

# Unifying MSc Physics and MSc Astrophysics Problem-Based Learning with LabVIEW NXG: A Critical Review

NI Academic Users Forum 2019

Dr Richard James Lewis

Cardiff University School of Physics and Astronomy (PHYSX)

www.cardiff.ac.uk/physics-astronomy



### Overview

### Plan: transitioning core modules to NXG 2.1

- Summary of MSc activity at Cardiff PHYSX
- Core MSc module structure: then and now

### **Execution: learning and application**

- Impact of NXG on LabVIEW language learning
- Impact of NXG on problem-based learning
- Logistical issues and their solutions

#### Outcome

- Student reception of new core module
- Future MSc core module design
- Summary of LabVIEW NXG 2.1 critique

## Plan: transitioning core modules to NXG 2.1



#### Summary of MSc activity at Cardiff PHYSX

#### **Programmes**

- MSc Physics
- MSc Data-Intensive Physics
- MSc Compound Semiconductor Physics
- MSc Astrophysics
- MSc Data-Intensive Astrophysics
- MSc Gravitational Wave Physics (2019/20)

#### Cohort of 2018/19

- 24 students (11 Physicists, 13 Astrophysicists)
- 2:1 minimum entrance requirement
- Dedicated co-located MSc teaching facilities
- 20cr common core module with LabVIEW NXG

#### Transitioning core modules to LabVIEW NXG

#### Major restructuring for 2018/19

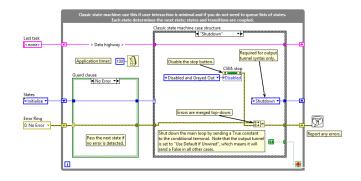
- Merger of core autumn physics and astrophysics modules
- MSc Physics pattern adopted for this 20cr module:
  - Practical introduction to LabVIEW (10cr)
  - Student-lead micro-projects (10cr)
- Transition from LabVIEW 2015 to LabVIEW NXG 2.1\*

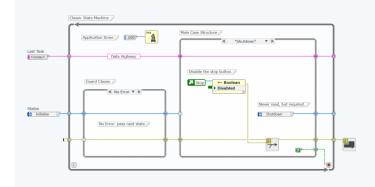
#### Why LabVIEW NXG?

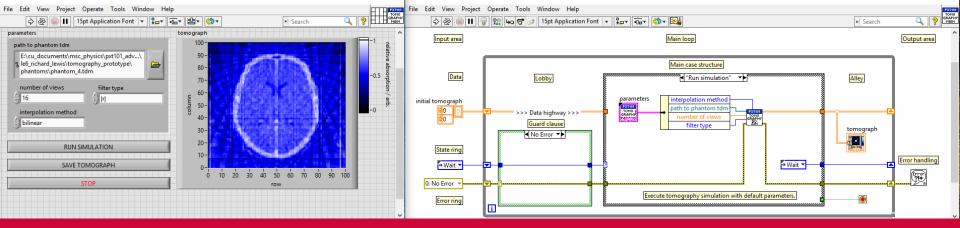
- Pedagogy: gentler, more logical learning curve
- Logistics: useful from day 1, therefore always relevant

#### What do we want to maintain / enhance?

- Students feel valued as part of our academic community
- Exceptionally high student feedback score average of 93







### Old structure (LabVIEW 2015): drills to application

Week 1: projects, front panel, block diagram, dataflow, Express VIs, AAP

Week 2: arrays, clusters, file I/O, case structures, loops, sub VIs, errors, style

Week 3: functional specifications, efficient VI engineering

Week 4: interfacing with hardware, MAX, VISA, AAP with hardware

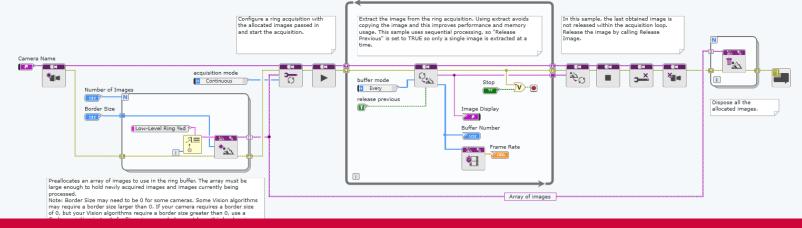
Week 5: development paradigms, type definitions, DAQmx

Week 6: error handling, tunnels, shift registers, classic state machines

Week 7: event structure, event-driven state machines, functional global variables

Week 8: queues, queued state machines

Weeks 9 to 11: applying LabVIEW to micro-projects



[]

+÷ ×-

\_\_\_\_

NØ

Ē

°O

## Planned (LabVIEW NXG 2.0): DAQ-first, applications throughout

 Week 1: a guided tour of LabVIEW NXG, establishing common and linked contexts

 Week 2 (AAV and IO I): no coding required, NXG functionality, DAQ on 1 and 2 channels

