

# Internship Guidance for the UK

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# 1. Introduction

This guidance should be adopted for internship opportunities across all units, functions, and nations of the Open University (OU) in the UK. Due to the complexities of employment law and tax implications, the university is not able to offer internships to students not resident and able to work in the UK.

The guidance is for university colleagues wishing to appoint a student to an internship position in their unit/function. An internship offers the opportunity for students to gain relevant professional work experience before embarking on a chosen career. They are structured, short-term, supervised placements and are often focused on specific tasks or projects within a defined timescale.

Well managed, high-quality internships are beneficial to both the university and the intern. The intern should experience a hands-on educational experience in a professional work environment, to develop their understanding of a profession. Through offering/undertaking work of value, the intern will be learning and enhancing their future employability whilst the university will be contributing to the creation of a new, highly talented workforce for the future<sup>1</sup>. \* It should be noted that internships are not OU employment opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> see the '[Common best practice code for high-quality internships](#)'  
(Produced by the Gateways to the Professions Collaborative Forum)

The OU is committed to providing the best possible study experience for its students and has a mission to transform the lives of those students both through the provision of high-quality learning and the improvement of employability prospects. The university recognises its responsibility for increasing the employability of its' students and therefore seeks to support students who wish to develop work experience through an internship.

OU students are defined as those who are either currently registered for credit-bearing study with the OU or have completed credit bearing studies within the last 3 years.

In line with this commitment, internship opportunities should wherever possible be open to OU students initially and only on rare occasions to external students at the outset (see section 3). The latter may include situations where it is unlikely that the expertise required would be available within the internal student community.

Similarly, internship candidates may be sourced from outside the OU for projects linked to large multi-institutional studentships, so long as a competitive and transparent process is followed.

## **2. Scope of this guidance**

The purpose of this guidance is to:

- Outline the university's commitment to supporting current OU students and recent alumni in their development and advancement into employment
- Provide a framework for use across the university, incorporating

guidance in relation to the recruitment, selection, and appointment of both internal and external students to internship opportunities

- Ensure that university procedures regarding the employment of interns (which is through our designated partner for agency workers) are understood and followed, including rates of pay
- Outline the ongoing support available, where internships are offered to OU students, from the Careers and Employability Services (CES) Internship Team

### **3. Internship principles**

The university's aim is to advertise internships opportunities to OU students first. Where specific expertise and/or experience is required that may not be available within the OU community, the unit may advertise such opportunities to students at other universities.

However, in some circumstances it may be agreed that certain roles can be open to internal and external students from the outset, for example externally funded research taster internships offered to students interested in a future PhD. The Internship team in CES will be able to advise on this.

The following guiding principles relate to all Open University internships:

- Paid work experience opportunities will be provided, via a third-party employment agency, for students/alumni who are 18 years old or over

- For consistency and equality, the agreed rate of pay will be the nearest positive spinal point above the Real Living Wage (as set by the Real Living Wage Foundation), unless justification to pay a higher rate is gained from the People Services Hub and the Reward team
- Such instances will be by exception and must be based upon objective justification, with reference to the scope of the activities to be undertaken during the internship
- The People Services Hub or CES Internship Team will advise line managers regarding the current rate of pay, plus the supplementary charge made by the university's preferred agency, for budgeting purposes
- Holiday entitlement will be provided on a pro rata basis to be used either during or at the end of the internship period
- Where an internship is open to PhD students and has an academic component then payment will be at the agreed rate i.e., AC1 and pro rata holiday entitlement will be provided on a pro rata basis to be used either during and or at the end of the internship period. However, this rate should not be used for teaching, facilitation, or other associate lecturer duties
- Where an intern has a PhD, but this is not a requirement for the opportunity, the rate of pay will be aligned with the Real Living Wage and holiday entitlement will be provided on a pro rata basis to be used either during or at the end of the internship period
- They will be in addition to existing or planned vacancies

- If a team or unit is undergoing a restructure, then advice should be sought from People Services as to whether an internship is appropriate
- Once the opportunity has been identified, the line manager/supervisor of the internship should email [internships@open.ac.uk](mailto:internships@open.ac.uk) to arrange an exploratory conversation with one of the Placement Managers within the CES Internship team
- The Internship team will be available to guide and support the line manager throughout the duration of the internship (for OU student internships only)
- Once the internship opportunity has been scoped out, final approval should be sought from the relevant Head of Unit/budget-holder, prior to advertising
- Once the selection process is completed the line manager/supervisor should complete the '[Authorisation to Hire Temporary Agency Staff](#)' form for the People Services Hub
- Wherever possible internship opportunities should be virtual, to offer accessibility to the wider OU student population, including those with caring responsibilities and/or disabilities
- Virtual internships are an excellent alternative to traditional internships, offering the opportunity to those with other commitments (either work or personal) to benefit from a flexible work schedule. This could include career changers who are currently in work and wish to gain relevant work experience to

strengthen future job applications. Also, those who wish to return to work after a break, due to an illness or caring responsibilities

