

# **Inference at the edge: the impact of compression on performance**

**Deliverable 1: Final year Dissertation**

**Bsc Computer Science: Artificial Intelligence**

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December 3, 2020

## **DECLARATION**

I, Sam Fay-Hunt confirm that this work submitted for assessment is my own and is expressed in my own words. Any uses made within it of the works of other authors in any form (e.g., ideas, equations, figures, text, tables, programs) are properly acknowledged at any point of their use. A list of the references employed is included.

Signed: .....

Date: .....

**Abstract:** a short description of the project and the main work to be carried out – probably between one and two hundred words

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# 1 Introduction

*Summarising the context of the dissertation project, stating the aim and objectives of the project, identifying the problems to be solved to achieve the objectives, and sketching the organisation of the dissertation. Good intro: hypothesis (assertion) one aim, set of objectives for meeting aim, try and quantify objectives (25% better perf)*

## 1.1 Motivation

With the continued revolution of AI technologies a desire to perform inference at the edge is becoming ever more prevalent. The argument for localising inference is only becoming stronger with the ever increasing availability of computation resources alongside new and constantly evolving AI applications, inference at the edge can provide better privacy and latency than the remote datacenter alternatives. Neural network compression is one avenue for bringing inference to the edge, intuitively we might think that a network with a smaller memory footprint would naturally have lower inference latency but this is often not the case.

## 1.2 Hypothesis

*An appropriate combination of compression techniques applied in a layer-context-aware manner can improve inference latency without reducing accuracy significantly, whilst constrained within a typical edge computing environment.*

## 1.3 Research Aims

This dissertation will research methodologies for reducing inference latency with a collection of off-the-shelf compression techniques, we will investigate which compression techniques have a positive effect on inference latency, and consider the context of this improvement with respect to the internal structure of the neural network.

1. This research project will explore a pool of compression techniques and apply a varied composition of them in a manner that is sensitive to the context of the individual layer structures within a network.

2. We will seek to optimise inference latency within a typical edge environment.
3. The reasearch will attempt to provide evidence of effective compression techniques for a given layer type within a conventional neural network.

Issues with limited resource computation [1]

outline the document: We start with ..., then we cover x, y, and z ...

## 2 Background

*Discussing related work found in the technical literature and its relevance to your project.* This Section will be split into 4 subsections:

Section 2.1 - **Deep Learning**: An overview of the basic components of a deep neural network and the CNN model.

Section 2.2 - **Neural Network Compression**: Discusses neural network compression techniques and on how they change the underlying representations of DNNs.

Section 2.3 - **AI accelerators** Covers a few popular AI accelerators architectures, their strengths, weaknesses and specialisms.

Section 2.4 - **Memory factors for Deep Neural Networks**: Describes the how DNNs interact with memory, and discusses some of the implications of this.

### 2.1 Deep Neural Networks

#### 2.1.1 Neural Networks & Deep Learning

- *Summary of NN*
- *Structure of NN*
- *Training & Inference stages*
- *weight update methodologies*
- *Feed Forwards*
- *Feedback Nerual Network*
- *Self-organizing Neural Network*
- *Weight parameters updated using back-propagation*

Deep learning is a subcategory of machine learning techniques where a hierarchy of layers perform some manner of information processsing with the goal of computing high level abstractions of the data by utilising low level abstractions identified in the early layers [2].

Neural networks fundamental purpose is to transform an input vector commonly referred to as  $X$  into an output vector  $\hat{Y}$ . The output vector  $\hat{Y}$  is some form of classification such as a binary classification or a probability distribution over multiple classes [3]. Between the input layer ( $X$ ) and the output layer ( $\hat{Y}$ ) there exists some number of interior layers that are referred to as



