

ONLINE INTERNSHIPS

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ONLINE INTERNSHIPS:

What are they?

Why should students consider them?

How can you support your personal tutees?

How can students find one?

What advice should you give to students?

WHAT DEFINES AN ONLINE INTERNSHIP?

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. All the student needs is a laptop or PC and an internet connection.

An online internship typically includes: an online induction, a group or individual project, online professional development and digital meetings.

Because the intern is working from home, they can feel isolated, so support from a personal tutor or academic can help, particularly as they transition into their remote working role.

Online internships have been growing in popularity with the development of collaborative technology, such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams (Bayerlein & Jeske, 2018). During the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a significant shift from on-site to online internships.

Bayerlein, L., & Jeske, D. (2018). The potential of computer-mediated internships for higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 32(4), 526–537.

WHY SHOULD STUDENTS CONSIDER COMPLETING AN ONLINE INTERNSHIP?

INCREASED INCLUSIVITY: Online internships open the opportunity to students from a broader range of backgrounds, some of whom might not be able to complete an onsite internship (e.g. students from remote locations or with caring responsibilities).

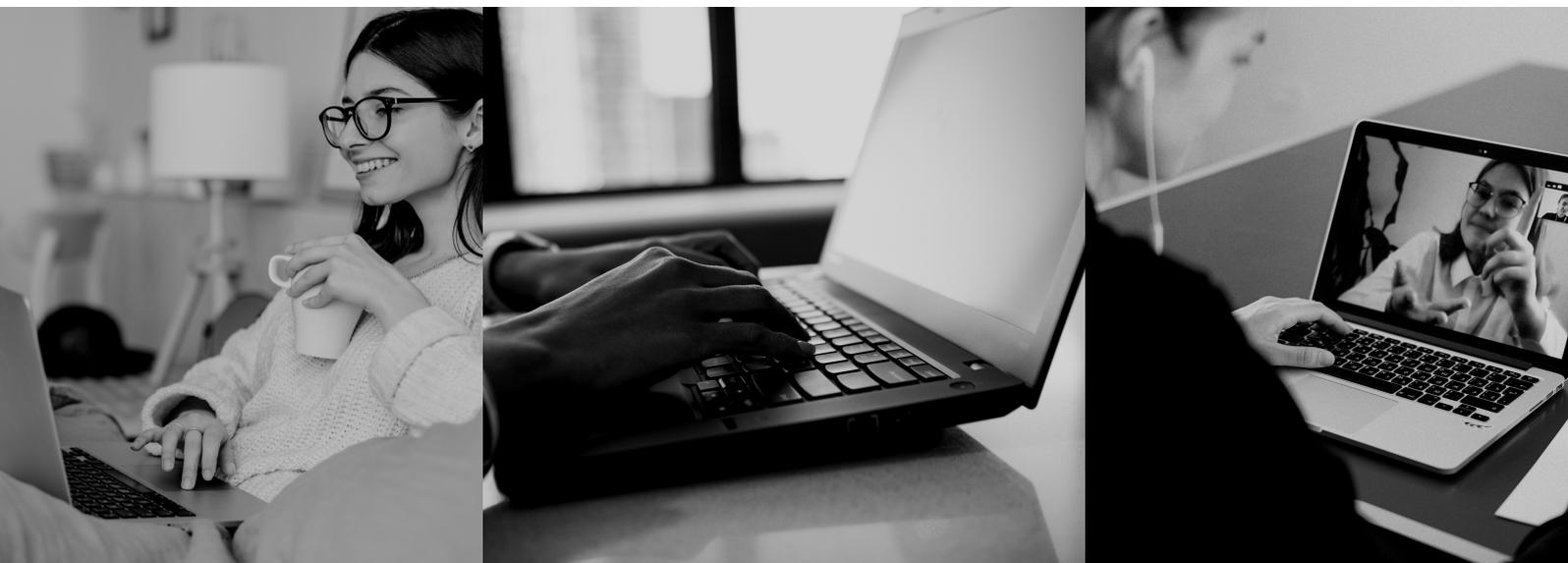
REDUCED COSTS: Online internships do not require the student to relocate, nor do they involve a commute. This reduces the costs associated with the opportunity, particularly if it is also associated with a low wage or a lack of monetary reimbursement.

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.

EMPLOYABILITY: Online internships provide insight into an organisation 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 (Cortese, Alessandro & Medeiros, 2015).

COVID-19: In the current circumstances, and with many traditional internships cancelled or restricted, online internships offer a good work experience opportunity - one that can usually carry on despite restrictions associated with the pandemic.

Medeiros, A. R., Icen, D., Morciano, E. A., & Cortese, M. (2015). Using virtual internships as an innovative learning technique. In 2015 IEEE Global Engineering Education Conference (EDUCON) (pp. 262-266).



