Placements, Work Experience & Internships

How they can improve your employability
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Work Experience, Placements and Internships

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INDEX

Page 5  Introduction
1. What do we mean by a placement or an internship?
2. Why should you do a placement?

Page 6  Types of Placement and Work Experience
1. On Course Placements
2. Vacation Placements
3. Sandwich Placements
4. Part Time/Casual/Summer Work
5. Voluntary Work
6. Unpaid Placements/Internships and Guidelines on Them

Page 9  Applying for Placements/Internships
1. Finding placements or internships
2. Choosing a placement
3. What does the application process involve?
4. When should I start looking for longer term placements or internships?

Page 12 Information for International Students
Introduction

What do we mean by a placement or an internship?

Placements are usually a structured programme where you work for an organisation as a full-time member of staff, providing you with experience of working in a particular job. They are extremely valuable as they allow you to gain relevant skills, experience and contacts in a particular type of work.

Placements range in length from 1 day per week over a number of weeks; a 2-3 week block with an employer, an Easter or summer vacation placement, or a 46 week or year-long internship.

The terms ‘placement’ and ‘internship’ are often interchanged. A variety of other names are also used including ‘Sandwich Placement’, 'Industrial Placement', ‘Placement Year’, ‘Year In Industry’, ‘Year-long Internship’. Year-long placements or internships usually take place between your second and third year at university. Different employers use different terms to mean the same thing. Throughout this booklet we will use the term ‘placement’ to cover all lengths and types of placement.

Why should you do a placement?

Almost all graduate employers expect you to have experience that is relevant to their organisation. Carl Gilleard, Chief Executive of the Association of Graduate Recruiters says:

“Employers want skilled graduates prepared for the world of work. The best way for a student to gain valuable work experience is by taking a placement during or as part of their degree course. Students who do are more likely to acquire the skills employers need.”

Benefits - See what graduates say: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v/fwZmhTVyBy8

- **Increased chance of getting a graduate level job** - research shows that students who undertake a placement are 76% more likely to get a graduate level job.

- **Evidence of your skills** - a placement allows you to show that you are able to work in a professional environment and that you can apply the skills and knowledge you have learned via university.

- **Improved academic performance** - research suggests that students who undertake placements get better grades when they return to university

- **Increased earnings** - research shows that students who have done work placements are more employable and attract an earnings premium compared to other graduates.
• **Developing useful contacts** – working with and meeting a wider range of people may give you greater confidence and help you to find a graduate job.

• **Gain an insight into an organisation or industry** – this is a great way of finding out what you may (or may not!) want to do.

• Employers benefit from the opportunity to work with enthusiastic graduates without having to make a long term commitment

#### Types of Placement and Work Experience

**On Course Placements**

Some courses include compulsory work placements as part of your degree, whilst other courses offer optional work placement modules. If this isn’t the case on your course then you should still think about arranging a placement, perhaps on a regular day each week when you are not in university, or in a 2-3 week block during vacations.

The important thing about work placements is that they provide an opportunity for you to get to grips with working - meeting deadlines and working in a team. A placement can: enhance your knowledge and help with your course; enable you to find out more about a job or industry and build useful job contacts.

**Vacation Placements**

Some large organisations advertise Vacation Schemes, sometimes called internships, which are aimed at second year undergraduates. They usually last between 4-10 weeks over the summer. Some organisations offer shorter placements during the Easter vacation. You gain an insight into how the company works and if you make a good impression, you stand a great chance of being offered a graduate job.

**Sandwich Placements**

A sandwich placement is an integrated placement year in an industry or profession as part of a student’s degree course. They usually last between 46 weeks and a full year. You’ll either get a tuition fee waiver or a reduction in your tuition fees during your placement year. There is no legal requirement for a company to pay you during your placement. However, plenty of companies do pay their placement students, often between about £10,000 and £17,000 a year.

**Part Time/Casual/Summer Work**

Many students have part-time or temporary jobs during the academic term or during vacations. As well as providing you with income, these jobs will help you to develop the skills and experience that graduate employers are looking for e.g. communication skills, problem solving skills and time management. The Careers
Centre advertises a wide range of part time and summer vacancies including summer jobs abroad, go to www.edgehill.ac.uk/careers and choose “search vacancies”. Also follow the Careers Centre on Twitter @ EHU_Careers and facebook for latest information, or contact careers@edgehill.ac.uk

**Our booklets:** ‘Applying for Part-Time Jobs’, ‘Summer Work Abroad’ and ‘Summer Camp USA’ give more detailed information and are free to download from the Careers Centre website.

