

Guide for Successful Internships for International Students

Introduction

As an employer, offering internships can bring a multitude of benefits to your organisation. Not only do they provide an opportunity to attract young talent, but they also allow for fresh perspectives and ideas to be introduced to your company. Additionally, interns can support current employees and assist in completing tasks that may have been put on hold.

However, it's important to offer effective internships that benefit both the employer and the interns. As an employer, you have a responsibility to guide and mentor interns to ensure they are gaining valuable experience and skills, while also supporting their academic goals.

This Guide for Successful Internships for International Students has been developed within the Erasmus+ INTERLOCALITY project and is a stand-alone tool in the Skilled level of the Employer-ability course. The guide is designed to help you as an employer to create effective internships offering both you and the international students the best preconditions to succeed.

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1. How does an internship differ from a regular job?

The differences between an internship and a regular job can be seen in various elements affecting the experience itself. It is important for every employer offering an internship to take these elements into consideration when designing the internship. Yet too many companies tend to neglect the importance of these aspects when welcoming an international student into their company.

First, an internship is a limited period in contrast to a regular permanent job. The length of an internship can vary from country to country, from institution to institution and even from study programme to study programme, lasting for a few weeks up to entire semesters. **The primary purpose of an internship is to gain experience and learn new skills in a particular field, while the primary purpose of a regular job is to earn a salary.** It is important that employers take this aspect seriously and remember that **this must be a learning experience for the international student.**

This aspect also affects the level of responsibility. Interns typically have less responsibility than regular employees. Interns usually observe and assist while regular employees may have more significant responsibilities and are expected to take the lead in their assignments. In addition, interns are more likely to be supervised closely by a manager or mentor, while regular employees are given more independence and freedom to complete their tasks. In fact, it is often an expectation from the educational institution that a specific person from the company is assigned as internship supervisor. Three-party meetings between the student, the internship supervisor from the educational institution, and the internship supervisor from the company is an effective tool to ensure a valuable student learning experience. **Interns receive training, mentorship, and guidance to help them learn the ins and outs of a field, while the expectation for regular employees is to know how to perform their duties already.**

Ultimately, internships are a learning opportunity designed to give participants a chance to gain skills, knowledge, and understanding of what it's like in a work environment and discover if that industry is the right choice for their career.

2. The benefits of hosting interns

Internships are a learning experience in a work-based environment, positively affecting a smoother transition between the world of education and the world of work upon graduation. Additionally, it provides the host company and organisations with a pool of new skills and competencies, energy, and innovation, which ultimately positively affect the competitiveness and productivity of the company. The benefits for host companies can be e.g. enhanced brand image, skills acquisition and -development. Among the benefits of hosting interns are:

- **Access to a pool of talented candidates:** Interns provide access to a pool of talented and motivated young professionals who are eager to learn and develop new skills.
- **Improved productivity:** Interns bring new energy and fresh perspectives to the workplace, leading to increased productivity.
- **Potential future employees:** Interns may prove to be valuable future employees for the organisation.

- **Enhanced employer brand:** Companies that host interns are seen as committed to talent development, which can enhance their image and reputation among prospective employees.
- **Increased diversity:** Internships can attract a diverse range of candidates, leading to a more inclusive workplace. It often kickstarts a more diverse work environment bringing in new cultures and languages, nudging current employees out of their usual habits.
- **Contributions to business:** Interns can assist in completing important projects, freeing up regular employees' time to focus on other areas of the business. However, do not underestimate the time and effort to be put into the mentoring aspect as described above. It must be a learning experience for the intern.
- **Empowering staff management skills:** Internships can be an opportunity to enable regular staff to develop their tutoring, supervising, and management skills.

3. How to define your internship goals

Defining internship goals as an employer holds significant importance, particularly considering the benefits mentioned above. Clear articulation of these goals serves as a guiding compass for the internship experience, benefiting both the organisation and the interns involved.

