Guide for student participants

You've successfully applied for and been offered a Nuffield Research Placement; well done! In this guide, you can find information on what to expect from your placement, how to write a report and how to create a poster to show off what you've done in your project, as well as information on payments and administration.

Contents

Preparing for your placement: What to expect on your first day

- Attend the regional Induction Event run by your coordinator. Don't be afraid to ask questions; you'll find that other students have the same questions as you!
- Ask your project supervisor if there is any background reading you can do to prepare.
- Have a look on your placement provider's website and think about any questions you may want to ask about the organisation.
- On your first day, you will probably feel nervous or anxious. This is normal, so don't worry!
- If you're not sure what to wear, ask your coordinator or supervisor in advance. If in doubt, it's better to be too smart than too casual on the first day.
- Arrive in plenty of time on your first day and take your supervisor's phone number with you in case you can't find the office or need to let them know you will be late. Your supervisor is giving up their time to help you so, if you are running late, you must inform your supervisor and your coordinator.
- The first week is all about getting to grips with your project. You probably won't be able to start your experiments immediately because your supervisor will be helping you to get up to speed on the topic area.
- You will probably also spend some time being shown the Health and Safety regulations so that you can work safely during your time on placement. If you forget or don't understand something, make sure to ask your supervisor to explain again.

Payments and administration

At your local Induction Event, it will be made clear what payments you can expect over the summer. You will also be asked to sign a Student Agreement explaining your role and responsibilities over the summer.

In order to get reimbursed for your travel expenses, you need to log your weekly costs and upload the relevant receipts on the application system. You will only receive payment for your travel if you have logged your expenses and uploaded the necessary evidence to your online account. The more organised you are in submitting your travel expenses, the quicker you will receive them. Please keep to the deadlines you are given by your coordinator.

Please note: Travel expenses are limited to £300 per student for the placement duration. Anything above this amount will not be reimbursed. We are unable to reimburse travel expenses for any students who choose to undertake a project out of their home region.

Writing your Nuffield Research Placement report

All students are asked to write a project report at the end of their placement. You should speak to your supervisor about your report early on, as they can help you to plan it. Some supervisors prefer reports to be structured in a particular way; this is fine. If they don't mind, below is a suggested format for your report. As a guide, reports should be longer than 10 but shorter than 20 pages. Remember, this is a scientific report, so you should be precise and professional in your writing.

Introduction

What did you set out to do? What were you being asked to do? What information about the subject did you already know (for example, from research papers or articles)? Did you read up on the subject? If so, where did you find the information? How did you go about finding information (perhaps your supervisor gave you some pointers about where to start)?

Abstract

Write a brief summary of your research. The reader will use this as a quick way to find out what your report is about.

Methodology

What sort of apparatus/equipment/techniques did you use and, in doing so, what safety precautions and special measures did you need to take and why?
Feel free to include diagrams, graphs and/or photos. An image can enhance a piece of text in your report by helping to better communicate ideas.

Results and discussion

What results did you get? You can include some or all data collection and results in your write-up.

Evaluation

If the work was to continue, what needs to be done and is there anything further anyone should look at or pursue?
Could anything have been done differently to the way you did it?

Appendix

The appendix can contain any additional information that the reader might find interesting.

References

You should include a list of any references you used at the end of your report (see below for suggested formats).

Bibliography

This is helpful, as it shows what other sources might be useful for readers interested in your topic.