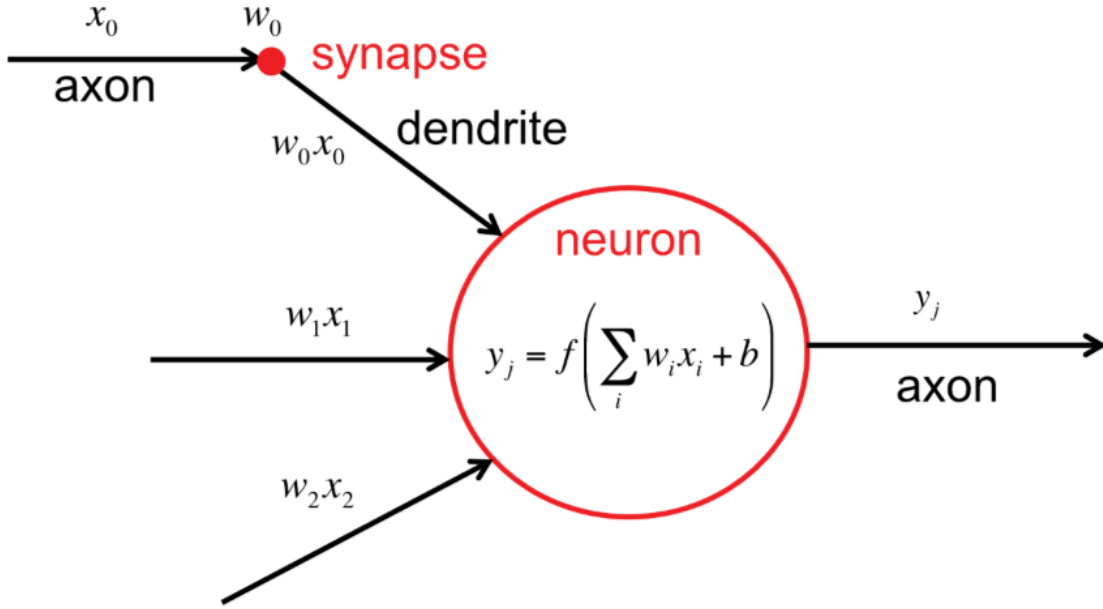


Figure 1: Neuron with corresponding biologically inspired labels.  
(Adopted figure from [1])

hidden layers, the hidden and output layers are composed of neurons that pass signals derived from weights through the network, this model of computing was inspired by connectionism and our understanding of the human brain, see Fig. 1 for labels of the analogous biological components. Weights in a neural network effectively correspond to the synapses in the brain and the output of the neuron is modelled as the axon. All neurons in a Neural network have weights corresponding to their inputs, these weights are intended to mirror the value scaling effect of a synapse by performing a weighted sum operation [1].

Neural networks and deep neural networks are often referred to interchangeably, they are primarily distinguished by the number of layers, there is no hard rule indicating when a neural network is considered deep but generally a network with more than 3 hidden layers is considered a deep neural network, the rest of this dissertation will refer to DNNs for consistency. Each neuron in a DNN applies a non-linear activation function to the result of its weighted sum of inputs and randomly initialised weights, without which a DNN would just be a linear algebra operation [1], the cumulative effect of the activations in each layer results in elaborate causal chains of transformations that influence the aggregate activation of the network.

### 2.1.2 Inference and Training

*Training* or learning in the context of DNNs is the process of finding the optimal parameters (value for the weights and bias) in the network. Upon completion of training *inference* can be performed, this is where new input data is fed into the network, a series of operations is performed using the trained parameters, and some meaningful output is obtained such as a classification, regression, or function approximation. Many techniques can be used to search for optimal parameters, one example known as supervised learning is as follows: Begin by passing some training data through the network, next the gap between the known ideal output (labels) and the computed outputs from the current weights is calculated using a loss function. Finally the weights are updated using an optimization process such as gradient descent coupled with some form of backward pass, backpropagation is a popular choice for this.

### 2.1.3 Convolutional Neural Networks

*Convolutional Neural Network (CNN)*

- A class of DNN
- CNN consist of: Convolutional Layers, Pooling layers & fully connected layers.
- Convolutional Layers contain sets of filters/kernels
- Should emphasize the computation requirements in conv layers & the memory access requirements in FC layers (see page 28 [4])

Much like traditional neural networks the CNN architecture was inspired by human and animal brains, the concept of processing the input with local receptive fields is conceptually similar some functionality of the cat's visual cortex [5]–[7]. The influential paper by Hubel & Weisel [5] ultimately had a significant influence on the design of CNNs via the Neocognitron, as proposed by Fukushima in [8] and again evaluated in [9] **(provide some comment on these papers)**.