 Week 3 (AAV and IO II): coding drag and drop, DAQ on 1 and 2 channels, images

 Week 4 (AAV and IO III): coding from scratch, DAQ on 1 and 2 channels, images

 Week 5 (looping and iteration I): looping and iteration, looping AAV code

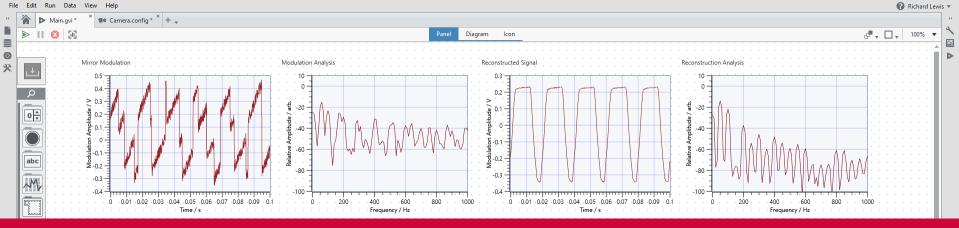
 Week 6 (looping and iteration II): classic state machines

 Week 7 (looping and iteration III): event-driven state machines

 Week 8 (looping and iteration IV): queued state machines

 Weeks 9 to 11: continuing to apply

 Weeks 9 to 11: continuing to apply



### Result (LabVIEW NXG 2.1): DAQ-first, applications throughout

Week 1: a guided tour of LabVIEW NXG, establishing common and linked contexts
Week 2 (AAV and IO I): no coding required, NXG functionality, DAQ on 1 and 2 channels
Week 3 (AAV and IO II): coding drag and drop, DAQ on 1 and 2 channels, images\*
Week 4 (AAV and IO III): coding from scratch, DAQ on 1 and 2 channels, images\*

Week 5: module recess

Week 6 (looping and iteration I): looping AAV code and classic state machines

Week 7 (looping and iteration II): classic and event-driven state machines

Week 8 (looping and iteration III): : event-driven and queued state machines

Weeks 9 to 11: continuing to apply LabVIEW to micro-projects

www.cardiff.ac.uk/physics-astronomy

Execution: learning and application Impact of NXG on language learning Session 2.1: Basic Coding (Dropping in Controls and Indicators, Wiring, AAV)



Impact of NXG on language learning

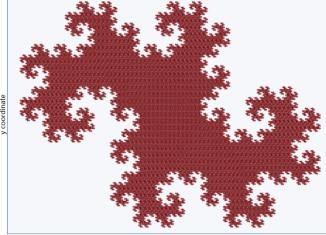
#### Summary of targets for NXG course

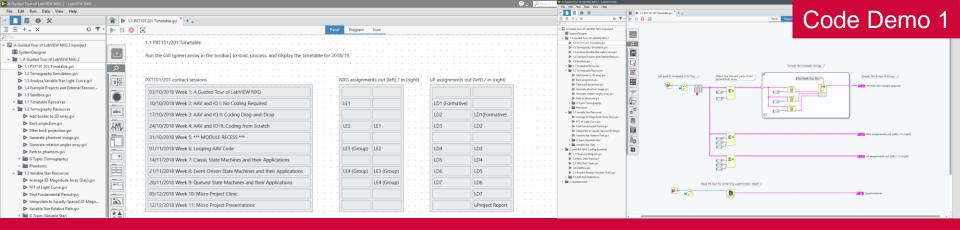
- Everything in projects (no slides)
- Every session recorded on Panopto
- No (nasty) surprises, anticipate student issues
- Physics **and** Astrophysics examples throughout

#### Lots to talk about, so have to be selective:

- Experience of keeping everything in projects
- NXG interface advantages and issues
- (Somewhat) nasty surprises, workarounds

Dragon Curve



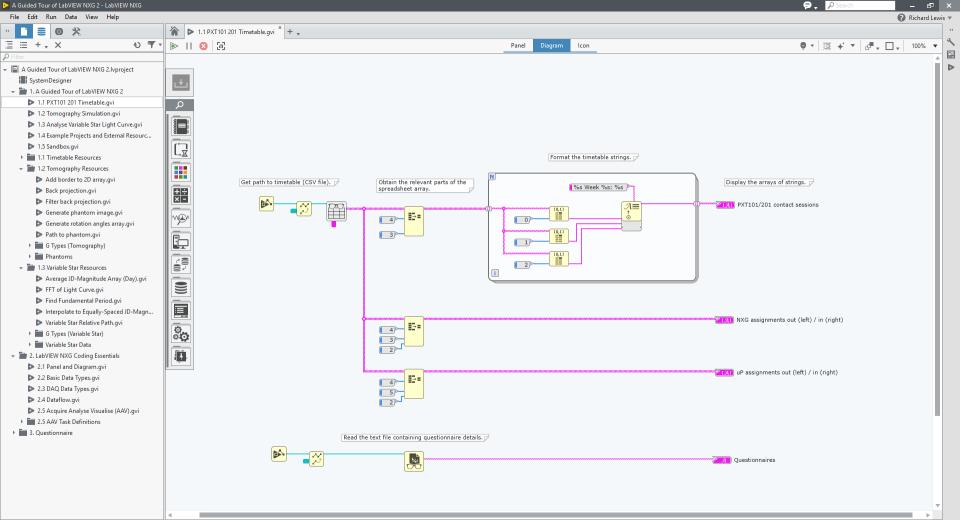


## Experience of keeping everything in projects

- Dramatically simplifies distribution logistics, projects enforced, real directories
- Full integration of session questionnaires, exercise scripts, and their solutions
- Live streaming of session capture allows students to review during hands-on
- Sessions much more dynamic than for 2017/18, with far less start-and-stop
- Formatting tools in NXG for free text comments are very simplistic
- Workbooks are much more sophisticated, but not available to end user

