

BM75 - Budva

Statement on quality and fair internships

Internships have grown to be considered as an education pathway that develops experiences and professional skills by allowing learners to put theory into practice. Internships and work-based learning are prevalent across post-secondary education, including work placements integrated within a programme, apprenticeships, traineeships, postgraduates teaching in Higher Education institutions, independently organised internships, and mobility opportunities. However, both when they are complementary to an academic program or when they are taking place as a separate learning experience, internships do not necessarily always focus on contributing to the learning process. Unfortunately, to the contrary, they sometimes end up exploiting young students or recent graduates as cheap or even unpaid labour, and this is simply unacceptable.

ESU believes that internships taking place outside/after formal education should ideally not exist, however where they exist they should follow the criteria specified in this statement.

ESU firmly believes that learners should benefit from the internships enriching their competency at the workplace within a short period and employers should benefit from the application of learnt skills, sharing innovative knowledge and motivation of interns without considering them as cheap labour. In many countries, and at a European level, legal quality frameworks still need to be put in place in order to safeguard the process preceding and proceeding internships, as well as to ensure that an internship does not become cheap labour. In addition, to the need for the development of legal quality frameworks, it is of great importance that there is a sufficient amount of internships for those internships taking place during the educational process, to be guaranteed for everyone.

All internship programs must have adequate guidance by the workplace provider, be organised in close cooperation with the higher education institutions and be underpinned by quality assurance if they are part and parcel of the academic program. Further, within the study program, they should be interlinked with the curriculum, accompanied by ECTS credits to reflect the workload, as well as be supported by an assessment of the achieved learning outcomes. The duration and planning of internships, must allow students to finish their programs within the allocated time when the internship is part of the study program. Internships should not merely reflect the pressure of the labour market for producing work-ready graduates via boosting employability, but should mainly focus on learners'

needs to improve work-based learning competency. Interns should have a clear legal status as a student, a worker, or both, so they have full access to the relevant benefits and support that accompany such statuses.

Internships shall never be used as a means to replace existing paid jobs or minimizing employment cost. Work-based learners should always be recognized fairly with formal accreditation that can be universally recognized, and with sufficient pay funding support for their work through remuneration, appropriate welfare systems, or both. Sufficient funding is crucial since it is fundamental that all students are able to participate in work-based learning without facing precarious situations such as economic barriers. Therefore, social security and a legal contract according to labour standards must be included by the internship providers. These learners should also have access to representation, and spaces to voice their needs which can influence the quality of their education. The cooperation between higher education institutions and businesses must not be imposed mainly by the market environment but should be negotiated at the grass-root level reflecting societal needs. The independence of research, teaching, academic values and learning outcomes must not be compromised.

Without the need to reiterate already existing policies and frameworks, reference has to be made to the [European Quality Charter on internships and Apprenticeships](#), which encompasses, in four core articles, how to make internships and apprenticeships a true learning experience for those engaging in it. This version of the Charter reflects ESU's position in this regard, and shall be seen and interpreted in conjunction with the rest of this statement. This same charter also draws reference to criteria that need to be met in any internship as well as the monitoring policies and legal frameworks that need to be adopted to enhance the outcomes of internships and apprenticeships. It is evident, that at the basis of this charter one finds education, rights of the interns and remunerations, which when combined can give a holistic approach and better outcomes. ESU believes that systems that have superseded the requirements in this charter should continue striving to improve the conditions surrounding internships and apprenticeships. Because of this, ESU believes that this Charter in its current version can be used as a toolkit in its' work and lobbying, in order to improve the situation regarding Internships, at a national and European level.