

Fair Trade Internships

Supporting charities, NGOs and social enterprises to improve policy and practice

This is a report of a workshop held by Public World and the Hub Kings Cross, where we are based, on 11 April 2013. It built on our earlier collaboration and set out to tackle the questions: What would Fair Trade Internships look like, and how can we support charities, NGOs and social enterprises to make the transition to providing them?

Around 40 participants, from the charity, NGO and social enterprise sectors, or with direct or indirect experience of internships, took part.

The workshop was opened by Brendan Martin, Public World MD, who outlined the background to it and why his company has taken an interest in the issue. (For more on that, see our [Ethics and Interns](#) report.) He said employment ethics and the importance of voluntary work were both at the heart of Public World's ethos. The problem with the way in which many charities, NGOs and social enterprises use interns is that they blur the line between employment and volunteering in a way that undermined standards in both.

Martin then introduced five invited speakers, each of whom made a brief presentation:

- Antony Mason of the Intergenerational Foundation spoke about how unpaid internships are an example of the intergenerational injustices about which his organisation is raising awareness.
- Tanya de Grunwald of [GraduateFog](#), which has been in the forefront of campaigns against unpaid internships, explained how failing to pay young people entering the charity sector gives unfair advantages to the better off.
- Marcus Mason of [Creative Employment](#) outlined what could be a model for the non-profit sector by explaining how his organisation supports businesses that give young people fair training opportunities in the cultural sector.
- Adam Ramsay of [People and Planet](#) described its paid internship scheme, which sets the standard for the campaigning charity sector, and is in addition to rather than a substitute for its equally strong volunteer programme.

[Public World](#) and the [Hub King's Cross](#) are working together to promote discussion in the charity and social enterprise sectors about the ethics of internships.

In November 2011 we undertook research about it and held a successful meeting. Out of that came our [Ethics and Interns](#) report.

Public World MD Brendan Martin also wrote two articles for *The Guardian* about [interns and social enterprises](#) and [interns and charities](#).

This is a report of a workshop we held in April 2013 to take this work further forward.

To keep up with our work please [follow us on Twitter](#) and visit our [Fair Trade Internships web page](#).

- Markus Gnirck of Hub Kings Cross added an international dimension by talking about the better opportunities for graduates and school leavers in Germany, where vocational training is taken more seriously.

After some general discussion, the workshop broke into four groups, each looking at a specific question, namely:

- How does an internship differ from a job and from volunteering?
- Should an internship be paid, and if so, how much?
- What kind of work and opportunities should an internship involve?
- How can an internship ensure equality of opportunity?

There was both repetition and variation in the points raised in discussion in each group. The following is a quite raw compilation.

What are the differences between employment and volunteering?

- Both volunteering and internships have specified roles and responsibilities, which require clear agreement at the beginning. Like internships, voluntary positions can also be seen by their holders as an entry point into employment. Therefore, the line is blurred and there is confusion about the difference.
- A volunteer as opposed to employee is free to come and go as she pleases. But formal freedom is not the same as inconsequential freedom.
- Volunteers can be asked to sign an agreement about what they commit to. e.g. London2012 volunteers. So they do choose to limit their freedom.
- Work experience is different from internship, but there need to be clear criteria.
- Just because you get something out of it doesn't mean you shouldn't be paid. Are we going to pay people only if they don't enjoy their jobs?
- Just because you want something out of it doesn't mean you are not a genuine volunteer.
- Interns have qualifications but not experience; apprentices have no qualifications or experience.

What did charities do before internships? Why are there more interns now?

- Universities are producing so many people for each job.
- From collectivism to individualism in our society's culture.
- If unpaid internships were abolished, would there then be no opportunities? It could lead to fewer but better opportunities: paid internships.
- If an intern agrees not to be paid, why should an employer pay them?
- Normalisation – unpaid internships have become normal, but that doesn't make them acceptable.
- If they ask for experience, why not give it to them?

“Just because you get something out of it doesn't mean you shouldn't be paid.”

- There are cultural factors that promote free internships
- “I’d kill to do one of those jobs” – they are a genuine foot in the door
- People want opportunities and training
- MPs use unpaid interns -- they have set the tone.

What does a good internship involve?

- Fairness and respect from the boss and fellow workers.
- Payment.
- Duty of care: Employers have a duty of care to their employees, which means that they should take all steps which are reasonably possible to ensure their health, safety and wellbeing.
- Responsibility to lead a project or to be part of a project.
- Doing an internship means to prove to be able to work in an English-speaking environment.
- Applying skills and learning how to work in a business environment.
- Getting to know another area of work and gaining insights there.
- A job offer after the internship.
- Connections and valuable networks, names.
- A name on the CV.

