

CIPR

CHARTERED INSTITUTE  
OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

# CIPR Internship and Work Placement Toolkit 2025

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# Introduction



The CIPR is committed to providing best practice opportunities for those entering the profession. We believe that it is our responsibility to provide future practitioners with a platform from which they can achieve the highest quality of learning and development.

We have written this guidance to help members and the wider industry, both in the corporate world and the not-for-profit sector, to create internships or work experience programmes that allow those considering a career in PR to gain as much practical experience as possible.

This toolkit includes information on how to plan a placement, recruit participants, set objectives, evaluate performances, and provide onward career support.

## Getting started

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### The why

Before you start setting aside budget and drawing up work plans and priorities for any prospective intern, it is important to consider the reasons behind why you want to hire.

Recruiting an intern can serve multiple purposes including freeing up your team's capacity and giving someone the opportunity to enter the workforce and develop professionally. Ideally, it should be a blend of both.

## Recruitment

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An internship is a period of work experience lasting for a fixed duration, usually anywhere between a week and 12 months. The term "internship" is used throughout this toolkit to refer to work carried out by a participant during a period of employment or placement to gain practical experience in a workplace.

### Employment status definitions

- **Worker:** Someone is a worker if they only occasionally do work for a business, the business does not have to offer them work and they do not have to accept it – they only work when they want to.
- **Employee:** Somebody who works under an employment contract. All employees are workers but, unlike workers, they have rights and responsibilities that do not apply to those who are not employees.
- **Volunteer:** Someone who is not given a contract of employment and so is without the same rights as an employee or worker. They are under no obligation to work but may have a volunteer agreement that sets out what they can expect from the organisation they're volunteering for.
- **Work shadowing:** Someone who observes a member of staff working in an organisation to gain an understanding of what a particular job entails without doing any work.
- **Work placement:** Those engaging in a period of work experience. This can either be arranged through a university, with an employer, or by the student themselves and is for an agreed period.

You can find more information on the different employment statuses and what employer's responsibilities are via the [Government Employment Status page](#).

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## Budget and payment

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

- Students undertaking an internship for less than one year as part of a UK-based further or higher education course.
- Work experience students of compulsory school age (e.g. under 16).
- Individuals working for a charity, voluntary organisation, associated fundraising body or statutory body who receive limited benefits (e.g. reasonable travel or lunch expenses).
- Interns shadowing employees but who don't complete any work or tasks.

Despite these groups being legally exempt from National Minimum Wage legislation, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) recommends that public relations employers pay all interns and those on work placements at least the living wage.

Failure to pay interns fairly perpetuates a culture of economic prejudice and is an inherently exclusionary practice that deprives the profession of promising talent.

When reviewing entry-level job applications, many employers will look for candidates with at least one internship; however, the ability for a person to take an unpaid position is often directly related to their socio-economic status.

Business Fights Poverty, Shift, and the University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL) published a [research paper](#) detailing the multi-level benefits of paying living wages including boosts to employee health and well-being and value chain reliability and quality.

As of April 2025, the living wage is:

- UK - £12.60
- London - £13.85

You can find more information on the current Living Wage via the [Living Wage website](#).

## University funding for internships

Many universities offer funding programmes that can support students and recent graduates with the financial costs of undertaking work placements. These funds are designed to improve accessibility to valuable work experience, particularly for students from underrepresented backgrounds.

For businesses that may have limited budgets for internship programmes, partnering with university career services can provide mutual benefits. For example, the University of Exeter's [A2i Student Widening Participation Funding](#) allows students to secure a paid internship by providing their chosen employer with funding to cover 80 to 140 hours' worth of the intern's pay at the National Living Wage.

Many university career services offer similar schemes to reduce financial barriers to internships for both employers and prospective interns.

## Diversity and social mobility

Championing workplace diversity is essential for attracting the best talent and fostering fresh thinking and creativity. This is particularly true in the public relations profession that seeks to build and maintain relationships with internal and external audiences from increasingly diverse backgrounds.

However, the CIPR's State of the Profession report (2024) shows that the profession is 80% white, with previous research highlighting that nearly one in three practitioners (28%) are privately educated.

Research consistently demonstrates that organisations recruiting from diverse talent pools and employing a range of voices and lived experiences achieve better problem-solving capabilities and outcomes.

As KPMG Chief Executive Jon Holt said in his company's [Social Mobility Progression Report \(2022\)](#): "Building an inclusive and diverse workforce is not only the right thing to do, it delivers better outcomes for our clients, communities and our people."

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## Ageism in recruitment

Addressing age diversity and ageism is equally as important as tackling other forms of discrimination and exclusion when creating an inclusive workplace, with research showing that age-diverse teams benefit both workers and their organisations.

CIPD research in partnership with Reed (2022) found that just 18% of organisations focused on age diversity in the previous five years. As the U.K. population ages and the proportion of over-50s in the workplace steadily increases, implementing supportive policies that improve the recruitment, development, and retention of an age-diverse workforce can enhance organisational reputation, bring diverse perspectives to work, and address critical skills and labour shortages.