- Where a virtual internship is not possible, either a workplace-based or hybrid model can be adopted
- They will include pre-identified and structured opportunities for the intern to interact with a variety of colleagues, to gain a range of professional work experience
- The hours worked per week may be flexible, to meet both student and university needs, up to a maximum of 37 hours per week
- An internship opportunity may be offered across the academic year; however, care must be taken to ensure budgetary approvals are in place where an internship opportunity crosses into another financial year
- There may be a maximum number of hours that the intern is allowed to work, for example those students who have another job or are completing a PhD
- Students on benefits may need to restrict the number of hours worked
- International students must have a visa status that allows employment in the UK, plus be resident in the UK, to be offered an internship. In such cases, the number of hours that they can work will be dependent upon their visa

## **4. The Appointment of Students to Internships at the OU**

As stated, the university commits that internship opportunities will initially be open to OU students only and thereafter to external students (see section 3).

However, in some circumstances it may be agreed that certain roles will be open to internal and external students from the outset. The Internship Team in CES will be able to advise further. By being made aware of upcoming opportunities, the Internship Team will plan resource to promote these to internal students and, if an OU student is appointed, will ensure they receive a comparable experience to other OU interns.

Where internship opportunities are open to external students, the People Services Hub will advertise the opportunity and support the recruitment, through the university's preferred agency partner. The Internship team will highlight such opportunities to OU students. If an OU student is appointed, they will support the intern and line manager for the duration of the internship.

For internship opportunities offered exclusively to OU students, refer to the process flowchart in Appendix A, which provides details of the recruitment, selection, and appointment process to internships. The key details of which are:



## **4.1 Advertising opportunities**

Once approval is gained from the unit/faculty for an intern, the job advert should be forwarded to the Internships Team (CES). Roles will be advertised on the university student vacancy platform 'OpportunityHub' for a minimum of 3 weeks, to enable fair and equal access to all potential candidates and to openly encourage expressions of interest.

The Internship Team will send out application packs to interested students and collate all applications received. This enables CES to fully support students interested in applying and to track management information, to support the University aim of attracting Widening Participation (WP) students.

## **4.2 Selection process**

All applications will be passed to the unit/faculty for shortlisting and thereafter to follow a fair selection process, as expected for all recruitment at the university and in accordance with the relevant recruitment guidance.

Interns will be interviewed, usually virtually and units/faculties will need to establish a fair process for choosing the most suitable candidate for the internship opportunity.

## **4.3 Hiring the intern**

Interns are not employees; therefore, university employment policies will not apply. An intern is first and foremost an agency worker, employed by the third-party employment agency chosen by the

university and subject to the policies and procedures of that company.

The line manager/supervisor will make an offer in principle to the successful candidate and on their acceptance gain agreement to pass contact details to the university's employment agency.

The associated employment checks (such as immigration checks) are completed by the agency. Interns are subject to all usual agency registration and pre-employment checks/procedures.

It should be noted that internships of over 12 weeks in duration, will be subject to a higher agency cost rate from week 13 onwards. The People Services Hub or CES can advise on current rates.

#### **4.4 Health and safety considerations**

Line managers/supervisors of interns must adhere to the university Health and Safety Policy and associated documents, to ensure that the university is meeting its duty of care. In addition, the university has a duty to consider whether any changes or reasonable adjustments could be made to the selection process, workplace, or the way that work is done, which would overcome the effect of a disability and to make any such changes that are reasonable.

All interns must complete all health and safety induction training relevant to workers at the university. The line manager/supervisor must also ensure that, where the intern is on-site, they have completed all mandatory Health and Safety training and they adhere

to the latest university guidance, in relation to working safely after the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Guidance and information from the Health and Safety team in relation to Covid-19 safety precautions can be found on the Estates intranet.

#### **4.5 Post-internship references**

The university cannot provide employment references. The line manager may choose to provide a personal reference, highlighting the interns' achievements, but must specify this is the case and that any request for an employment reference should be directed to the agency, as the legal employer.

If a personal reference is provided, this should state:

*This is a personal reference provided by me in a professional capacity. This reference does not constitute, nor should it be used as a substitute for, an employment reference which should be obtained from xxxx who legally employed xxxx whilst we hosted the Internship at The Open University.*

### **5. Ensuring the Success of an Internship**

The ultimate success of an internship will involve several parties working together to support the student who is undertaking the internship. The responsibilities of each are explored below:

## 5.1 Host unit/faculty

The unit/faculty that is hosting the intern will provide:

- Sign-off for the required budget and payment of the intern through the university's preferred employment agency
- Agreement that internships of 13 weeks or more will be at the higher cost rate (to cover additional annual leave rights after 12 weeks)
- The equipment the intern will need to perform the role and raise an IT request accordingly (see 'Hiring an Intern' guidance)
- Assurance that all equipment is returned to IT at the end of the internship
- Where the internship is to be undertaken virtually/remotely, ensure that no obligation is placed upon the student to attend on-site, or any other location
- Agreement that where the intern agrees very occasional attendance at work premises then appropriate travel expenses (and subsistence) will be paid, in line with university policy

## 5.2 Line Manager (Supervisor)

The line manager of the intern will commit to:

- Leading on the creation of the job description, shortlisting of candidates, and managing the interview structure and approach
- Planning a suitable and appropriate induction, including paid time at the start of the internship to undertake all necessary compliance training, to enable the intern to act in accordance with UK law and university policy

- If on review it is considered one or more elements of compliance training, do not have to be completed these decisions, and rationale, need to be recorded by the hiring manager
- Whether the internship is virtual, workplace or hybrid, it must contain pre-identified and structured opportunities for the intern to interact with a range of colleagues, beyond their line manager, to gain a range of professional work experience. Explicit planning is required, as even on-site attendance cannot be presumed to offer such opportunities
- Authorising weekly timesheets and annual leave
- Supervising the intern (remotely or on-site)
- Assigning a mentor, who can be a point of contact and support
- Holding a regular 1:1 meeting with the intern, for the creation and ongoing support of an agreed development plan
- Providing as much access to learning and development opportunities for the intern as possible, whilst the unit benefits from the skills and expertise of the student
- Ensuring that the intern has appropriate and regular support and contact while on the placement
- Ensuring that the intern is not subject to any harassment, bullying or similarly inappropriate behaviour in carrying out the placement
- Providing an evaluation of the internship to the CES team via the form supplied

## **5.3 Careers and employability team (for OU students only)**

The CES Internships team will:

- Advertise and manage the early-stage recruitment process for an OU intern
- Conduct separate pre-start, mid-way and final evaluation support telephone calls, with the intern and the line-manager
- Provide the 'Hire an Intern' and 'Supporting an Intern' packs to guide the line manager/supervisor
- Provide a 'Welcome Pack', which offers resources to support the intern at the start of their internship experience at the OU

## **5.4 Intern**

The intern is expected to:

- Complete the university induction and all required compliance training modules
- Adhere to the Health & Safety guidance provided
- Complete weekly timesheets for the university's preferred partner, plus any other required documents
- Adhere to the policies and procedures of the university
- Undertake any training as required, including relevant university on-line compliance training modules
- Work to the required standard and meet deadlines set for work submissions

## 5.5 People Services

The People Services function will:

- Set appropriate rates of pay for interns, aligned to the Real Living Wage
- Approve any exceptions to the agreed rate of pay, where objective justification is provided, via the People Services Hub/Reward team
- Review and update the university internship guidance, as appropriate
- Support in the appointment of the successful intern for the position and liaise with the university's preferred partner, as per any other agency worker

For internships offered to external students only (see Section 3):

- The People Services Hub will advertise the opportunity and support the recruitment process, through our designated partner for agency workers

## 5.6 University preferred partner for appointing agency workers

The agency will:

- Complete the recruitment and registration of interns, as instructed by the university
- Undertake all associated pre-employment checks
- Inform the intern of the university policies and practices relating to standards of behaviour that are expected at the university

- Check that the intern completes all compliance training as part of their induction, including the Health and Safety modules
- Ensure timely and correct payment of interns, based upon completed timesheets
- Check that interns are not generally working more than one full-time equivalent for the university, that is 37 hours per week (hpw).
- Ensure that the requirements of the Working Time Directive are being met i.e. if the intern has another job that they do not work more than an average of 48 hours a week in total across both jobs and that they take appropriate break periods
- Provide a welcome pack, to include information relating to auto-enrolment into the government National Employment Savings Trust pension scheme (NEST) after working 12 weeks, plus details on how to opt out of the pension scheme
- Take responsibility for providing any post-employment references

## 6. Equality

Policies are inclusive of all Open University staff, regardless of age, care experience, caring status or dependency, civil status, disability, family status, gender, gender expression, gender identity, gender reassignment, marital status, marriage and civil partnership, membership of the Traveller community, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic background or trades union membership status.



## **7. Useful website links**

[Careers and Employability Services \(CES\) intranet site](#)

[Hire an intern \(for employers\)](#) – See appendix A

[Virtual internships \(for students\)](#)

[OU resourcing policy and practice](#)

[Open University Access, Participation and Success \(APS\) Strategy](#)

## **8. Useful references**

Compliance Training Policy

Compliance Training Standard

Recruitment, Selection and Employment Policy

Effective Recruitment and Selection Guide

[The University Health and Safety Management System](#)

[Health & Safety Policy](#)

[Link to NHS Covid-19 Information](#)

For more information, please contact the CES, Internship Team at:

[internships@open.ac.uk](mailto:internships@open.ac.uk)

# Appendix 1

