student who cannot attend in-person; although of course we hope that the circumstances of the current pandemic will allow many, perhaps most, students to be on-campus this year.
- As noted in the student feedback, the Informatics Large Practical last year was entirely on-line; lectures were recorded and delivered on LEARN, and the labs and lecturer office hours were conducted on Microsoft Teams. We were unable to follow the planned hybrid teaching model because in first semester last year the university's buildings closed in response to the circumstances of the pandemic at that time. This meant that in-person lab demonstrating in the Appleton Tower was not possible, and there was no lecture theatre large enough to accommodate the ILP class in a socially-distanced setting, so the course was entirely on-line. In the 2021/22 academic year we plan to follow the hybrid teaching model by re-introducing the in-person labs in the Appleton Tower for face-to-face teaching, although we will also have a remote lab hosted on Microsoft Teams. Students who are studying remotely, or who are self-isolating in Edinburgh, will be able to ask questions of the lab demonstrators and course lecturers in the remote lab on Teams.
- Both of the labs run on a "drop-in" basis. There are no worksheets or fixed activities to do in the labs each week, so you just attend if you have questions which you would like to ask of the demonstrators. Attendance is flexible, so you can come and go from the in-person and remote labs as you wish; you are not locked in for a two-hour session. Depending on how much development you have been able to do, you can decide whether or not you think that the labs will be helpful to you. In any given week you can decide to attend the in-person lab, or the remote lab, or neither, or both, depending on the level of support that you need at that time.
- In addition to the labs, we will try to give high-quality support on the course's Piazza forum. We appreciate that some programming problems can completely stop software development in its tracks so where we can we will try to get you un-stuck as soon as possible with helpful suggestions on the course's Piazza forum.
- Thanks for reading this response. We look forward to welcoming you back to Edinburgh in September!

Stephen Gilmore and Paul Jackson, July 2021