

# Exploiting the Dream

*Your guide to work experience  
and internships*

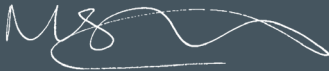


**NUJ**  
NATIONAL UNION  
OF  
JOURNALISTS

[www.nuj.org.uk](http://www.nuj.org.uk)

“The NUJ is here to make the voice of students and those starting out in the media, publishing and PR and communications heard and to help make work experience a good one. Unpaid internships exploit dreams and exclude new talent, undermining the diversity of our industry, just when we should be nurturing and supporting the people coming into the profession. Employers in the media should be warned; we will continue to take on those who seek to exploit young people and newcomers to the industry.

“Students and new entrants to the industry can benefit hugely from well-structured work experience placements giving them knowledge in a practical environment. But there is a difference between work experience and employers using people to fill jobs for which workers should receive a wage. If the work is good enough to be published, then the journalist is good enough to be paid.”

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'MS', with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish extending to the right.

***Michelle Stanistreet, NUJ general secretary***

**Work experience can an invaluable way to gain the hands-on experience required to secure that crucial first job. Yet young people need to ensure they are not exposed to months of unpaid exploitation at the hands of ruthless employers enjoying free or cheap labour.**

A 2018 National Council for the Training of Journalists survey found that the majority (87 per cent) of new entrants completed a period of work experience or worked as an intern before gaining their first paid job. The vast majority (95 per cent) were unpaid and the work experience or internship lasted an average of eight weeks, although the lengths varied widely from short (lasting one to two weeks) to 52 weeks. The report concluded this had led to a situation where “would-be journalists tend to need family financial support to fund courses or a period of unpaid work, with the implication that young people not in these circumstances continue to be deterred from becoming journalists”. Large numbers of internships are never advertised and are offered through informal networks, again locking out those without connections.

Various studies have highlighted the great deal of confusion about the law that governs internships, with the vast majority wrongly believing that it is lawful in most situations not to pay interns. This NUJ pamphlet will set out your rights and options.

### **Work Experience**

Work experience or shadowing is often undertaken as part of a higher education course. This usually involves the chance to perform tasks and

develop skills. If the work experience is restricted to work shadowing, this means that, instead of doing, participants watch and observe. These types of placements can be unpaid. Placements usually last for four weeks full-time or three months part-time. You should not be expected to carry out work that would otherwise be undertaken by members of staff. If this happens, you should be paid the national minimum wage (NMW).

### **Internships**

Those undertaking general internships, which are not part of a student course, should be paid at least the NMW. Interns are expected to do real work, completing set jobs. This arrangement benefits interns by providing an opportunity to gain knowledge and hone existing skills in a structured environment. Employers can train new entrants and improve the skills of their workforce. Internships can be used to increase the diversity of the workforce.

Interns should not be expected to replace otherwise vacant staff jobs unless they are being paid a staff wage. Internships often last between three to six months and the working week should not exceed 40 hours. Ideally, the terms of engagement should be formalised in a written agreement between the company and the intern. Employers who do not pay interns the NMW should be reported to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

### **Volunteers**

Volunteers work for companies on their own terms and can come and go as they please. Unless appropriate, volunteers should not be bound by any rota or shift pattern or set hours of work. This

is unpaid work, and a volunteer's help must remain optional.

### **What the Law Says**

Whatever you are called by your company, if you meet the definition of a "worker" within the meaning of the National Minimum Wage Regulations then you should be paid at least the national minimum wage and be eligible for paid holidays. The regulations say a worker is an individual who has entered into or works under a contract of employment, written or oral or implied, and undertakes to perform work for, or services to, the company.

Only students on work placements of up to one year that are endorsed by their university or college as being beneficial to the coursework; some apprentices; some trainees of government-funded schemes; and those of compulsory school age are not covered by this regulation.

### **National Minimum Wages Rates**

- For the UK: GOV.UK, National Minimum Wage and National Living Wage rates <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates>
- For the Republic of Ireland: citizens Information, minimum rates of pay [https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment\\_rights\\_and\\_conditions/pay\\_and\\_employment/pay\\_inc\\_min\\_wage.html](https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment_rights_and_conditions/pay_and_employment/pay_inc_min_wage.html)

### **Further Information**

The TUC's WorkSmart provides useful information for interns <https://worksmart.org.uk/work-rights/young-workers/interns-rights>

**"I have found the experience of getting a foot through the door very disconcerting. I have had to leave work placements to earn money, just so I can afford to be on a placement. Having my work published with a by-line was a great experience, but if you're not paid for your work it is difficult to gauge whether it is of any value."**

### **NUJ Work Experience Guidelines**

1. Work placements should be for a minimum of two weeks. In exceptional circumstances, when the student is moving between several placements, one week may be enough.
2. Unpaid work placements should normally last for no more than four weeks. Paid work placements may be for six weeks, or longer if part of a sandwich course.
3. The firm offering the placement should identify a responsible individual to whom the student reports and who offers feedback. The terms of the placement must be set out in writing. Students must always be supervised.

The placement should ensure the student experiences a wide range of activities with a mix of observing, working with a staff member and working alone. Students should be encouraged to join in all the editorial team's activities.

4. Students should not be expected to carry out duties that put them in danger or pose a risk to their health and safety, such as door-stepping or going undercover.

5. Students must be covered by the employer/client's insurance for all relevant risks, including, but not limited to, public and legal liability and injury.

6. Students must not be asked, or expected, to act in any manner that may cause a breach of the NUJ's code of professional conduct or the relevant industry code.

7. When a student's work is published or broadcast, they should get an appropriate by-line or other credit.

8. It is unacceptable for students on unpaid work placements to fill staffing gaps or to replace freelance cover. Students must not be treated as office juniors, running errands and fetching and carrying for staff - or, as one intern reported, walk the editor's dog with a pooper scooper.

### **What Can Your Chapel Do?**

- Incorporate the NUJ work experience guidelines into your chapel agreement.
- Make those on work experience aware of the guidelines.
- Display best practice guidelines around your office or college.

**"It is unbelievably competitive and there is a bias towards people who can work for nothing or have relatives who work in the industry. I think work experience and making contacts is the only way to get anywhere but I didn't realise quite how long it would take."**

### **Why You Should Join the NUJ**

The NUJ has successfully won money back for people who should have been paid during internships and constantly challenges employers who advertise unpaid posts that break the law. As an NUJ member you can get advice on your rights and will be part of a collective voice supporting new entrants to the industry. You can network with other professionals and be part of a union promoting ethical journalism and PR, press freedom and diverse workplaces. The fees are salary-related: [www.nuj.org.uk/join](http://www.nuj.org.uk/join)

### **Where We Are:**

#### **London office**

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#### **Scottish office**

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#### **Irish office**

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### **Contact Us:**

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NUJ website:

**[www.nuj.org.uk](http://www.nuj.org.uk)**

