

2013-14

Computing Undergraduate Students Industrial Placement Handbook

The purpose of this document is to provide information and advice as you embark on your placement. Please read it now and make sure that you do not lose it since you will need to refer to it several times during the forthcoming year.

The document comprises two sections. Section 1 contains information specifically for you, the student. Section 2 is based upon extracts from the official course Programme Document, which have been expanded in order to provide guidelines on the production of the report which you are required to submit as your academic commitment to the course whilst on placement.

Please print the Company Placement Handbook and give it to your Company Supervisor There are also documents that they need to return to us and to ensure an awareness of his/her commitment to the Placement. **The handbook can be obtained from**
<http://www.staffs.ac.uk/placements>

Any correspondence to the University should be sent to:

**Placements Unit
C027, Careers Centre
Staffordshire University
Beacon Building
Beaconside
Stafford
ST18 0AD**

Useful contact details

**Tel: 01785 353 460
Fax: 01785 353 605
Email: Placements@staffs.ac.uk
Placements Website:
<http://www.staffs.ac.uk/placements>**

Registering for a placement

In order to undertake a one year placement opportunity you must register your interest with the University Placements Team by filling out the form at <http://www.staffs.ac.uk/placements>

Administrative Details Please Take Note

It is essential that you complete the Placement Record Form as soon as possible after gaining approval for your placement and return this to the placements unit. This provides important information, including addresses and telephone numbers, which enable us to contact you during your placement. Clearly it is most important that you notify the placements staff of any changes (particularly addresses and telephone numbers), which occur during the year so that our information is always accurate. It is also important that you check your University e-mail account on a regular basis as this will remain ours and the University's way of contacting students out in industry. Please note your first visit from your Visit Tutor will normally take place around Christmas.

Section 1

Conduct

As an employee of the organisation for whom you will be working over the next 12 months (a minimum contract length of 48 weeks for full time awards and 32 weeks for Bridge students is required) you will be expected to conduct yourself in a way consistent with the expectations of both your employer and the University. It is important that you ascertain what normal practices exist within the organisation i.e. use of E-mail, standard dress code etc. In particular, you should maintain the same standards of time-keeping, and other working practices which permanent employees must comply with, especially in connection with professional and ethical protocol in relation to security and confidentiality of data and information.

I hope that you will be a good 'ambassador' for the University as your performance will form the basis for us being able to sustain long-term relationships with the company.

Supervision

Throughout your placement period you will be supervised by a Company Supervisor, (usually your line manager) and you will maintain contact with the University through a placement Visit Tutor. (These will be appointed at the start of the first semester and Visit tutors will normally conduct a first visit around Christmas.

You may know who will be your Company Supervisor as a result of the interview, which secured your placement. If this is not the case, you should establish, on commencing work, who your supervisor will be and communicate this information to the Placements Unit via the Placement Record Form.

A Placement Visit Tutor will be allocated to you as stated and will establish contact normally via telephone or e-mail.

You will normally receive two visits from your placement tutor during your period in industry.

You may find your tutors email address in the university directory:

www.staffs.ac.uk/directory

Health and Safety Issues

Employers have the primary duty to ensure the health and safety of placement students during their employment. The University has a Health and Safety record form which employers are required to complete and return, to ensure that they meet appropriate standards of health, safety and welfare. During your induction to the organisation the following items should be included where appropriate:

emergency procedures, safety policy received or location known, location of first aid box, first aid arrangements, fire procedures, accident reporting, display screen equipment regulations, manual handling procedures, protective clothing arrangements, instruction on equipment you will be using.

If you are in doubt over any of the above issues ask your Industrial Supervisor for clarification.

Work Expectations

It is hoped that your placement proves to be an interesting and stimulating experience, which will provide a good basis for academic work in the final year of the course. Do bear in mind, however, that most jobs have their mundane aspects, so do not be surprised if, at some time, you find yourself having to do what you consider to be routine, and perhaps even boring, tasks.

It is worth bearing in mind that routine tasks, which may not be particularly interesting or intellectually challenging, nevertheless have to be done and their timely and accurate completion could be very important. If, however, you feel that you are being asked to undertake an excessive amount of 'undemanding' work or, perhaps, are not being given enough work to keep you constructively occupied then you should take steps to rectify the situation. Often an informal discussion with your Company Supervisor will be all that is required - so do use your initiative rather than adopt a 'laissez faire' attitude, hoping that the situation will improve without your intervention. If you are unsure how to proceed, do not hesitate to seek advice from your University Visit Tutor.

