

How To... set up and run an internship

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Who's this guide for?

Any cultural, creative or heritage organisation or practice that needs some support on a specific digital project and that could offer some great experience to an enthusiastic, digitally native, Generation Y undergraduate student!

This guide is [AmbIT:ion Scotland](#)'s top tips to help ensure that you as the host organisation and the young person both benefit from the process. It is designed to help guide your planning process: to help you create a focused job description which can guide your work with the intern into the future. It is also a guide to enable you to take action and recruit an intern.

Background

"An internship is any carefully monitored work or service experience in which an individual has intentional learning goals and reflects actively on what he or she is learning throughout the experience." - The National Society for Experiential Education

The modern concept of internships essentially springs from the medieval apprenticeship, in which skilled labourers (often craftsmen) would teach a young person their trade and, in exchange, that person would agree to work for the teacher for a certain length of time.

The main difference between an apprenticeship and an internship is that internships are more exploratory. An intern is not bound to work for an employer after the internship is over (although many interns do receive job offers).

Internships vary from regular part-time jobs and volunteering in that an internship must offer, as a primary focus, meaningful exposure to a professional, college-level career field, and a specific project or task to be achieved. In other words, the student deliberately sets out to gain knowledge, skill, and/or further understanding of a particular industry. Unlike classroom learning, the student gains this knowledge not from lectures, reading, and exams, but rather from on-the-job experience. For this reason, internships are often referred to as "experiential learning".

Learning is the leading draw of an internship. Many candidates feel they'll get more hands-on training, real experience, and mentoring opportunities with smaller organisations, so don't worry about not being a big business with a large official internship scheme! An internship then is not an opportunity to get rid of all the mindless grunt work that no one else wants to do! Does this mean you can never ask an intern for copies or a cup of coffee? Of course not -as long as the majority of work provides a more meaningful learning experience, assigning duties like phones, faxing, and filing is completely acceptable.

Introduction to internships

Internships are a great opportunity – for university-level digital media students, and cultural organisations who will be their hosts.

Internships give the host organisation the following benefits:

- **Digital/interactive media/design capacity and specialised skills**, towards a specific project, at a certain time, at low cost to the organisation.
- **An extra set of hands** helps your other employees be more productive, and prevents them from becoming overburdened by side projects, as well as frees them up to accomplish more creative tasks or those where higher-level, strategic thinking or expertise is required.
- **A chance to work with fresh perspectives** - an intern will be someone who has grown-up digital, and has the "Generation Y" perspectives and ideas.

- **The opportunity to drive down full-time post recruitment costs.** For many, the process of recruiting and hiring is a drain on company resources. One solution is to appeal to tomorrow's staff members when they're looking for internships, and all you have to do is choose the best of the bunch when it comes time to hire. University and college campuses are viral societies - if your organisation impresses a student intern, word will quickly spread. Hiring someone as an intern is the most effective way to evaluate their potential as a full-time employee. When you "try out" candidates via an internship, you make fewer mistakes when it comes to full-time staffing; you avoid the pitfall of training a new hire, only to find out they're not a good fit, or that the entry-level employee doesn't like the field. Starting an internship program lets you benefit from added person power, while more accurately assessing candidates. According to the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE)'s 2009 Experiential Education Survey, almost 40% of employers reported a higher five-year retention rate among employees they'd hired via their internship programs.
- **An opportunity to build a longer-term relationship with a university faculty.** This might result in a steady stream of interns, research and development opportunities, teaching opportunities for your staff, etc.

The current UK landscape

Internships can be paid or unpaid, they can be for academic credit or not for credit. There are legal ramifications—and blurred lines—regarding whether it is permissible to employ interns without pay. In the UK, the term "intern" has no legal status, and therefore an intern is either a worker, volunteer or employee.

Student internships

Internships can be part of academic coursework and in this instance, students aren't entitled to a wage. When an internship is performed in exchange for college or university credit, the assigning of credit is strictly between the student and his or her school. Internships give students the following benefits:

- Earn course credit while exploring potential occupations and clarifying career goals.
- Develop skills and knowledge that will enhance marketability.
- Work with professionals and make key contacts in a field of interest.
- Test and apply academic concepts and theories in a real world setting.

AmbIT:ion Scotland's partners Interface can promote and broker your student internships to all of Scotland's Higher Education Institutions. [Get in touch with us](#) with your internship brief if you would like this support.

