

# COMMON **BEST PRACTICE CODE** FOR **HIGH-QUALITY INTERNSHIPS**

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**Gateways to the Professions  
Collaborative Forum**

## About us

The Gateways to the Professions Collaborative Forum is an ad hoc advisory body. Its membership is voluntary and represents around 60 professional bodies and related organisations. It was re-launched in January 2010 in response to recommendations of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions.

BIS is working with the Forum to support and encourage actions by the professions themselves to remove the barriers to professional careers, especially for people from disadvantaged groups.

The Forum's Executive Group is chaired by the Minister for Universities and Science.

Key tasks for the Forum include: identifying and expanding the routes into the professions, particularly non-university routes; internships and work opportunities; information, advice and guidance on professional careers; and broadening the criteria for acceptance into university courses feeding into key professions.

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## Foreword

Securing Britain's economic future will rely on the talents of all individuals, regardless of their background. Yet in our country today, some remain in a cycle of social exclusion, where 'birth not worth' defines opportunities and outcomes.

As a Forum of 60 professional bodies and related organisations, we recognise the contribution policymakers and the professions can make in supporting social mobility. By drawing upon a diverse pool of talent which includes individuals from all socio-economic backgrounds, employers can unlock untapped aspirations and foster the innovation needed to drive tomorrow's economy and improve social progress.

There is a transformation taking place in the workplace today, where both employers and employees understand the valuable role of internships in supporting the transition from education to professional work. For employees, internships provide valuable entry routes into the professions and contribute to the development of 'on the job' professional skills. For employers, internship programmes provide cost-effective ways to identify and recruit talent that will contribute to the prosperity of their profession.

Yet, the 'who you know rather than what you know' recruitment culture, coupled with the offering of unpaid positions, further prevents some of the most disadvantaged individuals in society realising their aspirations. As a result, the gaps in professional attainment are widening further for those without the connections to secure informal opportunities or without the financial resource to undertake unpaid positions.

# Common Best Practice Code for High-Quality Internships


With the collaboration of Government and Forum members we have produced this *Common Best Practice Code for High-Quality Internships*, which aims to overcome these and additional barriers as outlined in the Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, published in July 2009. The content also draws heavily on the work of CIPD whose publication *Internships that Work: a Guide for Employers* provided an important foundation in the development of this new internship code.

We believe that all internships should be fair, high-quality and comply with all current employment legislation provisions if we are to harness the breadth of talent in the UK. This code aims to signal a collective commitment from our members to ensure that the internships we provide are transparent and open to all, irrespective of background.

Tackling the barriers to professional careers remains at the centre of our work. The internship code is only the first step of many needed to ensure no one is excluded from the opportunity to prosper in Britain.

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Martin Hagan, Former President, Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales




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Alan Davey, Chief Executive, Arts Council England



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Mark Hatcher, Director of Representation and Policy,  
The Bar Council



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**High-Quality Internships**

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*Mark Goodwin*

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## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, in order to pursue a professional career, it has become increasingly important to gain experience through an internship, in addition to academic qualifications. In addition, it is acknowledged that high-quality internships can also have significant benefits for employers. Employers can evaluate interns ‘on the job’ for a set period of time or for a specific project and are also able to access new skills and talent in a cost-effective way thereby identifying the best candidates for vacancies within the organisation. Greater access to high-quality internships also helps to meet social and corporate responsibility objectives by promoting social mobility and diversity in the professions.

The July 2009 Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions concluded that a significant proportion of internships did not provide high-quality work experience. The report also identified several barriers to fair access including a lack of internship opportunities and the increased likelihood that able people would encounter obstacles without sufficient financial resources to undertake unpaid internships or without relevant personal connections. The Panel recommended that the professions, government, trade unions and the third sector work together to produce a Common Best Practice Code for High-Quality Internships.

This common best practice code has been developed in response to the Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions. It describes the core elements required in order to obtain maximum benefit from internships for both interns and employers.

This common best practice code draws on the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's (CIPD) 2009 publication *Internships that Work: a Guide for Employers*. The Gateways to the Professions Collaborative Forum would like to express its appreciation to the CIPD for the use of this content in the creation of this document. The guide can be viewed at [www.cipd.co.uk/publicpolicy/\\_internships-that-work.htm](http://www.cipd.co.uk/publicpolicy/_internships-that-work.htm)

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## **2. What is an internship?**

An internship is where an individual works so as to gain relevant professional experience before embarking on a career. Well managed, high-quality internships should be beneficial to both employer and intern. The intern should develop professional skills and an understanding of a profession by undertaking work of value for an employer. Employers can use internship programmes to identify and recruit motivated and capable individuals.

**For the purpose of this common best practice code, the duration of high-quality internships can vary from at least six weeks to no longer than 12 months (one year), but will typically last around three months depending on individual needs. A high-quality internship can be based on a specific project, and can include the following:**

- undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate placements: internships may take place during vacation periods, in between courses or after a student has finished higher education

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- students in further education, such as sixth-form, tertiary and specialist colleges, and adult education institutes: internships may take place during vacation periods, in between courses or after a student has finished further education
- adults wishing to pursue a new career path: people in this category may or may not have attended further or higher education.

The following are not considered to be internships:

- placements that are a compulsory component to a further or higher education course, which have been contractually agreed between the employer, student, and college or university
- work tasters or work shadowing where people do not perform work for the organisation, but simply observe a profession for a brief period to learn about the practical aspects of a possible career
- part-time, full-time or vacation work unrelated to the pursuit of a professional career
- work undertaken by students to finance their studies unrelated to the pursuit of a professional career.

