London Perl Workshop

2012

Feedback & Suggestions

a joint production by

The London Perl Workshop

& YAPC Conference Surveys

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An Introduction

This document includes fragments from comments that were submitted by attendees of the 2012 London Perl Workshop during a survey taken after the conference had completed. Each survey provided the attendee with the ability to provide suggestions for future events and feedback on the 2012 event.

Additional organiser comments may appear in response to some of the attendee comments, so that you can hopefully understand the reasons behind decisions that were made. These are our own personal thoughts, and merely stated to hopefully explain why some things happened the way they did.

One thing to bear in mind while reading this report, is that everyone's time and effort in putting on the conference was given freely. We did it because we enjoy programming Perl and wanted to have the chance to give something back to the community. All the organisers have full time jobs and were fortunate enough to have partners and family who were willing to put up with losing us for several nights over the last year, in order to bring the workshop to you. So a big thanks to them for letting us do it :)

Not everything goes according to plan, and the trials of hosting a technical event for several hundred people are not without frustration on the part of the organisers. Hopefully what follows provides a glimpse of the effort involved in organising a conference. To those who submitted their feedback, many thanks for doing so, as it really is very much appreciated and will hopefully help to improve the event for the future. Long may it continue.

The 2012 organisers of The London Perl Workshop

Rating The Conference

After asking attendees to rate the conference, the survey then asked the attendee whether there were any strong views.

- The 2012 website - very ugly stylesheet, sorry! Announcements were a bit sparse before the event. Possibly more posts on blogs.perl.org and more facebook activity. I don't think numbers attending were a problem, but some people had seemed unclear on the date or were unprepared for it...
- Being kicked out an hour early did knacker things somewhat.
- Could do with the schedule being e-mailed out before the event.
- Directions: even for my second visit to the LPW it is difficult finding my way in the building, which room is where, where to get tea...
- Enjoyed "Learning Perl together" course - very helpful and super presenter (Ian Norton).
- Great day, see you next year!
- I had already seem some of the talks before so didn't attend some of the more interesting talks of this LPW, but a couple of the talks I went to were more of a ramble. I may have just picked the wrong talks for me. And we missed the lightning talks, which was a shame!
- I know it wasn't the fault of the LPW organisers, but I felt the confusion in opening the venue initially with the University, and the rush to exit at the end, somewhat detracted from what was otherwise a good event.
- I marked "Somewhat satisfied" on the registration process because it was actually quite difficult to tell whether or not I was registered. I am a forgetful person and registered early, so closer to the event I wanted to double check I was registered and found that difficult to discern through the website.
- I struggled a bit to find the exact address (street, postcode)
- I think it's grand that LPWs exist. I hail from mainland Europe and annual LPW is certainly something I look forward to. Learning, Socialising, good Eating and seeing London, what's not to like? There was a bit of queuing here and there (coffee lines) but that's not something easily resolved. There are always going to be bottlenecks. It was too bad we had to leave the venue early (during lightning talks) but that was beyond our control.
- I think the organisers, and particularly MDK, do a fantastic job. It's amazing to have such a collection of topics and speakers, and not be charged an entrance fee. It's a real shame the lightning talks were cut short, as it meant the day ended on a somewhat low note.
- I would like to see a separate lecture room used for the day to hold talks specifically aimed at beginner/junior level developers (and to make this clear on the schedule). It had been mentioned in some talks that there are a lot of 'crap' developers at this level so some talks explaining proper ways of coding, important modules, what employers are looking for in developers at this level etc. I feel a reason why there are many bad beginner/junior Perl developers might be due to the fact that they don't teach Perl in a lot of universities so more structured technical talks would be a good way to improve this.
- It didn't affect my enjoyment of the conference too much, but I did miss mdk's talk and the start of Dave Cross's first session, due to having difficulty finding the place. It looked dead easy on the website. It's Apple Maps's fault really! Trying to marry up the data on the Google Maps applet on the LPW webpage with what Apple Maps on the iPhone said was a real so-and-so. Getting the web version of Google Maps working on my iPhone with location awareness, which I did afterwards, should prevent future wanderings. At the time I just used direction search, but not before I had gone round in an actual circle. I landed at

