Napier Consulting Partners preferred "House style" for reports

This section outlines a preferred "house style" for reporting writing. This includes some advice on how to structure and organise the report and bear in mind the reader of the report and how it should be styled.

Structure and organisation

Please use one file and submit via Turnitin prior to the deadline. The filename you use when uploading your final submission to Moodle must contain your matriculation number [e.g.: 40123456] followed by the module short name [e.g.: CBEM].

Please use:
- Left hand justification, it makes reading your response easier.
- Ariel font size 12.

The submission should include the following sections/pages:

Title Page

Use the Edinburgh Napier University front cover sheet, fully completed. Your name should not appear anywhere on your submission.

Contents Page

The contents page should include a list of heading and sub-headings with associated page numbers. You can generate a table of contents in word: References >> Table of contents, if you have followed a style (see navigation pane). Make sure the numbering is clear and consistent throughout.

Executive Summary

The Executive Summary is a critical part of the document, it should preferably not be any greater than 10% of the word count, or more than two pages (in general). It should be punchy, written specifically to inform the client, in terms of **purpose**, **findings** and **recommendations**: -

1. Statement of the **purpose** of the report / terms of reference – This is your first impression on persuading your client that you have interpreted their requirements and scoped out objectives for the report. *This should be a succinct paragraph.* Do not simply regurgitate the task, the client knows this – give it meaning.
2. key **findings –** there should be between three – five findings that have been identified from your analysis. There could be more than five, but try to consolidate them, into those that would be most relevant and significant for the client from all the analysis you have undertaken. *Synthesis* is a key skill that warrants higher marks.
3. **Recommendations –** you should have one to three suggestions or proposals as to the best course of action that could be taken by the client. The recommendations should make explicit links to your findings (analysis) and be feasible and desirable to the client. Again, you could have more, but do try to 'hone' in on your *synthesis* skills.

Terms of Reference / Scope of the Report

Under this heading provide a brief explanation to the intended reader why this report has been written (purpose) and some indication of how you went about it (methods). This is usually a single paragraph.

Introduction

The introduction is like one that you have written for an essay, as it sets the scene for the main body of your report. However, give it a meaningful title, other than 'Introduction' that is contextual to nature of your report and will offer good signposting to the reader. If you are unclear on a title then 'background to the report' will suffice. You should be clear in this section, on your aims and objectives for the report. Remember, you must interpret the task considering the organisation you

have chosen and its specific challenges and issues. Therefore, no report will be the same – avoid regurgitating the task without little meaning.

Within the scope of the report, outline the specific challenges and issues that are relevant to addressing the task. Offer some parameters to your analysis and research conducted and offer any necessary background history. It is important to consider what background history is required. For instance, if you are writing to a CEO and the board, they do not need to know when the organisation was founded, its products and markets? This is descriptive and not relevant (think about what they will know, don't waste their time nor money). What they are interested in, is some analytical thought that gives meaning to the aims and objectives of the report. *No more than a few short paragraphs.*

Findings and Discussion
This is the main section that details your analysis and discussion. It should be structured around your key findings, grouped and arranged in an order that is logical and easy to follow. Use appropriate headings and sub-headings to clearly structure the report around discrete sections.

You are encouraged (if necessary) to include figures, diagrams/tables to present numerical & graphical information. Ensure that each of these are labelled with an appropriate caption (see 'insert caption/references' in word processing software).

"A picture is worth 10,000 words (or in this case numbers)"

Old Chinese proverb

Conclusion and recommendations
The conclusion and recommendations is extremely important part of the document; these may be combined or, in long reports, presented in separate sections. Often the executive may well go direct to the conclusion and recommendations first and then consider the rigour of your analysis. Remind the reader of your important points, drawing on the most central findings from your analysis and discussion. Remember, this is a conclusion, so it should be free from new discussion and references. It should:

- Written with the client/reader in mind and directly relate to the scope and in achievement of the aims of the report
- Summarise the key findings from your analysis and research
- Offer any limitations or wider implications that the client/reader should be aware of
- Lead to compelling recommendations that are purposeful in terms of desirability and feasibility that meet the client's needs (in the context of the brief)

The RADAR elements can help you frame each recommendation. Figure 1 shows RADAR logic in the context of EFQM and table 1 provides a set of questions, compiled by John Cannon at Quality Scotland for writing more compelling and purposeful recommendations.

