

# ONLINE INTERNSHIPS

## A STUDENT GUIDE

LEAH HILLARI, DARJA WISCHERATH,  
DR AMY IRWIN & DR JOY PERKINS



### WHAT ARE ONLINE INTERNSHIPS?

An online internship is a work placement with an employer, which is carried out digitally and remotely rather than in-person at the organisation. Online internships are also known as virtual, remote or e-internships and can be completed from anywhere in the world.

An online internship typically includes: a virtual induction, an individual or group project to complete, online professional development and networking opportunities, digital meetings and support from a mentor and/or line manager.

What are online internships?  
Why should you do one?  
How can you find one?  
What are the critical success factors?



### WHY COMPLETE AN ONLINE INTERNSHIP?

- **Changing nature of the workplace:** The increased popularity of online internships reflects the development and use of technology within organisations. Many organisations have established remote working policies and are keen to employ graduates with remote work experience.
- **Accessibility & flexibility:** Online internships can be completed from anywhere and are usually very flexible in terms of working schedules. This means these opportunities are open to an increased range of students, supporting efforts towards equality and diversity.
- **Employability:** Online internships provide insight into a company and the online work environment. These internships offer a good opportunity to develop online professionalism, alongside skill development (e.g. communication, project management) and therefore enhance student employability.



## ADVANTAGES OF AN ONLINE / REMOTE INTERNSHIP

- **Low cost:** No commute or travel costs and no need to relocate, meaning no additional rent, or associated expenditure.
- **Insight into organisation / career area:** Online internships usually enable the intern to liaise with work colleagues, work collaboratively via Microsoft Teams or other software, and gain a unique perspective into the host organisation.
- **Specialised work sectors:** As online internships extend the geographical range of available placements, they enable students to gain experiences in highly specialised career pathways and specific industries which are not readily available in all physical locations.
- **Productivity:** Working remotely means fewer interruptions, the flexibility to work during peak performance times (which may be outside 9-5 office hours) and the ability to have an individualised workspace, all of which might improve productivity.
- **COVID-19:** Online internships are usually able to proceed during pandemic restrictions due to online only contact between student and organisation.



## WHAT ARE THE KEY SKILLS FOR AN ONLINE INTERNSHIP?

### **Self-regulated learning:**

Working remotely means accepting responsibility for your own learning process, along with engaging in effective self-monitoring and self-reflection.

### **Technological competence:**

Completing an online internship is going to require the use of collaborative learning tools and software, such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, including aspects such as screen sharing, accessing online drives etc.

**Independence:** Remote work often requires the intern to set and manage their own schedule. This may require working independently with less supervision than that provided by an onsite internship.

**Focus:** Lack of focus is more likely when working from home than in an office - an online internship will require the development of a work mindset, and management of potential distractions (such as household tasks, or social activities).



## CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

1. **Establishing behavioural guidelines:** Social interactions (netiquette, cooperation) should be clarified by the organisation. Make sure there are clearly defined work goals, and that you understand your role, responsibilities, and any milestones.
2. **Developing trust:** Research suggests that behaviours such as enthusiasm and a degree of informality can help trust to be built within an online team. Try to support relationship development by being an active participant in online meetings (e.g. speaking up, asking questions) and communicating openly (e.g. discussing any concerns you have).
3. **Coordinating information:** Make sure that you have an appropriate level of information available to you, and that ideally everyone has the same information and interprets it in the same way. When writing reports try to provide a concise summary or overview of your work and consider the different backgrounds of those you are communicating with.

***"It's more flexible than a traditional on-site internship - so you can create your own timetable for your internship. You can work at your own pace and frame your work around your existing schedule. Also, because a remote internship can be done at home it saves costs on travel and work attire. It can also reduce the stress that might come from working a 9-to-5 on-site internship because you are in the comfort of your own home."***

**- Student quote**



## FINDING AN ONLINE INTERNSHIP

- **University of Aberdeen Careers and Employability Service:** Use CareerConnect, the online careers portal to access internship, placement and graduate positions.
- **LinkedIn:** Find online or remote internships using the job search field on the LinkedIn homepage.
- **Internship.com:** Search this website to find a wide range of online and employer hosted internships.
- **Glassdoor:** Use the database to search for jobs and internships and access salary information, company reviews and interview questions.
- **Milkround.com:** Find an internship, placement or graduate job with UK organisations.
- **Prospects.ac.uk:** Search for online internships, volunteering opportunities and paid employment.



## MAKING THE MOST OF IT

- **Be proactive:** Make use of any support on offer (supervisor / colleagues / peers). Engaging with multiple colleagues and support mechanisms increases the likelihood of additional learning opportunities.
- **Training:** If training, of any sort, is offered, take up the opportunity - even if it's a skill you think you might not use much in the future.
- **Network:** Where possible ask to sit in on meetings and liaise with other staff.
- **Ask questions:** Send regular emails with questions. If possible team the questions with proposed solutions to showcase your initiative.
- **Mentor:** Try to get a mentor within the host organisation in addition to your immediate supervisor / manager. Having that additional contact will help support goal setting and motivation.
- **Blogging:** Research suggests that blogging your internship experience can enhance self-reflection, problem-solving and knowledge construction, in addition to raising your online profile.

## EVALUATING THE INTERNSHIP

### Does the opportunity meet your requirements

*If you hope to achieve course credit for the internship, or have specific entry requirements linked to postgraduate study, ensure the internship ticks all of the required boxes (if in doubt ask the host organisation).*

### Reimbursement

*Is the internship paid, or is there other reimbursement offered (such as course credit)? If not associated with a wage what other reimbursement is possible (e.g. conference attendance, training, skill development).*

### Commitment level

*Is the placement full-time, part-time or flexible? Do certain tasks have to be achieved within a set time-frame?*

### What is the 'best' internship for you?

*Think about this carefully - what do you want to get out of the experience? Don't rush into something that doesn't suit!*



## TOP TIPS FOR WORKING REMOTELY / ONLINE

- **Create a productive and comfortable working environment:** Create a space just for work which is free of potential distraction and interruption.
- **Coping with distraction:** Set boundaries with members of your household. Fight addictive habits - Schedule a time to look at your phone and social media and use apps to block social media. Create white noise with classical music or rainymood.com.
- **Time and task management:** Prioritise high importance and valued tasks in your planning. Break tasks down into smaller, more achievable goals. Identify your peak concentration times (morning, afternoon or evening) and aim to work within these times. Schedule short, intensive work periods rather than long, exhaustive ones. Working for shorter periods (1-2 hours) will enable you to keep up both, your concentration and quality of work.
- **Key competencies of successful remote workers:** Work Ethic • Integrity • Self-discipline • Accountability • Motivation • Independence • Initiative • Time Management.



This leaflet was created as part of an online internship study by Leah Hillari and Darja Wischerath, Employability Interns. The project was supervised by Drs Amy Irwin and Joy Perkins at the University of Aberdeen.

If you need further information, or would like to discuss the content, please contact Dr Amy Irwin, Lecturer, School of Psychology: [a.irwin@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:a.irwin@abdn.ac.uk)

## COMMUNICATING ONLINE

### **Regular communication**

*Communicate regularly and using different media - this will help enhance feelings of connection with the workplace and supervisor.*

### **Timely updates**

*Provide regular updates on task progression and try to feedback on the work of colleagues.*

### **Be responsive**

*Respond quickly to emails and requests, let the supervisor know if there will be periods of no communication.*

### **Open communication**

*State expectations explicitly, including learning outcomes, responsibilities and skill development.*