*CIPD & Reed, 2022. Inclusion at Work 2022. [online]* Available at: <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/reports/inclusion-work/>

*Business Fights Poverty, CISL, and Shift, 2022. The case for living wages: How paying living wages can improve business performance and tackle poverty and inequality. [online]* Available at: <https://www.cisl.cam.ac.uk/resources/publications/case-for-living-wages>

*CIPR, 2024. State of the Profession 2024. [online]* Available at: [https://cipr.co.uk/common/Uploaded%20files/Policy/State%20of%20Prof/CIPR\\_State\\_of\\_the\\_Profession\\_2024.pdf](https://cipr.co.uk/common/Uploaded%20files/Policy/State%20of%20Prof/CIPR_State_of_the_Profession_2024.pdf)

*KPMG, 2022. Social Mobility Progress Report 2022: Mind the Gap. [online]* Available at: <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/uk/pdf/2022/12/social-mobility-progression-report-2022-mind-the-gap-brochure.pdf>

## Advertising your placement

To find an intern, employers should use the same recruitment processes they would use to find a new member of staff. They should advertise roles on their website and promote those roles externally as they would usually do. Internal audiences should also be informed of the opportunity.

Many PR courses at universities and colleges require students to undertake work experience, making these institutions excellent partners for employers offering work placements.

When offering a placement to a student, employers should request that the university or college provide clear guidelines on permitted weekly working hours and their expectations of the placement provider.

## Interviews

Any interviews should be conducted following the company's usual interview procedures, so that participants can experience the processes and demands involved in interviewing.

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# The Intern Work Life



## Onboarding

- The onboarding of interns is as critical as that of full-time employees, setting the trajectory of their time at your company and their integration into the company culture.
- It's important to make interns feel welcome and informed from the outset, especially given their limited workplace experience and the short duration or time-limited nature of many placements.
- An onboarding process should begin before the intern's first day, ideally with a pre-boarding session that includes confirmation of their start date and standard hours, completion of necessary paperwork, and setting up their workspace and access to digital tools.

Over their first day/week, the onboarding should encompass an overview of:

- The company, including its history, culture, values, services offered, and a basic overview of its structure.
- Introductions to key team members and senior leadership with outlines of their roles and responsibilities. If in a larger organisation, then this should be done with the employees the intern will be immediately working with and senior management in relevant departments.

This ensures interns can quickly integrate and become productive members of the team that contribute to both the working atmosphere and culture of an organisation. It also helps to set a positive tone for the duration of their internship, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose from day one.

## Workplans, projects, and tasks

The goal of an internship is twofold: to get the best out of the intern so they make the biggest possible contribution to your company, and to expose them to opportunities for professional development with a workload that grows alongside their skill set.

A framework should be established that sets out how to help the participant accomplish these goals, develop themselves, and fulfill their potential.

The framework should include:

- Planning how the employee is to be guided throughout the placement.
- Consultation with line managers, senior leadership, and colleagues to find out what planned projects or tasks an intern could contribute to.
  - If large projects are unavailable, plan for the intern to work across various teams or departments. This helps to increase a department or individual's capacities, as well as giving the intern a wider range of learning and development opportunities.
- Reference to the job advert that you placed for the internship to ensure that tasks align with the intern's skills and the aims and goals outlined during recruitment.
- Training session(s) to equip the intern with necessary skills and knowledge for their placement, including soft skills like communication, time management, and networking.
- A designated mentor/supervisor with scheduled check-ins to provide feedback and assess the intern's progress.
- Room to adapt tasks and responsibilities based on the intern's performance and development.
- A risk assessment conducted using relevant guidance from the [Health and Safety Executive](#).

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## Supervision and feedback

- Effective supervision, feedback, and mentorship form an important part of any internship. Assigning a mentor with dedicated, ring-fenced time to provide the intern with feedback and guidance ensures they receive the support and knowledge necessary to navigate and grow in their new role.
- To measure and evaluate an intern's progress, the supervisor should refer back to the goals and objectives that were set out throughout the recruitment and onboarding process and job description.
- Initially, touchpoints between the intern and their supervisor should be frequent and supervision should begin with a firm structure to establish expectations and workflows.
- As the intern progresses along their placement and becomes more capable in their role, mentorship and supervision should evolve to focusing on task-oriented support, allowing for a gradual shift towards autonomy and encouraging the intern to develop self-sufficiency.
- If the placement forms part of a course, then the university and employer need to discuss possible methods of feedback or assessment.

## Code of conduct

All CIPR members are bound by the Code of Conduct, which centres around three core principles: Integrity, Competence, and Confidentiality. The Code of Conduct must be adhered to by members in the course of business and public relations activities.

The CIPR advises that these core principles are applied when managing, recruiting, and training staff, including interns. For example, if a CIPR member was found to not be paying an intern at least the national minimum wage (unless they fell within the exemptions as stated in this document), it is likely that they would be held to account under the CIPR Code of Conduct.