A critical aspect of image recognition is robustness to input shift and distortion, this robustness was indicated as one of the primary achievements of the Neocognitron in Fukushima's paper [8]. LeCun and Bengio provide comprehensive explanations of how traditional DNNs are so inefficient for these tasks

The local receptive fields enable neurons to extract low level features such as edges, corners, and

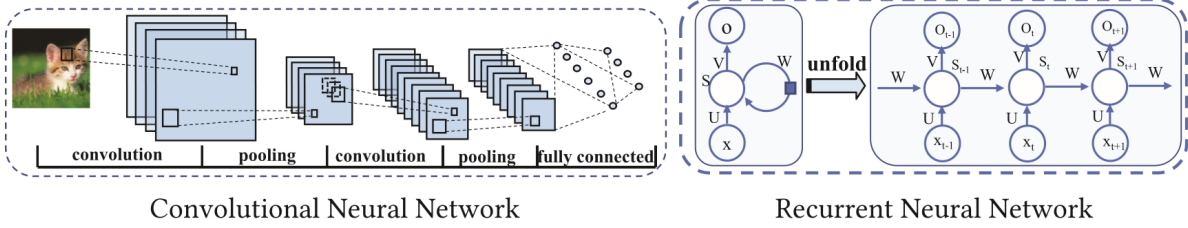


Figure 2: A typical example of a CNN (left) and RNN (right)  
**(Adopted figure from [10])**

end-points with respect to their orientation. CNNs are robust to input shift or distortion by using receptive fields to identify these low level features across the entire input space, performing local averaging and downsampling in the layers following convolution layers means the absolute location of the features is less important than the position of the features relative to the position of other identified features [6]. Each layer produces higher degrees of abstraction from the input layer, in doing so these abstractions retain important information about the input, these abstractions are referred to as feature maps. The layers performing downsampling are known as pooling layers, they reduce the resolution or dimensions of the feature map which reduces overfitting and speeds up training by reducing the number of parameters in the network [7].

Convolutional Networks for Images, Speech, and Time-Series by LeCunn & Bengio

CNNs have been found to be effective in many different AI domains, popular applications include: computer vision, NLP, and speech processing.

#### 2.1.4 Recurrent Neural Netowrks

*Recurrent Neural Network (RNN)*

RNNs are deep learning models that use loops in their layer connections to make predictions with sequential inputs and maintain state over those inputs, this architecture is designed specifically for time series predictions [11].

## 2.2 Neural Network Compression

Neural network compression is necessary due to storage related issues that often arise on resource constrained systems due to the high number of parameters that modern DNNs tend to use, state-of-the-art CNNs can have upwards of hundreds of millions of parameters. Different compression methods can result in various underlying representations of the weight matrices, particularly with respect to its sparsity. Compression techniques that preserve the density of the weight matrix tend to result in inference acceleration on general-purpose processors[12], [13], not all techniques preserve this density and can result in weight matrices with various degrees of sparsity which in turn have varying degrees of regularity. These techniques, the resulting representations of parameters, and their consequences will be discussed in this section.

### 2.2.1 Pruning

Network pruning is the process of removing unimportant connections, leaving only the most informative connections. Typically pruning is performed by iterating over the following 3 steps: begin by evaluating the importance of parameters, next the least important parameters are pruned, and finally some fine tuning must be performed to recover accuracy. There has been a substantial amount of research into how pruning can be used to reduce overfitting and network complexity [14]–[17], but more recent research shows that some pruning methodologies can produce pruned networks with no loss of accuracy [18].

