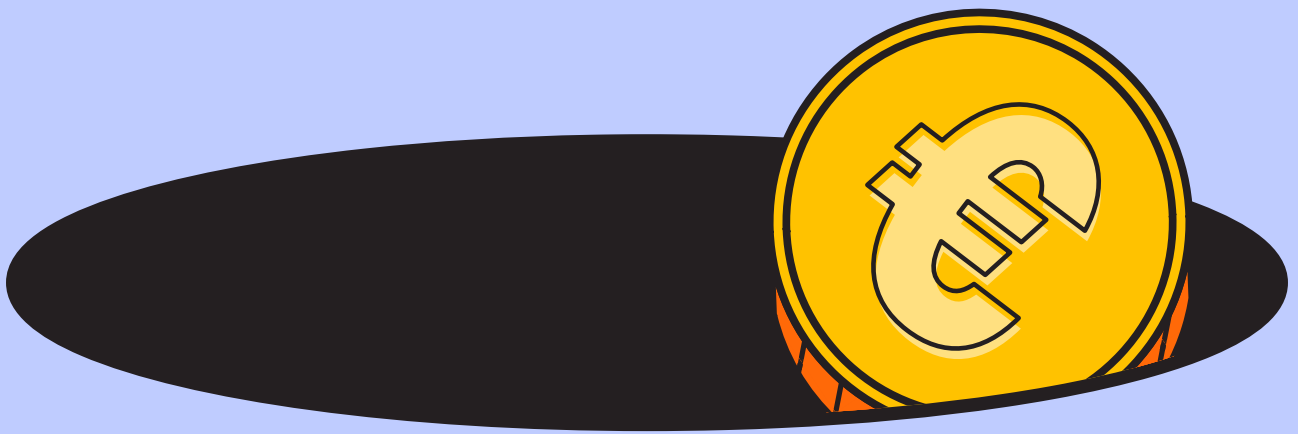




European Quality Charter on Internships & Apprenticeships



moving towards equal
opportunities for young
people in the labour market

preamble

Every year, countless young people expect to enter the labour market, start new projects, gain experience in a new profession or work area, or simply just embark on new adventures. Most of the time, these opportunities take the form of internships or apprenticeships. Ideally, these opportunities would smooth the transition from studies to work, thus representing a gateway for young people to enter the labour market, to jumpstart their careers and to develop new skills. For employers, interns and apprentices bring fresh perspectives, creative solutions and acquired knowledge.

However, most of the time, internships and apprenticeships do not meet certain quality criteria, ending in missed opportunities, both for young people to leverage their goals, and for the employers to benefit from young people's added value.

Despite some updates at EU level in the last decade with the adoption in 2014 of a Council Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships and in 2018 for Apprenticeships, the current system still allows for exploitation in the labour market. Practices such as unpaid internships that also have no proper mentorship or learning objectives, or no follow-up opportunities are still common. Unpaid internships in particular deepen social inequalities and prevent young people from being financially independent. Furthermore, research by the International Labour Organisation suggests that paid opportunities lead to better follow-up opportunities.

Currently, there is no binding legislation at international level that holds different stakeholders to account. Even in those countries with some form of legislation, there is little labour inspection and law enforcement. More often than not, young professionals find themselves in an endless loop of unpaid internships, which do not lead to any stable work contracts nor financial security.

In 2017, the European Youth Forum lodged a complaint against Belgium to Council of Europe's European Committee of Social Rights on the grounds that Belgium was not doing enough to prevent exploitation of interns in the labour market. The outcome of the complaint officially recognised that Belgium violated the European Social Charter with gaps in their laws allowing for unpaid internships to take place, and called on the government to better monitor them.

Against this background, the European Youth Forum proposes this Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships so that policy-makers can implement better strategies and initiatives which are de facto in line with young people's rights. We also encourage employers to follow these principles to offer the best possible opportunities to young people in order to capture and retain their talent and creativity and build diversity. This Charter is also a tool for young interns and apprentices to better know their rights in the workplace.

For the purpose of this Charter, the European Youth Forum defines:

Internships:

a) within the education world as a work experience that is undertaken by a student to obtain credit points to complete their higher education studies. Interns generally have a student status, access to services like student loans, student housing, health insurance, scholarships etc.;

b) in the open labour market as a work experience that is undertaken outside of formal education, including after graduation, that does not require obtaining credit points to complete higher education studies, but rather to obtain work-based experience as well as any other form of similar work experience that is offered to young people as a work-based learning opportunity.

