

Internships no help to graduates trying to find good jobs, research says

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Internships in the creative industries are no help to graduates trying to find good jobs, new research shows.

The British Sociological Association's annual conference in Birmingham heard today [Wednesday 6 April 2016] that the internships did not result in a bigger salary or more creative job.

Wil Hunt, of the University of Portsmouth, analysed 615 replies to a survey he ran of British graduates two to six years after they finished degrees in design, art and communications. One in four had done an internship, paid or unpaid, after leaving university.

He found that 72% of design, art and communications graduates had a graduate level job and 60% had a job in a creative industry. This rose to 84% and 77% when considering those who had done a paid internship.

But when other factors such as degree grades and prestige of university attended were discounted, interns were no more likely to have found creative or graduate-level job than others. In other words, intern and non-interns with the same degree grade from the same kind of university had equal chances of finding these types of work.

Mr Hunt also found that when comparing those who had been interns with other graduates with the same degree grade and from the same kind of university, internship had not improved their salaries.

In fact, those who had done unpaid internships were on average paid less – around £12,000, when compared with graduates who had not done one, who earned around £18,000. Paid internships did increase salaries, he found, but most internships were unpaid.

“The idea of internships is that they are supposed to give you a foot in the door and therefore it might be reasonable to ask whether they really do benefit individuals in the short to medium term, particularly in areas where they are becoming increasingly commonplace,” Mr Hunt told the conference.

“Based on this analysis the answer is that there is no clear evidence that they increase the chances of getting a graduate job, or getting paid more, at least for art and design and communications graduates, and unpaid internships may actually lead to lower pay.” One reason for the lower salary might be the delayed entrance to paid work due to the internship or a weaker bargaining position when graduates get their first paid position.

By analysing official data, Mr Hunt also found that 70 per cent of those graduates on internships in creative industries were unpaid. Overall, 58 per cent of graduates in internships in all job sectors were unpaid.

Notes

1. The subjects taken by design, art and communications students included graphic design, illustration, performing arts, fine art, cinematics, photography, fashion, textiles, crafts, journalism, publicity and media studies.
2. Mr Hunt's survey found that 95% of graduates who responded were in work overall, many with two or more jobs at the same time. He used regression analysis to compare how working in an internship helped graduates to find graduate-level and creative jobs when controlling for gender, ethnicity, degree grade and prestige of university, as well as other factors. This allowed him to measure the effect of internship experience on the chance of getting graduate-level or creative work. He found that when considering all the creative and graduate-level jobs that graduates had at the time of interview, two-six years after graduating, internships had not helped them to find these types of work. However, when considering only the job they spent most hours in, paid internships had boosted the chances of finding creative or graduate-level work.
3. In a separate analysis of data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency Mr Hunt found that more than half (58 per cent) of graduates doing an internship were unpaid six months after graduation, rising to around two-thirds for graduates of some subject areas such as creative arts and design, architecture building and planning, and biological sciences. Industries where unpaid internships were particularly common included the creative industries, the media, sports and recreation and publishing where more than 70 per cent of interns were unpaid six months after graduation. The analysis was of UK and EU graduates from HESA's 'Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education' survey and was based on data for the 2011/12 graduating cohort. Respondents were surveyed six months after leaving university. *HESA Student Record 2011/12 HESA Destination of Leavers survey 2011/12 is copyright Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited 2013. HESA cannot accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived from the data by third parties.*
4. The British Sociological Association's annual conference takes place Aston University, Birmingham, UK, from 6 to 8 April 2016. Around 600 research presentations are given. The British Sociological Association's charitable aim is to promote sociology. The BSA is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales. Company Number: 3890729. Registered Charity Number 1080235 www.britsoc.co.uk

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