LATEX

LaTeX2ε update, dateline: 31 January 1994

Chris Rowley

As I am sure you are aware by now, LaTeX2ε will soon be the standard version of LaTeX — prepared and supported by the LaTeX3 Project Team. An explanation of the need for this new system appeared in a recent issue of *TeX and TUG NEWS*.

The test release, which hit the archives on December 21 — just in time to give the dedicated something to do over the holidays, turned out to be far more robust than we (the LaTeX3 project team) had dared to hope. This is not to say that there were no problems but the testing so far has produced only about half-a-dozen clear bugs. Nevertheless, there is still, as I write, a lot to do before we have a complete system which can rapidly become the standard LaTeX for everyone, everywhere.

Perhaps the biggest sigh of relief came when Leslie Lamport reported that he had successfully used the new system — to format 'The Manual' (the old text, that is, using the compatibility mode provided by LaTeX2ε). Since then he has been working on the new edition and this work, together with that of many others, has been useful in exposing some of the rough edges which still need smoothing. This new edition of *LaTeX: A document preparation system* will, we hope, be published at about the same time as the full release of the new LaTeX becomes available; meanwhile, an expanded description of the system (covering both old and new features), together with a gold-mine of information about exciting things to do with it, can be found in *The LaTeX Companion*, by Michel Goossens, Frank Mittelbach and Alexander Samarin, Addison-Wesley, 1993, ISBN 0-201-54199-8.

Many of the reports we have been getting back from the testers have illuminated features of the old LaTeX which need attention but are not directly related to the changes made for LaTeX2ε. Some of the problems that have been raised will have to wait until LaTeX3 for a solution but others may be attended to sooner than that. They have also shown that there are tensions between the different uses, and users, of LaTeX which make the important task of providing a standard system difficult — both technically and diplomatically. Some examples are: portability of documents versus local requirements (e.g. language, or graphics inclusion); authors versus publishers. If you are interested in an electronic discussion of such issues (and many others), particularly in the context of looking forward to LaTeX3, then you should join the LATEX-L discussion list by sending:

> message: SUBSCRIBE LATEX-L
> to:
> LISTSERV@vm.hd-net.uni-heidelberg.de

Thus the continuing work of the project team is not just a matter of fixing bugs, improving the efficiency of the system and simplifying the installation process; we are also, where possible, adding flexibility and ensuring a smooth transition for everyone to the new standard LaTeX when the full system is released in the Spring. It will then be available for ftp access in the following subdirectory of the CTAN archives:

> tex-archive/macros/latex/core

We also expect that it will be available from the TUG office, from other TeX User Groups throughout the world and, of course, with all good commercial TeX systems. Part of the distribution is a file named features.tex; this can be typeset by any version of LaTeX and contains a brief outline of all the new features.

When we say that a 'full system' is being prepared, this does not just refer to our work on the core system; it also includes the many LaTeX-based packages on the CTAN archives which will be updated, by whoever supports them, so as to ensure that their material will continue to be widely available to LaTeX users. If you are one of these supporters and are wondering what you therefore need to do then don't panic: we are sure that, in the majority of cases, it will be very little! If you need further information about what needs to be done then please send a message to the following address:

> bugs@minnie.zdv.uni-mainz.de

Please ensure that it starts with the following line **exactly**:

>Category: latex-class-writing

If you want a prompt and useful reply, please make your message as short and precise as possible.

To summarise: thanks to a lot of support and the very enthusiastic response we have had from everyone involved, we are confident that the decision taken last Spring to produce LaTeX2ε was a good one, and that this Spring will see its fulfilment. Then it is 'onwards and upwards to LaTeX3!'.

⋄ Chris Rowley
Open University
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes MK7 6AA
United Kingdom
c.a.rowley@vax.acs.open.ac.uk