Firstly, having **well-defined goals** brings clarity to the purpose of the internship, establishing a shared understanding among all stakeholders. This clarity ensures that everyone involved comprehends the desired outcomes and can work cohesively toward achieving them.

Secondly, a **direct connection between the programme goals and the organisation's needs** is established. This alignment ensures that interns' contributions are strategically directed and effectively address the organisation's immediate and future requirements. Specifying the goals allows for a focused approach to skills development.

With **clearly outlined objectives**, employers can tailor the learning experiences to include skills and knowledge that are important to the organisation's operations. Furthermore, the presence of defined goals enables comprehensive evaluation and measurement of the internship's success. By assessing the extent to which these goals are met, employers can gather insights into the efficacy of the internship and identify areas for improvement.

Importantly, these **goals facilitate the identification of potential talent**. Internship programmes often serve as a talent pool for permanent positions. When programme objectives are explicit, employers can readily spot interns whose values, skills, and aspirations align with the organisation's.

Equally noteworthy is the impact on interns themselves. **Clear goals offer interns a roadmap for their learning journey**, equipping them with a clear understanding of their responsibilities and intended growth areas. Moreover, well-formulated internship goals contribute to the organisation's reputation. They highlight the organisation's commitment to structured learning experiences, enhancing its image as an employer that values professional development.

Lastly, goals that encompass diversity and inclusion initiatives underline the organisation's dedication to equal opportunities. This can attract a diverse pool of interns and foster a workplace culture of inclusivity.

In sum, the act of defining internship goals carries extensive benefits. It forges a purpose-driven environment, enhances communication among stakeholders, and creates a platform where both interns and employers can thrive.

4. Tips for recruiting and selecting the best interns

As an employer, recruiting and selecting the best interns involves a strategic approach aimed at attracting and identifying candidates who resonate with your organisation's values and aspirations. In many aspects this process is similar to the recruitment process for a full-time position. Please find more information about recruitment and onboarding of international talent in the Developing level of the INTERLOCALITY Employer-ability course.

To initiate the recruitment and selection process, begin by **establishing well-defined objectives** for the internship. These objectives serve as a foundation, guiding the selection process toward candidates who can contribute to and benefit from the goals of the internship.

Crafting **compelling internship descriptions** is a crucial next step. They should detail the responsibilities, growth opportunities, and potential projects the internship entails. They should also effectively communicate how the internship aligns with the candidate's professional journey.

Diversify your recruitment efforts by leveraging multiple channels and disseminating internship openings on your company website, prominent job boards, and university career centres. Additionally, engage with student organisations, attend career fairs, and tap into social media platforms to cast a wider net for potential candidates.

As applications are received, **review resumes and applications** to shortlist candidates who possess the requisite skills and qualifications. **Conduct structured interviews** that explore candidates' skills, motivations, and potential additions with your organisation's culture. Pose behavioural and situational questions to gauge their problem-solving abilities and teamwork skills in realistic contexts. Assess not only technical proficiencies but also essential soft skills. Effective communication, adaptability, and collaboration are invaluable traits that contribute to a successful internship experience.

In your pursuit of the best interns, **emphasise diversity and inclusion**. Actively cultivate a diverse candidate pool to enrich your organisation with a multitude of perspectives and experiences. Ensure that your recruitment process remains unbiased and equitable. Leverage the perspectives of current interns and employees by involving them in the selection process. Offer candidates opportunities to ask questions throughout the process, ensuring they have a clear understanding of the role's expectations and the benefits the internship offers.

Offer **timely feedback to candidates, irrespective of their selection outcome**. This fosters an environment of transparency and maintains a positive impression of your organisation.

Finally, **highlight the professional development prospects** in your internships. Talented candidates are often drawn to internships that provide meaningful learning opportunities and growth potential.

Following the internship period, **gather feedback from both interns and their supervisors** to refine your recruitment and selection process for future iterations. This iterative approach enhances the efficacy of your internships and the selection of the best-suited interns.

