

Graduate Internship template – checklist for creating a good experience

Background

The recently launched programme Graduate Talent Pool aims to encourage employers to offer internships (paid or unpaid) to new graduates to provide relevant work experience at a time of high unemployment when longer term job opportunities are scarce.

The internships are intended to provide graduates with employability skills as well as enable them to experience what it's like to work in a particular sector and role.

Third Sector Internships

NCVO has been asked to promote the scheme to third sector employers and encourage the creation of internship opportunities for new graduates. This checklist is to support third sector organisations in developing good internships which will be of benefit to the graduate as well as to the organisation.

1. Purpose

Each internship will be created to provide the organisation with a short term resource to deliver meaningful work which is of value to the organisation and at the same time will provide the intern with a satisfying learning experience.

2. Paid or unpaid?

In an ideal world it would be desirable to offer paid internships but an unpaid internship (with expenses) will be better than not at all and many internships in our sector are only viable if unpaid. If unpaid, please pay travel and lunch expenses. If your organisation has a standard expenses policy for volunteers it would be best to use this for interns too. If you do not have one, usual practice is to adopt a maximum allowance for lunch (say £5 per day) and local travel – both only payable on production of receipts.

3. Structure

The internship should be planned and structured with a clear brief, specific job content and a named line manager. However the length of the internship, the content and whether it is paid or unpaid may vary according to needs of the organisation:

- Length of internship – long enough to be useful. The suggested minimum would be 8 weeks, maximum 12 months. If unpaid: suggested optimum time is 3 months. Part-time would allow other

time for income earning and/or job seeking (suggest minimum 3 days per week to be a useful experience).

- Content – may be one specific and clearly defined project, or a number of tasks in one team, or a number of tasks across a number of teams. Think about what is useful for the organisation and what will make a satisfying learning experience for the intern. The key is to clearly define the task or tasks to be achieved at the outset and to review on a regular basis. It is essential to avoid an unstructured placement with the intern having little to do or being occupied solely with mundane and routine tasks. Remember you want them to leave thinking your organisation would be a great place to work.

4. Management

Identify an appropriate individual to line manage the intern/s and take responsibility for communication links within the organisation, induction, regular review meetings and feedback at the end of the placement. This key contact point will be the person to whom the intern should be encouraged to go with any questions, concerns or suggestions for changes to the workplan etc. This role in itself can be a development opportunity for the designated staff member and add to the positive outcomes from the internship. If your organisation has a buddy system then it would be an enhancement to provide the intern with a buddy to welcome and support them.

5. Shadowing opportunities

Whilst the intern is there to work on particular tasks / projects it is valuable to provide them with opportunities to experience other aspects of your organisation and encourage them to attend organisational events such as staff briefings and where possible to invite them to attend key meetings as an observer.

6. Network support

Being the only intern can be an isolating experience and it is helpful to think about any networking opportunities that might provide support. NCVO are looking to facilitate the development of a third sector interns' network.

7. References

One of the benefits to the intern will be the offer of an employer reference – if the experience is successful and you feel able to write a positive reference please make this known to the intern.

8. Afterwards...

At the end of the internship draw it formally to a conclusion by inviting feedback from the intern on how it was for them and giving the intern some constructive feedback from the organisation's perspective. If there are longer term opportunities for remaining in contact make these known – e-newsletters, long term volunteering, opportunities to apply for trusteeships, paid jobs, short term contracts. Wherever possible keep the relationship going and build on it.