

Think Ahead

ACCA

Hiring an intern:
ACCA's best
practice guide
for employers
(UK version)

About ACCA

ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) is the global body for professional accountants. It offers business-relevant, first-choice qualifications to people of application, ability and ambition around the world who seek a rewarding career in accountancy, finance and management.

ACCA supports its **178,000** members and **455,000** students in **181** countries, helping them to develop successful careers in accounting and business, with the skills required by employers. ACCA works through a network of **95** offices and centres and more than **7,110** Approved Employers worldwide, who provide high standards of employee learning and development. Through its public interest remit, ACCA promotes appropriate regulation of accounting and conducts relevant research to ensure accountancy continues to grow in reputation and influence.

Founded in 1904, ACCA has consistently held unique core values: opportunity, diversity, innovation, integrity and accountability. It believes that accountants bring value to economies in all stages of development and seek to develop capacity in the profession and encourage the adoption of global standards. ACCA's core values are aligned to the needs of employers in all sectors and it ensures that through its range of qualifications, it prepares accountants for business. ACCA seeks to open up the profession to people of all backgrounds and remove artificial barriers, innovating its qualifications and delivery to meet the diverse needs of trainee professionals and their employers. More information is available at: www.accaglobal.com



This practical guide has been developed with insight from ACCA members and students, and has been produced as a direct consequence of our social mobility research. The report draws on our conversations with politicians, businesses, and charities about what is needed to increase social mobility in the UK.



The accountancy profession plays a crucial role in business, the economy, and wider society. I am proud to lead an organisation whose members are on the front line of ensuring business practices are fair, transparent, and sustainable. As the profession develops it is vital that we continue to attract the best new talent. At ACCA, we are passionate about supporting our members and employers to identify and develop the next generation of finance professionals – and to broadening access to the profession so you can recruit from the widest possible pool.

ACCA was formed in 1904 with the aim of creating opportunity by removing artificial barriers to the profession. I am very proud that this remains one of ACCA's treasured core values and we firmly believe that anyone with the ability and desire should have the opportunity to become a professional accountant, regardless of their social background. Internships play an extremely important role in opening up the profession as a career path and attracting new talent to the industry.

For internships to work well for both employers and interns, it is important that there is a common understanding of what to expect, the potential benefits and required outputs. ACCA has developed this guide to support those considering taking on an intern for the first time; equally, it will help those who already employ interns get the most out of their programme.

I am delighted that this practical guide has been developed with insight from ACCA members and students, and has been produced as a direct consequence of our social mobility research. The report draws on our conversations with politicians, businesses, and charities about what is needed to increase social mobility in the UK.

I hope this guide will be a valuable practical toolkit, both for our members and for the broader accountancy profession.

Helen Brand OBE
Chief Executive
ACCA



Businesses offering internship programmes stand to benefit in a variety of ways. One of the more significant advantages is the opportunity to identify and develop future talent for your business.

THE BENEFITS OF INTERNSHIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

Businesses offering internship programmes stand to benefit in a variety of ways. One of the more significant advantages is the opportunity to identify and develop future talent for your business. Interns can bring fresh ideas, new thinking, and provide additional capacity within your business when you need it most.

When surveyed employers listed the following benefits of internships:

- bring in additional resources which can help boost capacity
- open the recruitment pool to a broader range of talent
- introduce in fresh ideas and a different ways of thinking
- provide resource for special projects which might not otherwise happen
- develop relations with local colleges and universities.

Internships can provide employers with an opportunity to identify future talent. Many businesses go on to employ those who have previously worked for them as interns as full-time staff. Taking on someone who has already demonstrated their abilities and understands the business removes some of the risk and expense of recruiting new staff.

Internships are also a good way of forming links with local colleges and universities, which can help raise the profile of a business and help it attract future talent. These links can also help to ensure that colleges and universities have a better understanding of type of skills that employers look for.

AN EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE

‘Taking on an intern gave us a great opportunity to get to know the potential employee without forming contractual commitments on day 1. The result was that we were able to assess a whole range of skills that simply cannot be determined at interview stage.

‘Happily, the employee surpassed expectation and we backdated a contract to the point at which she joined and that was the start of a successful 10-year relationship. I would urge anyone to give someone a chance to showcase their skills for longer than the usual work experience periods, you never know what you might find!’

[Paul Bithrey FCCA ACA](#)

IN FOCUS: INTERNSHIPS IN THE UK

Around one-third of UK businesses have employed an intern.¹ Many businesses, however, do not, meaning that a large number of employers of all sizes could be missing out on the benefits potentially offered through opening internship opportunities.

London has the highest proportion of businesses taking on interns. Around one-half of businesses in the capital either employ or have employed an intern. Wales currently has the lowest proportion of businesses offering internship opportunities with less than one in ten employing interns.

Having an internship on their CV can really set individuals apart from the competition when applying for jobs, particularly in a field as competitive as accountancy.

THE BENEFITS FOR INTERNS

An internship provides 'real world' and practical experience of the workplace. It can provide valuable hands-on experience and provide an insight into the accountancy profession. For some an internship will be a first taste of working life so it can provide an excellent opportunity to get a feel for the workplace and how to operate in a business environment.



Those who have completed an internship cite exposure to an accountancy role and the general workplace experience as significant benefits.

AN INTERN'S PERSPECTIVE

'I needed experience in practice and wanted to show a prospective employer what I could offer. I wrote a letter to a well-known local practice asking for a three-month internship and they accepted. I was fortunate enough to be offered a permanent position by the end of the internship. Even if the internship had not resulted in a permanent position, I believe that it would have been a worthwhile experience – I needed to gain the practical experience to understand the knowledge that I had already acquired in my studies. Applying theory to practice is very different and you only become an accountant when you do so. I would do it all over again if necessary.'