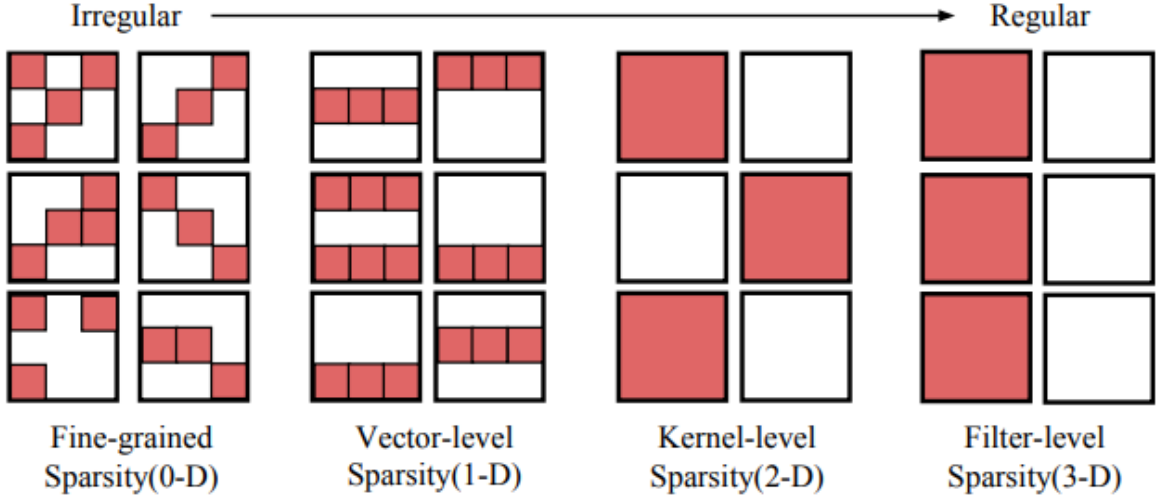


Figure 3: Sparse structures in a 4-dimensional weight tensor. Regular sparsity makes hardware acceleration easier.

(Adopted figure from [19])

This process of pruning the weight matrix within a DNN results in a sparse matrix representation of weights, where the degree of sparsity is determined by the pruning algorithm being used and hyperparameters that can be tuned for the situation, such as how much accuracy loss is considered acceptable, and to what degree the neural network needs to be compressed. The pattern of sparsity in a weight matrix is a fundamental factor when considering how to accelerate a pruned neural network [19], this is known as the **granularity of sparsity**. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of granularity of sparsity, the spectrum of granularity usually falls between either **fine-grained (unstructured)** or **course-grained (structured)**, pruning techniques are also categorised by the aforementioned granularities.

The influential paper Optimal Brain Damage by LeCun et al [16] was the first to propose a very fine-grained pruning technique by identifying and zeroing individual weights within a network. Fine-grained pruning results in a network that can be challenging to accelerate without custom hardware such as proposed in [20], [21], a software solution has been theorized by Han et al [22] that would involve developing a customized GPU kernel that supports indirect matrix entry lookup and a relative matrix indexing format, see Section 2.2.2 for further details on the necessary steps for this technique.

Coarse-grained pruning techniques such as channel and filter pruning preserve the density of the network by altering the dimensionality of the input/output vectors, channel pruning involves removing an entire channel in a feature map, filter level pruning likewise removes an entire convolutional filter.

This style of pruning however can have a significant impact on the accuracy of the network, but as demonstrated by Wen et al [23] accelerating networks with very coarse-grained pruning is straightforward because the model is smaller but still dense, so libraries such as BLAS are able to take full advantage of the structure.

### 2.2.2 Quantisation and Weight Sharing

Most off-the-shelf DNNs utilise floating-point-quantisation for their parameters, providing arbitrary precision, the cost of this precision can be quite high in terms of arithmetic operation latency, high resource use and higher power consumption. However this arbitrary precision is often unnecessary, extensive research [24], [25] has shown reducing the precision of parameters can have an extremely small impact on the accuracy.

Fixed-point quantisation is the process of limiting the floating point precision of each parameter within a network to a fixed point.

In the extreme fixed-point quantisation can represent each parameter with only 1 bit (also known as binary quantisation), Umuroglu et al. [26] used binary quantisation with an FPGA and achieved startling classification latencies ( $0.31\mu\text{s}$  on the MINIST dataset) while maintaining 95.8% accuracy, this is largely because the entire model can be stored in on-chip memory this is discussed further in Section 2.4.1.

Utilising fixed-point and binary quantisation can result in many weights using identical or very close weight values, these repeated weight values creates an ideal situation to use weight sharing techniques.

The paper Deep Compression by Han et al [22] weight sharing is taken a step further. First the weights are pruned and quantized, next clustering is employed to gather the quantized weights into bins (whose value is denoted by the centroid of that bin) finally an index is assigned to each weight that points to the weights corresponding bin, the bins value is the centroid of that cluster, which is further fine-tuned by subtracting the sum of the gradients for each weight in the bin their

respective centroid see Fig. 4.

