

Ralph Rapley – BBC Factual

Background

This placement was undertaken at the BBC factual department at the BBC Television Centre, White City, London. It specialises in the research, organisation and production of a number of well know prime time television programmes such as Tomorrows World and Best Inventions. At the time of the start of the placement in September work was underway on the research for Best Inventions in which inventors send in ideas for various items that have reached at least a first patent stage. The ideas are collated, assessed and reported upon and further discussed at group meetings. A decision is then taken as to the worth of the invention with regard to the programme. At this time decisions were also being made as to the new format of the Tomorrows World programme.

Duties and General Work

The duties and general day to day work of the placement involved the reading and scanning of primary sources of information such as the daily press, weekly magazines such as New Scientist, Nature etc., more specialist publications such as Flight International, The Economist, etc. were also read and assessed. Any items that were of potential interest to the programmes were brought to the attention of one of the researchers and in particular the senior researcher. Periodic meetings were also held to discuss progress of various items such as the content of Best Inventions. There were also activities of a more specific nature. These included the research of particular items that were to be used on the programmes. This involved research on the internet, telephone conversations, written material, etc. and decisions on items to be used from sound archive etc. Additional items also included filming on location for specific items and here duties might have included any general items or specific matters relating to the running of the day.

Thoughts and Reflections on the Placement

The team and environment at BBC Factual, Tomorrows World was a lively and dynamic place to be. The team both immediate and others located in the same area were all very friendly, helpful and supportive. In general it was a 'fun' place to work. The duties were also interesting, although I understand that because of the timings and decisions of the new format the Tomorrows World programme that it might have been slightly different had the placement taken place at a different time. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects was the filming of items on specific locations. It was interesting to meet the people being filmed and also to see how the events of the day unfolded and especially how the timings were organised.

In general I was very surprised as to how the planning of filming days and items was undertaken. A great deal of thought and detail went into the preparation for the days. It was also interesting to see how ideas for specific items developed through the day with input from other members of the BBC team. Furthermore, there was always a high degree of emphasis on how to make, in some circumstances, complex ideas into ones which could be easily understood by the general public and that made interesting television.

Logistics and Travel

The BBC Centre was located at White City which meant that I travelled in from Hemel Hempstead. At this time there were some difficulties with train and underground travel which in some cases led to delays getting to and from the BBC Television Centre. Depending on the proximity it may well be better to find local accommodation for a similar placement.

Concluding Remarks

The placement at the BBC was a very interesting and enjoyable experience. The duties of the placement, including the filming, were fascinating and the planning and thought into how to convey ideas through the media very interesting. There are a number of aspects where I could see the adoption of ideas back in my own workplace. This in particular is a challenge since Universities typically are not good at presenting science to the general public. This is now even more essential in terms of funding also recruitment of new students. With regard to this I have since had a meeting with the external relations department, which was very interested in the Media Fellowship and its placement and also the ideas that arose from it. I would recommend a placement to anyone with an interest in science and the media. The BBC factual team would also be a great place to undertake such a period of time. My thanks to Melanie Heath and her team at the BBC for the time spent there.