A-level Computing

Guide to good practice

This Guide to Good Practice provides some suggestions about how to ensure that candidates fulfil their potential when working on the COMP4 project.

The guide is about what is at the heart of doing a project and how to maximise the potential of the project for your students in terms of both their marks and their experience of practical Computing within a school/college environment.

Practical Suggestions

1. The project should aim to get the best out of a student rather than allowing them to settle for the lowest common denominator of doing only what they need to do to “get by”.

2. If you wish, your students may ignore the sequential order of the headings in the specification when developing the system. For example, the system does not have to be fully analysed and designed before coding can commence. However, the project documentation must be presented in the order indicated on the Project Log Form.

3. It is a good idea for a student to develop a prototype for the system as soon as possible after the project is commenced. A prototype serves a number of purposes:

a. it helps the student to clarify the requirements of the End User

b. it assists the teacher in ensuring that the scope of the project is appropriate for the individual student

c. it allows the student to understand and try out the “critical path” through the project, ie the parts of the project which are core to its success (such as building a web-based interface or developing a scheduling algorithm).

4. Clear, specific objectives in the analysis are essential. They allow the complexity of a project to be accurately judged at an early stage and they define the scope of a project. Setting very specific objectives is likely to be an iterative process involving the student and the End User as often initial information provided by an End User does not contain sufficient detail to write objectives that are sufficiently specific.

5. The teacher should set and enforce clear milestones for students to reach in terms of the development of the system and also the production of the project report.

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6. The complexity of a project should be judged by a holistic mapping of the Teacher Resource Bank document, *'Definition of problem types for projects'*, not a heading by heading match.

Setting Challenging Objectives

Students should be encouraged to agree challenging objectives with their End User. Some of these may be regarded as extension objectives, which may or may not be tackled depending upon how the project progresses. A candidate could fail to meet the extension objectives, but still complete enough of the core objectives to produce a system which meets most of the End User's needs and which are sufficient to justify marking the project at a particular level of complexity. If this is the case, then when marking the technical solution section, a mark can still be awarded in a category that requires that all or nearly all of the objectives are met.

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