

# SPORTS SCIENCE GRADUATE INTERNSHIP GUIDELINES



The main aim of these best practice guidelines is to aid both the graduate and the organisation in determining whether an internship experience will be **mutually beneficial**.

This document should be read in conjunction with [Fair Work Australia's](#) information regarding internships to ensure the arrangement is lawful under the Fair Work Act 2009.

*Note:* These guidelines cover **graduate internships only** and do not apply to any university placements (i.e. vocational (student) placements including post-graduate).

## WHAT IS AN INTERNSHIP?

An internship is when a person works for an organisation to gain experience in a particular occupation or industry. An internship should be viewed as a learning opportunity for both the intern and the organisation, involving regular feedback and reflective practice – allowing the development of the **interpersonal and critical thinking skills** essential for working in an elite sport environment.

Internships must be of mutual benefit to the intern and the organisation. Central to creating mutual benefit is the employer ensuring that the **supervisor(s) has sufficient time** to guide and mentor the intern.

If the supervisor is actively involved in ongoing education, then this makes the experience more engaging for the intern. For example, if the intern and their supervisor are working towards a common goal, such as an internship project, then this promotes collaboration, teaching and learning from both sides.

Where appropriate, the intern should progressively have the opportunity to interact directly with staff, coaches and athletes. Translating technical work into behaviour change is also a core quality needed for impactful work and allows the intern to develop their skills towards further employment.

## Potential intern benefits

- » Development of technical skills and experience
- » Understanding of career pathway
- » Developing communication and translation skills – understanding how knowledge can be applied in the workplace
- » Improving marketability
- » Increasing network of contacts to enhance job prospects
- » Possibly leading to a paid graduate or junior position within the organisation
- » Assisting with meeting experience requirements for ESSA accreditation
- » Greater understanding of how multidisciplinary teams work and interact

## Potential organisation benefits

- » Qualified and motivated addition to the team
- » Identifying potential future staff
- » Learning from any specific projects led by the intern
- » Opportunity for the intern supervisor to earn CPD points towards maintaining ESSA accreditation
- » Meeting corporate social responsibility strategy
- » Development of mentoring and leadership skills for the intern supervisor



## IS AN INTERN RIGHT FOR YOUR ORGANISATION?

An intern should not be viewed as inexpensive labour. Offering an unpaid position that should be a paid position is strictly against the law. Rather, an intern should complement the organisation, and their **core tasks** should not involve completing work that would otherwise be performed by a paid employee. It must be clear that the person engaged as an intern is receiving a meaningful learning experience, training or skill development. This is because the law strictly prohibits the exploitation of workers when they are conducting productive work or fulfilling the role of an actual employee.

For the intern, an internship is a potential pathway into a paid graduate or junior position within an organisation. For the organisation, it can help with the process of identifying the 'best fit' for a position. It's also a great way to explore new areas or roles within the organisation.

## WHAT TYPE OF INTERNSHIP IS RIGHT FOR YOUR ORGANISATION?

### Volunteer

A volunteer is someone who does work for the primary purpose of benefitting someone else, such as a sporting club, government, school, charity or community organisation. Volunteers are not employees and don't have to be paid. As with work experience and internship arrangements, all relevant factors must be considered to determine whether a person is a genuine volunteer or whether an employment relationship exists even though the worker is called a 'volunteer'.

Key characteristics of a genuine volunteering arrangement include:

- » The volunteer is under no obligation to attend the workplace or perform work
- » The volunteer doesn't expect to be paid for their work

### Unpaid or paid internship

There are several indicators to consider when assessing whether the engagement of an intern will create an employment relationship.

If the engagement of the intern **meets the criteria of a paid internship**, then the person must be engaged as an employee and should receive the minimum entitlements under the Fair Work Act, National Employment Standards, or enterprise agreement. Each case must be considered on its own facts.

#### *Nature and purpose of the arrangement*

If the purpose of the internship is to give the person work experience, it is less likely to be an employment relationship. If the person is doing work to help with the ordinary operation of the business or organisation, it may be considered an employment relationship. The more productive work that's involved (rather than just observation, learning, training or skill development), the more likely it is that the person is an employee.

#### *Significance to the business*

Is the work being performed normally completed by a paid employee? Does the organisation need this work to be done? If the person is doing work that would otherwise be done by a paid employee (productive work), or it's work that the organisation must do, it's more likely the intern is an employee.

#### *What is the intern doing?*

Although the intern may perform some productive activities as part of a learning experience, training or skill development, they're less likely to be an employee if they aren't expected or required by the organisation to come to work or do productive activities.