5. Best practices for onboarding and training interns

To make sure the internship gets off to a good start it is important to pay attention to, and understand the importance of, the onboarding phase of the interns. If you haven't done so yet please go through the 'Onboarding' section in the Developing level of the INTERLOCALITY Employer-ability course to obtain a broader understanding of the concept. In this section, we will highlight the most important aspects to be taken into consideration for employers to ensure a smooth and proper onboarding.

- **Provide a comprehensive overview** of your organisation's history, goals, values, and work processes to set clear guidelines for new interns. This will help them to understand their role and responsibilities better and adjust to the organisational culture.
- Assign a **senior employee or team member to guide the intern**. The mentor should be responsible for providing the intern with frequent feedback and support, answering any questions regarding the job, and connecting with them regularly to ensure they are progressing well.
- **Devise clear and measurable goals for the interns** that align with the company's objectives. Keep the goals realistic and challenging, so the intern has a clear understanding of their role and the expectations of them.
- **Schedule regular meetings** with the intern to understand their concerns, questions and provide feedback on their performance. Offer opportunities where interns can openly and honestly ask questions without fear of judgement.
- **Provide the interns with relevant training materials** and necessary resources that can support their growth and learning. This could include online courses, training manuals, software licenses, and access to industry-related events.
- **Encourage interns to socialise and connect** with other team members, which can lead to networking opportunities and informal learning. This can foster a sense of community at the organisation.
- **Conduct a thorough evaluation** of the intern's performance at the end of their internship and offer constructive feedback. Provide them with recommendations to improve their skills and succeed in their future career.
- Even after the internship is over, **stay in touch with the interns** and keep them engaged with the organisation. By maintaining relationships, it can lead to new opportunities and possible future hires.

6. Guidelines for assigning tasks and projects to interns

It is important to clearly define the scope and objectives of the task or project, so the intern understands what they are responsible for and what the end goal is.

- To provide a meaningful and challenging experience for the intern make sure to **assign tasks and projects based on the intern's skills, interests, and career aspirations**
- **Set clear deadlines and expectations** for deliverables and make sure to continuously provide guidance and support as needed, but also encourage the intern to take initiative and work independently.
- **Offer constructive feedback and opportunities for growth** and learning throughout the internship.
- Allow the intern to **collaborate and work with other team members** when appropriate.
- **Plan regular check-ins and progress updates** to ensure the intern is on track and has the necessary resources to complete the task or project.
- Make sure to **pay attention to the intern's workload** and schedule when assigning tasks and projects and avoid giving them too much at once.
- **Ensure that the tasks and projects assigned are relevant** to the company or organisation's goals and objectives.
- **Encourage the intern to ask questions** and provide regular feedback about their experience.

7. Strategies for providing feedback and evaluating intern performance

When offering an internship, it is essential that the employer is focused on continuously providing feedback to the intern to make sure the intern develops and maximises the outcome of the internship. This is preferably done by having a close and honest dialogue between the intern and the company supervisor, but also in the **three-party meetings between the intern, the supervisor from the particular study programme, and the company supervisor**.

Before the intern starts their work, make sure to **clearly communicate the expected goals** and outcomes for the internship. This will help the intern to stay focused and motivated, and it will also provide a clear benchmark for evaluating their performance. Scheduling **regular check-ins** with the intern to provide feedback and discuss progress is important. This can be done through one-on-one meetings, email updates, or chat messages.

When **providing feedback**, focus on specific examples of what the intern is doing well and areas for improvement. Avoid personal attacks or general criticisms, and instead offer practical suggestions for how the intern can improve.

Encourage the intern to reflect on their own performance and identify areas for improvement. This will help them to take ownership of their work and develop a growth mindset. Utilise **performance metrics**, such as productivity, accuracy, and timeliness, to evaluate the intern's performance objectively. This can also help to identify areas where the intern may need additional support or training.

Remember to **recognise the intern** for their hard work and accomplishments. Offering praise and recognition can help to build their confidence and keep them motivated throughout the internship.