Voluntary student internships

However, internships can also be part of an individual student's extracurricular plan to gain experience, and in this instance, it is best to set up a voluntary internship, which is voluntarily undertaken by the intern, and is in a charity, voluntary organisation, fundraising body or statutory body. In this instance you can agree to compensate the student with reasonable travel and subsistence expenses.

[AmbIT:ion Scotland](#) may be able to help creative, cultural and heritage organisations cover the costs of providing an intern with reasonable travel and subsistence expenses. Get in touch with us if you would like this support!

Paid internships

If you are not a charity, voluntary, fundraising or statutory organisation, then an intern must be given the status of worker or employee, and paid the national minimum wage. If an internship only involves shadowing an employee, i.e. no work is carried out by the intern, the employer does not have to pay the minimum wage. (See Gov.UK's notes on Employment status here - <http://www.gov.uk/employment-status/>).

[Third Sector Internships Scotland](#) (TSIS) offer financial support, as well as brokerage and recruitment support to charities that want to offer paid internships, or voluntary internships where the cost for travel and subsistence is high. The lead-in time is long (at least 6 months), but the benefit for the host organisation is the financial support, brokering support and recruitment support. The website lists the upcoming deadlines for host organisations.

Modern Apprenticeships

A Modern Apprenticeship provides a young person with vocational training that is relevant to employment. Modern Apprenticeships are available in a number of sectors, with the format of training decided by the appropriate vocational qualification for that sector. They give young people over the age of 16 the opportunity to work in a paid job while undertaking workplace training and occasionally part-time study in order to gain new and enhanced skills and recognised qualifications.

Apprentices are supported with training that is appropriate for level of the job although this isn't the only focus of the training. A Modern Apprenticeship will also give a range of 'soft skills' to draw upon, including sound communication, teamwork and problem solving skills, and improved numerical and IT skills - all of which are invaluable to any employer.

A Modern Apprenticeship can be completed within a time period that's suitable to the host organisation, or employer. In most cases, apprentices work towards SCQF 5 (SVQ Level 2) or above to gain the qualification. This will normally take up to four years but some MAs can be completed in a lot less time.

The employing organisation is paid a small amount by a skills council to host the apprenticeship, the apprentice's study is paid for by a skills council, and the apprentice is paid the national minimum wage by the employer. It is expected that the employer keeps the apprentice on in a job following completion of the apprenticeship.

As apprenticeships are a much larger undertaking, this guide does not outline the process for setting one up. Creative, cultural and heritage organisations can find out more via [Apprentices in Scotland](#), [National Skills Academy - Creative & Cultural](#), and [Creative Scotland](#).

Get started - planning and designing an internship

Having an intern around needs company-wide backing: all of the organisation will need to be on board. This will help an intern feel welcome, and ensures that you as the host organisation has planned to allocate the necessary resources, and have it on your weekly team meeting agenda. Here are a few tips to help you plan the internship project:

- **Think in discrete projects.** A good internship has clear boundaries. It will give the young person a tangible outcome to work towards – i.e. "I built that web page/ I carried out that piece of research/ I pulled together that database". Look for a discrete project of which an intern could take ownership.
- **Think part-time.** Students have to juggle a lot: classes, coursework, and often a student job as well. Many small and medium sized organisations may not have enough work to keep an intern busy for a full time post. A lot can be achieved in small amounts of time spread over a term or semester (a day a week or even a half day per week).
- **Think about the academic year.** There are two main cycles usually – the autumn term (starting late September / early October) and the spring term (starting in the new year / February). Students usually have exams and lots of pressure in the late spring (April/ May). It will be hard to reach anyone at the university over the summer (May – August) staff or students! Keep this in mind when you are planning the work you want an intern to do.
- **Think about work experience that offers academic credit.** Many universities recognise the importance of industry experience to the employability of their students. These universities will offer undergraduates academic credit for a relevant internship. This is a