It is most important that you use your initiative to gain the widest possible experience of the "real world" aspects of the business environment by taking full advantage of all opportunities open to you, consistent of course with the requirements of the position to which you were appointed.

Looking Ahead

In the final year of the course you will undertake a number of modules and a project. It is quite likely that your placement will help you both to identify modules which are attractive to you and also to generate ideas for your project, which, in turn contributes to your award.

It is recommended that, once you have settled in and are familiar with your working environment, you should keep a watchful eye open for an opportunity to identify an activity (an analysis, an investigation, a software requirement) related to your work which could form the basis for this project. There is no reason why you should not inform your Company Supervisor about this component of your final year studies - doing so may prompt some useful suggestions.

At some point during the placement period you will be required to register for your Level 3 modules. This is likely to take place during April/May and you will be contacted at that time.

Student Card/Loans information

Complete Student card form and hand in or post to:

STOKE STUDENTS

**Student Records, Information Centre, Flaxman Building College Road,
Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 2DE**

STAFFORD STUDENTS

**Student Records, Information Centre, Beacon Building, Beaconside
Stafford, ST18 OAD**

Student cards will be produced in September/October following confirmation from your school of your placement details.

Please note Tuition Fees are for the administration of your placement, not for its sourcing or the provision of a Visit Tutor. Fees will only normally be charged once you have successfully secured and started a placement.

REQUEST FORM

STUDENT CARD



Please note your card will not be issued until you have completed your enrolment process or your School have confirmed your industrial placement/year abroad.

Award	
Surname	
Forenames	
Date of Birth	
Student Reference	
Address to send card to (If part-time or on placement)	

If you wish to change your photograph, please attach a passport photograph for your Student Card

Please return this form to the Information Centre:

STOKE STUDENTS

Student Records, Information Centre, Flaxman Building College Road,
Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 2DE

STAFFORD STUDENTS

Student Records, Information Centre, Beacon Building, Beaconside
Stafford, ST18 0AD

Dear Student,

**RE: STUDENT LEA RENEWAL
PLACEMENT YEAR 2013/14**

According to the University records you will be on placement in the academic year 2013/14 and therefore not attending regular classes at the University.

Despite not being in attendance on the University premises it is important for you to complete all forms sent to you by Student Finance England (SFE) relating to the 2013/2014 academic year. If you are currently paying £3465 your placement period carries a tuition fee of £711.00 or if you are currently paying the new higher tuition fee rate eg £7490 or £7990 your placement period carries a tuition fee of £1000. It is crucial that SFE tuition fee assessment is renewed. You may apply for a tuition fee loan to cover this amount. For further information please contact SFE or the SFE European Team.

I am afraid that if SFE informs the University that it cannot pay our invoice, you personally will become liable for the tuition fees. Therefore, as you can appreciate, it is definitely in your interest to ensure that all relevant forms are completed and returned promptly to SFE.

If you require a student card for the academic session 2013/2014 please put your request in writing to **Lynn Hassall, Information Centre, Staffordshire University, College Road, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 2DE** ensuring you state the placement address for the card to be sent to. Student cards will be produced in September/October following confirmation from your faculty of your placement details.

If you move address during your placement year or if any of your personal details need amending please contact your Faculty Office so that your record can be updated. Should you have any queries regarding tuition fees/loans/student card please do not hesitate to contact me on the below number/email.

Yours faithfully

H. Ferneyhough

Ms Helen Ferneyhough
Student Information Manager
Direct telephone line 01782 292734
Email: h.ferneyhough@staffs.ac.uk

Please reply to: Student Records/Loans, Information Centre, College Road, Stoke on Trent ST4 2DE

Section 2

Supervised Work Experience

The pattern of the sandwich degree includes a supervised work experience period, which comprises of at least 48 weeks in Year 3, between Levels 5 and 6 of the course for full time awards and 32 weeks for Top Up students between Levels 5 and 6.

