

JANUARY 2014

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KEY TERMS

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INTRODUCTION

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In recent years, unpaid internships have become a polarising issue for employers and policy makers alike. An internship is a form of work experience, lasting anywhere from a few days to a few months, and they are common in the creative industries, the arts and politics. During their time, the intern will hope to gather experience in a field of work which they may be interested in pursuing. For critics however, when these internships are unpaid, the practice becomes exploitative. Some suggest that the practice of bringing interns into the workplace for free is unacceptable, and that employers are taking advantage of enthusiastic young people eager to make their mark in competitive industries [Ref: [The Times](#)]. Others however contrast this view, by noting that an unpaid internship is often a fantastic opportunity to learn new skills and gain valuable experience [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. So who is right? Should all interns get paid? And if so why? Should the chance for young people to learn in a professional environment really be considered exploitative? Or should they be grateful for the chance to prove themselves, whether they get paid or not?



A fair day's work for a fair day's pay?

The Oxford Dictionary definition of exploitation is: “The action or fact of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work” [Ref: [Oxford Dictionary](#)], and critics claim that this is exactly what unpaid internships do. They assert that in creative industries such as fashion and magazine journalism in particular, unpaid interns provide invaluable work for the company, and that there is a clear moral and legal case for the interns to be paid accordingly [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. They declare that unpaid internships are an antiquated and exploitative practice which must be outlawed [Ref: [Huffington Post](#)]. However, others note that it is simply unrealistic and unfair for employers to be expected to pay young people who do not yet have any practical skills to offer the workplace [Ref: [Independent](#)]. They claim that “Employers shouldn’t be expected to pay for interns who bring no value to their business”. [Ref: [Independent](#)]. This position is countered however, by those who suggest that many young people do in fact have a lot to offer employers. They note that according to National Minimum Wage legislation, once an intern takes on set hours and duties within an organisation, they are classified as a worker, and must be paid properly, and failing to do so is unlawful [Ref: [Independent](#)].

Is exploitation only about pay?

Some argue that it is a mistake to assess whether an internship is exploitative based solely on the pay conditions. Instead, they claim that we should concentrate on the quality of the internship itself. They go on to say that exploitative internships are often ones where interns are paid [Ref: [Independent](#)]. In such instances, interns are expected to work long hours, and carry

out menial and laborious tasks that in no way enhance their skills in a given field. By way of comparison, these commentators suggest that an unpaid intern at another organisation may have the chance to make a real impact, thus giving them a far more worthwhile experience even though they have not been paid. Critics however disagree, and state that not paying interns undermines their sense of worth. Resulting in staff treating them differently, and they themselves feeling undervalued and de-motivated regardless of their duties, and thus having poor experiences on the whole [Ref: [Guardian](#)].

Opportunity Knocks?

Traditionally, internships have been seen as the principle entry route into the world of work. And those who support unpaid internships claim that just like paid ones, they are a fantastic opportunity for graduates to prove that they have the requisite talent, tenacity and drive to make it in a competitive market place [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. They argue that these internships, paid or unpaid, far from being exploitative, are giving young people vital skills and insights, and as such, graduates should grab these opportunities wherever they can find them [Ref: [Spectator](#)]. Critics however, suspect that the opportunity argument is overstated. They go on to say that sadly, in reality unpaid internships are seldom a stepping stone to a paid position [Ref: [NACE](#)], and suggest that many young people actually end up interning unpaid for months and sometimes years at various companies [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. They also suggest that whilst this pool of enthusiastic young people exists, there is no incentive for employers to pay them.



Modern day slavery?

With this in mind, some have described unpaid internships as a modern day form of slavery [Ref: [Huffington Post](#)]. They argue that often, interns perform duties that would otherwise be performed by paid staff, and because companies can get away with it, they bend the rules in order to have a constant pool of young, desperate interns, who work for free for long periods of time [Ref: [Independent](#)]. Unpaid internships are a way of exploiting the enthusiasm of talented young people critics assert, putting graduates in a position where they feel compelled to work hard for free, with the hope of gaining a foothold in a tough graduate job market [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. Others though consider this position too extreme. They state that an internship is not a job, and therefore does not require remuneration in the same way, and that to compare it to slavery is a gross exaggeration. One commentator notes that, “The demand that internships become paid positions is an extension of modern youth’s corrosive belief that everything they do should be instantly rewarded” [Ref: [Spectator](#)].



