

A guide for Interns

What is an Internship?

An internship is a period of paid or unpaid work experience. It can be compulsory or optional, as part of a study programme, or simply a chance to gain relevant skills and experience in a particular field. Internships are also known as work placement programmes or practicums and are primarily for the benefit of the intern.

How to seek out an Internship

Think about what areas of the industry interest you the most. The more engaged you are with the company you hope to intern with, the more you will get out of it.

If you are currently enrolled in an educational programme, you could talk with the course coordinator about the process of finding a company to approach. They may have established relationships with businesses that offer internships already.

It would be advisable to research companies you are interested in so you can select which ones to approach with an informed mindset. Some companies may have an established internship programme that you can apply for through their online channels and others you may need to cold call to enquire if they take interns. All businesses are different and may have different ways of offering internships.

Explore New Zealand websites such as www.mindfulfashion.co.nz/members/ <https://fashionz.co.nz/> and <https://www.nzfashionweek.com> to identify companies that interest you.

Here is an example of some types of businesses to look at; Individual fashion brands, CMT (cutters, manufacturers, finishers), fabric suppliers, trim suppliers, photographers, photography studios, make-up artists, brand retail stores, multi-brand retail stores, media and PR companies.

Small, medium and large companies will potentially offer different experiences – one is not necessarily better than the other, just different. In a smaller company, you may get an overview across all departments, in a larger company you may get a more in-depth view of a singular department.

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Things to think about before you start

Recruitment

- There may be an application or interview process depending on the company; candidates may be shortlisted, interviews may be conducted, and references checked.
- You may need to provide a CV and portfolio, which outline your strengths and current situation (i.e. enrolled in an education programme, a recent graduate or employed?).
- There may be no formal recruitment process.
- All companies are different and no one way is better than the other, although it is important to ensure the right fit for both the intern and the organisation.

Understanding the role

- As the intern you should understand the scope of the internship before committing to it. This will ensure that you feel engaged with what is expected of you.
- You should understand the length of the internship, and the days and hours of work to be undertaken.
- A job description or schedule of activities/projects could be provided. You should feel comfortable asking for one if one isn't given automatically.
- Understand if the role is paid or unpaid.

Agreement

- A written agreement should be provided and may include the following: the time commitment, a job description, and any remuneration.
- As an intern, you may need to sign an NDA (non-disclosure agreement) with the company. This is standard practice. You may come to learn privileged information about a company and this ensures you understand your role in keeping that information private and confidential.

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During the internship

Point of Contact

- There should be a mentor or point of contact within the organisation, who has provision to be available to you as the Internship requires.
- A basic orientation of the organisation should occur, to impart company culture, systems, structure and any essential technical skills that are required.

Plan & Do

- Companies should aim to complement introductory tasks with tasks that extend the Intern's knowledge, experience and skills and will encourage learning by experience.
- As an intern you could have exposure across a range of business activities to provide a broad understanding of the organisation and industry. Interns sitting in on meetings and brainstorming sessions could be seen as a mutually beneficial learning experience.
- Business environments are dynamic and challenges often crop up. Interns should understand that planned tasks could change with short notice and should be flexible to the needs of the host organisation.

Check-in

- A formal check-in process should occur for both parties (intern and provider), to enable feedback and monitor progress against goals. As an intern you should feel safe and supported, be given the opportunity to ask questions and be able to grow in confidence.

After the internship

Feedback

- A provision for feedback from both the organisation and you, the intern, about the internship should be given. This will help both parties grow and develop.
- A realistic understanding of any job opportunities beyond the Internship should be indicated.

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What makes an effective Intern

A great intern shows initiative, has a positive attitude, is enthusiastic and willing to adapt and learn. You should be open to listening and be confident to ask questions as well as receive feedback. A good work ethic, punctuality and communication skills are important. A good Intern wants to learn about the industry and find where their passion lies and is prepared to help where needed.

An effective intern is someone who shows up, is committed and is willing to learn.

Paid & Unpaid Internships

Regardless of if an internship is paid or unpaid it is intended to be a valuable learning opportunity.

Not every company is able to offer a paid internship and there could be a number of reasons for this. When a business provides an internship, they are committing to giving their time and resource to help an intern understand the industry and are offering the opportunity to learn and gain real life experience.

Internships are not defined in the Employment Relations Act. For an intern to be unpaid they need to be volunteers. A volunteer is not an employee, so employment law does not apply to them (with the exception of Health and Safety law). A volunteer gets the primary benefit from the internship, not the organisation they are working for.

An employer offering a paid internship can use a fixed-term agreement. In this case, the employment law applies – the employer needs a genuine reason for the fixed-term appointment and the pay must be at least at the level of the minimum wage.

Read more at [Employment.govt.nz](https://www.employment.govt.nz/).

Find out more

Read our '*Thinking of running an internship? A guide for industry*' and dive into case studies from business owners and students who have participated in internships at www.mindfulfashion.co.nz/Internships.