Although this common best practice code does not classify these experiences as internships, it does agree that they can be valuable both to employers and for individuals' professional and skills development, subject to individual circumstances.



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### 3. Remuneration

Internships must comply with all current employment legislation provisions. National Minimum Wage (NMW) legislation ensures that all workers in the UK who are over compulsory school leaving age are entitled to be paid at least the NMW, unless they are covered by an exemption in the NMW legislation. ‘Worker’ has a legal definition and depends upon the existence of a contract of employment or any other contract to personally perform work or services. These contracts can be written, oral or implied. The NMW is a minimum standard. If employers pay above the minimum wage, they are more likely to attract high-calibre candidates.

Limited groups are not eligible for the NMW, either through being exempt from the legislation or not being classified as workers. Of specific relevance to internships are:

- students undertaking work placements of up to one year as part of a higher education course of study
- volunteers – those who are under no obligation to perform work or carry out instructions: they have no contract or formal arrangement and so can come and go as they please; they have no expectation of and do not receive any reward for the work they do.

Further information regarding NMW legislation can be found at Businesslink ([www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)), Directgov ([www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)), and the Pay and Work Rights Helpline (0800 917 2368).

Interns should be reimbursed for any necessary work-related expenses, such as travel costs incurred to attend external

meetings and events. The employer should provide interns with written information on what expenses can be claimed and how to claim them.

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## **4. Principles of best practice**

Below are six principles of best practice: preparation; recruitment; induction; treatment; supervision and mentoring; and certification, reference and feedback. Each of these principles describes core elements necessary to allow both employer and intern to benefit from the internship. However, this code aims to provide general guidance and recognises that different industries and employers may have specific requirements.

### **Preparation**

Prior to recruitment, employers should consider how they expect to benefit from employing an intern, alongside the professional skills and insight that the intern will gain. A high level of preparation is important so as to recruit interns who possess the appropriate skills, qualifications and perceived potential. The employer should be fully prepared to provide an induction to the organisation, and to effectively manage and supervise interns. In advance of recruitment, employers should:

- identify the work that the intern will be responsible for – this will include the team(s) and project(s) with which the intern will work
- establish how the internship will provide the intern with a genuine opportunity to acquire skills and experience relevant to a professional career

- agree the skills and personal attributes that the intern needs to demonstrate
- ensure that they have the capacity to accommodate the intern and to provide the necessary level of support, as set out in this code
- understand the rights and responsibilities both of the employer and the intern in terms of working conditions and remuneration.

## Recruitment

Employers should recruit interns in broadly the same way as their regular employees. They need to convey how the interns' skills, qualifications and experience will dovetail with the tasks they will be expected to fulfil. The recruitment procedure should be conducted in an open and rigorous way so as to enable fair and equal access to available internships. The job advertisement should:

- indicate clearly the intern's role and responsibilities, and the skills and experience the intern can expect to gain or expand (see 'Preparation', above)
- specify the expected working hours, the start date and remuneration and expenses terms offered in the contract
- state clearly the length of the internship: prospective interns should be advised at interview of the employer's policy on the extension of an internship position to a full-time contract.

All applications should be treated on an equal basis and comply with best practice and legislation on equality and diversity.

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The successful candidate should receive written confirmation of the terms and conditions of the internship. This can be done through a letter or a standard short-term employment contract.

### **Induction**

Interns should receive a proper induction at the beginning of the internship. Whatever the size of the organisation, joining a new workplace can be intimidating for those entering the job market. It is therefore important to introduce an intern to their colleagues and explain the organisation's values to enable them to become a fully integrated team member. The induction should therefore cover:

- a description of the organisation, outlining its structure, objectives and values
- introductions to relevant staff and team members
- a tour of the facilities
- practical issues including how to claim expenses, and health and safety procedures.

### **Treatment**

Interns should be treated with exactly the same degree of professionalism and duty of care as regular employees, including access to disciplinary and grievance procedures. The intern should be given as much responsibility and diversity in their work as possible. Employers should:

- ensure that interns are made to feel part of the organisation and are not treated merely as visitors
- provide interns with work that develops their skills – an

intern's structured work plan should contribute to their professional and learning objectives and should be open to revision

- allow interns to attend job interviews or complete study requirements, as necessary
- be cognizant of issues relating to insurance, health and safety, and the provisions of the Working Time Regulations (1998)
- consider part-time internships so as to provide opportunities for those who have responsibilities as carers
- provide interns with equal access to paid holiday, at least in line with the statutory minimum.

Interns should know who to go to access support if they are concerned about work or with how they are being treated at work.

## Supervision and mentoring

Interns tend to be inexperienced and may need regular support and supervision. Good management and supervision will help to make them more productive and develop more quickly. Therefore, all types of employer should ensure that there is a dedicated person(s) with ringfenced time in their work schedule to act as a supervisor and mentor. The supervisor/mentor should:

- provide ongoing feedback and support: specific feedback could be given to appraise interns' performance and competencies on tasks or group exercises; and more general feedback could be given also on interns' professional behaviour and diligence – such as interpersonal skills

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- conduct regular performance reviews, based on the intern's learning objectives
- agree and revise the learning objectives for the internship with the intern
- conduct a formal performance review to evaluate the success of the intern's time with the organisation.

### **Certification, reference and feedback**

On completion of the internship, the employer should provide the intern with:

- a certificate/reference letter detailing the work they have undertaken, the skills and experience acquired, and the content of the formal performance review conducted at the end of the internship
- the opportunity to give feedback on their experience in an 'exit interview' – this would provide the employer with the opportunity to reflect on the quality of internship that they deliver.

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The Law Society



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