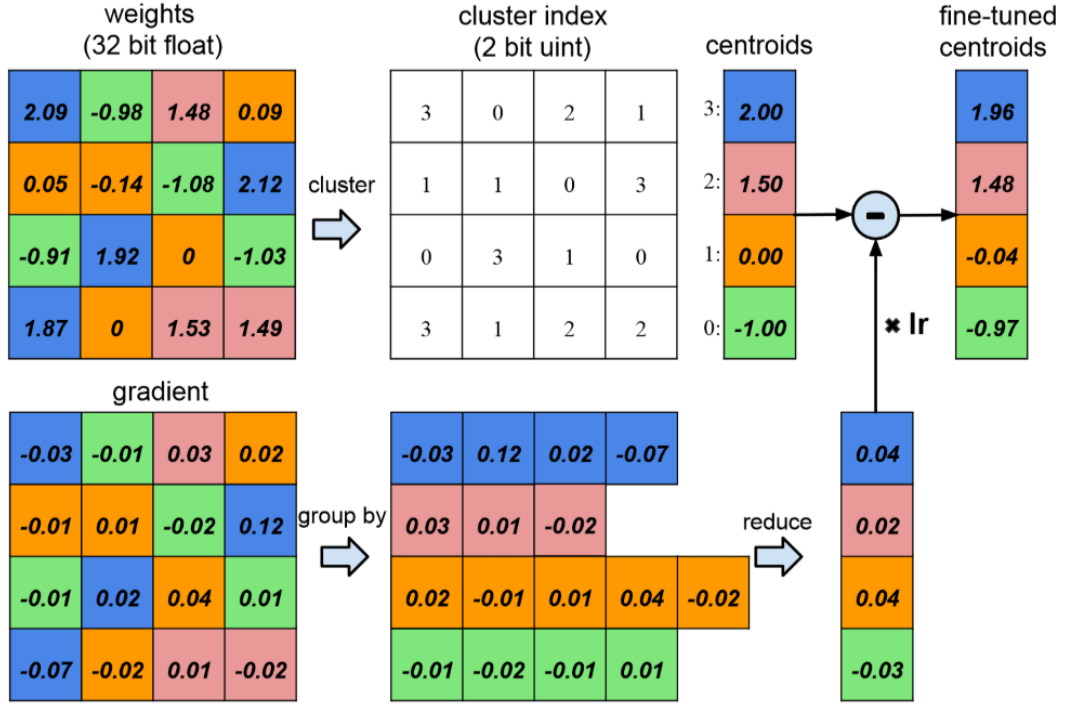


Figure 4: Weight sharing by quantisation with centroid fine-tuning using gradients (Adopted figure from [22])

### 2.2.3 Distillation

### 2.2.4 Low-rank Factorization

### 2.2.5 Network Design Strategies

## 2.3 AI accelerators

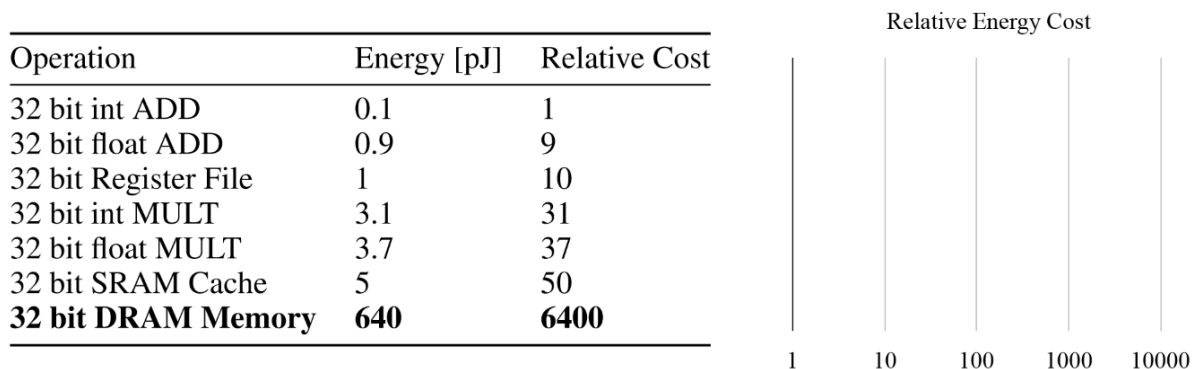


Figure 5: Energy table for 45nm CMOS process  
(Adopted figure from [18])

The increasing popularity of DNNs for classification tasks such as computer vision, speech recognition and natural language processing has prompted work to accelerate execution using specialised hardware. AI accelerators tend to prioritise improving the performance of networks from two perspectives; increasing computational throughput, and decreasing energy consumption. Energy consumption is critical to the feasibility of performing inference on mobile devices, the dominant factor in this area is memory access, figure. 5 shows the energy consumption for a 32 bit floating point add operation and a 32 bit DRAM memory access on a 45nm CMOS chip, they note that DRAM memory access is 3 orders of magnitude of an add operation. Hardware is commonly referred to as an AI accelerator, these can be built to accelerate both the *training* and *inference* stages of execution, this section will specifically focus on the *inference* phase, however some of the following are capable of both.

