

[Project Name]

Initial Document

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# Intro

Those working within education currently face the challenge of not only working a full-time job but also having to find additional hours of their own time to mark homework as well as providing accurate and helpful feedback. Evidence suggests that 17% of teachers spend over 11 hours a week marking homework [1] and as a result, there have been many approaches to reducing the workload: student self-marking, online homework websites [2] and plagiarism detection services (Turnitin).

In comparison to traditional subjects such as maths and science, computer science is a new and developing subject area that until recently hasn’t been widely adopted in state education. As a result of the subjects’ infancy those within education have failed to extend modern marking techniques to include efficient ways of assessing coding homework. Marking code can be a complex task, an assessor cannot just read the code they have been given but additionally will be required to compile it and or run tests to establish if it runs correctly. Furthermore, an assessor could also incur added difficultly from several other external factors such as missing environment variables or different versions of a compiler, all of which require more time and effort in comparison to other subject areas.

Despite there not being an effective solution, some attempts have been to fix the problem, there are sites such as ‘Codewars’ that allow a user to create unit tests for coding challenges. Other users would then write code that runs against these tests[3]. Sites like ‘Codewars’ however, only allow for autonomous marking through unit tests, which means a student is assessed as being either right or wrong. An option to mark manually would allow an assessor the opportunity to award points for a variety of criteria such as good coding practice which would reward the student with better feedback on their code.

Plagiarism is a prevalent issue within Computer Science and checking the validity of coding assignments. Services such as Turnitin, search the web for similarities between pieces of work, however, problems arise when using this service for coding projects. Due to certain words and phrases being used to perform certain tasks, many pieces of code on the web appear very similar. This could then lead to work being flagged as plagiarised when in fact it is original. It’s possible to spot originality within code as a result of every programmer developing their own coding styles. The clues to identify are; indentation, variable name choice and commenting style, which can be hard for software to detect, but can be spotted when marked manually by an assessor [4].

This is an exciting project to me as it’s something that hasn’t been done before. Professors at Swansea University have been searching for a tool such as this and so making it a reality would prove useful. This project awards me the opportunity to improve my skills and learn something new when working on a full stack web development project. The above reasons and the fact I will make something that could potentially be used after I have graduated is why I’m so heavily motivated for this project. **(find a source to illustrate the need of this)**

**Paragraphs about balckboard – state that you want it to operate like blackboard as a coursework hosting system. Why blackboard doesn’t work but what areas you want to adopt in your project.**

My aim is to create a web application that is a coursework management system, like blackboard, but also allows assessors to review and mark coursework on the same platform by also providing the same features that sites such as ‘Codewars’ provide [3]. The aim of this project is to reduce the time it takes to mark coding assessments, minimising the number of steps involved and reducing the complexity of testing. Below are multiple features my web application will include that will achieve this aim:

* An assessor will be able to set coursework and mark it within the same application.
* The web application will compile submitted coursework and run any unit tests the assessor provides.
* An assessor can view the submitted coursework through an online editor that includes text highlighting and line indention.
* Each submission will get checked for similarities against other submissions within that coursework and notify the assessor of any significant number of similarities.

I believe that with good planning these aims are achievable. I have confidence in my abilities to complete a project of this size due to my experience working in the software engineering industry allowing me to transfer the knowledge I have gained to my project. A large amount of the skills I have gained as a front-end web developer will also be transferable as this project. Later, in this document I will go through my plan and provide evidence in achieving these aims.

This document will be split up into multiple different sections. Section 2 includes web applications that have helped inspire this project as they contain similar features to what this project will contain. Section 3 goes over many design decisions such as how I have designed by database. It also answers questions such as why I chose the framework I have decided to use and why I have chosen certain third-party tools to help me. The sections following go over the software life cycle I have used for this project, the plan I have created to make sure I achieve my aims on time and a risk assessment to assure I avoid and reduce the chances of risks in the future. There will also be a conclusion which goes over everything I have covered in this document. Finally, this document will end with my references as a bibliography.

# Related Work

## Turnitin

Turnitin is the leading internet plagiarism detection service. Swansea University use this service to collect coursework submissions. Turnitin is integrated into blackboard and is primarily used for text matching and checking plagiarism within assignments that are submitted by students. Tutors are also able to use Turnitin to mark and provide feedback on student work [5].

Turnitin’s support for coding coursework is limited. It does not include line indention or syntax highlighting. Computer Scientists marking submissions usually download the files and view them in an IDE which includes these missing features. My project relates to Turnitin as it’s an alternative way to specifically submit coding coursework and includes features such as syntax highlighting and line indention, so downloading files is not necessary.

