



Introduction

This Charter has been created to provide guidance for employees on what can be expected from a placement and provides guidance for employers on the issues they should plan for and consider before offering a placement.

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) is the UK industry body for Public Relations and is committed to enhancing professional standards; it is our responsibility to provide future practitioners with the platform from which they can achieve the highest quality of learning and development.

The CIPR is involved in several initiatives to help promote the value of formal and informal education and experience in public relations, and we have a duty to ensure our members build the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience to become outstanding PR practitioners.

The Charter explains the objectives, expectations and outcomes of a placement from both perspectives.

The CIPR has a work placement finder that is designed to match employers throughout the UK and across all sectors with students on CIPR approved courses or members seeking work experience. Employers offering placements must be CIPR members. For more information, please contact Vicky King: victoriak@cipr.co.uk

Objectives of a Placement

PR is a challenging and exciting career and there are many applicants for each vacancy. The CIPR encourages all those considering a career in PR to gain as much practical experience as possible to reassure future employers of their commitment and practical skills. Work placements can be invaluable to people looking to build the knowledge and skills required for entry-level roles.

Placements are a practical way for organisations to engage with the public relations practitioners of the future. The host organisation gains extra support and may participate in, or contribute to, research for a student's dissertation work.

Before a placement takes place both the employer and participant should agree objectives and outcomes, as well as discuss any basic expectations on both sides. Employers should provide a structured learning experience and should benefit from the fresh and creative input that participants can inject. Participants should understand what is expected of them and work as directed.

Those studying PR should aim to supplement the knowledge gained through their studies and see how it is applied in practice.

Benefits of a work placement

Employer

- Identify future employees.
- Employees are motivated to contribute and learn.
- Can provide junior managers with the opportunity to supervise staff.
- A low risk appointment as employment is for a set period.
- Flexibility: temporary support, where and when needed (e.g. holiday season).

Employee

- Make use of the knowledge and skills acquired.
- Develop practical, business and professional skills.
- Enhance personal confidence and maturity.
- Improve communication and team skills.
- Experience the discipline of the working world.
- Experience juggling a variety of projects.

Definitions of placements

- **Sandwich placements:** a fixed-term period of assessed, paid work that forms part of your degree. It often lasts for a full year.
- **Work-based project:** a specific piece of assessed work for your course, undertaken at an employer's premises.
- **Work placement:** a period of work experience. This can be arranged through your university with an employer or by yourself and is for an agreed period of time.
- **Internship:** a phrase that is increasingly used by large organisations and refers to a placement within their organisation, usually over 6-12 weeks during the summer holiday.
- **Voluntary work:** any type of work undertaken for no payment, in your spare time.
- **Part-time work:** paid or unpaid work, less than 35 hours per week.
- **Work shadowing:** where you observe a member of staff working in an organisation, to gain an understanding of what a particular job entails.

Expectations

This section looks at what the employer and employee can expect to gain from the placement. It is recommended that expectations/objectives are agreed in advance through a pre-placement interview.

What is expected from the organisation

- A work plan should be discussed and agreed to by both parties.
- The salary or fee for the placement should be agreed before the placement commences – see note on payment.
- The organisation will ensure the employee is guided through their first day and throughout the placement.
- Hours of work and the duration of the placement should be established. A period of up to three months is suitable in most cases, and if a placement is to be extended much beyond this there should be good reasons and the employer should consider whether they are offering the appropriate remuneration.
- Administrative and health and safety procedures explained.
- Ensure the employee is covered by your employer's liability insurance policy. Strictly speaking this is not necessary for those on short term unpaid internships, but you should check this before commencement of the placement and ensure the employee knows where they stand.
- Full training on any software or equipment to be used, if necessary.
- Dress code should be stated, and also expectations and guidance on professional conduct.
- Employees are to be involved in live projects.
- All staff interacting with the placement employee should be aware of their responsibilities.
- Other members of staff should treat the employee with the same respect they expect to receive.
- The organisations should provide constructive feedback as appropriate to the employee, informing them when they need to improve or when they are doing a good job.

What is expected from the employee

- Be clear about specific learning objectives and agree these in advance with the employer.
- Prepare for the placement and make contact with the organisation before arrival.
- Prepare a professional CV that informs the employer of your strengths and weaknesses to allow for work to be allocated appropriately.
- Arrive every day on time. If illness arises then the employee must let the employer know before 9am of that working day. Contact must also be made if the employee is going to be arriving late.
- Adhere to dress codes, working hours and conduct themselves in a professional manner.
- Where necessary find suitable accommodation before the start date.

- Do not lie or mislead the organisation. Do not divulge or exploit any private or confidential information.
- Act in a mature and professional manner and treat all staff with the same respect expected in return.
- Do not use the Internet or email for private use unless given permission to by the organisation.

Payment

National Minimum Wage legislation requires employers to pay minimum wage or above for all work placements, unless they fall within the following exemptions:

- Students who are studying on higher education courses at UK universities or colleges if placed with an employer as part of their course. This exemption may be applied for a maximum period of one year.
- Students doing voluntary work for a registered charity and those doing work-shadowing.

The government's own guidelines on payment for internships are not entirely clear in this area (see http://graduatetalentpool.bis.gov.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/What_are_my_responsibilities_/pleFiimek), and there is anecdotal evidence that PR internships are frequently unpaid.

PR remains a popular and therefore highly competitive career for graduates, but this does not mean that employers should take advantage of this to exploit interns. There are also equality issues to consider here: those graduates who are in a position to undertake unpaid internships are likely to be fortunate enough to be supported by family, but that does not necessarily mean they are the best or the brightest. Employers should be aware that by only offering unpaid internships, not only are they possibly in breach of the law, they may also be denying access to the profession to the highest quality graduates.

Bearing all this in mind, from January 2010, graduates already receiving Jobseekers Allowance for six months or more will be able to do an internship for up to 13 weeks alongside claiming an allowance and looking for work. This means unpaid internships will be open to graduates irrespective of whether they or their families can support them. All the same, unpaid internships should be the exception rather than the rule and best practice is to offer at least the minimum wage.

At the end of the placement

It is the aim that both the employer and employee benefit from the placement, that positive outcomes are achieved and good relationships are developed. If the placement forms part of a degree course then the university and the employer need to discuss possible methods of feedback or assessment.

General feedback on the value of the placement, for example whether the student benefited from the experience, whether the organisation was happy with the calibre of employee and their knowledge and ability to learn, is vital in accessing its value and for informing future working relations and placements offerings respectively.

Further resources

Department of Business, Innovation and Skills Graduate Talent Pool <http://graduatetalentpool.bis.gov.uk>

Work Experience; A Guide for Employers (produced by the DFES in 2005)

<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-1471-2005> - this focuses more on placements for school children but has some useful information on employers' liability insurance

Health and Safety Executive has a leaflet on Employers' Liability Insurance at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/business/leaflets.htm>

The National Council for Work Experience

<http://www.work-experience.org/ncwe.rd/index.jsp> - provides advice to both students and organisations on work experience.