### 2.3.1 GPU

### 2.3.2 VPU

One commercial hardware accelerator using a VPU architecture is the Intel Movidius Neural Compute Stick.

- 16 VLIW (very long instruction word) SHAVE (streaming hybrid architecture vector engine) processors, optimized for machine vision and able to run parts of a neural network in parallel



- 4Gb LPDDR3 DRAM

### 2.3.3 TPU

The TPU is a custom ASIC developed by google, designed specifically for TensorFlow, conventional access to these chips is via a cloud computing service. Google claims [27] the latest 4th generation TPUv4 is capable of more than double the matrix multiplication TFLOPs of TPUv3 (Wang et al. [28] describes a peak of 420 TFLOPs for the TPUv3). The TPU implements data parallelism in a manner prioritising batch size, one batch of training data is split evenly and sent to each core of the TPU, so total on-board memory determines the maximum data batch size. Each TPU core has a complete copy of the model in memory, so the maximum size of the model is determined by the amount of memory available to each core [28].

### 2.3.4 APU

## 2.4 Memory factors for Deep Neural Networks

### 2.4.1 Memory Allocation

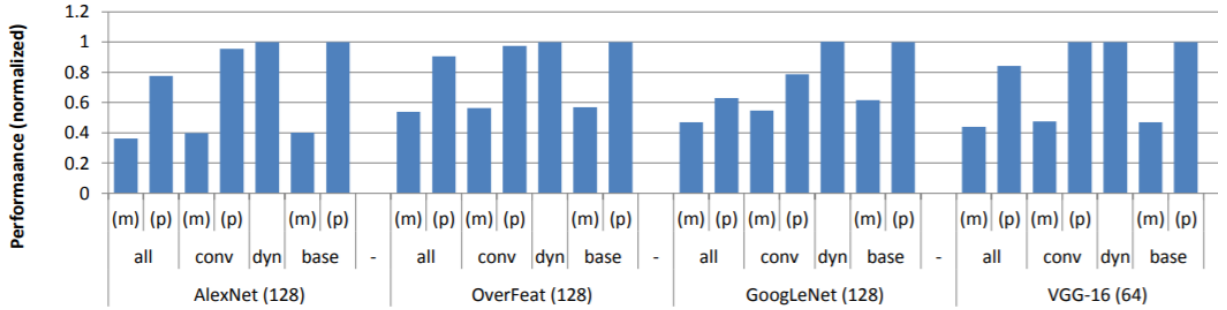


Figure 6: vDNN performance, showing the throughput using various memory allocation strategies. (Adopted figure from [29])

While designed specifically for training networks that would otherwise be too large for a GPU, the memory manager vDNN proposed by Rhu et al [29] does provide some insight into the importance of memory locality to neural network throughput. Fig. 6 summarizes the performance of neural networks using vDNN to manage memory compared to a baseline memory management policy (*base*). The vDNN policies include: static policies (denoted as *all* and *conv*) and a dynamic policy

(*dyn*). *base* simply loads the full model into the GPU memory, consequently providing optimal memory locality. *all* refers to a policy of moving all  $X$ s out of GPU memory, and *conv* only offloads  $X$ s from convolutional layers,  $X$ s are the input matrices to each layer, denoted by the red arrows in Fig. 7. Each of *base*, *conv* and *all* are evaluated using two distinct convolutional algorithms - memory-optimal ( $m$ ) and performance-optimal ( $p$ ). Finally the *dyn* allocation policy chooses ( $m$ ) and ( $p$ ) dynamically at runtime.