This experience is viewed as an opportunity for the student to sample a real working environment, which will help with study in the final year and also with students' career development.

During this period it is hoped that at least part of the Level 4 and 5 studies will be brought to focus on a problem or task having direct practical application and probably of a size not practicable in the University environment.

The placement period also provides a time for reflection, consolidation and maturation, with the student able to consider the direction of future studies at Level 6.

Aims

The aims of the placement year are as follows:

- (i) To provide practical experience of working within and for an organisation;
- (ii) To increase awareness of the financial and other constraints within which organisations function;
- (iii) To apply and further develop skills in communication and decision making within a practical environment;
- (iv) To develop appropriate behaviour and attributes within the work environment;
- (v) To experience at first hand the practical application of some of the theory and methods studied during the previous two years.

Objectives

At the end of the placement period the student should be able to:

- (i) Understand how an organisation is subdivided and managed;
- (ii) Appreciate the wide range of skills and knowledge that are required to practice successfully in commerce or the public sector and, in particular, appreciate the roles and requirements of multimedia and/or computing professionals and how they can complement each other;
- (iii) Write a report on the organisation and a major part of the work in which they have been involved;
- (iv) Make an informed choice of option modules.

The Report

During your placement period you will be required to submit a report giving an account of the environment in which you have worked and a description of the activities in which you have been engaged. The production of this report will be regarded as an opportunity to demonstrate your written communication skills.

The report is to be produced by you alone. **If there is likely to be any difficulty with regard to the availability of typing or word processing facilities then you should bring this matter to the attention of the Visit Tutor at an early stage.**

For this process it is a good idea to keep a diary or log of your activities from the start, which will help you to construct your report at a later date.

One hard copy of the report **including a copy of the company assessment** sheet available from:

Company's Placement Handbook

http://www.staffs.ac.uk/assets/Computing%20Company%20Handbook%202013_tcm44-24387.pdf and one copy in an electronic format should be submitted to the relevant school office by the appropriate date; Each student is responsible for retaining a safety copy of their own report.

ALL Computing Undergraduate Awards 16th July 2014 for those returning in September 2014

NON SUBMISSION of a STUDENT REPORT and SUPERVISOR'S MARK SHEET will mean that you will FAIL your placement

If you are unable to hand it in personally, then please obtain a CERTIFICATE OF POSTING (free from any UK post office) and allow three days First Class. You may wish to email a copy to your tutor (remember to include a note about company mark).

Format

A wide variety of working environments make it difficult to lay down a set format, but the following may be used as a model.

- (a) Introduction - a brief description of the company, its sector of business, organisation (including chart), and perceived major strategies.
- (b) The technological environment - a background to the technology systems used or planned in various functional areas, and any relationship between them.
- (c) An outline schedule of the work programme.
- (d) Project description(s) - an overview of the objectives of any projects with which the student becomes involved, with more detailed notes of the student's contribution and experiences.
- (e) Conclusions - a summary of what the student has learned during the placement and, possibly, recommendations on the future course of projects in which he or she has been involved.
- (f) Appendices - specifications, plans, listings, etc.

For further advice, both general and specific, on report writing you should refer to the Report Writing Guidelines at the end of the handbook.

Length

The report should contain approximately 3000 words of text (+/- 20%), excluding contents page and any diagrams, charts and appendices, which are considered appropriate. **A word count must be included** and should this differ substantially from the recommendation above a penalty may be imposed.

Confidentiality

The student should check with the Company Supervisor for possible security or confidentiality problems in disclosing material, and inform their Visit Tutor (at an early stage) if this is likely. Such problems may be resolved by a combination of the following.

- (a) Removal of data from the report.
- (b) Returning the report to the company after assessment.
- (c) The University Tutor may visit the company premises to mark the report.
- (d) Security vetting of University Tutor. (This should be avoided if possible as it causes delays.)

Assessment

The assessment of the placement period is based upon the performance of the student in the workplace as perceived by the Company Supervisor, the performance of the student as perceived by the Visit Tutor and the report marked by the Visit Tutor.

Many aspects of the third year experience cannot be controlled as tightly as are the years spent within the University. There are many factors that could upset the progress normally to be expected from a year of real-life work in a business organisation, extreme examples being a company closure or industrial action. In such rare cases, assessors would need to use subjective judgement in awarding an appropriate mark for the year.