A Guided Tour of LabVIEW NXG 2 - LabVIEW NXG										🖻 🗸  🔎 Se	arch		- 8	
File Edit Run Data View Help												6	🕽 Richard L	ewis 🔻
" ≦ ◎ X	<b>À</b>	1.1 PXT1	11 201 Timetable.gvi × + 🗸											**
፲ = + - × • • 🔻	• 🕨 💷	8		Pane	l Diagram	lcon					e <b>r</b>	- D -	125%	- ~
P Filter														
👻 🔚 A Guided Tour of LabVIEW NXG 2.lvproject	· · · ·	• •	. 1.1 PXT101/20.1 Timetable											
SystemDesigner	_↓	• •	. Run the GVI (green arrow in the toolbar) to load, process, and display the tim	••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••										
👻 🚞 1. A Guided Tour of LabVIEW NXG 2			. Run the GVI (green arrow in the touldar) to load, process, and display the tim	etable 101.20	10/.19									
1.1 PXT101 201 Timetable.gvi														
1.2 Tomography Simulation.gvi														
Þ 1.3 Analyse Variable Star Light Curve.gvi	0+		PXT101/201 contact sessions		NXG assignme	nts out (left) /	in (right)	uP assignments out	: (left) / in (right)	<u>.</u>				4
1.4 Example Projects and External Resourc			03/10/2018 Week 1: A Guided Tour of LabVIEW NXG	1										1
1.5 Sandbox.gvi			03/10/2018 Week 1. A Guided Tour of Labyrew NAG											
1.1 Timetable Resources			10/10/2018 Week 2: AAV and IO I: No Coding Required		LE1			LD1 (Formative)						
👻 🚞 1.2 Tomography Resources	abc		17/10/2010 West 2: ANV and 10 III Cadina Dava and Dava					LD2	LD1(Formative)					
Add border to 2D array.gvi			17/10/2018 Week 3: AAV and IO II: Coding Drag-and-Drop					LDZ	LD I (Formative)					
Back projection.gvi	M		24/10/2018 Week 4: AAV and IO III: Coding from Scratch		LE2	LE1		LD3	LD2					
Filter back projection.gvi				1										4
Generate phantom image.gvi	977		31/10/2018 Week 5: *** MODULE RECESS ***											1
Generate rotation angles array.gvi			07/11/2018 Week 6: Looping AAV Code	]	LE3 (Group)	LE2		LD4	LD3					
<ul> <li>Path to phantom.gvi</li> <li>G Types (Tomography)</li> </ul>	-													
Phantoms			14/11/2018 Week 7: Classic State Machines and their Applications	]				LD5	LD4					
<ul> <li>In antonis</li> <li>In a Variable Star Resources</li> </ul>			21/11/2018 Week 8: Event-Driven State Machines and their Applications		LE4 (Group)	LE3 (Group)		LD6	LD5					
Average JD-Magnitude Array (Day).gvi				1				LD7	LD6					-
FFT of Light Curve.gvi	abc		28/11/2018 Week 9: Queued State Machines and their Applications			LE4 (Group)		. [107	LD6					-
Find Fundamental Period.gvi			05/12/2018 Week 10: Micro Project Clinic						LD7				• • • •	
Interpolate to Equally-Spaced JD-Magn	2													
🐌 Variable Star Relative Path.gvi			12/12/2018 Week 11: Micro Project Presentations	]				•	uProject Report					
G Types (Variable Star)	×▲													
🕨 🚞 Variable Star Data														
👻 🚞 2. LabVIEW NXG Coding Essentials			Questionnaires							<u></u>				1
Þ 2.1 Panel and Diagram.gvi			- Every week there will be a laboratory questionnare embedded in the conta	ct session pro	ject as a VI;									
Þ 2.2 Basic Data Types.gvi			- The questionnaire will consist of two or three questions directly related to t	the contact se	ssion;								• • • •	
Þ 2.3 DAQ Data Types.gvi			- You can answer these as we go through the contact session (you will be giv											
2.4 Dataflow.gvi			- Every questionnaire will require you to write some simple LabVIEW code in			estion by writin	g a commen	it;						
2.5 Acquire Analyse Visualise (AAV).gvi			<ul> <li>Discuss the questionnaire in your laboratory pairs and come up with your a</li> <li>When done, email the VI to Richard (LewisR54@cardiff.ac.uk) before you le</li> </ul>							w Snip				J
2.5 AAV Task Definitions			<ul> <li>Make sure that you include both your names in a comment in the VI (so I k</li> </ul>											
3. Questionnaire			- The questionnaires are worth 10% of the mark for PXT101 / PXT201.	now whose v	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,									1
			The questionnaire for this session can be found in the navigation pane:										• • •	
													· · · ·	
		• •	A Guided Tour of LabVIEW NXG 2 \ 3. Questionnaire \ Questionnaire 1.gvi										• • •	
													)	T
													•	