Anyone can make a complaint to the Institute if they believe a CIPR member (or others for whom they are directly responsible) may have breached the Institute's Code.

To file a complaint, or for advice on the CIPR Code of Conduct and the independent complaints process that support it, visit our dedicated Professional Standards page online.

## Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) puts interns in the driving seat of their own careers. It gives them a point to start mapping and navigating their professional journey and helps them build the knowledge and skills they will need to thrive.

The CIPR recommends that all employers offer some type of training and / or CPD to their interns. Research from the government's Social Mobility Commission finds that, on average, studying a Further Education qualification is associated with increased future earnings and a positive 'value-add'.

The CIPR offers a range of industry-leading qualifications and more than 70 specialised training courses, available virtually, in-person, and on-demand. This flexible learning framework helps PR professionals both master essential skills and confidently expand into new areas of practice.

*Social Mobility Commission, 2023. Interim Report - Understanding student access to labour market value of HE and FE qualifications. [online] Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1135395/Understanding\\_student\\_access\\_to\\_labour\\_market\\_value\\_of\\_HE\\_and\\_FE\\_qualifications.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1135395/Understanding_student_access_to_labour_market_value_of_HE_and_FE_qualifications.pdf)*

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# Onward career support



Effective onward career support should start before the intern is due to finish their placement. Regular feedback sessions and performance reviews can help interns build on their strengths and identify gaps in their skill sets for further growth.

Encouraging participation in networking events and providing career advice can further aid their professional journey. Ultimately, support should extend beyond the internship, with potential references or assistance in job placement, ensuring a lasting impact on their future career paths.

## Exit interview

Conduct an exit interview at the end of each internship to gather insights about the intern's experience and collect feedback for improving future placements.

## Referencing

Provide interns with a reference letter upon completion of their placement. The letter should highlight specific skills developed and key achievements during the internship. Draw on the information gathered during feedback sessions and the exit interview.

## Portfolio

During their placement, actively encourage interns to develop a portfolio showcasing the different campaigns, projects, or tasks they contributed to. This should include evidence of writing, such as published articles, blogs, and press releases, or evidence of other types of creative work.

## CIPR Membership

Consider encouraging interns to [join the CIPR](#) as they begin their PR career journey. Membership connects them to a global network of over 11,000 PR practitioners while providing professional credibility, training opportunities, and pathways to accreditation.

For interns who are still studying, [CIPR Student membership](#) offers exceptional value. Benefits include exclusive access to the Career Starter mentoring scheme, extensive learning resources, discounted training, and networking opportunities through 26 special interest groups - all designed to give students a competitive edge when entering the PR profession.

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# Appendix



Suggested activities for interns - with thanks to Leeds Beckett University.

While the activities in the Appendix focus on students and graduates, employers should adapt them for career-changers and returners to recognise the transferable skills, experiences, and perspectives these professionals bring to internships.

## School or college students

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- Making and taking phone calls
- Drafting and reviewing documents (e.g. news releases)
- Creating and reviewing website and social media content
- Brainstorming ideas
- Assisting with research
- Providing support to the team as required
- Assisting with events

## University students

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Students and graduates are not hired for what they know, but for their potential to develop in future. This is an opportunity for them to demonstrate their curiosity and willingness to learn. Encourage them to ask lots of questions.

### Research

- Online research into sectors, issues, stakeholders, influencers, news etc
- Reading sector and issue-specific media and analyst reports

### Creativity

- Prompting AI chatbots to generate ideas and assets
- Contributing to brainstorming sessions

### Client-consultancy liaison

- Attending meetings
- Taking notes and preparing summaries
- Assisting with presentations
- Contributing to reports and proposals

### Media and influencer relations

- Contacting journalists and influencers
- Drafting media materials
- Answering press enquiries
- Creating media and influencer lists

### Internal communication

- Drafting internal memos
- Creating posters, presentations and intranet content
- Attending employee events
- Interviewing colleagues

### Digital PR

- Researching keywords and hashtags
- Generating proactive and reactive campaign ideas
- Monitoring social media
- Deriving insights from data
- Experimenting with new tools and channels (including AI)

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## Designing and creating

- Presentations
- Images
- Videos
- Podcasts

## Measuring, monitoring and analytics

- Monitoring and analysing metrics and data

## Writing

- Media materials
- Social media content

## Events

- Helping to organise events
- Providing support at events

## Graduates

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Graduates will be expected to acquire greater proficiency in all of the above. In addition, they will also be expected to develop soft skills such as communication, negotiation, relationship building and persuasion.

A graduate from any discipline is expected to demonstrate attributes in areas such as innovation, digital literacy, and responsibility.

They should begin to develop specialist expertise within a chosen sector and specialism.

## Examples of sectors and specialisms:

- Business-to-business (B2B)
- Business-to-consumer (B2C)
- Corporate and financial
- Digital PR
- Energy
- ESG and sustainability
- Healthcare
- Internal communication
- Leisure and hospitality
- Public affairs
- Public sector
- Professional services
- Science and engineering
- Sport
- Technology
- Transport
- Travel

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