Observing the results in Fig. 6 where performance is characterized by latency during feature extraction layers; a significant performance loss is evident in the *all* policy compared to baseline, this loss is caused because no effort is made to optimise the location of network parameters in memory. In this example the memory allocations are being measured between memory in the GPU (VRAM) and host memory (DRAM) accessed via the PCI lanes. This does show how important the latency in memory access can be crucial for model throughput.

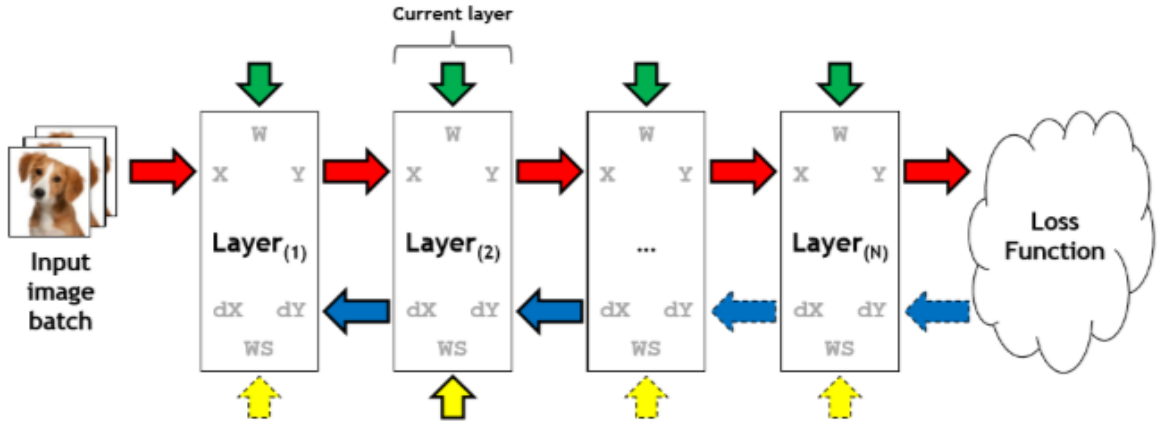


Figure 7: Memory allocations required for linear networks. All green ( $W$ ) and red ( $X$ ) arrows are allocated during inference, the blue and yellow arrows are allocated during training. (Adopted figure from [29])

**Justifies the need for compression ... pruning**

### 2.4.2 Memory Access

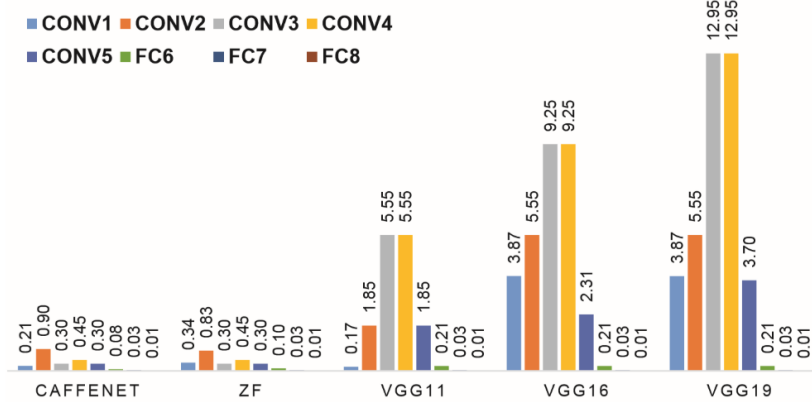


Figure 8: Operations demanded in different layers (GOP)  
(Adopted figure from [4])

A significant portion of DNN computation is matrix-vector multiplication, ideally weight reuse techniques can speed up these operations. However some DNNs feature FC layers with more than a hundred million weights (Fig. 8), memory bandwidth here can be an issue since loading these weights can be a significant bottleneck [4]. As observed in Section 2.4.1 this indicates that compression (Section 2.2) techniques could help alleviate this bottleneck by making parameters available for cache reuse. However often modern networks are so large and complex there can still be an insufficient cache capacity for the full network parameters even when using modern compression techniques such as described in [22], in a follow up paper Han et al. [20] discuss this case where memory accesses occur for every operation because the codebook (from a pruned and then quantised network) cannot be reused properly. This paper proposes EIE (an FPGA inference engine for compressed networks) also shows that while compression does reduce the total number of operations and a tangible speedup can be observed in the FC layers see Fig. 9, this technique when applied to convolutional layers has some issues. This is due to the irregular memory access patterns, lack of library and kernel level support for this style of sparse matrix (as discussed in Section 2.2.1). It should also be noted that Fig. 9 is comparing general purpose compute hardware with a custom built FPGA, so the speedup while impressive would be more appropriate compared to other purpose built FPGAs, however the most pertinent part of this Figure are the single batch size FC layers with dense and sparse matrices.