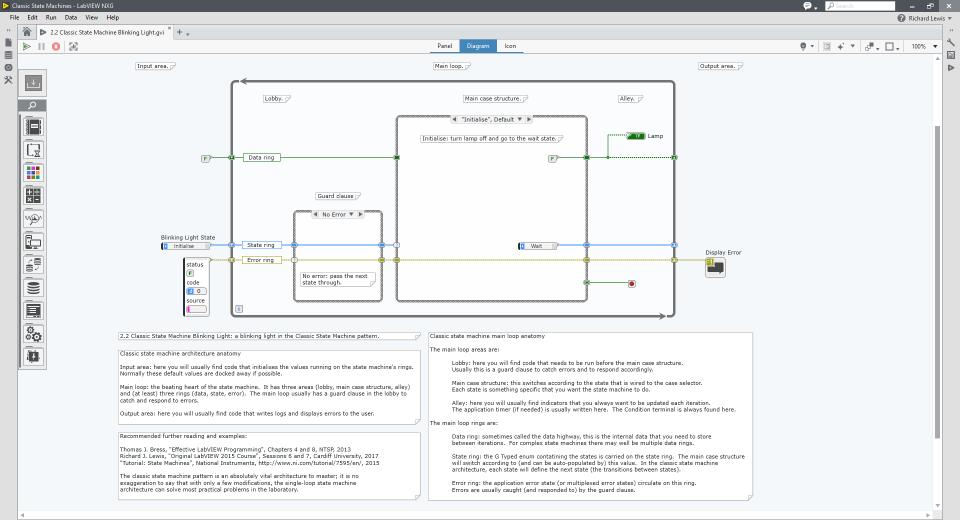
A contact session can be contained entirely within a LabVIEW NXG project. The use of external materials and other applications has been minimised to maintain session flow.



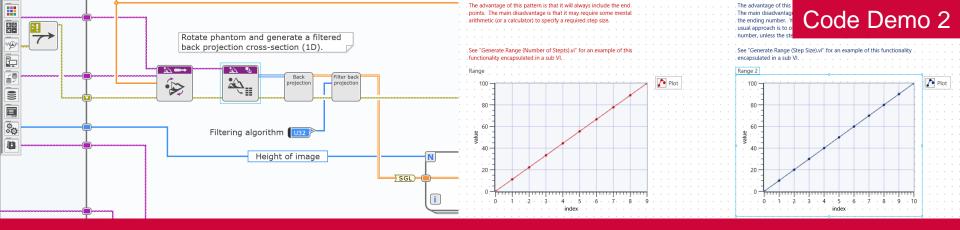
Embracing the "everything in a project" concept allows for unexpected teaching and learning opportunities. Here we can use the course timetable to demonstrate dataflow!

AAV and IO III Coding from Scratch - LabVIE	W NXG	P 🗸 👂 Search		- 8	×
File Edit Run Data View Help				🕜 Richard Lew	is 🔻
* 🗋 ≣ 🛛 🋠	S.1 Bottom-Up Development.gvi <sup>×</sup> + .	ltem	Panel	Document	**
፲ = + - × • • ▼ •	Parel Diagram Icon	ABCD Name	Text		_
🔎 Filter		Туре	Text		
👻 📳 AAV and IO III Coding from Scrat		▼ Visual style			
SystemDesigner	.3.1 Bottom-Up Development.	<ul> <li>Visual style</li> </ul>			
🕨 📰 1. Questionnaire 2 Solutions	<b>—</b>	Segoe UI	<b>▼</b> 9 <b>▼</b>	B / <u>U</u> 4	3-
👻 🚞 2. Software Development Best	A 1 4 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 5 4 5		===	Ξ	
2.1 Software Development	In general terms, bottom-up development means:				
Functional Specification	0÷	Text color			
Old Functional Specificatio		reat color	v		
<ul> <li>3. Bottom-Up Development</li> <li>3.1 Bottom-Up Developme</li> </ul>	- Thoroughly planning your application with a functional specification and supporting documents;	▼ Layout			
<ul> <li>3.1 Bottom-Up Developme</li> <li>3.2 Completed Application</li> </ul>	- Selecting an appropriate architecture for your application ("script", state machine, etc);	1 T			
3.3 BU Application.gvi	abc Writing subroutines / functions / classes that encapsulate the functionality that you will require;	🔽 Auto size			
<ul> <li>3.2 Completed Application</li> </ul>	- Thoroughly testing elements of functionality with combinations of these subroutines / functions / classes;	Width	744 🚔 Heig	ht 112	
GTypes	- Writing the boiler-plate code for the main application;				_
subVis	- Building up the functionality by inserting calls to subroutines / functions / classes directly into the boiler, plate.code, thoroughly testing as you go	▼ Programming	assistance		
4. Top-Down Development	┃		Create referer	ce	
👻 🚞 5. Blackbody Simulation	In LabVIEW terms, bottom-up development means:				
5.1 Blackbody Simulation.gvi		▼ Context help	description		
GTypes	- Thoroughly planning your application with a functional specification and supporting documents;				
SubVIs	- Selecting an appropriate architecture for your application ("script", state machine, etc);	Tooltip			
Tests	- Generating a LabVIEW project with the appropriate application template;				
6. Questionnaire	- Encapsulating required functionality in fully-functional and documented subVls / classes / type defs;				
🕨 📰 7. Lab Exercise 2	- Testing elements of functionality with combinations of these subVls / classes / type defs;	▼ Documentati	n		
	- Generating the main vi, together with all states (if a state machine), logic, loops, etc required;				
	- Building up the functionality by inserting subVIs / LabVIEW classes / type definitions directly into the main VI, thoroughly testing as you go	?			
		Context	Online		
		Help	manual		
	. We will now develop a simple calculator application bottom-up				-
	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·				
	4				
Errors and Warnings					

