

TAKING THE EXAMS

Notes for Guidance

Your route to becoming a Chartered IT Professional

These Notes for Guidance apply to the examinations and should be read in conjunction with the Syllabus for BCS Higher Education Qualifications, which is reviewed and published each year.

From time to time, authorities in some countries may impose certain restrictions on how we operate. However BCS makes every effort to ensure that these neither advantage nor disadvantage the candidates in those countries.

1 Eligibility

2 Academic Level of the qualifications

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- 2.2 Professional Graduate Diploma in IT Examination.
- 2.3 Professional Project (Diploma in IT Level)
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3 The syllabus and regulations

4 The Professional Project (Diploma in IT and Professional Graduate Diploma in IT Level)

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1 Eligibility

You may take any module without having evidenced qualifications, though you are strongly recommended to ensure you have adequate knowledge for the level of module that is being examined. To pass Diploma in IT or Professional Graduate Diploma in IT complete levels, you must have passed the previous level, or been granted an exemption. To pass Certificate in IT level you must pass all three modules. The following notes are offered for guidance:

- You are expected to have a standard of general education equivalent to the English GCE A level. You must be at least 16 years of age and have completed the equivalent of 12 years of schooling before you attempt the BCS Higher Education Qualifications. If you are younger than 16 and you wish to take these exams you must obtain written permission from BCS.
- You must be able to communicate adequately in English.
- You will be expected to draw on practical experience when answering examination questions, particularly at the Professional Graduate Diploma in IT level.
- Examination questions at both Diploma and Professional Graduate Diploma in IT level will assume knowledge of the subject areas covered by the Certificate in IT modules.
- Prior knowledge expected for specific modules will be listed in the syllabus.

2 Academic Level of the qualifications

2.1 Certificate in IT and Diploma in IT

The Certificate in IT is the academic equivalent to Year 1 of an English university honours degree. The Diploma in IT is the academic equivalent to Year 2 of an English university honours degree.

2.2 Professional Graduate Diploma in IT

The Professional Graduate Diploma in IT is the academic equivalent to the final year of an English university honours degree.

2.3 Professional Project (Diploma Level) The Professional Project Diploma level is examined to the level expected of a project submitted in Year 2 of an English university honours degree.

2.4 Professional Project (Professional Graduate Diploma Level)

The Professional Project Professional Graduate Diploma level is examined to the level expected of a final year of an English university honours degree project.

3 The syllabus and regulations

The syllabus is kept under review to ensure that it remains up to date and relevant to the needs of IT professionals. New optional modules may be added and updates made to existing modules each year. Two years' notice will be given both for changes to the structure of the qualifications and for the discontinuation of modules.

4 The Professional Project

4.1 Purpose

The purpose of the Professional Project at Diploma and at Professional Graduate Diploma levels is to demonstrate an appropriate level of professional competence in the development of a suitable computer-based system. To demonstrate this fully, the project must be "real" in the sense that the end product can be used to do a real job for users other than the author. A development for use by the candidate alone, a collection of course exercises, a literature search, or a descriptive evaluation is unacceptable. If possible, the project should come from the candidate's normal work.

All Professional Projects will be expected to demonstrate that the work undertaken is of professional quality and value to the customer. If the project contains confidential material, the candidate is invited to contact the HEQ office for advice. It is mandatory that you submit a project proposal so that the examiners can comment on the suitability of the work proposed.

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4.2 Purpose of the project proposal

The purpose of the proposal for the Professional Project at Diploma and at Professional Graduate Diploma levels is to set up a framework to enable the project work to be managed, achieved and documented efficiently and successfully. It should be constructed so that the prospective project work may be assessed in advance for fitness; and so that advice may be given to enable that fitness to be achieved and maintained.

While the proposal is being constructed, pay close attention to the guidelines for the Professional Project so that you understand the requirements for the final submission. You will need to provide enough information to show how those requirements are to be met. If in any doubt, consult your authenticator for assistance in this aspect.

4.3 Structure of the project proposal

The project proposal should convey to the examiners the nature of both the product itself and the process by which it will be produced. The proposal should include:

- Identification - a working title, whether the submission is at Diploma or at Professional Graduate Diploma level, together with your name and membership number. Similar details should be given for the project's authenticator and for the project supervisor and/or a client, where relevant.
- Background - a short overview, with aims of the project, and any external involvement, such as an employer. A brief appreciation of why you chose this project work, and where the deliverables might be used in the future.

- Objectives – what you expect to attain, which can be measured. Project deliverables should be included here.
- Scope and approach – the boundaries of the work – items that are expected to be covered, and those parts beyond the project's expectation. The approaches to project management, analysis and design, implementation and testing may be described here. Also include here how the work will be shown to be fit for its intended purpose.
- Groupwork (applies ONLY to Diploma level work) - whether the work is to be an individual submission, or the work is to be undertaken as part of a group.
- Milestones – an overview of the expected timescale.