Apprenticeships:

a work-oriented training that is part of vocational education and training and that is a solely school-based programme or a combined school- and work-based programme.

article 1

we are convinced that internships and apprenticeships should be primarily a learning experience and believe that:

Internships/apprenticeships should never lead to job replacement;

Well organised internships/apprenticeships help young people acquire practical experience and add practical skills to the knowledge and qualifications that have been previously acquired through either formal or non formal education;

Internships/apprenticeships help to orientate oneself professionally and also widen one's perspectives of different sectors;

Internships/apprenticeships provide recognised working experience that develops the skills of young people and elevates their professional capacity;

Internships/apprenticeships should be carried out under guidance of a competent supervisor and have access to robust evaluative and complaints channels to monitor progress and quality of the internship/apprenticeship experience;

Interns/apprentices should be informed at the beginning of their internship/apprenticeship experience of their social and labour rights, workers representatives, their responsibilities to the organisation, any health and safety risks posed to them through the position or at the work place and are provided the relevant social protection accordingly;

article 2

we believe that internships (as part of higher education) and apprenticeships should meet the following criteria:

Existence of a written and legally binding contract between the educational institution, intern/apprentice and hosting organisation outlining the main principles of the internship/apprenticeship, including how many credit points this will contribute to the diploma of the intern/apprentice; a description of learning objectives and tasks should be attached to the contract;

Length and tasks of the internship/apprenticeship correspond to specified learning objectives that are shared with the student at the beginning of his/her internship/apprenticeship;

Guidance throughout the internship/apprenticeship period by a supervisor(s) trained specifically for the role;

The right of the intern/apprentice to receive reimbursement of costs incurred during the internship/apprenticeship or right to receive food, housing, and public transportation tickets instead;

Decent remuneration for work carried out additional to the requirements outlined in the internship/apprenticeship contract, including compensation for overtime;

Clear evaluation criteria of the internship/apprenticeship period.

article 3

we believe that internships taking place outside/after formal education should ideally not exist however where they exist they should meet the following criteria:

Existence of a written and legally binding contract outlining the length, remuneration of the internship, a description of learning objectives and tasks should be attached to the contract;

Decent remuneration not below the EU poverty line of 60 % median income or national minimum wage, if more favourable, in accordance to the tasks which are performed by the intern and to working hours (overtime should be additionally compensated). Internship remuneration should be regulated either in law or collective agreements in accordance with national practice;

Use of internships should be limited to pupils, students and very recent graduates, length of internships period should be restricted to a reasonable and fixed number of months;

Reimbursement of costs incurred during the internship;

Inclusion of the intern in the social security system, especially those of health, unemployment, pension systems;

Mid-term evaluation, discussion of the possibilities to be hired as a permanent employee during the internship period and a final evaluation at the end of the internship period;

Limited number of interns per internship provider;

Transparent advertising that includes a detailed task description and working conditions.

article 4

we urge the competent stakeholders to progressively develop the following support and monitoring policies for a better implementation of quality internships:

4.1. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND RECOGNITION OF SKILLS

Internships should be given a place in the national legislation and employers should be provided assistance to any legal enquiries related to the implementation process;

At the European level there should be mechanisms in place to promote the exchange of best practices in the area and the implication of the main criteria that define quality internships;

National and European systems for certification and recognition of knowledge and skills acquired through internships should be in place to further support to smooth integration of young people in the labour market and support youth labour mobility.

4.2. MONITORING AND STATISTICS

Statistics should be available on internships, nationally and at European level, with a special focus on: the number of internships available, the average length of internships, the social benefits being made available for interns, the allowances paid to interns, the age groups of interns;

An overview should be available, nationally and at European level, on the different internship schemes and their place within the legal systems.

4.3. PARTNERSHIPS

National partnerships run between schools, universities, civil society organisations and the social partners should be encouraged and supported;

More career development loans and investment in training by employers should be encouraged and supported;

Schools should provide assistance to the young people when they are looking for a suitable apprenticeship.

Student and pupil organisations, trade unions should be available to provide assistance to interns throughout the internship period and the implication of the main criteria that define quality internships.

Find out more about our work on quality internships and apprenticeships here:



www.youthforum.org/topics/no-more-unpaid-internships

For more information contact youthforum@youthforum.org

