



INTERNSHIPS: An AGCAS Position Statement

Background

Work placements have been common for students on some HE courses, especially in vocational subjects, for a long time. In some sectors, in which demand for graduate positions exceeds supply, eg the media, public relations, politics and fashion, unpaid work experience before and after graduation has been common for many years, pre-dating national minimum wage legislation.

The recent well-publicised rise in graduate unemployment and underemployment has, however, prompted more employers, encouraged by UK governments, eg through the Graduate Talent Pool ¹, to promote internships, and universities and other agencies to broker them. Many internships are paid and adhere fully to national minimum wage legislation. In addition, some internships fall beyond the scope of existing legislation eg some internships with charities, very specific cases in which a volunteer is genuinely under no contractual obligation, those for students undertaking a maximum of one year's work experience as part of their course and work shadowing ².

There are many reports, however, that some employers continue to offer internships which appear to contravene the legislation. Indeed the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) recently recommended that graduates on internships be paid less than the minimum wage ³. On the other hand, many individuals and organisations, eg the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) ⁴, are campaigning for new legislation, enforcement of existing legislation and better practice from employers.

AGCAS members' views

AGCAS recently conducted a poll of its members which asked whether the government should 'clamp down on unpaid internships'. 85% of members voted 'Yes' and 15% 'No'.⁵ The continuing discussion stimulated by the poll demonstrates that there are deep concerns ⁶ within AGCAS and amongst its members. Not only are careers services and others being encouraged to break the law, but individual graduates are being exploited, and unpaid internships are contributing towards restricted social mobility. The recent report, *Fair access to the professions* ⁷, concluded that they are disproportionately difficult for graduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds to take up, especially for a prolonged period. In some sectors, the number of such unpaid internships also appears to be reducing the number of entry level jobs for graduates and other workers.

AGCAS and HE careers services would not, of course, wish to stand in the way of individuals' career opportunities or economic growth but this paper sets out its position for its members, employers, students and graduates, government and the media.

AGCAS's position

AGCAS supports internships which enable students and graduates to:

- ✓ Acquire new and develop existing skills and knowledge;
- ✓ Demonstrate their value to employers;

- ✓ Make new contacts that will benefit them in their career;
- ✓ Sample particular sectors, employers and types of work;

AGCAS calls for further action to ensure that internships do not:

- ✓ Exploit individuals;
- ✓ Restrict social mobility;
- ✓ Replace entry level jobs for graduates and others.

AGCAS's recommendations

Recommendations for AGCAS services

- ✓ **Do** offer careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) to students and graduates which will allow them to make informed decisions, negotiate and manage their own careers;
- ✓ **Do not** advertise internships which contravene current legislation;
- ✓ **Do not** broker internships which contravene current legislation;
- ✓ **Do** ensure all employer contacts are aware of current legislation and best practice;
- ✓ **Do** promote the AGCAS position statement to HE management, employers and local, regional and national government contacts.

Recommendations for employers

- ✓ **Do not** contravene current legislation;
- ✓ **Do** consider the implications for your organisation of not making all positions, including internships, accessible to anybody with the skills and potential to succeed;
- ✓ **Do** offer at least travel and subsistence expenses even if your internship is not covered by minimum wage legislation;
- ✓ **Do not** offer long (over 1-2 months) or full time unpaid placements even if your internship is not covered by minimum wage legislation;
- ✓ **Do** ensure that all your internships offer genuine learning opportunities to the intern.

Recommendations for government

- ✓ **Do** ensure that current legislation is enforced;
- ✓ **Do** review policy and legislation to ensure that the growth of internships does not contribute to a lack of social mobility or fewer paid opportunities for graduates and others;
- ✓ **Do** offer clear guidelines to employers and agencies that broker internships, which make it clear that the government does not condone breaches of legislation;
- ✓ **Do** ensure that government, government suppliers and political parties give a lead by adhering to the recommendations for employers above.

Recommendations for students and graduates

- ✓ **Do** consider carefully how internships in general and specific opportunities in particular can help you progress your career, and weigh any potential long-term benefits against immediate financial and other personal implications;
- ✓ **Do** make the most of any placement in terms of making contacts, learning new and developing existing skills/knowledge, and gaining experience;
- ✓ **Do** consider how best to negotiate with your line manager and others to ensure that you maximise the benefits of each internship;
- ✓ **Do** think about how you will articulate the skills, knowledge and experience you have gained or developed in future applications and interviews;
- ✓ **Do** make use of your HE careers service for information, advice and guidance on any of the above.

Actions for AGCAS

- ✓ To distribute this position paper as widely as possible;
- ✓ To actively lobby government and employers;
- ✓ To produce appropriate CEIAG material for members to use with students and graduates.

References

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3. Internships: to pay or not to pay; CIPD, 2010 http://www.agcas.org.uk/agcas_resources/221-Internships-To-Pay-or-Not-to-Pay-
4. Why interns need a fair wage; IPPR, 2010 http://www.agcas.org.uk/agcas_resources/229
5. AGCAS poll and website discussion, AGCAS, May 2010 <http://www.agcas.org.uk/articles/317-AGCAS-poll-on-unpaid-internships>
6. University careers services claim the rise of unpaid internships is damaging the prospects for the Class of 2010; press release, AGCAS, 20 May 2010 <http://www.agcas.org.uk/articles/322-Unpaid-internships-the-AGCAS-view>
7. Fair access to the professions (Milburn report), 2009 <http://www.agcas.org.uk/articles/236-Top-professions-out-of-reach-government-report>

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