Assessment Regulations

Stafford based awards

The assessment is made up of three components:

- (i) The Industrial Supervisors' mark weighted at 40%;
- (ii) The mark for the written report weighted at 20%;
- (iii) The Visit Tutor's mark for the placement period weighted at 40%.

Stoke based awards

The assessment is made up of three components:

- (i) The Industrial Supervisors' mark weighted at 40%;
- (ii) The mark for the written report weighted at 40%;
- (iii) The Visit Tutor's mark for the placement period weighted at 20%.

A copy of the Company Assessment Form is included in the Company's Placement Handbook.

In the assessment process, factors as indicated below will be taken into account.

The Company Supervisor's Component

- (i) How well the student fitted into his or her work situation.
- (ii) The student's performance as a member of the team.
- (iii) The student's ability in carrying out specified work.
- (iv) The student's ability to meet deadlines and to organise his or her workload.

The Visit Tutor's Assessment of the Report

- (i) An assessment of the student's report as a record of his or her employment experience.
- (ii) An impression of the student's contribution to his or her employer, as conveyed by the report.
- (iii) An assessment of the student's report as a professional communication document.

The Visit Tutor's Assessment of the Placement Period

- (i) A perception of the student's contribution to his or her employer.
- (ii) A perception of the student's technical ability and its application.
- (iii) A perception of the student's personal organisation and professional behaviour.

Progression to Level 3 for a Sandwich Award

In order to proceed to Level 3 for a Sandwich Award a student must have passed Level 4-5 as defined by the University regulations and in addition should normally have achieved a mark of at least 40% overall in the placement assessment.

Placement Referral

The form of referral of a failed industrial placement will be decided by the Award Board and will depend on the nature of the failure. It may, for example, take the form of a resubmitted report.

In exceptional circumstances a student who has failed The Placement Year **may** be allowed to repeat the year once only. In such cases it will be the student's own responsibility to find an appropriate placement in which to repeat the year.

Module Referrals

It is **your responsibility** to contact your level tutor or award administrator if you have any referrals from levels 4 and 5, in order to ascertain what form of referral work will be required for these modules. Re-sits normally take place at different points in the year. These commonly are January, June, and August. Please ensure that **you** find out when your referral/s will take place.



**Staffordshire University
Placement Record Form (UG)**

**STAFFORDSHIRE
UNIVERSITY**

1. Student Name

2. Student ID Number

3. **Company's** name and address including department

Tel	Email
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4. **Student's address** for correspondence during placement

Tel	Email
-----	-------

5. Start Date End Date (if known)

6. **Company Supervisor's** Name and Position

Tel	Email
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7. Job Specification

8. Student Declaration - I agree to read the handbook and keep Staffordshire University up to date with any changes to my circumstances i.e. work address, home address or mobile number.

Student's signature

This form must be completed as fully as possible and returned to the Placements unit when a placement has been secured. Please inform the placements unit if there are any changes to this form by sending an updated copy. You can return this form by email, fax or post.

Email:
placements@staffs.ac.uk

Placements Unit
Careers and Placements Office
Beacon Building
Staffordshire University
Beaconside
Stafford
ST18 0AD

Telephone:
01785 353 460

Fax:
01785 353 605

Office Use	
Th	<input type="checkbox"/>
SM	<input type="checkbox"/>
CV	<input type="checkbox"/>

Faculty	
CES	<input type="checkbox"/>
ACT	<input type="checkbox"/>
BEL	<input type="checkbox"/>

REPORT WRITING GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

A good report will, in general, be easily spotted; its title will be precise and informative, flicking through its pages will reveal an attractive layout and page format, its binding will be such that it opens flat to allow all text and diagrams to be easily seen.

Reading a report should be an interesting and pleasurable experience, made so by the use of a concise and fluent writing style, with non-textual material (tables, diagrams, graphs, etc.) carefully presented with appropriate labelling.

There can be no absolute rules about report writing since reports will vary both with respect to their nature and their intended readership. However, there are some 'golden' rules which will usually apply to most reports be they short or long, technical or non-technical. Likewise there are some rules which may not apply in some instances. The following checklist should be a useful guide.