- great opportunity for both parties. Even an unpaid work placement will give an intern something of value in this system. Organisations that partner with universities like this can build relationships with a department and potentially host a series of students from year to year.
- **Think long term**, building relationships for a lifetime and the skills that the sector will need. An intern has an intimate view of the organisation they work with, and a positive experience is the foundation for an ongoing relationship as a potential advocate, volunteer, donor or employee. Many of the skills needed in the cultural sector are quite specialised – this is your opportunity to help make sure that the future workforce will be there in the next generation.
- **Think about what you might learn from an intern.** Students often have access to the most up to date tools and software. Their skills may still be developing, but they may be technologically ahead of the sector. Students may also bring knowledge of new theories and research that they can share with you and consider applying to old problems. Students may bring personal experience of audience segments and demographics that you can learn from. Your intern will probably be in their very early twenties, a “Generation Y”, and will have very likely “grown-up digital”. In a couple of years they will be entering your organisations at first job/officer level, so use this opportunity to learn what to expect!
- **Think professional.** Even if internships are not traditional jobs, they are still subject to many HR regulations. Have a simple contract and an agreed description of what the intern role will entail. Share with the intern your company policies and procedures. For your intern, this may be their first experience of seeking work and “being professional”, bear this in mind, and guide and manage interns appropriately as you would any staff member. Plan to provide lots of support and supervision – s/he might need extra support. If the intern is a student, have a contact within the university that you will follow-up with if you need to. Report back at the end of the internship so that the intern’s learning can carry on.
- **Think compensation.** If you can’t offer a wage, think about what you can offer: travel and subsistence costs, mentorship beyond the term of the internship, professional connections, CV building and tailoring support, introduction to the range of different types of specialised work that your organisation does, tickets, etc..

Take action - advertising and recruitment

Your internship post recruitment advert should both set expectations and provide clarity so that your post attracts the best and most appropriate applicants. There is basic information that you should provide to potential interns when advertising your internship opportunity.

What does the intern need to know about your organisation?

- What you do, in general terms - artistically or creatively; and operationally. Why, where, when and how?

- Who is the department or group in the organisation that will be leading the internship project.
- What is the role of the intern in the organisation? (Where do they fit?)

What does the intern need to know about the project?

- The project's aims, objectives and intended outcomes and/or outputs in broad terms
- Where it fits in terms of the organisations goals and overall strategy?
- What is the timescale?
- What digital development skills are needed to deliver the project?
- What other skills will be needed?

What the intern needs to know about the internship

- What is the intern's role in delivering the project?
- What will the intern's duties be (basic person/skills specification)?
- What kinds of experience might s/he gain?
- Who will supervise the intern?
- What tools will be available to support the intern in his/her work?
- Can the work take place remotely, or does the intern need to be on site?
- What kinds of hours will the intern be expected to put in?
- When will the internship start and how long will it last?
- How will the intern's success be measured?
- What are the compensation terms?
- Who will supervise the intern? Can this person be contacted to give more details prior to making an application? If so, give name, title and contact details.

What you need to request in your brief for great applications!

- Ask for a link to the online portfolio of their relevant work.
- Ask for a covering letter explaining how their skills match your project's requirements.
- Ask for a reference - this could be a course tutor or part-time employer.
- Explain how an applicant should submit their application. Email? Post? Who should it be addressed to? What is the contact address?
- What is the deadline for application?

Shortlist if necessary and arrange to interview potential interns you're interested in.

Interview and offer an internship. Interns should be chosen whose skills, training, interest and previous experience match the needs of host organisations' projects.

Identify a single supervisor for the intern for the entire duration of the internship.

Provide a desk with internet connection, or a space with wifi, and agree whether you or the student will provide a computer.

Provide an induction to the organisation on the intern's first day. Go over your venue, policies and procedures, as you would with any new member of staff. Provide a clear project description, timetable and workplan; clear instructions of how to keep in contact with their supervisor; a clearly communicated explanation of what your expectations of them are; and clear instructions on how and when to claim their compensation.

If possible, organise a "get to know" lunch with the team. Brief your team to make the first move and be friendly with an intern. Remember, it might be their first professional experience, and they may be shy to ask questions, or feel unsure about how to act, or even be nervous. Interns treated as insiders will have a more enjoyable experience. But also, their heightened sense of loyalty will translate into increased effort and more positive peer-to-peer feedback about your business.

And finally... some wider reading!

The [Guardian Culture Professionals Network](#) has been examining the evolving role of the intern, from the perspectives of the cultural sector and of young people looking for their first 'real' job. For more wider reading, check out:

- 2.12.11 [Live chat: internships in the arts – how can we use, not abuse them?](#)
- 6.12.11 [10 tips for arts interns and their employers](#)