

# Informatics Student Course Feedback 2017/18

<http://www.inf.ed.ac.uk/teaching/surveys/2017-18>

This report contains feedback from students about a course taught in the School of Informatics during the 2017/18 academic year, in response to the following questions:

- What would you say to students interested in taking this course?
- What did you find most valuable about the course?
- What improvements, if any, would you make to the course?
- Please add any other comments you have about workshops and tutors

Each course organiser receives this report as well as statistics on multiple-choice responses. All these reports, together with student feedback about individual members of teaching staff, are collected and sent to the Director of Learning and Teaching.

Please note that these are personal responses from individual students: some courses only have a few responses and a small sample can be unrepresentative.

Stereotyping and bias, especially unconscious bias, is a serious concern in any survey gathering personal responses. All students received the rubric below before completing the surveys, and you can read a brief introduction to issues of unconscious bias on the university web pages at <http://edin.ac/2iypZBv>

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## **Rubric given to all students taking the end-of-course feedback survey**

We value your opinions on the courses you take here at the University, as they allow us to shape future delivery and development. We welcome constructive comments about your courses, whether positive or negative, and ask you to give details about any issues in order to help the course organiser to understand and address them.

We encourage you to be aware of the potential for bias in the completion of these questionnaires, so we have developed resources which may be helpful to you:

- Equality, Diversity and Unconscious Bias (<http://edin.ac/2iypZBv>)

You also have a responsibility to provide feedback in a manner which does not breach the University's Dignity and Respect Policy:

- University of Edinburgh Dignity and Respect Policy (<http://edin.ac/1Cq0VZY>)

The results of the questionnaires will never be analysed in a way that seeks to identify individual students from their responses. However, should you wish to remain anonymous, please do not identify yourself in your answers to the survey questionnaire implicitly or explicitly.

## Comments Report

What advice would you give to a student taking this course in future?

- Be prepared to spend >48h on coursework 2, work on your own without relying on any help and hear 'good' old KK's jokes.
- Buy a good book on it cause the lectures aren't helpful and there's only one lab.
- Do your hardest not to fall behind, as it is VERY difficult to catch up once you do so. Go to tutorials and ask questions when you don't understand things. Go to more than one tutorial a week if you still feel like things are not clear. Also, never leave the coursework until the last minute, there is a lot to work for. Always read the notes before the lecture, makes everything much clearer.
- Don't leave the learning coursework to the week before the deadline, never mind the day before...
- Ensure you keep up to date with the content
- I believe that this is the hardest Informatics course in second year because there's a lot of information we need to know and the two threads aren't connected. Definitely read the lecture notes and do the tutorial exercises to really understand the material.
- It's a lot of work but it pays off. The Algorithms part establishes a lot of jargon and background knowledge used throughout Informatics and the Learning part is conceptually really interesting. Don't expect to be able to slack off though.
- It's challenging, so keep up with tutorials and labs. Also, start coursework early.
- Make sure you know your Linear Algebra + other math
- Read the lecture notes. Start the coursework early.
- Read the notes, don't just rely on the lectures. Also start the coursework early.
- Start the learning coursework early, it is significantly harder than the algorithms coursework. Attend KK's lectures, don't bother with Hiroshi's, if you know any linear algebra and calculus then you'll be fine. Attend his labs though, and get to grips with Matlab. Read around the course, this is the groundwork for a huge field, there's so much more interesting stuff to do.
- Start the machine learning coursework early
- Study the notes in parallel with the lectures, don't fall behind and start the courseworks on day 1 of release!
- Take it
- The content of this course is very interesting, but be prepared for a lot of work because it is a challenging course
- The learning part never really gets interesting but is a good introduction to later ML course so pay attention anyway. Try to make sure you get put in a tutorial taught by KK as this will mean you understand the material much better, especially that which is taught by him in lectures.
- This course is hard, it requires a lot of thought outside of the lecture theatre to understand the concepts. A firm understanding of Java and mathematical proofs are needed to feel at ease with the course.
- You will need to spend more time on learning. Lectures are not quite clear.

## Comments Report

What did you find most valuable about the course?

- Algorithms and Data Structure Lectures, Tutorial Exercises
- Coursework in this course has been some of the most challenging and rewarding I've yet done. Good stuff.
- Coursework, tutorials with KK (who is an excellent tutor).
- Exploration of core algorithms in computer science
- I mainly valued the ADS part because it will be useful for me in a future career and also in interviews for internships and jobs. A lot of it was new to me but it was very interesting and I will definitely use the material in the future. I valued the Learning thread for the gained insight to introductory machine learning algorithms but the delivery could be better (see next section). The lecture notes were helpful as well because they gave more detailed explanations than the lecture slides.
- KK's lectures help to develop intuitive understanding
- Learning about the different types of software complexity and data systems
- Lecture notes
- The core content was interesting and useful
- The course provided valuable insight into the field of algorithms and machine learning. The notes provided and the recommended reading are valuable pieces of research.
- The courseworks made me learn a lot about Matlab and also made me better in Latex
- The learning coursework was really interesting, especially the final part which gave us the freedom to implement what we wanted from the course.
- The lecture notes.
- The lectures notes are EXTREMELY good. Textbooks in other courses are often overkill, but lecture notes aren't enough. The lecture notes in this class are seriously great.
- The notes were really good even though it is a lot of reading.
- The notes, giving further insight to how the material of the lectures relates to the real world and starting from scratch building upwards.
- Tutorial sheets were a good form to consolidate knowledge
- Tutorials and coursework
- Well explained coursework

## Comments Report

What improvements, if any, would you make to the course?