Table 1   Radar Elements for writing recommendations (Compiled by John Cannon, Quality Scotland, 2018)

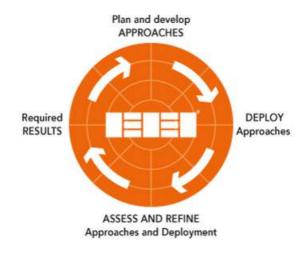| RADAR element	Recommendation(s)
Result	*What would success look like from this recommendation?*
Approach	*Describe what the recommendation looks like in terms of an approach or approaches?*
Deployment	*What specific steps would the client take to deliver this recommendation/approach?*
Assessment & Refinement	*How would the client ensure the recommendation/approach stays on track? What else would they need to consider? Who else could they learn from?*

Figure 1 RADAR Logic (Quality Scotland Website: https://www.qualityscotland.co.uk/content/radar-logic)

See https://www.qualityscotland.co.uk/content/radar-logic for further details.

Appendices

Appendices are not a requirement for this assignment. If you feel, an inclusion of an appendix is necessary, then the content must be referred to in your findings/analysis section of the report.

Reference List

The reference list should be produced in accordance to APA 6th referencing system (See the Business School Quick Reference Guide). The quality of your submission will be influenced by the adoption of strong references (particularly contemporary journal articles), that support your analysis. The Business School library guide is a useful source of guidance on accessing academic journals, texts, and company and industry reports and data analysis.

The purpose of research is to inform action – your analysis and eventual recommendations will all depend on the quality, scope and depth of your research. This stands true in business reports too – your client will be interested in your interpretation of the task, rigour of analysis and the purposefulness of your recommendations. All founded on a sound evidence base and clarity of argument – informed always by the quality of your research.

You are encouraged to use reference management software – the library offers written guides in the use of **Endnote** (available on Napier PCs and a University licence for home) and **Mendeley** (free software). Use the one that suits you best. The good news is that they will link with your word processor and can generate a reference list in APA 6th.

Tip: You have been offered some essential journal article reading. It's always useful to look for additional references from the journal paper reference list. Why not perform a citation search to view the latest research that has cited this work? For instance, in Google Scholar you can click on 'cited by' or even 'related articles' to find similar contributions. Even better, add some further search terms by clicking 'search within citing articles' such as "automotive industry" or whatever relates best to your research.

Note: the reference list is *excluded* from the word count

Additional advice on report writing

Who and what is the report for?

This is a commissioned report, undertaken by you, an analytical report by Napier Consulting, to be presented to a client. You have some flexibility in who this client may be – there is an expectation

that you address your report to the Chief Executive Officer and the Board of the chosen organisation. Pay attention on why you are writing this report to them and keep this audience in mind as you outline and write the report.

Language and proof-reading of the report

Please bear in mind that the client has requested a report NOT an essay - *they are different and using an essay style will restrict your opportunity to achieve higher marks!* The report must be styled in terms of your interpretation of the **client's** requirements. Reports use clear and concise language; broken down into sections, with specific headings and sub-headings. Business reports can include bullet-points to convey key messages. Although, bullet-points are encouraged, they should not be mis-used when detailed discussion is required to expand your point(s), with appropriate sources of evidence and reference to appropriate theory, concepts and frameworks.

The report should follow the principles of academic writing. An Academic Skills site is available on Moodle to help you, plus take advantage of academic skill workshops, drop-ins and appointments. This includes using language suitable for management and use the third person, as this is more professional.

Please proof-read your submission to use grammatically correct sentence structure, vocabulary and punctuation. If your work is hard to read, then this will limit your ability to achieve high grades.

Ensure that your dictionary/spell-check is set to **British English**.

Word Count

The word count is not negotiable – this ensures fairness and forces you to write more concisely. Always consider whether the intended reader will find what you have written useful and relevant. Often you can consolidate your points as it becomes more sophisticated. You are strongly encouraged to produce a 1 – 2 page outline of your report and gain feedback on this from your peers and tutor. Time will be available in tutorials to look at report outlines.

Compiled by:-

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The Business School for empowerment, enterprise and employability for all.

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