Platform	Batch Size	Matrix Type	AlexNet			VGG16			NT-		
			FC6	FC7	FC8	FC6	FC7	FC8	We	Wd	LSTM
CPU (Core i7-5930k)	1	dense	7516.2	6187.1	1134.9	35022.8	5372.8	774.2	605.0	1361.4	470.5
		sparse	3066.5	1282.1	890.5	3774.3	545.1	777.3	261.2	437.4	260.0
	64	dense	318.4	188.9	45.8	1056.0	188.3	45.7	28.7	69.0	28.8
		sparse	1417.6	682.1	407.7	1780.3	274.9	363.1	117.7	176.4	107.4
GPU (Titan X)	1	dense	541.5	243.0	80.5	1467.8	243.0	80.5	65	90.1	51.9
		sparse	134.8	65.8	54.6	167.0	39.8	48.0	17.7	41.1	18.5
	64	dense	19.8	8.9	5.9	53.6	8.9	5.9	3.2	2.3	2.5
		sparse	94.6	51.5	23.2	121.5	24.4	22.0	10.9	11.0	9.0
mGPU (Tegra K1)	1	dense	12437.2	5765.0	2252.1	35427.0	5544.3	2243.1	1316	2565.5	956.9
		sparse	2879.3	1256.5	837.0	4377.2	626.3	745.1	240.6	570.6	315
	64	dense	1663.6	2056.8	298.0	2001.4	2050.7	483.9	87.8	956.3	95.2
		sparse	4003.9	1372.8	576.7	8024.8	660.2	544.1	236.3	187.7	186.5
<b>EIE</b>	<b>Theoretical Time</b>		<b>28.1</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>28.1</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>6.5</b>
	<b>Actual Time</b>		<b>30.3</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>34.4</b>	<b>8.7</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>7.5</b>

Figure 9: Wall clock time ( $\mu$ ) comparison for sparse and dense matrices in FC layers between CPU, GPU, mGPU and EIE (an FPGA custom accelerator)  
(Adopted figure from [20])

### 2.4.3 Optimisation Techniques

- *What can we do between out of box pruning and achieving a speedup?*
- *What changes can be made to the underlying structures?*

Han et al [20] provide a clear description of a technique for exploiting the sparsity of activations by storing an encoded sparse weight matrix in a variant of compressed sparse column format [30].

### 3 Research Methodology

This is required for research projects and should be linked back to the project aim and objectives. It should describe the research methods that will be employed in the project and the research questions that will be investigated.

1. build dataset of benchmarks from my systematic benchmark framework from models
2. perform pruning on models
3. run benchmark again with pruning
4. make adjustments to underlying mechanism of parameter storage
5. verify adjustments do not break the model
5. run benchmarks again
6. draw conclusions

#### 3.1 Research questions

#### 3.2 Research steps

Find baselines/benchmarks

How to perform pruning

Look at underlying storage mechanism of parameters in Network

- provide some plots visualising the sparsity of the weights for the pruned matrix

perform some engineering of refactoring/altering these mechanisms

rerun systematic benchmarking framework

## 4 Design

Initial software design/sketch of research Methodology

## 5 Evaluation Strategy

Details of the evaluation and analysis to be conducted

## **6 Project Management**

### **6.1 Plan**

### **6.2 Risk Analysis**

mention benchmarking NLP/NLG/Audio - text/text - audio models as a risk to the project

### **6.3 Professional, Legal & Ethical issues**



## A Back matter

### A.1 References

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## A.2 Appendices

to include additional material, consult with your supervisor.

## Acronyms

**ASIC** application specific integrated circuit. 12

**BLAS** basic linear algebra subprograms. 9

**CNN** convolutional neural network. 3, 5, 6

**DNN** deep neural network. 4, 5

**FC** fully connected. 14

**FPGA** field programmable gate array. 9, 14

**NLP** natural language processing. 6

**RNN** recurrent neural network. 6

**TPU** tensor processing unit. 12