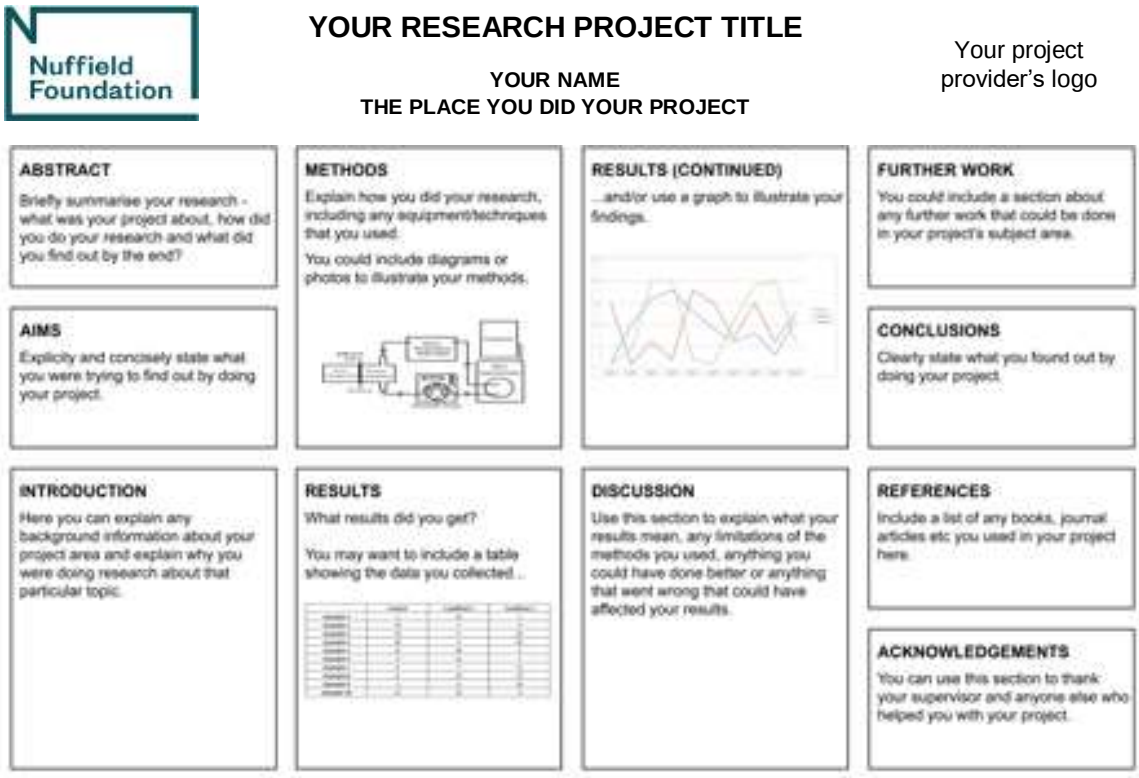
Acknowledgements

You may wish to say thank you to those who helped you on your project.
Did you consider the project to be worthwhile? Has it changed your view of how scientists work? Has it confirmed the fact that you want to pursue a career in science or scientific research?

Making your Nuffield Research Placement poster

As part of your Nuffield project, you'll also need to create a scientific poster. It's worth thinking about this during your project, as your supervisor may be able to help you print it at their organisation.

To get you started, we have created a suggested template for your Nuffield poster:



What is plagiarism and how can I avoid it?

Plagiarism is when you present someone else's work as your own. At school or university, you would be marked down or even disqualified for plagiarising someone else's work.
However, this doesn't mean that you can't use others' work in your report; you just need to make sure that you reference the work properly. For example, if you want to quote or present the ideas that you have read in a scientific article, you can; as long as you make a note in your report as to where these ideas have come from, which you can do in the text of the report.

For example:
Cause-effect relationships or the direction of causality have proved difficult to establish; in other words, higher levels of team cohesion may lead to more successful performances (Weinberg & Gould, 2003).

You should also add the full reference at the end of the report in the following format:
Weinberg, R.S. & Gould, D. (2003). Foundations of sport and exercise psychology (3rd ed.). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Talk to your supervisor and your Coordinator if you are not sure. This is something you'll need to use a lot if you carry on to university, so it's good to get to grips with it now.

After your placement

Each region has a Nuffield Celebration Event. This is a chance for all the Nuffield students from that region to get together and celebrate their achievements. It's also an opportunity to invite your parents, teachers and supervisors along to show them what you've done. At the Celebration Event, you'll be able to exhibit your poster and you may be asked to do a short presentation or answer some questions on your work. It's not an exam; it's a chance to show off what you have achieved, so enjoy the event!