An employment relationship is unlikely to be found if:

- » the role is primarily observational; and
- » the expectation or requirement to perform activities is incidental to the learning experience and not primarily for the operational benefit of the organisation (i.e. the main benefit of the arrangement goes to the person doing the placement).

### ***Length of time***

The longer the period of the arrangement, the more likely the intern may be seen as an employee.

During a long term internship of **6 or 12 months**, the intern will increase their skills and knowledge of the organisation. This may lead to the intern being asked to perform tasks that would be considered 'productive work' or work that would otherwise be performed by a paid employee.

Long term unpaid internships should have clear boundaries on what tasks are performed by the intern and should be closely monitored to ensure the nature of the tasks performed has not changed over time.

Relatively short engagements can still be seen as an employment relationship if the intern is performing productive work.

## **FAQS**

### **Q. Is there a difference between an unpaid internship and a volunteer?**

**A. Yes.** Volunteers are usually engaged in activities which take place through not-for-profit organisations or projects which are undertaken:

- » to be of benefit to the community and or the volunteer;
- » of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;
- » for no financial payment; and
- » in designated volunteer positions only.

An unpaid internship is usually undertaken for the sole purpose of providing work experience to the intern through observation, learning, training and skill development.

### **Q. Can an unpaid intern or volunteer be provided with any kind of bonus or payment?**

**A. No.** The graduate intern's employment status is upgraded from 'volunteer' or 'unpaid intern' to 'paid intern' if they receive any other payment, reward or benefit in kind. This includes:

- » Complimentary match tickets
- » Fee payments for training courses/postgraduate study
- » Professional body registration fees

Uniforms are not considered a bonus or payment and can be provided to an unpaid intern or volunteer.

Providing any kind of bonus or payment would change the volunteer or unpaid intern status to employment which may result in the need for backpay and/or fines.

### **Q. Are interns eligible to claim expenses?**

**A. Yes.** Although an 'unpaid intern' will not be paid for work, they should be reimbursed for legitimate expenses incurred during their engagement, including but not limited to:

- » Travel
- » Meals

## ENGAGING AN INTERN

### Position description

It's essential to clearly outline expectations and outcomes from the internship before commencement through a position description and selection criteria. This provides a learning experience for the intern as they are required to construct a resume and cover letter specific to the selection criteria associated with the position.

### KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

#### *Roles and responsibilities*

- » Sports science related
- » Appropriate internship title

#### *Experience and qualifications requested*

- » For an elite level internship position, it is reasonable to expect some previous experience (most likely at a lower level) that aligns with the position description/selection criteria
- » Should be appropriate and realistic for a graduate internship position
- » Requirements are dependent on the position, for example:
  - a. Volunteer or unpaid internship for a local sporting organisation may require no previous experience.
  - b. Paid elite level internship with a professional organisation may require basic experience, minimal standards and exposure to sport.

*Note:* You should only require an intern to have specific skills and experience for a paid internship that will require them to utilise those in the performing of their duties.

#### *Resources*

- » Equipment provided (e.g., computer and workstation)
- » Continuing professional development budget (if paid internship)

#### *Supervisor*

- » Should be appropriately qualified (i.e. qualifications and experience in sports science)
- » Must have sufficient time for:
  - a. Induction
  - b. Training
  - c. Mentoring
  - d. Regular review and reflective practice
  - e. Providing networking opportunities
- » It would be good practice to outline in the position description how the above will be implemented. For example, listing how often training, mentoring, review and reflective practice meetings will be held.

### Employment status

Refer to the 'What type of internship is right for your organisation?' section and resources from [Fair Work Australia](#) to establish the employment status of the intern. This will help to determine if remuneration is required.

## Insurance

It is essential the graduate intern is covered by adequate professional indemnity and public/products liability insurance, either personally or through the organisation.

Recommended cover is for a minimum of \$5million professional indemnity and \$10million public & products liability for sports scientists acting within the scope of practice as set by Exercise & Sports Science Australia (ESSA).

If an intern is acting outside of the scope of practice, they will not be covered under insurance unless qualified to undertake additional activities and these additional activities have been added to the appropriate insurance policy.

## INTERNSHIP FORMAT

This will depend on the position description and employment status of the intern, but in general, you should consider:

### *Duration*

Internships of approximately **6-12 months** allow sufficient time for the graduate intern to 'bed-in' and be able to bring value to the organisation. However, this is not to say that shorter internships do not provide value.

Regular internship reviews are recommended (e.g., initial formal review after approximately 2 months).

*Note:* An internship of this length would most likely fall under a paid internship.

