George Keen
Placement Student Software Engineer

What is your degree course at university and why did you choose it?
I am studying for my BSc (Hons) in Computer Science at the University of Gloucestershire, between 2nd and 3rd year of studying there. I chose this course specifically because it was designed to explore different areas of computing rather than focusing on a single area like "Cyber Security". This was important to me because, while I was looking for a university course, I had no idea what I wanted to specialise in. This turned out to be the right decision as while in my 1st and 2nd year, I was able to rediscover my love for programming and it is now something I want to pursue a career in.

What was the attraction to the industry placement year as part of your degree?
Doing a placement allows someone to gain experience in the field and acquire knowledge while working on the job. The big attraction, I think, is what comes after you have finished. After completing university with placement, employers will see that you already have the necessary skills and training in the industry and thus will make you a better candidate when looking for a job.

Why did you choose the degree route?
I chose to study at university so that I could broaden my knowledge of Computer Science further. On top of that, part of the university experience is about meeting people and learning to live independently.

What do you enjoy most about your course and the university?
The practical assignments are always the things that I enjoy the most. Last year, I worked in a team to design and develop a phone app that tracks the location and information about trees in Cheltenham. Trying to problem-solve different issues and working together with the team on the project was so much fun, and we were incredibly proud of the result.

What benefits does the placement opportunity provide to you?
Apart from looking good on a CV and helping to get a job, the placement has personally allowed me to understand the role of software engineer better and how it works in a company setting. Before I only had the skills for an academic setting, so the placement has allowed me to be better prepared for after university.

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What are you planning to do after you complete your degree course?
After I complete my degree, I hope to find employment as a software engineer, working in a place or setting where I can continue to develop my skills and make an impact, however small, in the industry.

What are you hoping to achieve during your placement year with Savient?
While working on practical projects at university, such as developing a program, it can feel a little useless at times. Of course, I don't mean in terms of learning as that aspect is useful and incredibly interesting, but the end product of what comes out of projects is never used in a real setting and only exists to "test" my skills. Now that I have the chance to properly work in the industry, I hope that I can contribute to a project with the knowledge that my work in developing a program will be used by a client for real-world applications. On top of that, I also look forward to being able to talk to others through outreach events about what working as a software engineer is like, and hopefully inspire some to pursue a career in the industry.

What advice would you give to someone who is considering doing a placement year during university?
Start looking as soon as you can. Many placement openings can close quickly and gain a lot of interest, so being watchful of opportunities and sending applications early is the best bet. Doing lots of research into companies and what they do helps tremendously, especially when finding a placement that is best suited to you. Finding a placement is not easy, but worth it.

How did you feel transitioning from university life to your first professional role at Savient? Were there any surprises?
Outside of work, it was a bit of a shock to see how little free time I get during the week. Things like shops closing before I finish for the day or seeing university friends do fun stuff during the day without me. It's something I've never faced in my university life and before, but I've learned to get around it by making plans in the evening instead and using my weekends to do the chores.

What has been the most exciting or rewarding aspect of your placement so far?
Every few weeks, I hear about a demonstration made to a customer or a summary of new features added to a product. Hearing about the aspects that I contributed to development is the most rewarding aspect, I think. I can't wait to see other projects I've been working on come to full use.

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Can you talk about any specific technical skills or tools you've worked with at Savient that you didn't get the chance to explore in university?
Being able to focus on a project with a team is something I could not do during my studies. Group assignments are never the only thing we work on at university, so things like daily stand-ups are never something that can be practically done often. But at Savient, I have been able to learn how to work in a team using scrum methodologies in detail.

Have you faced any challenges or obstacles during your placement? How did you overcome them, and what did you learn from those experiences?
At the start, it was a challenge to understand the many different systems in place in products. However, after walking through a few tickets with members of the team, I started getting the hang of how everything functions together, and now I am more confident tackling more complex tickets.

How has working at Savient helped you build other key skills, like teamwork, communication, or time management?
Working at Savient has taught me how to work in a professional environment. From managing work efficiently to communicating with the team about what needs to be done, I've learned important skills while working here.

Looking back at your placement so far, what's one thing you wish you had known before you started?
I wish I knew that I was more ready than I thought. Before joining Savient, I was not sure if I was right to be working there, but after beginning work on projects, I realised I already knew way more than I realised. There was still tons of stuff I didn't know, but working in this professional environment has allowed me to learn.

What are you most excited about for the rest of your placement year, and how do you hope to continue developing your skills in the coming months?
I'm excited to continue developing products and projects and seeing them come into action when they are done!