The text formatting tools in NXG 2.1 apply to entire text blocks. In the Panel shown here are no fewer than six text blocks.

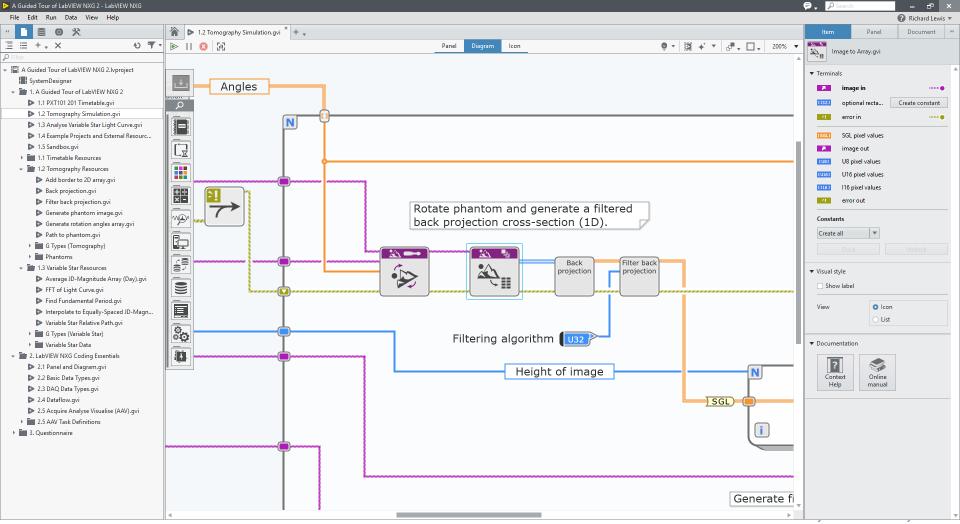


The text formatting tools in NXG 2.1 apply to entire text blocks. In this Diagram we would like to be able to shade the boxes and bold headings, but this is not possible.