If you want to take your project further, you can:

- Put your project forward for a CREST Gold Award, which is a well-respected accreditation scheme that you can include in your university applications. The CREST Awards are endorsed by UCAS for inclusion in a personal statement.
- Use your project to enter local and national science fairs. Prizes at the competition include trips to international science fairs in the USA and Europe, as well as many others.
- Publish your research project as an article in the Young Scientists Journal (YSJ). The YSJ is a free, online science journal written, edited and published by young scientists for young scientists, aged between 12 and 20. You can submit a contribution to the journal by uploading it on their website.
- Mention it in your UCAS personal statement.

Join our Alumni Network

As a member of the Nuffield Research Placement Alumni Network, you'll get the opportunity to become a Nuffield Ambassador, attend events and encourage future Nuffield students to apply for the scheme. If you have recently finished a placement, you can join the Alumni Network by completing this survey. Please also take a look at our Alumni page to find out more.

Marketing your Nuffield Research Placement

Taking part in the Nuffield Research Placement programme is an excellent way to gain some valuable experience and an insight into the world of research. By spending four to six weeks working on your project, you will have gained many useful skills that are valued by both universities and employers, regardless of the subject area you choose to go into after school or college.

Being able to talk passionately about an area of interest is something that universities and employers like to see at an interview, as well as in personal statements and CVs. When discussing your Nuffield Research Placement, think about which of the following skills you have gained:

Practical skills gained through a Nuffield placement

Technical skills

Consider the procedures or research methods that you have not had the chance to learn at school; these skills might have been gained in the lab, out in the field or through the use of specialised software packages. Have you had the chance to share what you learned with classmates? How have your practical skills at school improved?

Data collection/analysis/interpretation

The use of large data sets is common in science, technology, engineering and maths. Being able to analyse them efficiently and accurately is a very useful skill. Did you make use of Excel or statistical analysis software? What statistical tests did you use to analyse your experimental data?

Health and Safety

You almost certainly had to follow strict health and safety protocols during your placement; were you responsible for making sure that chemicals and equipment were handled and stored correctly?

Transferable skills gained through a Nuffield Research Placement

Problem-solving

It can be quite common to face unexpected problems in science; did you have to overcome any barriers or use your initiative in order to adapt your original work schedule?

Verbal communication

It is likely that you had to present your findings to people without a background in your subject; if so, what skills were necessary to get the right message across without losing the key details? Did you present your work at a Nuffield celebration evening or similar event? Were you asked by your teachers to present your project work to your classmates?

Teamwork

Did you have to work alongside other people in the team, either in a lab or in the field? When using expensive instruments, different team members will often want to use them at the same time; did you have to coordinate and agree session times or be adaptable so that you could use the apparatus once it was available?

Time management

Lab experiments or field studies often have to be left for a precise amount of time; did you have to manage your time effectively to make sure that you could fit all of your work in during the allocated time?

Planning and organisation

How did you go about planning your project to ensure that you could collect the necessary data? Did you hold responsibility for documenting your observations and keeping a clear record of all of your results?

Written communication

Think about the skills needed to communicate complex ideas to both technical experts and the general public. Did you produce a poster summarising your research project? Did you create a written report outlining the project aims, methods and procedures, results and a detailed conclusion or evaluation? Did you read a large amount of background material and summarise it concisely?

Commitment

Think about why you decided to apply for a Nuffield Research Placement. How do you feel about your subject after committing your summer holiday to carrying out research in a specific area?

And finally...

Think about what you learned by doing the placement. Has taking part in the Nuffield Research Placement programme sparked an interest in a new area? Maybe you have been able to transfer the skills you gained through your placement to other subjects? You should also consider the wider personal skills you developed through dedicating yourself to a research project; resilience, determination, logical reasoning and critical thinking.