Goodge St Tube but totally missed Howland St for some reason. I usually have a great sense of direction and read maps well, so perhaps I was overconfident - London seems much more densely laid out than Manchester. Plus I have lived in London and visited it several times so I didn't think of it as somewhere I didn't know, but in fact every little quarter is packed with addresses, streets and buildings! Of course next time I shall probably find it with ease if we are back at Westminster Uni.

- It was great that this year the building wasn't 110 degrees inside.
- Mark and all of the volunteers did good!
- My only problem with the schedule was there wan't a clear coffee break in the afternoon - or they may not have been a coffee break at all? In any case, I didn't get a coffee in the afternoon and it's a long day :) Otherwise, I thought it was very good the way it was chunked.
- the external social needs more tables and chairs
- The facilities where not great, trying to find your way around the venue was confusing and difficult.
- The LPW is one of the most perfect events one can ever aspire to attend. The staff always puts a lot of effort into it, and it shows. It's high quality, and I hope it stays that way!
- The organization was close to perfect.Everything worked out - great schedules. It was a great conference. Btw. the small signpost were excellent! The iCal calender for the schedules are a great idea.
- The site for previous LPW was much better.
- The venue is great, except its communication with the organisers. The hold up at the start wasn't really a problem, but only telling us with a few minutes' notice that we'd lose an hour of the planned event at the end was pretty rubbish
- The website didn't show as the #1 on google. And they kicked us out in the middle of the best part of any Perl workshop -- the lightning talks!
- The website is really, really, really dated, does not help with perl's image.

For The 2012 Organisers

For the final question of the survey, we asked "Do you have any feedback you would like to give specifically to this year's organisers?"

- Did a really great job getting it all together!

- Different venue please. Liked the sponsors being there and 40% off O'Reilly books. Would have liked to see more books.

- Free tea/coffee in the morning is wonderful. But (for the second year running) there was a massive queue, because people weren't able to pass through the serving table quickly. I'm not sure *exactly* what the holdup was, but I think it might work better if the table were in the middle, with coffee "stations" on both sides. (Or even two tables in different places. Or the table with the coffee on one side, and the muffins on the other side) This is quite awkward, given that the coffee break is only 30 minutes.

- Good job.

- Great job again. Thanks!

- Great job! It was a great experience to be there - I really enjoyed my time. Probably here are a few things. Reusable batches would have been nice. I got a sticker which I put on my pullover, however, once I decided to take off my pullover I was nameless. There had been OReilly lanyards a liitle bit later, that's a better way to place them on cards. The coffee experience has been nice, probably there should be two lanes for coffee by putting up 2 tables. Once again - great conference, I'll make sure to attend next year, too!

- great let's do it again

- I know a bit about organizing events: great jobs, ladies and guys! The charity was definitely a good idea. The talks (I attended) were great. I just would have like... MOAR COFFEE! More precisely coffee between 9am and 6pm (or 4pm) I still don't know if I missed the WiFi or not :-)

- I know we are grateful to all the organisers and sponsors, and the UoW for providing the venue ... however: the coffee breaks did not really work - ran out of coffee by the time the back of the queue reached the table (again); only snacks available were hyper-sugary cup cakes (again - I ate a quarter of one last year and had to throw the rest away)- could the sponsors and/or organisers think of something alternative?

- I like the idea of having newbie events but I don't think that should be at the expense of intermediate or advanced events. In other words, add more newbie events without removing others and try and ensure newbie events clash with advanced events and not intermediate events.

- I really enjoyed the high level talks on unit testing and plundering programming paradigms in the morning. More talks like that to get people thinking is always good. THANK YOU!