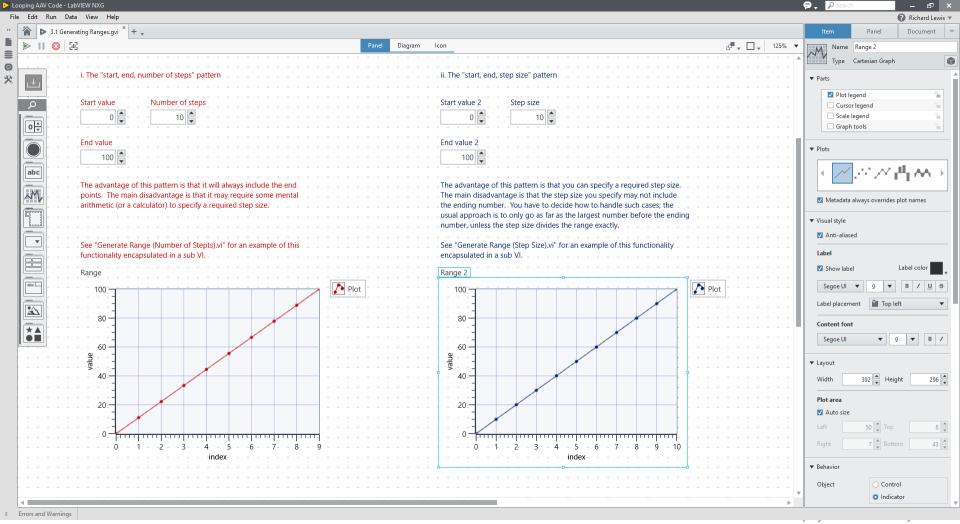


## NXG interface advantages and issues

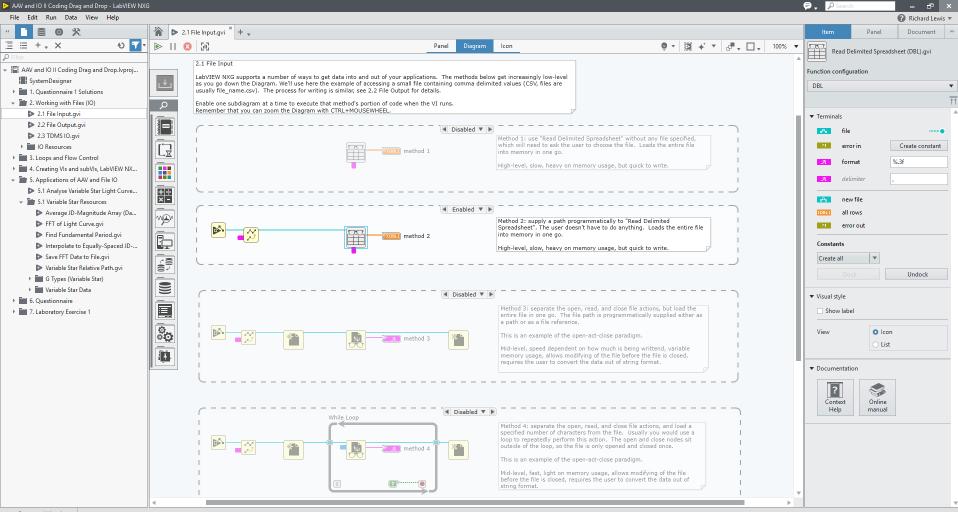
- NXG UI is vastly superior to LabVIEW UI in almost every usability aspect
- Panel and Diagram zoom enhances delivery, recording, and development
- Docking constants and the properties pane really help with clarity
- The ability to zoom necessitated a rethink of what "good style" means
- NXG is noticeably slower and less stable compared to LabVIEW
- Some consistency issues: analysis panel only available for waveforms, e.g.



The zoom function is a killer feature on the Diagram. It is particularly useful in session recordings to remove visual clutter.

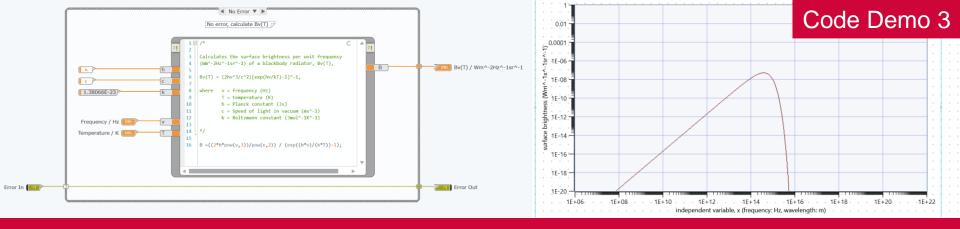


The zoom function works equally well on the Panel. It is particularly useful in session recordings to remove visual clutter.



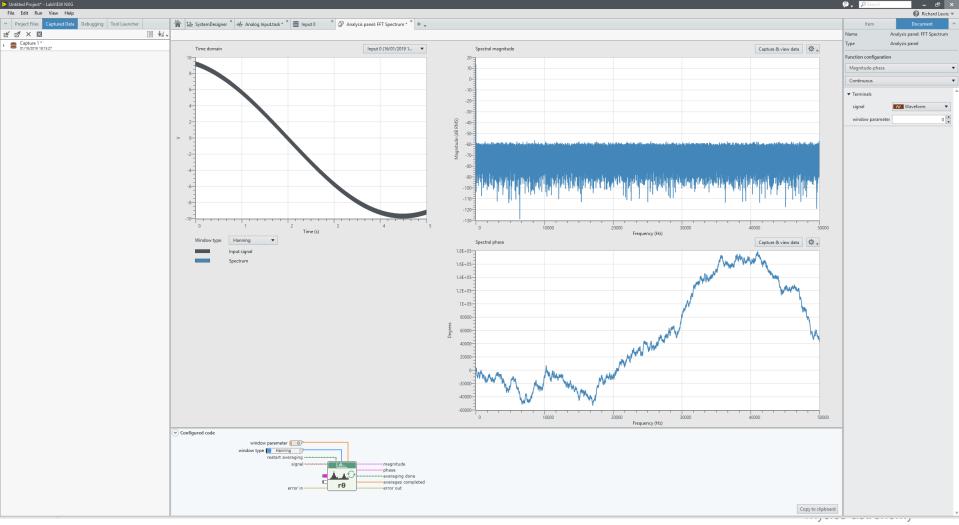
\* Errors and Warnings

The zoom function aids exploration from the student's perspective, allowing clearer focus on individual areas of code.

