**Code of Practice: the promotion of unpaid internships & work experience**

Careers and Employability at the University of Worcester recognises that work experience and work shadowing are both hugely beneficial for students, in helping them to build their skills and experience of certain industries and sectors. We welcome and appreciate the opportunity that many employers give our students to develop their employability and boost their CV.

Work experience is highly valuable for current students, and may be undertaken as an essential part of coursework, with specific learning outcomes attached. It may be undertaken by students outside their course work for example on a part time basis or in vacation periods, to develop specific experiences and an understanding of a profession. New graduates or people changing career direction may also find a short period of work shadowing highly valuable as a way of understanding work environments and cultures.

We also recognise the value of volunteering in the local and wider community, as a way of making a contribution towards charitable and voluntary organisations, as well as enabling a student to develop further skills and expertise.

However, we are concerned that long periods of unpaid internships are leading to positions of inequity amongst graduates. Many of the occupations and sectors in which lengthy unpaid internships are most common are those in which the workforce clearly does not reflect UK society as a whole, such as in the media. This is because many graduates cannot afford to work unpaid – often in an expensive part of the country away from their home base – for more than a very limited period. In addition, there is a widespread belief that many internships are offered on the basis of who you (or your parents) know rather than what you can do.

**In addition, we will not promote opportunities which we believe to be in breach of employment law, such as the national minimum wage legislation.**

**Therefore, the Careers and Employability will only promote unpaid internships which adhere to the following guidelines:**

1. Internships which last no more than six weeks or full time equivalent, (except in exceptional circumstances to develop student’s skills and experiences, at the discretion of the Careers and Employability Service ), which give interns the opportunity to observe employees and get a feel of the industry. Such opportunities be seen entirely as voluntary and so interns would not will not have a job contract or be expected to perform specific duties, as in doing so they may be seen as ‘workers’ and thus be entitled to the national minimum wage. Businesses would be expected to reimburse interns for any necessary work related expenses such as travel costs to and from work.
2. Placements which form an integral part of a course of study, and which:

• Involve no more than a 40 hour week

• Workers should have an appointed supervisor during their placement

• Employers must have adequate insurance cover

• The usual health and safety standards are met

1. Unpaid internships which are exempt from the National Minimum Wage, such as volunteers who ‘work for a charity, voluntary organisation, charity shop, school, hospital or similar body; and they receive only reasonable expenses, relevant training and/or subsistence (but not money for subsistence)’. See [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)

Further information: [www.bis.gov.uk](http://www.bis.gov.uk) Common best practice code for high quality internships

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**Appendix 1: Advice for students in considering taking an unpaid internship**

An internship is one way to get work experience that will strengthen your graduate job applications. However, some internships are unpaid, particularly in sectors such as the media or politics. So how do you decide whether an unpaid internship is a valuable opportunity or a waste of time that could be better spent earning some much-needed cash?

The following guidelines may help you decide whether an unpaid internship is valuable:

* Discuss the purpose of the internship and clarify expectations from the start.
* Ensure the placement is valuable – does it give insight into a particular industry? Will it improve certain skills or clarify career aspirations?
* Will there be any training or development with this opportunity? Will you have a supervisor/mentor to help you with this?
* Discuss the possibilities of any future paid work with the employer, pointing out the skills that you have gained during the internship.
* Re-consider the value of the internship if it ceases to supply useful contacts and training opportunities.
* National minimum wage legislation states that it is unlawful to take someone on as a worker and not pay an appropriate wage. If you are being expected to work certain hours, have specific job role which is useful to the organisation, then your company may be in contravention of this legislation. For more information see <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/index.htm>
* Everyone has a choice and if the balance between valuable work experience tips into exploitation then it is up to you to decide whether to continue or not.

Careers and Employability Team

University of Worcester

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