Why unpaid internships are a problem

- Ultimately it’s not fair.
- What does this say about us as a society?
- Encourages a culture of free labour.
- Sustainability – there should be questioning around how your business, social enterprise or charity is impacting the national system of employment and sustainability of certain sectors by continuing the cycle of unpaid employment and the long term effects of this.
- Those who get internships, get the experience and get the jobs – the privileged become more so.
- Equal opportunities – internships cut people out of the sector, only people who can afford to work for nothing can get the job.
- Age discrimination – generally unpaid internships are given to young, well-off (“comfortable”) graduates.
- People who do unpaid internships are seen as being more keen and therefore employers are more likely to take them on.
- Modern day slavery or serfdom – though others thought it was important not to use those words.

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- Unpaid internships undermine the democratic will of the people to have a national minimum wage.
- Unpaid internships create anti-competitiveness – gives a business advantage to those who use unpaid interns.
- Long term unpaid internships take away the opportunities for small, irregular volunteering.
- If we don't stop unpaid internships, they will spread.
- There are no more “starter” jobs, they've all become unpaid internships.
- There is now a pool of interns who expect not to get paid.

How can internships ensure equality of opportunity?

- Advertising of opportunity – those who network and participate in internship will have better access to paid opportunities.
- Those who network deserve to have an advantage of those who do not put themselves out there to seek opportunities -- but this is different from those who can afford to network and/or work for free.
- Age dimension: internships are mostly offered to graduates above skilled professionals, but there should be a more rigid process of non-discrimination based upon age during application stage.
- Are unpaid internships indirectly racist? Perhaps, but this is not the angle to take to tackle them.
- Stipend for travel is often limited to London commuting: therefore, there is unequal opportunity for applicants living further out of London.
- Graduate vs non-graduates: how can non-graduates gain relevant experience when internship positions are dependent on academic achievements? Creating a larger divide.
- Should managers not question how interns are funding their living arrangements while working for free?
- Sectors see themselves as an exception to the rule – this needs to be standardized so that all sectors can be asked to treat this issue equally. Minimum standards list or charter?
- Equality on levels: how do internships sustain language barriers to entry and promotion, gender barriers, financial barriers, cultural barriers etc.?

What about the financial pressures on non-profits?

- If you can't afford to pay, then don't employ.
- Need to find the financial benefit in paying interns.
- Why shouldn't organisations use free labour when they can use the money elsewhere?

“How can non-graduates gain relevant experience when internship position filter applications by experience and academic achievements?”

- Employers are using interns to test areas of work without much expense.
- The argument with managers is “why should I pay?”
- Organisations that pay their people invest more in their development and get better results from them.
- Lack of resources does not justify unfairness or unethical practice.

How can young people gain experience?

- How to respond to the question: “Can I have some experience?”
- Experience could be provided as easily through a paid as an unpaid job.
- Employers expect to be able to recruit proven experience and skills: colleges and universities don’t produce people with those skills; unpaid internships are accepted as a way to fill the gap.
- Difference between work placement/experience and internships – one is very short and to get a “flavour”; other is longer and more like a “real job”.

Rights for interns

- Problem of language and legality – internship is not a legal term.
- Review legal definitions of worker, volunteer, voluntary worker and work experience.
- Review legal definitions of work: under direction, to a schedule, no substitution and for benefits in kind.
- If work is being done under those definitions then people are entitled to the minimum wage and those rights cannot be waived.
- Interns are not legally defined so have no recourse in the law.
- Actually they are covered, because technically they will classify as a worker, employee or volunteer.
- Volunteers have more rights than interns.

Obstacles to changing to more ethical practice

- “We won’t get any funding if we attack funding bodies who themselves use interns”.
- People are frightened of going to court – fear of being blacklisted.
- Problem of lots of individuals rather than groups such as trade unions.
- Does the responsibility lie with the employee or employer to provide training?
- Internships have become a way to reduce recruitment risk.

“ Internships have become a way to reduce recruitment risk.”

Next steps

- Develop a Fair Trade Internships charter and guidance and tools to support organisations in making the transition.
- Create an Association Of Interns.
- Connect with Volunteering.org
- Campaign for “Know Your Rights” – educate graduates about their rights as an intern.
- Campaign for more legal cases.
- Unions need to get involved more heavily – connect with Unite, TUC, Equity.
- Connect with law firm.
- Campaign to win test cases and advance the law.
- Name and shame companies that use unpaid interns.
- Campaign to ensure companies that use unpaid interns don't get government funding or contracts.
- Campaign for the Charities Commission to remove charitable status from companies that use unpaid internships.
- Encourage people to sign up for some sort of Best Practice.
- Funding pots to encourage employers to pay interns – match funding.
- Publish a book, like the Top 100 Companies to work for.
- Could there be short-term internships – a day, a week? What is the appropriate length of time for someone to work without pay?
- Best practice and logos – where is the brand that defines and justifies internships?
- How do we access young, small startups and educate them?
- Campaign for government action.

Closing comment

- Anyone who would like to help Public World and the Hub Kings Cross to take the next steps -- please get in touch at admin@publicworld.org. Thanks!

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