The implementation of a similar feature to Turnitin, to search the web to check for plagiarism of submitted coursework, is out of the scope for my project. This feature is too large and beyond my knowledge and ability in implementation. As a compromise, I plan to implement a smaller feature that will check for familiarities between submissions for that specific coursework. I will achieve this by using third party software called ‘Moss’ [6]. This software checks for similarities between files.

## Blackboard

Blackboard is a web-based coursework management system. Swansea University uses this web application to manage coursework and modules. This is like my project as it’s also a coursework management system. The project will contain its own eco system of users, all with different level of permissions. Some users will be able to create Modules and coursework’s within them, whereas some users will be students to those coursework’s.

## Bitbucket

Bitbucket is like GitHub, it’s a web-based version control repository hosting service (I’m using this service to control my project). Bitbucket contains similar features that I want to implement within my project. When making a pull request on bitbucket, it gives other people the ability to review the code before it gets merged to a remote branch. Bitbucket allows users to highlight certain characters on a line and write comments of feedback for that line. This makes It very clear for people to understand the line of code the comment is referring to; I plan to implement a similar feature for my Project. When users receive feedback when using my project, they will be able to see which line of code the comment is referring to.

## Codewars

Codewars is a web application that helps users improve their coding skills for many different types of languages. Users receive challenges and must code a solution, then once they are done, their solution is tested against set unit tests. This relates to my work as Codewars provides a code editor with syntax highlighting and line indention. Furthermore, Codewars is able to run the unit test and check the code compiles by using compiler such as the JVM on the host machine. These two features from Codewars are very similar to what I aim to implement for my project.

# Design

This section contains information about my project and the research into the structure, design and implementation of my project. As well as including relevant information about the range of different services and tools used within the project.

## Laravel

Laravel is a php web application framework, this is the main framework I will be using to build my project [7]. Laravel is an open source and contains many libraries, such as this one: [Laravel-Permission](https://github.com/spatie/laravel-permission), that can allow me to focus on implementing features like a complete permissions system [8].

Laravel requires other services in order to run correctly. A server is needed and so is a database framework. To solve this issue, I have decided to use Laravel’s homestead [9]. Homestead is a pre-packaged virtual box, which includes a web server called ‘Nginx’, ‘MySQL’ and more. This means the server used to run my project will be on a virtual machine. This means none of the requirements of the server will be part of my development machine. This requires me to have Virtual-Box and Vagrant installed on my development machine in order to run homestead.

Laravel is a popular choice for developers and as a result has led to a growth of hundreds of different libraries and help online. This was something I took into consideration when choosing Laravel over a framework like Symfony. Laravel provides lots of helpful commands that can create templates of classes [10]. This is very useful when learning a new framework as it provides examples of how things should be structured, furthermore Laravel continues to be friendly to newbies by also extracting a large amount of authentication configuration so it works out the box, this will speed up my development time as I can focus more of my time on the implementation [11].

## Use of Third-Party Applications

### Java SE Runtime Environment

I plan to integrate the Java SE Runtime Environment 8 (JRE 8) into my project. This is a Java Virtual Machine (JVM) that will be obtained from Oracle and installed on the host machine. The JRE will be primarily used as a form of automatic marking of submissions. When a coursework deadline is reached, The JRE will be executed on the host machine and all the submissions will be compiled and if any Junit tests were found, they will also be run. This means when the Professor proceeds to mark the submission, they will know if the submission was able to compile and pass any provided tests. This is a form of automatic marking and can be used solely to mark submissions if set by the coursework creator.

The complexity of this is medium. The installation of the JRE on the host machine is simple. The path to the JRE will be added to the hosts external variables so can be accessed from the command line. The results of the compilation and tests as well as the output string from the compiler will be stored in a json string and will belong to a ‘submission’ on the database. This means the results from the JRE can be collected at any time and displayed on a webpage.

I have chosen to focus on only supporting Java 1.8 for this project as I have experience with working with the JVM and running tests along side it. As its such a popular language, there will be plenty of libraries that will help me complete my aim of syntax highlighting and line indention within html.

### Moss

Moss is a third-party software tool used to detect plagiarism between files or programmes. This is different to services such as ‘Turnitin’ as it runs offline and only checks for plagiarism in files provided as input. Moss was created to be used in the classroom to check code was not copied in class. I plan to use Moss to check for similarities in different submissions within a single coursework. Its use will be to notify users marking the submission of similarities, not that submissions were copied or plagiarised, this will require manual investigation by the user reviewing the submission [6].