- (i) The author(s) should plan and write the report bearing in mind who the reader(s) will be.
- (ii) The report should be as short as possible, consistent with the objectives set.
- (iii) The report should be structured and organised in a logical manner to aid the reader.
- (iv) The writing style should be formal, fluent and concise.
- (v) Care should be taken with the preparation and positioning of non-textual material like tables and charts.
- (vii) Before submission a report should be meticulously checked for accuracy, consistency, spelling and punctuation errors.

1 OBJECTIVES OF THE REPORT

Before writing a report its author must identify its purpose.

What is its subject matter?
Who will read (and perhaps use) the report?
What is its scope?

During the writing of the report the author should regularly check that it remains correctly focused on the objectives

It should be clear from the list of 'rules' above that the reader is of paramount importance and who this will be must be borne in mind when setting the objectives. Some questions to answer might include the following.

- (i) What does the reader already know about the subject matter of this report?
- (ii) What further knowledge will the reader expect to gain from reading this report?
- (iii) What kind of terminology will be appropriate?

In some instances a report will be written for a disparate readership; for example, both a technical manager and a personnel manager may be readers. Writing separate reports could be time-consuming and may even be 'politically' risky, since one reader may be suspicious that the other version presents a different 'picture'! A partial answer to this problem is to make appropriate use of appendices and summaries. The important point is that the author must recognise when such a situation exists and take a decision on how best to deal with the difficulty.

The approach, the technical level and the style of writing should all be dictated by a knowledge of who the reader(s) will be. A balance should be struck between a relatively informal style, when the reader will be a colleague, and a more formal approach when the report is destined, perhaps, for a managing director or someone in another organisation.

2 THE REPORT FORMAT

Once the objectives have been established, material must be collected and categorised. As it accumulates it should be put into one of three categories:

- (i) Information, which is clearly very important and will certainly be included in the report since it is completely relevant to the objectives;
- (ii) Borderline information which might be relevant to some readers, or which might amplify or substantiate other more important material;
- (iii) Information which, though interesting to the writer, is not relevant to the objectives.

As the report takes shape category (iii) material will probably be discarded, whilst that in categories (i) and (ii) should be further sifted to determine which should become 'main text' and which appendix material.

2.1 The Beginning

A conscious discussion must be taken on how to start (i.e. open) the report and this will again be influenced by the objectives and therefore, indirectly, by the reader. The writer should attempt to answer questions like:

How familiar is the reader with this topic already?

How much background information will the reader need in order to facilitate his understanding of the report?

Clearly the answer to the second question will depend upon the answer to the first. If this is 'not very' then more background material will be needed than if the answer is 'quite familiar'. If the answer to the first question is 'one reader is an expert in this field but another is not' then a balance will have to be struck between including a lot of detail in the text and relegating some to the appendix.

2.2 Appendices

An appendix (or appendices) should be used as a device for removing from the main text all information, which is not essential to ensure its flow and understanding. Remember that conciseness is important; if the main text is not cluttered by detailed statistics, data tables, explanations of technical terms and the like, it will be as readable as the material allows.

Thus an appendix is a good place for background information which one reader may take for granted but which another may choose to delve into. It is the place for supporting statistics, tables and diagrams which are not needed as the report is read. It is the ideal place for lists of symbols, technical terms and abbreviations that may be familiar to some readers but not others.

As mentioned already, tone (getting the balance right for the readership) is all-important. One reader may feel patronised if too much detailed explanation is included in the text, whereas another may be frustrated (and therefore irritated) if too much knowledge is assumed. Judicious choice of helpful back-up material included in an appendix could be a useful compromise.

2.3 Basic Structure - sections and sub-sections

The main text will usually be comprised of sections rather than chapters. Section headings should be as concise and specific as possible. Often, sections will require sub-division and therefore sub-headings. Adequate spacing ('white space') is important since this helps the reader to recognise the underlying structure. In a long report a major section should start on a new page. If a report is long it may well be that it will be 'used' rather than 'read'. That is, a reader may be particularly interested in certain sections and less so in others. In fact, a reader may well look at the beginning and end of the report first and then 'pick and choose' amongst its component sections according to his interests. For this reason each section should be clearly identifiable and its sub-sections easily recognised.

