

Making internships work - an intern's guide

This guide has been developed alongside the Common Best Practice Code for High Quality Internships (July 2011).

Introduction

In a number of industries, having experience is essential to getting a job. Internships can give you the opportunity to gain transferable skills, experience and knowledge in a working environment. They can provide short-term opportunities for networking and exploring a sector more widely, boosting your CV and improving your chances of getting the job that you really want.

What is an internship?

A paid internship is usually a short-term period of employment aimed at providing you with professional skills and experience. It is different from a work shadowing scheme where you only observe other people working, and different from volunteering where you choose to give up your time to help a cause or a company.

A short period of work designed to allow you to gain skills and experience in a professional environment	✓
An opportunity to learn from people in the business	✓
A good first step at the start of your career	✓

What's the difference between a paid internship and volunteering?

Volunteering is great. But it's not the same as working. As a volunteer you help out on your own terms. This means that you agree both your hours and responsibilities, to suit your working arrangements, with the organisation.

Volunteering can also be about giving your services free of charge in order to develop or maintain your skills. Responsibilities or duties are mutually agreed with the organisation you work for, and are not imposed on you as if you are a worker. As a volunteer you may give your time to enhance your skills and experience, but you are also likely to do so to help a cause which you care about.

Am I entitled to be paid the National Minimum Wage as an intern?

If you have a list of duties you have to fulfil and fixed times when you have to work, you are likely to be a worker and entitled to be paid. If you are being paid an amount that is less than the National Minimum Wage, but more than expenses, this is illegal. If this is the case, you may be able to claim back your correct pay from the point at which you started working.

As a volunteer you are different from workers and not entitled to the National Minimum Wage. Therefore, if an internship is an unpaid position, without a specific exemption, then you must be treated as a volunteer.

If you want to discuss anonymously whether you think you qualify for the National Minimum Wage, phone the Pay and Work Rights Helpline for advice on 0800 917 2368. You can make a complaint up to six years after your internship (five years in Scotland). This means that if you have completed your internship you can still make a complaint.



What makes a good internship?

A successful internship is a high quality learning experience ideally including the following:

A contract - explaining details of your pay, responsibilities and what else you can expect to get out of the internship.

Induction - you should expect to be given an introduction to the organisation and relevant staff members, and to be given an explanation on how the workplace functions and which resources will enable you to carry out your role.

Support - interns are valuable members of staff who should be treated in the same professional way and with the same duty of care as regular employees.

Challenge - the work must offer a challenge, an appropriate learning experience and an opportunity for development.

Supervision and mentoring - as a new member of the team you can expect to be given guidance to help you carry out your role effectively.

Feedback - regular feedback can help your development and may be informal or formal.

Top tips for getting the most out of your internship

An internship is a great opportunity to test your abilities and for you to develop your transferable skills. Make the most of it by following these top tips:

Do your research

- Get to know the company, the sector, and the expectations of your role
- Set yourself objectives in order to maximise your development and widen your skills set
- Identify your strengths and think about where you can add value to the organisation
- Consider where your role fits into the bigger picture
- Ask questions.

Challenge yourself

- Don't be under-used or stay in your comfort zone
- Reflect on your learning - perhaps by keeping a journal
- Become one of the team and build your network of contacts
- Ask for regular feedback
- Ensure you update your CV at the end of the internship.

People to contact for advice

Pay and Work Rights Helpline

Tel: 0800 917 2368

Citizens Advice Bureau

<http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

National Council for Work Experience (NCWE)

<http://www.work-experience.org/>

National Union of Students

<http://www.nus.org.uk/>

Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS)

<http://www.agcas.org.uk/>

Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR)

<http://www.agr.org.uk/Home>

Volunteering England

<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/>

The Worker Checklist at www.gov.uk

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-minimum-wage-worker-checklist>

Graduate Talent Pool

http://graduatetalentpool.direct.gov.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/plercaefg

The Students' Union at your college or university

Intern Aware

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London
SW9 9BT

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