8. Supporting international interns in achieving their academic goals

From the start, companies should communicate clear expectations and goals for the internship program. This will help interns understand what is expected of them and what they can **learn during their internship** at the company.

Companies should provide interns with the necessary **resources to help them achieve their academic goals**. This includes access to books, journals, and other resources that can help them learn more about their field of study.

Companies should **provide mentors** to their international interns who can guide them in achieving their academic goals. Mentors can offer advice and support throughout the internship and can help interns make connections within the industry.

Companies should **be flexible** with their international interns so that they can balance their academic responsibilities with their work responsibilities. This includes allowing interns to attend classes or complete assignments during work hours.

Companies should provide opportunities for their international interns to **experience the local culture**. This can include cultural events, language classes, or tours of local landmarks. By immersing themselves in the local culture, interns can gain a better understanding of the country and its people, which can enhance their academic and professional experience.

Companies should **encourage their international interns to provide continuous feedback** on the internship. This will help the company understand the international interns' needs and make necessary adjustments to better support them in achieving their academic goals.

9. Workplace guidance as an important aspect in the internship process

Workplace guidance refers to a set of instructions, policies, procedures, and best practices that provide direction and support to employees within an organisation. It aims to create a safe, productive, and harmonious working environment by outlining expectations, standards, and procedures that employees should follow in their day-to-day activities.

In the context of an internship, workplace guidance becomes even more crucial as it helps interns navigate their roles, responsibilities, and overall experience within the organisation. Interns typically have limited professional experience and are seeking to learn, contribute, and develop their skills during their time with the company.

Workplace guidance for interns entails clarifying interns' specific roles, responsibilities, and tasks within the organisation, enabling them to understand their unique contributions to both the team and the overarching mission. During the onboarding process, interns receive essential insights into the company's history, values, and culture, while also gaining proficiency in the tools, software, and processes central to their tasks.

Integral to this guidance is the establishment of **clear performance expectations**, including articulated goals and objectives for interns to work towards. By aligning their efforts with the **organisation's broader objectives**, interns gain insight into the strategic significance of their work. Moreover, the provision of **mentorship and supervision** fosters a supportive learning environment. Interns benefit from the expertise of experienced professionals who offer guidance, feedback, and assistance in navigating challenges.

Professional conduct remains a cornerstone, as workplace guidance outlines expected standards of behaviour, including adherence to codes of conduct, dress norms, and effective communication practices. This professional conduct extends to interactions with colleagues, superiors, and the broader professional community, both within and beyond the organisation.

For interns involved in specific projects, the guidance extends to encompass project management aspects. This entails explanation of project milestones, deadlines, expectations for collaboration, and reporting protocols.

Networking and integration guidance facilitate interns' engagement with colleagues, participation in company events, and integration into the company's professional fabric. Knowledge of **company policies**, especially those related to confidentiality and data security, ensures interns handle sensitive information responsibly.

Beyond immediate tasks, the guidance accentuates opportunities for interns to contribute proactively, highlighting their potential value to the organisation. Effective communication channels, whether for virtual or in-person work, are delineated to ensure seamless information flow. **In cases of remote work, guidance includes remote communication protocols, time management, and expectations for virtual collaboration.**

Lastly, the **guidance encompasses the exit process**, offering details about final evaluations, potential referrals, and avenues for ongoing engagement.

In sum, workplace guidance is a holistic framework that empowers interns to cultivate a productive, educational, and professionally enriching experience. It establishes a structured path for interns to comprehend their roles, responsibilities, and the intricate dynamics of the organisation, thereby facilitating their successful transition into the professional life.

10. Building a strong company culture that includes international interns

To make sure international interns feel included in the workplace it is important for the employer to build a strong company culture that reflects this. Establish and communicate your company values to create a foundation for your company culture. Make sure that your values are clear and understood by everyone, including international interns.

Conduct orientation and training sessions for your international interns to **help them adapt to the company culture**. Introduce them to your company's history, values, and work culture. This will **help them better understand your company and feel more connected**.