ESSENTIAL READING

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NOTES

FOR

Stop unpaid internships

Alex Sullivan *Huffington Post* 2 December 2013

Stop bashing interns

Tom Beardsworth *Telegraph* 2 October 2013

Brendan O'Neill is wrong on unpaid internships

Ben Lyons *Spectator* 16 August 2013

Unpaid internships: Exploitation and discrimination

Francesca Mitchell *Huffington Post* 2 February 2013

Why expect interns to work for no pay?

Alex Graham *The Times* 31 October 2011

AGAINST

Some graduates are only worth unpaid internships

Lauren Razavi *Independent* 25 November 2013

Interns should stop complaining

Ed Cumming *Telegraph* 30 September 2013

Unpaid Internship turned me into a banker

Martin Vander Weyer *Spectator* 24 August 2013

Why interns don't deserve pay

Brendan O'Neill *Spectator* 17 August 2013

In defence of unpaid internships

Andrew Scherer *Independent* 12 March 2013

IN DEPTH

Pay interns (a little)

Libby Purves *The Times* 25 April 2011

Social Immobility

Simon Jenkins *Guardian* 5 April 2011



BACKGROUNDERS

Unpaid internship are exploited by the wealthiest in creative industries

Will Wood *Guardian* 30 November 2013

The future of unpaid internships

Libby Page *Guardian* 14 November 2013

How can we make unpaid work pay?

Tom Chivers *Telegraph* 11 November 2013

Unpaid interns and Medieval Peasants

Will Manners *Huffington Post* 24 October 2013

Surviving unpaid internships

Cerian Jenkins *Huffington Post* 28 September 2013

Rights, responsibilities and unpaid internships

Charlie Cadywould *Huffington Post* 24 September 2013

Internships must be more than a posh child swap

Adrian Furnham *The Sunday Times* 15 September 2013

Useful experience or unpaid labour?

Liz Barclay *Independent* 7 September 2013

Are we undervaluing our interns?

Clare Dyckhoff *Huffington Post* 28 August 2013

Lay off Sheryl Sandberg and her unpaid intern: the millionaire's an easy target

Louisa Peacock *Telegraph* 16 August 2013

Unpaid internships are an anachronism

Sophie Rodger *Huffington Post* 10 August 2013

The End of the Unpaid Internship

Cullen Seltzer *Slate* June 2013

Don't dismiss unpaid internships

Maria Sowter *Huffington Post* 2 May 2013

Unpaid Internships; nothing really comes for free

Jessica Keating *Guardian* 11 September 2012

Intern generation must stop feeling sorry for itself

Sophie Heawood *Independent* 6 July 2012

Ripping off young interns

Zoe Williams *Guardian* 21 March 2012

In defence of unpaid internships

Finbarr Toesland *Huffington Post* 28 September 2011

Charities and unpaid interns

Tanya de Grunwald *Guardian* 28 June 2011

Internships, a question of class

Kaya Burgess *The Times* 7 May 2011

The internship myth

Emily Sands-Bonin *Guardian* 25 February 2011

ORGANISATIONS

Intern Aware

Interns Anonymous

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IN THE NEWS

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Arts Universities oppose unpaid internships

Guardian 9 January 2014

West Herts MP David Gauke under scrutiny over unpaid intern advert

hemeltoday 2 January 2014

HMRC to investigate unpaid internship advert

Guardian 16 December 2013

US Interns battling to change the culture of US work

BBC News 5 December 2013

Sony pays intern £4600 in minimum wage ruling

BBC News 2 September 2013

Revenue clams down on unpaid internships

The Times 3 June 2013

Internship Bill fails in parliament

Independent 4 March 2013

Universities urged to give poor interns help

The Sunday Times 24 February 2013

'Young people are being used as free labour'

The Times 22 September 2011

Half of all internships are still unpaid

The Times 5 September 2011

MP's accused of exploiting interns

The Times 29 January 2011



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- I am a sixth form student and would like further details about events in my area
- I am interested in becoming a Debating Matters judge
- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
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