The complexity of this is medium. As Moss is just an application, it will be installed on the host machine. The path to the moss executable will be added to the hosts external variables so it can be run from the command line. Once the deadline of a piece of coursework has been reached, the Moss application will be executed and will check all submissions for similarity and store the result within a JSON string and will belong to a ‘submission’ on the database. This means results can be displayed on a webpage and viewed by an authorised user. The time it will take to run through all the submissions with Moss in big O notation will be: O(n2), as It will have to compare itself to every submission within the coursework.

### Problems with invoking applications on the host machine

Running an application on a host machine will take a certain amount of time to complete. During this time more of the hosts machine’s CPU will be occupied by other tasks. This can lead to other server-side tasks taking longer to run while these applications are running.

If multiple coursework’s have the same deadline, this leads to a large server side slow down as multiple applications will be running on the server at the same time. This is because the applications are executed when the coursework deadline is reached. A solution to this can be creating a queue. So, the server-side applications only work on one coursework at a time even if they have the same deadline. This will prevent overloading the CPU on the host machine.

### Database Design

The database design is a key part of a web application. The front end’s primary use is to allow a user to view and edit the database, so getting the database correct first is very important as it will lead to less rework of code later. I will be using Artisan, the main tool for Laravel to create my database. Artisan contains commands that allow me to generate or delete my database and populate it with test data. This will be very useful when wanting to test by web application. It will also save me time and reduce several mistakes as I won’t be doing it manually and won’t be writing any SQL.

Converting these tables (Figure 1) and these pivot tables (Figure 2) to a database is simple in Laravel. Each table is a model class and contains the schema for a table. Laravel will create these tables using a command called migration, this is a source control approach to databases, which allows me to add schema to a database later or undo changes. I can then populate the tables I have migrated with Seeders and Factories. Factories is a way to create large amounts of fake data to go into a table, this fake data is then given to the Seeder which stores it in the database. This means if I was working as part of a team, I wouldn’t need to keep a database file in source control or transfer it to other developers as they can create their own data for the database with these Laravel features.

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated

Figure 1

The Sections Highlighted in light blue or in bold are the primary keys.

**Users**: A user is generic. A student and a professor will both be users. It’s the role within a module that makes has that provides them different actions compared to other users. A user can only have one role per module. A user can be assigned to many modules. A user can own many submissions.

**Modules**: A module can belong to many users. A module can have many coursework. A user with the correct global permissions will be able to create a module.

**Courseworks**: A coursework can belong to only one Module. A coursework can have many submissions.

**Submissions**: A submission can belong to only one Coursework. A submission is owned by a User. A submission will contain a JSON string. This string is in the JSON format, which means when its read, it can be converted to a JSON object and the information it holds can be read. Information contained inside the JSON string will include, compilation results, unit test results, in-line comments, and Moss comparisons.

**Roles**: A role contains a name and an ID. The name is to allow people to understand what the role is and does. An example of a role is student or Administrator.

**Permissions**: A permission allows the user to perform a certain action, such as edit coursework or create a module.

A screenshot of a social media post

Description automatically generated

Figure 2

Database Diagrams made with [dbdiagram.io](https://dbdiagram.io)

**Users\_Modules**: This table contains a list of all the users and the modules they are signed up to. This includes users with different types of permissions.

**Roles\_Permissions**: This table contains the relationship of roles and permissions. A user can’t just be given a permission. The user must be given a role that contains that permission. A role can have many permissions.

**User\_Roles**: Users with roles within this table have permissions which can be used globally and not just for a specific module.

**Users\_Roles\_Modules**: This table contains a list of all users with roles. Users are assigned roles within a module. A user who is a marker in one module may not have those permissions in another module.

## Front End Development

### Cascading Style Sheets

When it comes to styling the html for my webpages, I will use bootstrap as a framework. All the custom style sheets I write will complement this style. Bootstrap is an open source framework that contains great front-end component libraries such as navigation bars and containers. Using this framework will reduce the development time of the front end of my project and will reduce the size of my custom style sheets to improve readability [12].

### JavaScript

I will be using a JavaScript library to help speed up the development time of my front end. I will be using jQuery. This is a feature rich library which allows easy manipulation of html elements and contains useful JavaScript functions. jQuery is also open source and supports all modern browsers [13].

### Testing

I will be using PHPUnit to write unit tests for my project. PHPUnit is perfect as it supports Laravel and allows me to test both my code (Unit Testing) and my models, controllers etc (Feature Testing) [14]. Laravel also offers commands to quickly make PHPUnit templates for you and it also includes a unit test file that offers Laravel help functions and enables the Laravel framework. This means that I can use these functions and reduce the amount of code I write as I don’t have to write some functions myself.