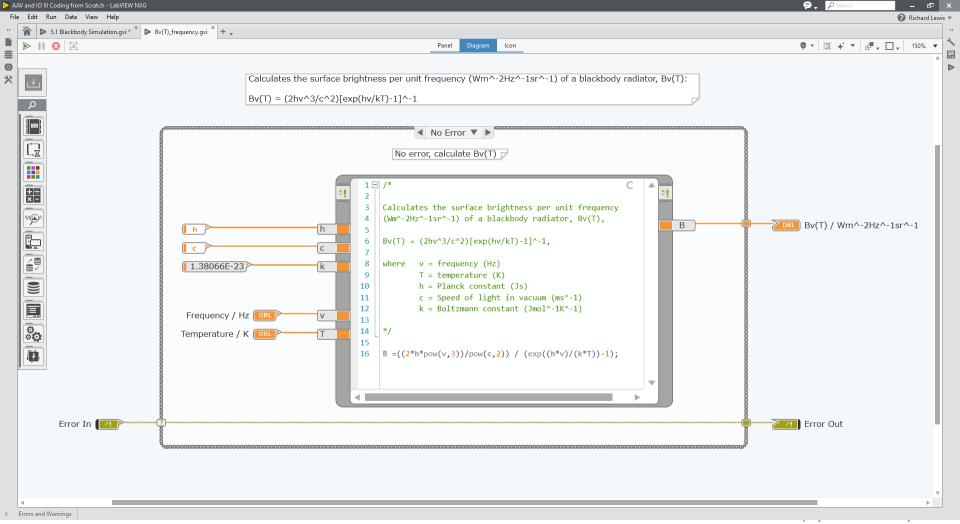


## (Somewhat) nasty surprises: some workarounds required

- Analysis panels (from direct acquisition / capture) unreliable across PCs
- Cannot distribute compiled C Node code (crashes target PCs)
- G Types do not always work as expected (i.e. as strict type definitions)
- LabVIEW NXG 2.0 code will not load at all on LabVIEW NXG 2.1 machines
- Have reported the bugs to NI, will provide code to reproduce the errors



The analysis panel is not available for all data types. Attempting to invoke the analysis panel occasionally crashes NXG 2.1



C Nodes in NXG 2.1 have a tendency to crash when projects are run on PCs other than the original machine.

Execution: learning and application Impact of NXG on problem-based learning



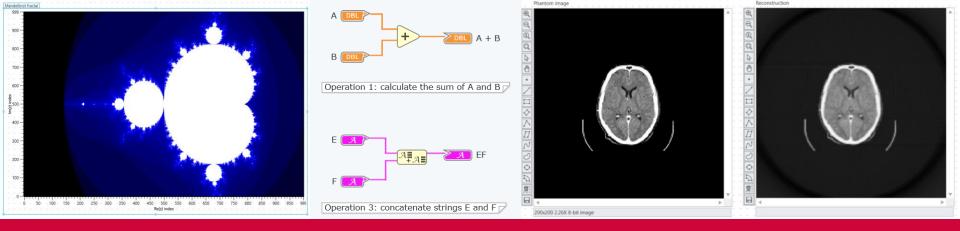
### Impact of NXG on problem-based learning

### Aims: LabVIEW NXG course contact sessions

- Start useful, stay useful
- Flatten the learning curve
- Remain relevant to Physics and Astrophysics
- Leverage NXG's strengths (UI, projects, etc.)
- Retain old module's USPs (funcspecs, etc.)

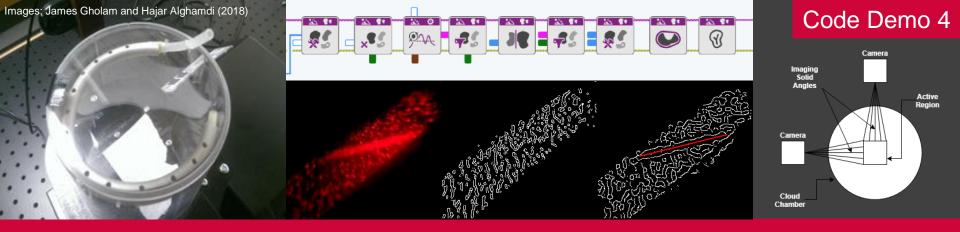
### Aims: Student-lead micro-projects

- Start useful, stay useful
- Allow more sophisticated applications earlier
- Provide a common language for related projects to encourage collaboration
- Retain old module's USPs (community, etc.)



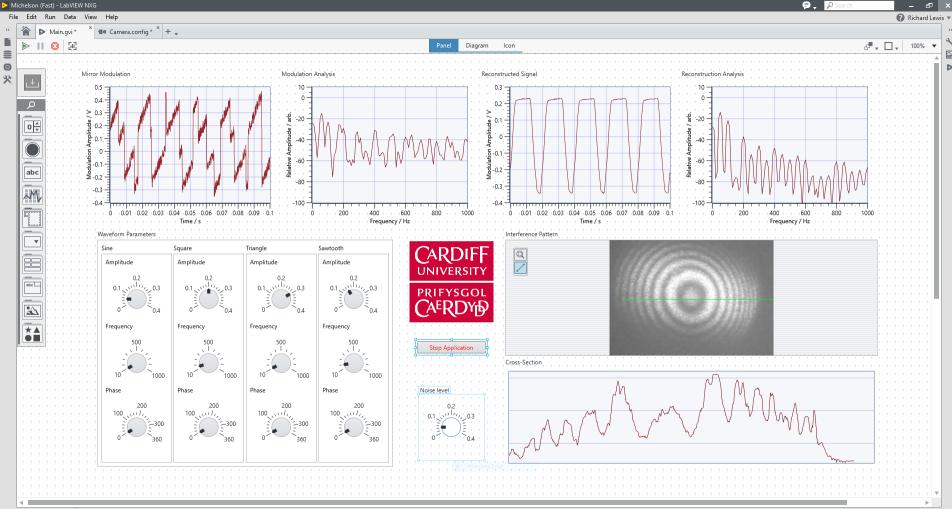
### Impact of NXG in contact session problem-based learning

- · Flashes of brilliance when NXG's strengths all came together
- Freely-flowing sessions dramatically accelerated learning, made teaching more efficient
- Staying "in project" allowed students to concentrate more effectively on their tasks
- Full retention of original module's USPs, group work in particular enhanced
- Instability and bugs introduced interruptions in otherwise freely-flowing, dynamic sessions
- DAQ-first concept partially thwarted by crashes, but the concept itself is sound



## Impact of NXG in student-lead micro-projects

- This is where NXG really shone: a noticeable increase in efficiency
- Image analysis in particular was found to be much more accessible
- Students explored the language in much more depth than in previous years
- Students progressed much further in the micro-projects than in previous years
- One micro-project formed the basis of an exhibition at a Royal Society Event...