The above list does not imply that a particular method or approach has to be adopted. Any professional approach is acceptable but the proposal should address the above issues. Other aspects, such as likely resources and expected risks, might also form part of the proposal. Remember that the proposal should not exceed 500 words in length: this guideline should be sufficient to enable enough detail to be given without including superfluous material.

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4.4 Recommended hours

	Certificate in IT Modules	Diploma in IT Modules	Diploma in IT Project	PGD in IT Modules	PGD in IT Project
Study Hours (per module)	200	225		250	
Study Hours (total)	600	900		1,000	
Initial Experience Hours	175				
Practical Hours (per module) 75		75		25	
Practical Hours (total)	225	300		100	
Total	1,000**	1,200**	200*	1,100**	300*
Diploma in IT Total Hours			2,400**		
PGD in IT Total Hours					3,600**

* The total hours for the Projects include investigating the idea, undertaking the project and writing it up.

** The total hours include a distribution of study time between student staff contact time such as lectures, tutorials and supervised practicals, coursework and assignments and self-managed study.

4.5 Plagiarism – how to avoid

Plagiarism consists of passing off the work or ideas of others as your own. It is a clear breach of BCS’s Code of Conduct. In the context of BCS Higher Education Qualifications, specifically the Professional Project, plagiarism would include, for example: un-attributed quotation from a public source, including the internet; copying material from other people, e.g. colleagues, without acknowledgement; copying or reuse of designs, programs, or other source material without acknowledgement; submission of work jointly produced with someone else as if it were entirely your own work.

No intellectual endeavour is ever absolutely original. Even the most original minds depend on the thoughts and discoveries of their predecessors. Also, in information systems engineering, teamwork is an essential element of most developments. We have no objection to using other people’s work as part of your project but you must make clear in your project report what is your own work and what is the work of other people.

The following simple guidelines are intended to help you avoid straying from legitimate and desirable cooperation into the area of plagiarism:

- If your project uses work that has been done by your colleagues, include a section in your report called “Acknowledgments”. This explains what is your own work and what is the work of others. Include a bibliography in your work listing all the sources you have used, including electronic sources and documents such as company standards manuals
- Surround all direct quotations with inverted commas, and cite the precise source (including page numbers or the URL and the date you accessed it if the source is on the Web) either in a footnote or in parentheses directly after the quotation
- Use quotations sparingly and make sure that the bulk of the work is in your own words
- If you are reusing code or design information from another source, never remove annotation that identifies the original author, even when you are modifying the code

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- Remember that it is your own input that gives a piece of work merit. Whatever sources you have used, the structure and presentation of the argument should be your own. If you are using electronic sources, don't cut and paste sections into your work. If you are using books or papers, put them aside when you actually sit down to write. In this way you won't be tempted to copy in material that you don't understand, or be at risk of unintentionally copying in more material than a brief quotation, or of accidentally leaving quotations unmarked

BCS works hard to detect cases of plagiarism in project submissions and reserves the right to scan the project work through anti-plagiarism software. We take a very serious view of any cases of plagiarism that we find. The penalties for committing this offence are outlined in Section 10 of the Regulations, Breach of Regulations.

5 Study Hours (learning support time)

5.1 Rationale

Traditionally the study hours for these qualifications have indicated only the time students were expected to spend in the classroom and not in self-study or relevant employment. However, the manner in which course material is delivered has changed dramatically over the last decade. The traditional approach of attending a course, completing set exercises and sitting a final examination has been replaced by a far more flexible and student-centred approach to learning. In recognition of this, BCS has clarified the study hours to express student effort required in terms of learning-support time. (See table in section 4.4).

5.2 Learning support time

The table in section 4.4 breaks the learning support time down into three individual components: study hours (time in the

classroom), initial experience hours (to develop initial experience of a computer system and software – assuming Certificate in IT candidates having no IT working experience) and practical hours.

Candidates and approved centres should consult the following and gauge how much time is required by applying it to their own situation. These figures are approximate. Whilst the examiners recommend relevant practical experience, particularly at Professional Graduate Diploma in IT level, candidates who lack this will be expected to commit a far greater number of hours than stated to make up the deficit.

6 Study mode

A formal course of study, whether by attendance or distance learning, is not mandatory. However, candidates are advised that qualifications of this type should not be undertaken without adequate preparation.

BCS has two levels of approved centre recognition. The first level is registered approved centre. This means that the centre has committed to a Code of Practice that requires it to ensure that students are treated fairly and properly informed about the qualifications. It also provides students with the right to appeal to BCS in the case of grievance.

The second level is accredited approved centre. To achieve this level the centre must first become registered and then have its course provision successfully assessed by the BCS examiners. Candidates should be aware that accredited centres may not be accredited to run all BCS Higher Education Qualifications modules. The modules that centres are accredited to run are clearly stated on the BCS website.

7 Use of calculators

BCS will allow non-programmable calculators only in the following examinations:

- Certificate in IT - None
- Diploma in IT - Computer Networks, IT Project Management
- Professional Graduate Diploma in IT - None