### *Working hours*

A standard working week is defined as a minimum of 37.5 hours per week. If the internship is classified as 'paid', then it's important to include in the position description, as well as documenting that hours can be outside that of traditional working hours and include weekend work if relevant.

It is also important to outline that working hours may vary as this is the nature of elite sport. However, a key professional skill is time management. Therefore, some weeks may be very busy, but time can be taken the following week to prevent 'burn out' or overwork. This may need to be managed by the supervisor initially but becomes part of the skill set learned by the intern through the period of the internship; self-management, supported by realistic expectations from the supervisor/organisation.

Remember that the aim of a graduate internship is to assist the intern with gaining the necessary skills and experience to enter the profession. Therefore, it is important to allow time for academic study, training and/or job interviews where possible.

### *Full-time or part-time*

Part-time internships provide the opportunity for income generation and/or job seeking outside of the internship.

## RECRUITMENT, SELECTION AND ADMINISTRATION POLICIES

Recruitment of interns should be a fair, rigorous and transparent selection process that complies with legislative requirements. Consideration should be given to constructive feedback for unsuccessful applicants that request it, as this provides great benefit to graduates looking to progress in the field of sports science.

## Documentation

**Unpaid internship:** Minimum of letter confirming terms and conditions (these should include specific information regarding duration, confidentiality and termination); and basic job description including hours of work and duties.

**Paid internship:** Offer letter; written contract of employment (that meets the minimum requirements of the National Employment Standards (NES) or enterprise agreement); and comprehensive job description.

## Induction program

This should be applied to all interns and needs to be a primary focus at commencement of employment. The process helps to ensure the graduate settles in successfully and addresses Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) requirements and an understanding of organisational policies and procedures.

## Confidentiality, intellectual property and privacy

Be clear about confidentiality, data protection and intellectual property rights both during and after the internship, and ensure these aspects are detailed within the intern letter or contract. Any internship should abide by the specific organisation's privacy policy.

## Reference and feedback

Regular, structured feedback against clear criteria (e.g., practical competencies, project goals, etc.) is critical and the process should be outlined clearly at the commencement of employment.

It's a two-way process. Be sure to provide the intern with a Statement of Service, a reference (if appropriate) and feedback on overall performance, together with developing structured formal feedback from the intern.

## Other things to consider:

- » Visa requirements
- » Police and working with children checks, if required
- » Immunisation schedules (e.g., Hepatitis B if working with blood)
- » Compliance with specific WHS duties and requirements (e.g., purchase and wearing of personal protective equipment)
- » Signed agreement regarding compliance with organisational policies and procedures, including policies relevant to privacy, confidentiality and intellectual property
- » Uniforms
- » First aid and CPR

Who is responsible for the above? This depends on the organisation and its human resources policies. Hence, all internships should go through the appropriate internal departments.

## KEY POINTS

- » Careful attention should be given to any unpaid work experience to ensure it is a legitimate opportunity.
- » Merely classifying individuals as interns does not necessarily negate an employer's obligation to pay minimum wages and treat employees in accordance with the Fair Work Act 2009 and relevant industrial instruments.
- » In determining whether an intern is an employee, consideration must be given to whether this is their status under common law and the Fair Work Act.
- » An employer who incorrectly classifies an intern as a non-employee is liable to backpay the intern and pay a range of civil penalties under the Fair Work Act.

## QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Volunteer	Unpaid Intern	Paid Intern
No remuneration/reward	No remuneration/reward/incentives	Remuneration
Ad hoc hours	Agreed hours	Agreed hours
No obligation to attend workplace or perform work	Role is primarily observational and the expectation or requirement to perform activities is incidental to the learning experience and not primarily for the operational benefit of the organisation	Role includes doing work to help with the operation of the business or organisation, or is focused on an internship project, and is of mutual benefit to the organisation and intern
No set length of engagement	Set length of engagement	Set length of engagement
None or limited feedback required	Regular and structured feedback	Regular and structured feedback
No documentation	Minimum of letter confirming terms and conditions; and basic job description including hours of work and duties	Offer letter; written contract of employment (that meets the minimum requirements of the National Employment Standards (NES) or enterprise agreement); and comprehensive job description

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### *What to do if an internship doesn't comply with these guidelines*

ESSA members have access to the ESSA Business Network for more information about employment support.

### *Finding mentors*

ESSA members have access to a list of appropriately qualified mentors who have access to complimentary mentor training, on the ESSA website.

### *Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points*

ESSA CPD points may be claimable for an internship arrangement. Refer to the ESSA CPD guidelines to determine requirements and how many CPD points are applicable for both the intern and supervisor(s).

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