

Unpaid Internships and Work Experience

All work experience will be valuable in your search for employment, and traditionally students have found work experience through sandwich placements (usually paid, for a period of 12 months and forming part of your degree studies), summer internships and vacation work. However, despite strict rules for paying the National Minimum Wage (NMW) unpaid work experience has been the norm for a number of industries including the media and politics, and some employers continue to offer unpaid opportunities (often referred to as internships) as a way of attracting students into their organisation..

Whilst there are some benefits from undertaking an unpaid internship:

- it can provide you with work experience and a chance to extend your network of contacts
- the experience you gain will be beneficial to your CV and being prepared to work unpaid will indicate to an employer that you are keen and motivated;
- if you do a good job you may find that you are first in line for any suitable paid posts that arise. (NB there is also some evidence that you are more likely to gain a long-term role from paid work rather than unpaid)

Bearing in mind all the above, the Careers Service has strict guidelines about advertising unpaid opportunities via Career Connect (the online Careers Vacancy Service) – these should be for 2 weeks maximum unless with a charity (see below). Whilst there is no doubt that these opportunities provide valuable experience, it is essential that you consider seriously the implications of working for no pay before you commit yourself. You should consider your own personal circumstances and your own limitations when making your decision.

Some points to consider:

- If you have a contract and you are required to work regular hours and undertake specific duties you should be paid the [National Minimum Wage](#) Voluntary workers working for a charity, voluntary body, associated fund raising body or statutory body are exempt from NMW guidelines.
- An unpaid internship should have an emphasis on training and should not be used by the employer to complete work or projects that would normally be undertaken by paid staff.
- Consider at the outset how long you can afford to work for no pay – be practical and realistic – how will you meet your living costs during your internship? Agree the number of hours and the length of the internship at the outset.
- Travel expenses and some other benefits in kind eg lunch allowance may be paid – ensure you know what you will receive and when and how this will be paid.
- Consider alternative ways to gain useful experience to add to your CV eg write a blog, learn a language, commit long-term to a part-time job, take a course or run your own business

At the end of the day it will be your decision as to whether or not you decide to undertake an unpaid internship. If you feel that you are being treated unfairly you should approach your employer in the first instance and explain your concerns (see <https://www.gov.uk/employment-rights-for-interns>) If you are unable to resolve the situation you can gain help and advice [here](#)

See overleaf for paid internship information



Not all internships are unpaid - paid internships are available – the following websites may be helpful to source these:

- <https://www.internavenue.com/>
- <http://www.ratemyplacement.co.uk/internships>
- <http://www.step.org.uk/>
- <https://www.milkround.com/jobs/internships-and-work-experience>
- <https://enternships.com/>

Keep up to date with the unpaid internship debate at:

- <http://graduatefog.co.uk/>
- <http://www.internaware.org/>
- <https://targetjobs.co.uk/internships/275017-unpaid-internships-are-they-worth-it>