Encourage cross-cultural interaction by organising team-building activities or social events where people from different cultures can interact and bond. **Celebrate diversity** by recognising and showcasing the unique talents of your international interns. Create opportunities for them to share their cultural backgrounds and perspectives, which can enrich your company's culture.

Foster an inclusive environment by creating an environment where everyone feels valued and respected. Develop policies and practices that promote diversity, equality, and inclusion. You can find more information about intercultural teams, as well as about diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in the Developing level of the INTERLOCALITY Employer-ability course.

11. Legal considerations for hosting internships

Before launching an internship, it is important for the company to take into consideration any legal matters that might affect the internship. Interns are considered employees and may be entitled to certain legal protections. Employers must comply with labour laws that dictate maximum working hours and safety standards. In that matter, **employers have a responsibility to provide a safe environment for their interns**, which includes providing adequate training, protective equipment, and emergency procedures. Like in any other situation, employers must comply with anti-discrimination laws and create a safe and respectful workplace free from harassment. You also need insurance to protect the interns in case of accidents or incidents that occur during the internship. In addition, **intellectual property law** can apply to work produced by interns while working for the company, which is why it is important for employers to ensure that they have the rights to use and distribute this work.

12. Easy checklist to consider when offering internships

As an employer, offering internships is a great way to bring in fresh talent, build your brand, connect with local higher education institutions, and give back to your communities. It is also a significant responsibility to ensure that your interns are gaining valuable experience during their time at your company. You can use this short, yet comprehensive, checklist when offering an internship:

1. Establish clear objectives. Before you offer an internship, it is important to define what you hope to achieve by doing so. Identify the skills you want your interns to learn, the work you want them to be doing, and the results you expect. Additionally, set goals for what you can realistically offer to your interns, including schedules, compensation, and flexibility.

2. Clarify expectations for language proficiency and communication skills. Make sure to clarify the expectations for language proficiency and communication skills, as well as any cultural differences or norms that may affect the student's adjustment to your organisation.

3. Create a job description and an application process. Create a detailed job description outlining the responsibilities, qualifications, and goals of the internship. Attract the right candidates by posting on job boards, social media, at career fairs, or on your website. Use higher education institutions' own job portals or get in touch with the lecturers who often have a close and direct link to the students.

4. Provide adequate training. Once you have selected an intern, provide adequate training to ensure the intern knows how to do their work properly. Give them a tour of the office, overview of company policies, and expectations regarding communication and confidentiality.

5. Give specific assignments. Assign specific duties clearly outlining the task, the objective, and the timeline. Meet regularly to provide guidance and feedback on their work and use this time to discuss any issues or questions with your interns.

6. Encourage team collaboration. Provide the opportunities for interns to collaborate with team members, attend meetings, and make presentations. This will help interns to experience and learn the company culture and enhance communication and teamwork skills.

7. Provide actionable feedback. Regularly provide interns with feedback about their work and progress. Recognise achievements, share constructive feedback to improve performance, and encourage each intern to voice any questions or concerns.

8. Evaluate the internship. At the end of the internship, evaluate the outcomes and benefits of it. Seek feedback from your interns about their experiences, what works well, and what improvements could be made.

9. Offer job opportunities. At the end of each internship, consider offering extend employment, whether on a full- time or part-time basis depending on the company's ability to do so.

13. Conclusion

By following these guidelines, you can create successful internships that benefit both the interns and the company. Providing young professionals and students with opportunities to learn and grow in a professional setting is one of the greatest gifts an employer can offer. It is also a valuable long-term investment in access to talent pipelines and enhances your employer brand.

We encourage you to take a look at all **three INTERLOCALITY online courses** if you would like to learn more about **Employer-ability, Intercultural Sensitivity, and Guidance and Counselling**.

Sources

This guide has been based on the work that has been done in the [Erasmus+ SPRINT project](#), where a [Guide for Implementation Process of Quality Internships for Host Organisation](#) has been developed. The INTERLOCALITY guide has made significant changes to the original source.

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