**Voluntary Work**

Volunteering is a great way of acquiring the skills that employers want, and can help your job application stand out from other candidates.

- 84% of employers say volunteering is a way to find paid work
- 73% of employers would employ someone with volunteering experience over someone without
- 51% of graduates said volunteering helped them to secure employment (Research by Reeds Recruitment agency for the charity Timebank)

Volunteering can also improve your confidence and build your self-esteem. It can help you make new friends, develop new interests and a network of contacts which in turn can help you to find a job.

For more detailed information on volunteering see our booklets ‘The Student Volunteering Handbook’ and ‘International Volunteering’ which are free to download from the Careers Centre website.

The Careers Centre helps students to find volunteering opportunities. Go to www.edgehill.ac.uk/careers and choose “search vacancies”. Also follow us on facebook for the latest information. Other useful websites are:

- www.csv.org.uk
- www.do-it.org.uk
- www.timebank.org.uk
- www.vinspired.com
- www.volunteeringliverpool.org.uk

**Unpaid Placements/Internships**

Work experience placements or internships have increasingly become an established stepping-stone to employment for students and graduates. However, some internships are unpaid, particularly in sectors such as the media.

The National Council for Work Experience has produced the following guidelines to help you decide whether an unpaid internship is worth your while:

- Discuss the purpose of the internship and clarify expectations from the start.
• Ensure the placement is valuable – does it give insight into a particular industry?
  Will it improve certain skills or clarify career aspirations?
• Discuss the possibilities of any future paid work with the employer, pointing out the 
  skills that you have gained during the internship.
• Re-consider the value of the internship if it ceases to supply useful contacts and 
  training opportunities.
• Everyone has a choice and if the balance between valuable work experience tips 
  into exploitation then it is up to you to decide whether to continue or not.

**Guidelines on Unpaid Internships**
There is a specific exemption in National Minimum Wage (NMW) legislation for 
students undertaking work as part of a university course, such as a work placement 
year during a sandwich course, and there are also different rules for people working 
for charities.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development has produced some best 
practice guidelines for employers, *Internships that Work*. The guidelines explain that 
the rules for the national minimum wage (NMW) apply if the arrangements are such 
that the intern counts as a worker rather than a volunteer.

“If someone is expected to undertake ‘work’ for any organisation, they are entitled to 
be paid the NMW – even if there is no written contract in place. However, the issue 
of whether an intern classes as a ‘worker’ is made more complicated by the fact that, 
in some circumstances, they could instead be classed as ‘volunteers’ (who are under 
no obligation to perform work, have no contract or formal arrangement and have no 
expectation of and do not receive any reward for the work they do besides having 
their expenses reimbursed), in which case the NMW legislation does not apply.”

The CIPD recommends that, as a minimum, reasonable travel expenses for interns 
should be covered and suggests that there is a strong case for paying a bursary or 
salary that is equal to or better than the NMW, particularly if the internship lasts for 
three months or more.

The Government-backed *Graduate Talent Pool*, aimed at helping graduates find 
work, advises employers to take account of the NMW rules before offering an unpaid 
internship, and adds: 'It will then be for graduates to decide whether the benefits of 
taking up the internship outweigh the fact that it is unpaid.'
Applying for Placements/Internships

How can I find placements or internships?

The Careers Centre operates a Vacancy Service which advertises these types of opportunities. Go to: www.edgehill.ac.uk/careers and choose “search vacancies” Also follow the Careers Centre on Twitter @ EHU_Careers and facebook for latest information.

For opportunities with large employers (national/international companies) try the following websites:

www.fledglings.net
www.milkround.com/
www.prospects.ac.uk/work_experience
www.ratemyplacement.co.uk
www.step.org.uk
www.studentjob.co.uk/internship
www.targetjobs.co.uk
www.yini.org.uk
www.fish4jobs.co.uk
www.europlacement.com

Also look out for Graduate Recruitment Fairs at Edge Hill University and at other local universities (e.g. in Liverpool and Manchester) in autumn of your second year. when there are lots of opportunities with larger employers. Fairs are also held in the Spring/Summer Term and to promote opportunities with remaining or smaller companies.