- I would have wanted to know there was no wifi beforehand (maybe it was on the site and I missed it) since I would have been willing to set it up for myself with the university.

- I'm thoroughly unimpressed with the way the university treated LPW in this instance: not only were there exams going on in the same building all morning, but we were ejected before the end of the conference, and with (as far as I could tell) almost no notice. It's particularly galling that this put a sour note on the end of the day (and some of the lightning talks I'd most wanted to see had to be cancelled). I do understand that finding a suitable venue in central London, at an affordable price, is not easy. And I also don't blame the LPW organisers for these problems; I think it's clear where the root cause lies. But after the way

we were treated this year, I think it would be much better if we had a different venue next year, even if it needed more commercial sponsorship.

- Just to point out where I went wrong finding the place. I don't know whether other folks had the same problem - quite possibly not.
- Keep up the great work!
- Nothing I haven't said above (strong points). Keep up the great work - it was delightful.
- Signage for Motortrak/Eligo W1 4 was poor, rest of rooms where signed well.
- Thank you for all your time and effort. I'm bootstrapping my company, and can't afford to go to things like YAPC::EU, so I really appreciate the opportunity to meet up with other Perl types.
- Thank you very much to everyone involved. This was yet another excellent LPW, and I very much look forward to the next one.
- Thank you.
- Thanks a lot ! :o)
- Thanks for a great workshop - it's amazing that it is free and I made sure to donate to keep them going. I liked that the rooms were signposted clearly and the front-desk people were friendly and informative.
- Thanks for a great workshop!
- The directions (arrows) to the rooms were sometimes very unclear.
- The obvious organisational problem was the 6pm cut-off at the end of the day. This seems to have been a problem on the venue's side rather than the conference, but it was very anti-climactic. Other than that, it went quite well. Perhaps some clearer signage to the rooms within the venue would help too. The 10 minutes between sessions was just about right.
- There were a lot of women there. This is great, and unexpected - I was expecting to be much more in the minority. I go to a lot of technical events, and there were more women here than in most other events - as in literally more, not just proportionately more. Whatever you did to have that happen, well done!
- This was my first (and hopefully not my last) LPW. I thought it was fantastically organised. I only wish that I could've gone to a few more of the talks, but that would've required an extreme advancement in science. Thoroughly enjoyed it, Well Done!
- This will probably come across as a trivial whine, but please can the audience (especially a prominent sponsor and speaker sat at the front row of the lightning talks) be asked not to tap VERY LOUDLY on their laptops during talks? Immensely distracting and shouldn't be tolerated.
- UoW should really get its act together and avoid springing surprises like "you have to leave by 6, didn't we tell you?"
- While the venue was great, as usual, their lack of communication in a) exams at same time, and b) shutting venue early was poor, and is a factor when considering value for money.
- Yes. ;-) Please, next time no encoding errors on the badges. Also, be aware, that there are "hot spots"/"peaks" during these conferences. Like e.g. distributing the badges on arrival. Coming to a conference, having the badges printed out on a table, partially obscured (paper over paper) and someone telling you "Go find it", really doesn't work for ~100 people. Also better multithreading when giving out drinks and nutrition @ coffee break would help. I know the english are well educated in a "stand in line" mentality, but at least make it several lines next time. :-)

For Future Organisers

In the final section of the survey, we asked attendees "Do you have any suggestions for improvement (please give examples where possible)?"

