

Internships – the route to a graduate job?

So, you've carefully coaxed them through A levels, steered them through the maze of decisions of what to study and where, and successfully shipped them off to university – now you can take a deep breath and relax. Not so. The Graduate Market in 2020 is a survey of the UK's 100 most well-known and successful employers – around 40% of these recruiters said that graduates who have had no previous work experience at all have little chance of receiving a job offer for their graduate programmes. A good degree from a respected university is only part of the package employers are looking for, and is no guarantee of future employment unless your son or daughter has some solid work experience to back-it up.

The good news is that more than 80% of the employers in this survey offered paid work experience programmes for students and recent graduates during the 2019-20 academic year.

How to get an internship

Your son or daughter may be on a course that includes a year spent on an industrial placement (such as a sandwich degree) or may be able to arrange this through their university. If not they should research employer websites for internship opportunities.

Summer placements for penultimate year students

Most large employers offer summer placements, lasting from a few weeks to three months. These are highly competitive and recruitment is similar if not identical to the application process for graduate schemes. Expect on-line applications, phone interviews and assessment centres. Your son or daughter should have a real interest in the internship position as these are often specific rather than general management roles and research into the role and the company will be essential to make a good application. Employers prefer to recruit future employees from their interns and are competing to headhunt the most talented undergraduates. Getting an internship position this way will be tough, but if successful and they perform well during the placement, there is the likelihood of an offer of a graduate job.

Taster experiences for first year students

Possibly less daunting are the schemes large employers are increasingly offering for first year undergraduate students. These include shorter placements, introductory courses, open days and taster experiences. These are more suitable if your son or daughter has some vague ideas of job roles they want to explore or companies they might like to work for. Opportunities include shadowing a student intern or junior employee, for example in lesser understood career areas, such as financial trading.

Do smaller companies offer internships?

It is not just large companies that offer internships, your son or daughter could make speculative enquiries by sending a CV to smaller companies to ask for a period of work experience. Get them to think about how they can be of use to this employer, stating modules they have completed on their degree that give them knowledge or skills they could offer in return for an insight into a field of work or company.

Work shadowing

If getting paid work experience proves impossible, asking to work shadow someone in their day to day job can be just as useful. Asking questions and using this time productively can give an insight into whether a job role or work setting is right for them and provide valuable content for a CV.

Paid or unpaid?

Internships offered by large companies are usually paid. In some job sectors however expect the National Minimum/National Living Wage or expenses only, and if the participant is classed as a volunteer, not a worker, the internship may be unpaid. Your son or daughter will need to make a judgement about how valuable this experience will be to get them into their chosen career and guard against the employer using them as cheap labour. You may find the following useful:

<https://www.gov.uk/employment-rights-for-interns>

A wide range of opportunities

Internships are not just available in business, science and engineering - the range is now much wider. For example, the [Charity Works](#) graduate trainee scheme is a national programme with placements each year in charities or housing associations, in areas such as frontline charity work, fundraising, research and policy or communications.

Your son or daughter could consider an internship abroad. As well as gaining useful skills this will demonstrate to a future employer that they have confidence, adaptability and a can-do attitude. For example, some large companies offer global internships and the [AIESEC Go Global scheme](#), offers 3– 18 month placements abroad.

Useful websites

www.studentladder.co.uk

www.inspiringinterns.com

<https://www.studentjob.co.uk/>

<http://www.e4s.co.uk/>

http://www.prospects.ac.uk/work_experience.htm

<https://targetjobs.co.uk/internships>

www.ratemyplacement.co.uk

www.europacement.com

www.iaeste.org

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