“IT’S MORE FLEXIBLE THAN A TRADITIONAL ONSITE 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 ONSITE INTERNSHIP BECAUSE YOU ARE IN THE COMFORT OF YOUR OWN HOME.”

- STUDENT”



STUDENT SKILLS

Working remotely requires a certain skill-set, and students should be encouraged to engage in self-reflection to consider if working from home / remotely is going to suit their skill-set and / or attributes (Krumm et al., 2016):

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS: The student must be prepared to self-motivate, exhibit commitment and discipline, along with capacity for time / project management.

ADAPTABILITY: The student should show a willingness to adapt to online working, including the utilisation of collaborative software such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

INDEPENDENCE: Students need an element of independence in order to work successfully from home, where they will often be completing tasks in isolation.

COMMUNICATION: Ideally the student should have strong interpersonal and communication skills, alongside a good level of online professionalism.

INITIATIVE: The student will need a good level of initiative, paired with problem-solving abilities, in order to excel in a remote working environment.

Krumm, S., Kanthak, J., Hartmann, K., & Hertel, G. (2016). What does it take to be a virtual team player? The knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics required in virtual teams. *Human Performance*, 29(2), 123-142.

SUPPORTING YOUR PERSONAL TUTEES

To help support and signpost your tutee:

- **Discuss** the opportunity with them to ensure it is appropriate and of high quality: An internship should be a learning experience for the student, with the skills and knowledge gained transferable to other contexts. The experience should have a defined beginning and end, with appropriate support and supervision offered by the host organisation.
- **Cover** graduate attributes and skill development, highlighting the importance of developing both throughout their university degree programme. Highlight the importance of internships and voluntary work to enhance skills.
- **Encourage** students to use the Careers and Employability Service for feedback on their CV and for practice interviews.
- **Support** their employability development each year of study by discussing progress and suggesting new avenues of activity.
- **Be prepared** to be a referee for an online internship if required.
- **Remind** them that there are opportunities to gain academic credit for their experiences e.g. Professional skills and work experience in Psychology (15 credit course)

WHERE CAN STUDENTS FIND AN ONLINE INTERNSHIP?

University of Aberdeen Careers and Employability Service: Students should be encouraged to register and use CareerConnect, the online careers portal to access internship, placement and graduate positions.

LinkedIn: This platform is a useful networking tool and can be recommended to students on that basis, as many find it useful both as an undergraduate and then as a graduate on the job market. Students can also use it to find online or remote internships using the job search field on the LinkedIn homepage.

Internships.com: Students can search this website to find a wide range of online and employer hosted internships.

Glassdoor: Students can use the database to search for jobs and internships and access salary information, company reviews and interview questions.

Milkround.com: This is a useful website for students to be aware of. They can use it to find an internship, placement or graduate job with UK organisations.

Prospects.ac.uk: Most students will be aware of this webpage already, and should be encouraged to use it to search for online internships, volunteering opportunities and paid employment.

Most of these websites focus on UK based internship opportunities. Students can also search for international online internship opportunities - a benefit of a lack of geographical restriction for these types of internship.



“SELF-DISCIPLINE AND TIME MANAGEMENT SKILLS MAY BE CRUCIAL FOR THE STUDENT INTERNING FROM HOME, NOT ONLY FOR A STRONG COMMITMENT TO CARRYING OUT THE JOB TASKS BUT ALSO TO ALLOW SELF-CARE (AS WORKING VIRTUALLY CAN RESULT IN EXTREMELY LONG HOURS ON A COMPUTER).”

- EMPLOYER



TOP TIPS FOR STUDENTS

Be proactive: Students should 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, students should take up the opportunity - even if it's a skill they think they might not use much in the future.

Network: Where possible the student should ask to sit in on meetings and liaise with other staff.

Mentor: Ideally the student should be allocated a mentor - and this is something you could raise on their behalf if you are connected to the host organisation. Having that additional contact will help support student goal setting and motivation (Jeske & Linehan, 2020)

Blogging: Research suggests that blogging the internship experience can enhance self-reflection, problem-solving and knowledge construction, in addition to raising the students' online profile.

Jeske, D., & Linehan, C. (2020). Mentoring and skill development in e-internships. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JWAM-09-2019-0028>

SOME GENERAL ADVICE

WHAT SHOULD YOU CONSIDER WHEN ADVISING A STUDENT?

Commitment: Have they considered the level of commitment required, including the nature of the tasks and the duration / timing of the internship? This needs to be carefully considered to ensure the student is not overwhelmed.

Well-being: Discuss the challenge of feeling isolated with the student and encourage them to communicate regularly with their host organisation, and with you as their academic support. You could also direct them to the University well-being resources.

Working online / remotely: The student may need advice on setting up a good home working space. Establishing a routine when remote working and sticking to it can also help with motivation and time management.

Reflection: At the end of the online internship encourage your tutees/students to reflect on their achievements and to consider their next steps. Encourage them to think about any challenges they overcame, and how best to present the experience in their CV and at interview.

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.

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