These helper functions can be used to test more complex things within the web application, these types of tests are called feature testing. For example, certain webpages can only be viewed if your logged in or contain certain permissions. The helper functions can be used to help recreate the exact same scenario for testing.

# Life Cycle

The model I have chosen to use for my project is the Iterative model. This model applies the waterfall model to multiple chunks of the project. This breaks up the project into something more manageable as it allows me to individually plan and implement each chunk separately.

I decided to choose this model over the V-shape model and the waterfall model as these are too strict when it comes to its different phases. I need the flexibility to keep moving through the phases of implementation and requirements as I am learning the Laravel Framework as I go. As I work on the project, I will learn more about the framework and its possibilities which could lead to me making changes to the implementation or requirements later into development. The Iterative model gives me this flexibility as it takes me back to the requirements phase after each chunk. During the implementation of the project if discover an important software or user requirement that I missed, I can just create a new chunk which fulfils this and move onto it later. If I was using the waterfall model, I would not be able to do this as it wasn’t in the original software requirement documentation. Furthermore, if I am unable to reach my deadline, I will still have some implemented and fully tested chunks, whereas if I used the full waterfall model, I may only have half implemented the project and not completed any testing.

There is the possibility that I could run into problems when using the Iterative model. It can be difficult to break very large and complex tasks into a single chunk, this is because it may effect how many parts of the application work and so may result in having to make changes to other chunks that have been completed, this goes against the Iterative model. As a result, there might be certain iterations of chunks of work which overlap each other.

The Iterative model is a perfect choice as my project supports working in chunks. Front end development follows the iterative model nicely as webpage is a chunk, so I would design the webpage and create the requirements, then implement, test it and then move onto the next webpage of my application.

# Plan

Working on multiple modules as well as my project will require great time management and organisation skills in order to complete this project before the Easter break. I have come up with ways of reducing the chances of overloading myself with too much work.

I have created a Trello board for my project [15]. This allows me to break down my project into lots of different tickets. Some of the tickets are marked with ‘MVP’. This means that it’s a task that needs to be completed to achieve a minimal viable product (A product that works and is useable with minimum features). I will complete all these marked tickets before I move on to completing other tickets. This means I won’t be overloading my project with lots of features and means if I do run out of time, I still have a useable product to show for my efforts.

The amount of time suggested to spend on my project was around 300 hours, this is equivalent to 2 months of full-time work. The project is due in May and so from the first teaching week to the deadline is 32 weeks. This is roughly 9 hours a week I should be spending on my project. I have created a Gantt chart (Figure 3) to help display the different areas of my project that I will be focusing my time on throughout the year. I have specified some deadlines throughout the year, these are goals that I want to meet for my project.

A screen shot of a building

Description automatically generated

Figure 3

The blocks represent a week of work. I have broken the workload up into three groups: planning, implementation and presentation.

The month of October will primarily be planning. I will be working on setting up my database and creating tasks on my Trello board [15]. I will be constantly learning Laravel and researching what it can do throughout October and throughout the implementation phase. I plan to have created all the front-end mock-ups before the beginning of my implementation. This will be used as a guide to make sure I include all features, but also to take usability and mobile devices into consideration when creating my web pages.

The implementation blocks contain arrows. These arrows show that I will be going back and forth from implementation to testing as I work my way through different chunks of my project. This relates to the life cycle model as I will complete a chunk of implementation for a page and then move onto the testing for that chunk before moving onto the next implementation. The implementation has been broken down into two subgroups. The first group contains the work required to complete the minimum viable product (MVP). The second subgroup contains the advanced features (ADV). These are features I will implement once MVP tasks are complete.

24/11/2019: By this time, I would have prepared a presentation and a live demo for Gregynog. The demo should include a demonstration of logging in, creating a module and assigning students to that module and then creating a piece of coursework for the other users to complete. This will require a functional database and the barebones of the web application to have been implemented.

April 2020: By this time, I would have prepared for the project fair. A poster will be prepared, and the implementation shall be complete. I will be able to provide a full demo showing off all the features discussed in the aim.

May 2020: By this time, I will have completed my dissertation in time to be handed in.