- A longer break for drinks in the afternoon if possible. Drinking water (the drinking fountains all seemed to be switched off)

- Already mentioned, open up two tables for coffee - not just a single long line of tables. What I really would like to see in the future is a gpx/kml file for google routes. That would be awesome to use! The lightning talk section was great! Probably extending this section will provide a better snapshot on everything Perl.
- As mentioned, more talks for developers at beginner/junior level, advice on how to improve there skills, listing functionality they really should know, what employers are looking for, how to get Perl jobs (show list of companies in London that use Perl etc)
- Bring more coffee
- Coffee queuing, perhaps more distributed. Wifi in the venue? Although I must say I've not used my laptop, it's nice to be able to get my mail on my cellphone without having to roam on a nondomestic network. When having printed out stickers for nametags, something that ensures they stay alphabetised, a simple binder with letter-code would suffice (they were quickly non-alphabetised as time passed).
- Don't put me up against the two talks I want to see next time?
- How about a "How to do X" track: something between the tutorials and the regular talks. 15 minute talks on pragmatic and practical "how to do an X in Perl". And case studies could go in here. Encourage companies to talk about how they're using Perl, and what would make Perl even better for them. Was surprised that it wasn't "advertised" on blogs.perl.org and similar places. While I wouldn't like to see the level of spamming that YAPC::NA did last year, a little bit of PR would be good.
- I do. About parallelization of actions. But pictures are worth a thousand words, so if someone is interested, mail me rj@petamem.com and I'll send you a drawing. ;-)
- I guess, the same as the above specific suggestion. For tea/coffee breaks, try to lay things out to maximise the throughput of attendees. You've got maybe 50/100/300 people all arriving at about the same time - figure out where the queue is going to be, and how to get people through and *away* from the serving area in as short a time as is practical. Putting the same thing on more than one table probably helps. Making tables "double sided" may help, if that fits.
- I suppose, some schedule enforcement would be nice. Just not to let one speaker take away speaking time of the fellow after him.
- I think it's going to be very hard to improve on this years, but good luck with that.
- I'd like to see fewer of the less serious talks, eg Dave Cross's talk on the history of perl and James Laver's "Lovecraftian perl", and give the time to first-time speakers. I'd also like to see the long tutorial sessions not be run in parallel with the rest of the talks but instead to run on a different day, both so that people can go to both, but also so that the tutors can see the other talks and take part in the hallway track too. And how about a BoF track, with a room set aside (the L3 classroom would have been great for this, big enough for two groups at once probably) for ad-hoc groups to get together. This has happened at some YAPCs and was really helpful with making the CPAN-testers the powerhouse that they now are.
- More t-shirts. I left without any additions to my wardrobe. Please advise sponsors that t-

shirts provide better, year round, marketing than pens, playing cards and coasters.
- More testing of projectors in the morning before the talks are supposed to start!
- Not really. It was great! Well done mdk and everyone else who made LPW happen!
- perhaps encouraging attendees to register which talks they are interested in early might help scheduling to avoid conflicts... also, I arrived after the start despite having left home early (7:07 from Bournemouth), ... can't you have less interesting talks at the start :-) ?
- Please keep up the good work!
- Please try to ensure the rooms are connected by a common space (if possible) to encourage inter-speaker mingling. Please allow a 5 minute interlude between talks if there is any distance/reseating necessary.
- The abscence of wifi is sometimes really troubling.
- The address of the venues and of the social events should be easily accessible (first page for the venue, first click in the wiki for the events). If you choose not to provide WiFi, maybe make it clear on the website (I missed that point, I wouldn't have brought my laptop so). Having coffee available anytime during the conference is something I like. Come to any hackathon on Act : we need a schedule sized/designed for smartphones!
- The cupcakes were great again, but the option of something with slightly less insane levels of frosting would be appreciated
- The website schedule should be styled to be printed on one page, it makes it easier to carry. Schedule print-outs ran out at the conference so I printed my own beforehand. Indicate on the schedule which talks are going to be videoed so that if two talks clash and you can't decide then you can skip the one being videoed. Some of the talk descriptions could be better (more than one line). Maybe have a "how to get there" section with directions from major train stations (Paddington, Waterloo, Kings X) and which is the closest easiest tube station?

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[1] http://yapc-surveys.org
[2] http://act.yapc.eu/lpw2012