Obviously reports will vary - technical, non-technical, long, short, - and any given report will require some, but not necessarily all, of the following sections.

- Title page
- Acknowledgements
- Summary
- Table of Contents
- Introduction/Terms of Reference
- Procedure
- Results
- Conclusions
- Recommendations
- References/Bibliography
- Appendices

Depending upon the nature of the report, the writer may consider it appropriate to adapt this basic framework to its specific requirements. Whilst the above list prescribes the logical order of sections, there is no reason to assume that they will be written in this order. For example, the Summary will almost certainly be the last item to be drafted.

2.4 Notation

In technical reports the notation used to reference the various sections and subsections is usually decimal notation. The system is perfectly logical in that, as far as possible, the visual impact of headings, often created by the font style and size, should relate to their importance. The pattern is thus:

1.	MAIN HEADING
1.1	LESSER HEADING
1.1.1	Small Heading

Which should be applied to all sections of the report? This notation is usually modified for use with appendices by the addition of a preceding letter. Thus Appendix B.3.4 is the fourth sub-section of the third section of the second (letter B) appendix.

2.5 References

If reference is made to other sources of information this must be acknowledged, otherwise the author of the report may risk being accused of plagiarism. In a technical report the Harvard system of referencing is commonly used. In this system brief details of the source are given at the appropriate point in the text and full details are given in a bibliography at the end of the report. The brief details comprise the author's name, date of publication, and page number(s), enclosed in brackets thus (Smith A B, 1994, p124), and the full details will contain some or all of: author, title, edition, place of publication, publisher, date of publication, page numbers referred to. The bibliography should be an alphabetic listing by author.

3 WRITING THE REPORT

The style should be formal and the English clear and concise. 'Formal' means writing in full (e.g. it is rather than it's), avoiding slang and colloquialisms and using words correctly. Formal writing is more ordered and 'considered' than speech, but it does not have to be full of long words.

Usually a report is written in an impersonal style, thereby avoiding over use of 'I' and 'we'. Thus 'It was clear that...' is preferred to 'I could see that...'

3.1 Sentences

The basic component of text is the sentence. Good style involves the use of sentences of different lengths. Short sentences produce a clear, easy-to-read style. Long sentences are sometimes appropriate but they can pose a problem in that the writer may become bogged down in grammatical confusion. Above all, very long sentences should be avoided; a reader is likely to ignore a sentence, which is six lines long!

Variety in the way in which sentences begin is important since this helps the writing to flow easily and adds interest. If this attribute is missing the reader will easily become bored. Care should be taken not to open a string of successive sentences in exactly the same way. However, variety should not be introduced by overuse of clichés or jargon. 'At the present moment in time' is verbose; the more concise 'At present' is preferable.

3.2 Paragraphs

A paragraph should focus on a single theme, and will usually comprise a set of sentences designed to develop this theme. As with sentences, paragraphs should not be over long. Several paragraphs on a page, with consequent 'white space' between them, will encourage continued reading; conversely, very long paragraphs will create dense blocks of print, which will discourage the reader.

3.3 Checking

The first draft is likely to be flawed and a significant amount of revision and re-writing will probably be required. This process can be time consuming. Even when the text is considered to be satisfactory, meticulous checking of detail will be necessary - spelling, grammar, punctuation, typing errors,

A word processor's spell check facility is not infallible; - words correctly spelt but incorrectly used will not be identified. For example, misuse of 'there' and 'their' will not be detected. Thus even after a successful spell check, a conscientious 'editor' should read the text in order to detect this type of error.

Whilst most people will, out of habit, perform a spell check, many will probably not follow this with a grammar check. If the writer were not confident in his ability to compose grammatically correct prose, it would be very imprudent of him not to take the time to perform this check also.

4 DIAGRAMS

Diagrams (tables, graphs, charts, line drawings, or any other non-textual material) form an essential part of many technical reports. There is much truth in the saying 'A picture is worth 10,000 words!' The guiding principle here might be remembered as the 'four R's rule':

The right diagram with the right labels should be in the right place for the reader.