- A re-write and review of the Learning slides, as sometimes it felt as if the lectures did not flow well as slides could have been ordered better
- Better organisation of the learning part.
- For the first coursework, the handout was much better at explaining what we had to do than for the second coursework (e.g. what's a confusion matrix?). Also it would have been good if we had been taught a little bit about vectorization in the lectures especially since it was important for the coursework and most people probably have limited experience with Matlab/Octave/numpy.
- Have more labs since, the course has more than 100 students yet there's only an hour long lab. How are we expected to learn matlab like this, especially when you don't teach us the basics in the lectures.
- I think that this should be two courses, not one since the topics are very different. I didn't like Hiroshi's style of teaching. I felt that he only described what was in the slides without proper explanations. Especially, when presenting mathematical formulae, he only gave them to us without explaining where they come from or what is the reasoning behind them. Furthermore, I didn't like the way he squashed multiple missed lectures (due to UCU action) into one because it was impossible to understand anything from them. I felt like it was done like this only so that the contents could be in the coursework/exam. Also the Lecture Notes for ADS are slightly outdated (for example mentions Inf1B which isn't taught) so reviewing them could be helpful.
- I understand that Hiroshi wanted to strike, however it was not fair to give us a full coursework on content that we hadn't been taught. (And telling us to watch the previous year's lectures online does not count as being taught the content)
- I would say the strikes didn't help that much. Made the schedule difficult
- It's too hard and too much to learn. We did not have many lectures from learning due to strike and CW does not care about it. Too challenging.
- Learning section - maybe focus a bit more on intuitive understanding of the material before throwing all the maths at us (particularly with the neural networks part).
- More teaching about vectorisation techniques for MATLAB
- None
- Publish past papers' solutions
- Python support for those using it for their coursework
- Release answers for more past-papers. Release answers for the self-study exercises in the lecture notes. I appreciate that the reason behind holding them back is that many students can't help but peek at the answers and thus they don't get the practise necessary - but I think it's unfair to hold them back from the students who actually have the self-control to only look at them when necessary.
- The first coursework that we have received under professor Kalorkoti was very well organised. It was challenging, but we have received a 10-page handout with VERY careful and clear explanations over what we had to do. In the lectures, prof. Kalorkoti explained everything carefully, but made us refer to other material in case things were unclear. I have also attended his workshops and he helped me a lot with clarifying my uncertainties. The second coursework was the complete opposite. The topic was very challenging and the explanations in the handout were VERY brief. I had to run over all the options I had available in order to just clarify "what had to be done": questions on Piazza (very rarely answered to), shuffling through all the lab material and lectures just to find out an explanation that was not given where it was supposed to. Fortunately, Heru Praptono was available and helped a lot with my questions, but I consider the provided material very unclear and difficult to grasp. The coursework was also very lengthy and time-consuming (and the lack of clarifications made it even worse). Having started such a coursework, I spent full days and nights working only on it so I could submit in time, making me fall behind very badly in my other subjects. I appreciate the learning experience and I do feel that I have improved on the topic, but the way it was taught and conducted made it difficult to enjoy.
- The learning and data side was not very well explained and more examples would have been useful for this
- There's too much workload with Lectures, reading material, tutorials and labs all at once - a bit less would be nice. I would honestly split the course in two different smaller courses: Algorithms and Data Structures being one and Learning the other. The two threads have next to no intersection and it's a little tiring having to wait wait for say Algorithms lectures because they're only happening once a week close to the end of the semester. It also feels like we're not really doing any of the topics properly, because it's like two 15 credit courses fused into one 20 credit one.
- This should be 2 courses, amalgamating them was a bizarre move. I found the learning half of the courses lectures a waste of time. No commentary on Hiroshi, I think he did as well as he could, however learning seems to be an incredibly practical exercise. Perhaps fewer lectures and compulsory attendance 'School of Maths'-style workshops? The labs are definitely a good initiative.
- This year I think we got a little bit screwed over due to the strikes affecting lectures and there being a lot of uncertainty as to whether we were expected to catch up in our own time or whether the material would be NE and so on. As to feedback so far being helpful and informative I've yet to receive any - I'd expected to have received feedback regarding the first coursework by now, but I suppose the strikes might've affected that as well.

## Comments Report

What improvements, if any, would you make to the course? (continued)

- Underwhelmed by learning section of course. Expected more excitement from the lecturer. In my opinion, the lecturer is simply reading from the slides and there is no interaction with the topic.
- It is just quite sample with the algorithm but not quite clear with learning part of the lectures...

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## Comments Report

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Please add any other comments you have about workshops and tutors

- A lot of tutors didn't really seem to be too interested in teaching and would sometimes state something that's just plain wrong (more when it came to the mathematical bit of the Learning thread).
- I would specifically like to thank Heru Praptono for his help with clarifying the 2nd coursework we had been given. His explanations made the very confusing problems straightforward and easy to solve.
- KK is a fantastic tutor, especially when allowed to go off the 'scripted' questions. He can be a little rude at times, but only in a funny, friendly way that keeps you engaged :)
- Nice tutorials, I liked that for the algorithms part the solutions were released beforehand so the aim wasn't to just solve them in the tutorial but rather to get a deeper understanding of the material.
- Since my tutor and Hiroshi participated in strikes, tutorials' content was far ahead of what we covered and nobody could explain it (since my tutor participated in strike)
- The tutor was really great, was always happy to take questions and answer them to the best of his ability.
- The tutorials definitely helped me understand the topics more in both threads.
- Tutor was very supportive and dedicated even through the strike
- they were extremely challenging though