Michelson Interferometer as a LIGO Analogue: prototyped in an MSc Physics micro-project 2018

\* Errors and Warnings

Execution: learning and application (Other) logistical issues and their solutions

## (Other) logistical issues and their solutions

### Point release 2.0 to 2.1 broke compatibility(!)

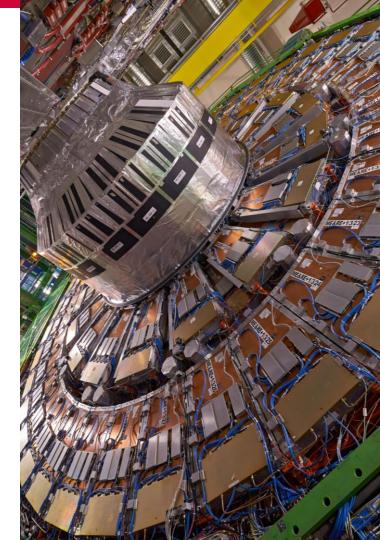
- No easy way around this; code was re-written
- PCs in PHYSX migrated to 2.1

### Some code elements crashed on lab PCs

- Hard to pin down; some PCs worse than other
- Drive towards "safe" implementations
- Avoided these elements in assessments

#### Freezes, crashes, and bugs

- Very rarely show-stopping in practice
- Bugs reported to NI



## Outcome

## Student reception of new core module

#### Student module evaluation scores

Academic Year	LabVIEW Version	Score / 100			
2018/19	NXG 2.1	86			
2017/18	2015	94			
2016/17	2015	90			
2015/16	2015	94			

#### Student feedback

- Overall very positive, all students felt they got something positive from the module (projects)
- Astrophysicists see the value of LabVIEW, but some would have preferred to develop their Python instead
- LabVIEW generally valued, especially on projects

#### Future MSc core module design (2019/20)

#### Scaling (>30) and broadening of MSc student cohort

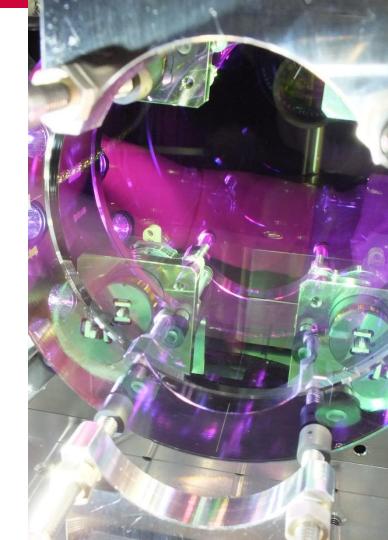
- MSc Gravitational Wave Physics comes online for 2019/20
- Additional micro-projects and relevant examples required
- Currently reviewing language teaching structure for 2019/20

#### Will we use LabVIEW NXG for 2019/20 or revert to 2015?

- Contingent on outcome of module review
- Will evaluate NXG 3.0 for stability improvements
- Now have full resources (inc. videos) for 2015 and NXG

#### Will we use NXG for the advanced programming module?

- Main problem is the lack of RIO support in NXG
- More difficult to migrate advanced materials to NXG
- Retain LabVIEW 2015 for now (considering 2018 SP1)



# LabVIEWNXG



#### Summary: critique of LabVIEW NXG 2.1 for teaching and micro-projects

- Usability: excellent for micro-projects, more variable for teaching, but good.
- Reliability: NXG can be slow, crashy, and buggy. Often masks true potential.
- Materials: can stay in-project, so more efficient. Really need workbooks!
- Student reception: excellent for micro-projects, overall positive for teaching.
- Overall: NXG 2.1 has its issues, but the potential for brilliance is there.



### **Contact details**

Dr Richard James Lewis Director of Postgraduate Studies School of Physics and Astronomy Cardiff University

Tel: +44(0)29 2087 5433 Email: LewisR54@cardiff.ac.uk URL: https://tinyurl.com/y94cfmk5

### Case studies, presentations

Transitioning MSc Physics Teaching to LabVIEW NXG 2.0: From Drills to DAQ-First (NI AUF 2018)

Reflections on LabVIEW as a Common Language for Community and Skill Building (NIDays 2017)

LabVIEW as a Common Language for Community and Skill Building (NI AUF 2016, NIWeek 2017)

MSc Physics Students Take Ownership of their Learning with LabVIEW (NI EIA 2016)

Bringing the Research Group Ethos into Taught Masters Learning (VICE/PHEC 2016)

www.cardiff.ac.uk/physics-astronomy