To find smaller local employers try contacting Chambers of Commerce:

www.lancscommerce.co.uk/
www.liverpoolchamber.org.uk/
www.settonchamber.com/
www.sthelenschamber.com/
www.wirralchamber.org.uk/
www.gmchamber.co.uk/ (Greater Manchester)

There are also many creative ways of finding a placement or an internship. This is particularly true for IT, Media or Creative/Performing Arts students. Have a look at this student’s CV on youtube:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPq7eMXJkhw
Choosing a placement

It can be easy to fall into the trap of choosing placements based on location or pay rate. Choosing companies close to where you are already living is very tempting and will mean you don’t have to find new accommodation, but you will only do this once and it is important to make as much of your placement as possible. Remember how much care you put into choosing your degree course (or wish you had)?

Many of the large national and international businesses have many different placements students can choose from, depending upon their specialisms. Unilever are based in our region and have several placement programmes. These youtube clips show students who have carried out a wide range of placements with Unilever:

http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLs22gX74WbwN4qRQNwHSE2n45TI1GlrEA

What does the application process involve?

For short term placements, the responsibility to get a placement often lies with the student. However you may find that staff in your department will be willing to help.

It is usually best to contact an employer directly by telephone or email. You will need to be sure of what the organisation does, what you can offer them and what you would like to experience whilst you are with them.

Application for these types of placement is often via a CV and covering letter. There is information on how to write a CV and covering letter on our website www.edgehill.ac.uk/careers and in our booklet ‘How to create a CV and Covering Letter’ which can be downloaded from the website.

For longer term placements (lasting more than a month) there are usually a number of stages to go through in order to get a placement/internship.

1. **Apply in writing** – either by completing an online application form or by sending a CV or letter of application.
2. **Online tests** – these are typically tests of numeracy, verbal or logical reasoning and personality and must be completed successfully.
3. **Telephone Interview** – this is a cheaper and quicker way of deciding which applicants a company wants to take through the rest of the process.
4. **Assessment Centre/Day** – some companies use these at the start of the application process whilst others use them at a later stage.
5. **Interviews** – you may have number of them on different days and with different people.

There is information on how to succeed at each stage on our website www.edgehill.ac.uk/careers and also on the prospects website www.prospects.ac.uk

Careers Centre staff are happy to help you to apply, and to prepare for each of the stages.
When should I start looking for longer term placements/internships?

- Most national and international companies start advertising these opportunities from the September of your second year at university. This is when you should start to research what is available.
- There is strong competition for these opportunities and many closing dates are before Christmas. This means that you only have a short period of time to apply for them.
- There are however, some national companies or more locally based employers who recruit all the year round.
- Most medium or local companies (SME's) advertise their placements/internships as and when they arise. The Careers Centre starts to receive these around Easter time i.e. in the Spring term of your second year.
Information for International Students

Before you begin to look for placements/internships we advise you to check your eligibility with the Centre for International Education [www.edgehill.ac.uk/international/](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/international/)

The Careers Centre can help you to find and apply for jobs in the UK, however we cannot advise on visa and immigration issues

[UKCISA website](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk) (The Council for International Student Affairs) has information on working in the UK during your studies. On the website select ‘Study, Work and More’.

The [Directgov website](http://www.direct.gov.uk) has general information regarding your employment rights.

**Benefits of Working Part-Time**

Graduate employers value view work experience gained whilst studying and a part-time/vacation job or placement can give you the opportunity to:

- discover what it is like to work in the UK
- gain valuable work experience
- develop new skills and improve existing ones e.g. language skills
- meet new people and make new friends.

**Finding Vacancies**

For help in finding part time, voluntary work and placements please go to [www.edgehill.ac.uk/careers](http://www.edgehill.ac.uk/careers) and choose “search vacancies”.

Also follow the Careers Centre on Twitter @ EHU_Careers and facebook for latest information, or contact careers@edgehill.ac.uk

For help with applying for jobs please visit the information for international students on our website e.g. to find out about writing a UK CV. Alternatively call into the Careers Centre and speak to one of our staff.
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Will this publication help you? YES / NO
Did you find the information easy to understand? YES / NO
Was the publication interesting? YES / NO
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Do you have any other comments about Edge Hill’s Careers Centre or the information we’ve given?

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