# Risk Assessment

Risks are an obstacle that can prevent the success of a project. I believe it is important to assess the possible risks within a project ahead of time so that there can be enough plans made to prevent these risks or reduce their severity.   
I have created a risk assessment table [16] which identifies possible risks when completing different tasks. These risks are identified with actions to reduce their severity or prevent them entirely. I have included the severity and likelihood of each risk, the range of these vary from: low, medium and high.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Risk | Severity | Likelihood | Hazard | Mitigation |
| Dependency Software Updates | High | Low | Software projects have their dependencies. Using libraries that fulfil certain functions saves us time and maintenance. However, if a dependency a project uses updates and changes its behaviour it could break the project that depends on it. This can lead to a time-consuming process of trying to debug where the problem has come from which is expensive. | A solution to this risk is instead of just depending on the latest version of a software dependency, I will depend on certain version. This way I guarantee that the behaviour of that dependency will always be the same. If this risk does occur, then I will revert the dependency back to the previous version I was using. |
| Change in Development PC | Medium | High | Moving to a new computer for development can be stressful. The project compiles on the previous PC but may fails to compile on the new PC. This is usually due to a new development environment. Time will have to be spent setting up the new PC to match the development environment of the previous machine. | I will create batch or python scripts to set up the development environment on my PC automatically, this will make moving to a new PC easier. |
| Inadequate User Interface | High | Medium | A user interface that is not easy to use will discourage new users to learn how to use the product and can lead to users being unaware of certain features and getting lost within the user interface. | To solve this, I have created some wireframes which focus on improving user experience. When creating the UI for the web application, these wireframes will be used as inspiration to ensure the user experience is met. |
| Developing Wrong Purpose Functionality | High | Medium | When developing features, it’s possible that the point and use of that feature may be misunderstood. This can lead to a creation of a feature that does not fulfil the user requirements. This leads to wasted time and additional code being added to the code base. | To prevent wrong purpose functionality, I have created a set of requirements that have to be bet, I will not implement a feature if it does not reach any of the requirements. If this risk does happen, then I will analyse the feature and check if it fulfils any requirements. If it does not, then I will remove it from the application. |
| Hard Drive Failure | High | Low | Should the hard drive fail in some way that will cause me to not be able to access my files, this can lead to losing files and progress. | This is avoided by using git to back up my files. If this does happen, I will have scripts that can automatically setup my development environment. |

I have identified these risks by using multiple different approaches:

* I have investigated problems that have occurred for other previous third year students and industrial software development projects.
* I have investigated all aspects of my own project, including generic risks and specific risks related to my project.
* I have also spoken to other students with experience in software engineering as they may be aware of risks that aren't obvious to me.

I will continue to manage the risk of my project by following up with another risk assessment which will be used to identify new risks and update the risk assessment table above.

# Conclusion

Within this document I have discussed a solution to a challenge lots of teachers within Computer Science are currently facing. This software will contain many useful features that will help reduce the average time a teacher spends marking work for a course. The application will be able to host coursework and allow the assessors to mark and provide feedback within the same application. The assessor will be able to upload unit tests for a piece of coursework so when users submit their work, their code is automatically compiled and tested reducing the overall time the assessor spends marking. The ability to leave feedback on lines of code will be help students understand where they went wrong which will result in the students also benefiting from this new software. I have included relevant information about related applications and how they are similar and have inspired this project. The risks within this project have been analysed thoroughly and appropriate actions have been planned in case problems arise. I have discussed how I will manage my time in order to achieve the aims of the project and explained my decision in using the iterative development life cycle model.

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Section 1

* The motivation and context are evidenced through reference to initiatives or reports from government, industry, public bodies or academic sources.
* There are clear, ambitious and detailed aims for the project. There is evidence they can be carried through to completion. Aims are imaginative and creative. These are conveyed precisely and effectively to the reader.
* Extensive independent research and effort using primary sources
* Mature and thorough evaluation of previous work including a critical comparison and reflection on the knowledge and evidence of integration into the project.

Section 2 & 3

* Demonstration of a sound body of understanding across the topic, and effective judgement in the selection of appropriate techniques.
* In depth understanding of technical background and evidence of ability to apply it in a constructive fashion.
* Critical evaluation of approaches and the current limits of knowledge are appreciated.
* Substantial progress has been made for this stage of the project.
* Original thinking has been demonstrated.
* Demonstration of conceptual understanding at the forefront of the discipline.

Sections 4 5 6 7

* Effective judgement in the selection of a software development model has been demonstrated.
* There is a clear and precise description of how the chosen SDLC will be applied.
* The work schedule identifies deliverables that are detailed and ambitious.
* The size of each deliverable is appropriate and demonstrates progression.
* Each deliverable is associated with a method to measure its success, and risks are identified with mitigation.
* Delivery is timetabled appropriately.
* The reader is convinced that effective project management will take place as an integrated and useful component of the project.
* All risks are identified with mitigation. These include generic and project specific risks.
* It is clear how risks will be identified during the project, and risk management is a core component of the project.