4.1 Layout

It can be irritating to have to interrupt one's reading in order to search for a diagram; it should be presented in the right place, that is, where it is needed. It should not be assumed that all diagrammatic material is to be placed in an appendix or appendices. Only if diagrams are supplementary, having no immediate bearing on the text, should this be done. A diagram, which is essential to facilitate the reader's understanding, should be positioned within the text. The reader is also helped if labels on diagrams are presented horizontally, so that the report does not have to be rotated in order that they may be read.

4.2 Tables

A table is the most common form of diagram in a technical report. Tables can provide a great deal of information and care should be taken to present them effectively. The routine use of horizontal and vertical lines to create individual 'cells' to accommodate data values should be questioned; the use of blank space may create a more attractive table. To provide more vertical space in a table, units and powers of ten should, if possible, be put into the column heading. Horizontal space may be created by grouping items and introducing a blank line between groups. For example, an annual financial breakdown could have months grouped into quarters.

4.3 Graphs and Charts

Graphs and charts are used to illustrate trends, relationships between variables or to enable comparisons to be made. Computer graphics packages facilitate experimentation to determine, for a particular type of chart, the most appropriate format to use. Care should be taken with the positioning of labels, titles, legend detail and diagram reference numbers. Probably the most sensible method of numbering is to use the decimal system in which, for example, Figure 2.3 would identify the 3rd diagram in section 2 of the report. References in the main text to diagrams should indicate, if necessary, the page number or appendix where the diagram is located.

5 FINISHING THE REPORT

5.1 The Summary

The various sections of a report will probably not have been written in the order in which they will appear in the finished document. Some sections, perhaps presenting purely factual material, will be relatively straightforward to compose and are likely to be tackled first; others, involving discussion, appraisal or analysis will be more demanding and will probably be left until later. However, in all cases, the last section to be written should be the summary. This should give, in a very concise form, a general picture (an overview) of the report. It will serve two purposes: a person who needs to decide whether he should read the entire report will consult the summary first, whereas a person who has already read the report would be likely to use it to remind him of the report's subject matter.

The writer's first draft of the summary will probably be too long. Close scrutiny, however, will usually lead to economies in terms of words used without sacrifice of information.

5.2 The Contents Page

Even in a short report there should be a contents page. This should list the numbered sections of the report with corresponding page numbers. Under each (main) section heading any sub-section headings should be named, together with their page numbers. This will enable the reader to select a particular sub-section and locate it easily, at the same time seeing its connection to what precedes and follows it.

5.3 Final Check

Ideally someone should check a report for typing errors and inconsistency other than the writer. However, in most cases it will be the writer who has to check his own work. This task, if it is to be done with care, should not be rushed. Further, proof reading should, if possible, be undertaken some time after the report has, supposedly, been completed. A quick check performed immediately after the last page has come off the printer will almost certainly result in many errors remaining unnoticed.

5.4 Appearance

The reader will form an initial impression of the report by just flicking through it, pausing at random to look at individual pages. Poor binding, pages in the wrong order (or even unnumbered), pages missing, narrow margins (particularly adjacent to the binding), too small or too large a font size, unusual font style, overcrowded pages, inappropriate line spacing, - all these faults will put the reader off before he starts to read. Of course, all of these are design and formatting features and should have been decided at an early stage in the report's production process.

If much time and effort has been devoted to the production of the report it is surely worth binding it within card covers to protect it from damage by creasing. On opening the front cover the first page will be the title page. This should contain the title, author's name, and date, classification (e.g. Confidential) if appropriate, section or department or company name, perhaps also a logo, and nothing more.

6 CONCLUSION

It is hoped that these notes will have provided some useful tips on report writing by indicating not only elements of convention and good practice, but also advising of likely mistakes and shortcomings. One final piece of advice is as follows. Whatever is the initial estimate of the time it will take to produce the report, then be prudent - Double it!

(These notes are based on a publication of the IEE entitled 'Technical Report Writing', by J van Emden and Eastal.

www.aston.ac.uk/lis/studyskills/assignments.htm)

Placement Experience Feedback Form

Please complete this form and submit it along with your report or to the placements office.

Name

Organisation

Job Title

What were the main benefits of completing a placement?

Do you have any regrets about your placement year?

What skills in particular have you acquired by doing a placement?

What advice would you give to other students who are about to commence their placement?

Would you allow the above comments to be passed on to other students?
YES/NO

Please add any further comments overleaf.

Thank you for completing this form.