'I have now gained my ACCA qualification and hold a position in an international company in London where I act as a European Project Accountant with exposure to different aspects of accountancy from leading audits and tax investigations to monthly and yearly management and financial reporting for both internal and external stakeholders.'

Corinna Biermann
Ranir Ltd/Ranir Group

88%

of students surveyed would recommend an internship to friends and family

Internships provide an excellent opportunity to bridge the gap between academic and working life. Having an internship on their CV can really set individuals apart from the competition when applying for jobs, particularly in a field as competitive as accountancy. In some instances internship activities can even count towards attaining the ACCA qualification.

The survey showed that students really do value the experience an internship provides and 88% would recommend an internship to friends and family.

The first step is to get a clear understanding of how an intern will fit into your business – what will their role be and how can they contribute to your company's goals.

THE FIRST STEPS TO HIRING AN INTERN

Understanding the needs of your organisation

The first step is to get a clear understanding of how an intern will fit into your business – what will their role be and how can they contribute to your company's goals.

To help you with this you might want to consider the following questions:

- What does your organisation hope to achieve from the internship?
- Is your organisation looking to fill a need on a specific project or in a specific role?
- Will the internship focus on one major project/role, or cover a variety of small projects/roles?
- At the end of the internship what would you expect the intern to have achieved/delivered?
- If your organisation is searching for new part-qualified and qualified accountants, how will you frame your internship to identify and develop future accounting talent?

SOME PRACTICAL TIPS:

- Who will be responsible for supervising/mentoring the intern?
- What projects or activities will the intern work on? Be as specific as possible and be realistic with your expectations on what can be delivered in the time the intern is working for your company/organisation.
- Talk to others in your company/organisation when drawing up a work plan for your intern and ensure you have the relevant agreement from senior managers/HR before seeking to recruit.
- Decide and confirm the logistics – such as where your intern will be based, whether you will need to alter your workspace to accommodate an intern, what IT equipment will they need to be able to carry out their role?



Interns are seeking opportunities that stimulate their interest in the accountancy profession and provide real-world experience.

WHAT ARE INTERNS LOOKING FOR?

Interns are seeking opportunities that stimulate their interest in the accountancy profession and provide real-world experience. For those who had completed an internship, our survey reports that the experience had the greatest influence in helping them reach an informed decision on pursuing a professional accountancy qualification.

A meaningful, purposeful internship will:

- provide challenging projects and tasks
- give interns focused, purposeful roles to keep them motivated
- give them a broad exposure to the organisation
- provide supervision and mentoring
- set clear goals and objectives for the intern to achieve.

WHAT TYPE OF WORK DOES AN INTERN EXPECT?

An essential part of a successful internship is deciding what kinds of work and projects the intern will do. Interns want to be

challenged. The main issue identified in unsuccessful internships was the intern not having enough work or appropriately challenging work to keep the intern interested and engaged.

In terms of day-to-day work successful internships tend to be structured as follows.

1. **Project work:** this can be a special analysis or project that will require the intern to use and develop their accountancy skills. This should form the major part of the intern's work, for example, the intern may assist with a system implementation project.
2. **General work:** this will be ad hoc work that will give the intern a better understanding of day-to-day operations in your business and in the workplace more generally. It may involve assisting colleagues with routine tasks, which could help give the intern a better understanding of how the company operates.
3. **Reactive work:** this might involve helping out with non-planned work that needs an urgent response. Dealing with urgent issues is an important part of working life so it can be valuable experience.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORK EXPERIENCE, INTERNSHIPS AND APPRENTICESHIPS?

Work experience offers an opportunity for individuals to observe and get a feel for working life within a company or organisation. Work experience opportunities normally run for a very short period (normally no longer than two-weeks). Often work experience will involve an individual shadowing an employee to get a better understanding of the work they do, they may be given simple tasks to complete while on work experience but will generally not have full access to internal systems. Work experience opportunities are normally unpaid.

Internships will last for a longer period than work experience opportunities. An intern will be brought in to assist with specific business related tasks. Employers should provide interns with a simple contract, which sets out the terms of their employment. As interns will be delivering a service to the employer they should be paid for the work they do.

Apprenticeships combine practical training in a specific job with study. Apprentices will work alongside experienced staff and gain job-specific skills while studying for a related qualification. Apprenticeships can run from 1 to 4 years depending on their level (which align to different education levels, such as GCSE level or degree level). There will be certain obligations on both employers and apprentices, for example, employers will need to be able to let apprentices attend classes and take study leave. From 2016 there will be an Accountancy Apprenticeship available as part of the Government's Trailblazers initiative.

Internships should fit the needs of the business and provide the intern with meaningful professional experience.

37%
of apprenticeships in finance and accountancy lasted for up to 2 months

TECHNICAL TASKS FOR INTERNS

We surveyed a number of firms who take on accounting interns and Figure 1 sets out the types of tasks assigned during the internship.

Bank reconciliations, accounts preparation, data entry, and general administrative/office duties are the most common routine tasks.

For project-based work the following tasks are examples of more in-depth technical assignments:

- ad hoc accounting projects, this could be a discrete project to meet business needs, or a sub-project that feeds into a larger project
- business analysis
- preparation of tenders
- gathering market data and running analyses and reporting on findings
- hedge fund accounting, including preparation of net asset values for clients.

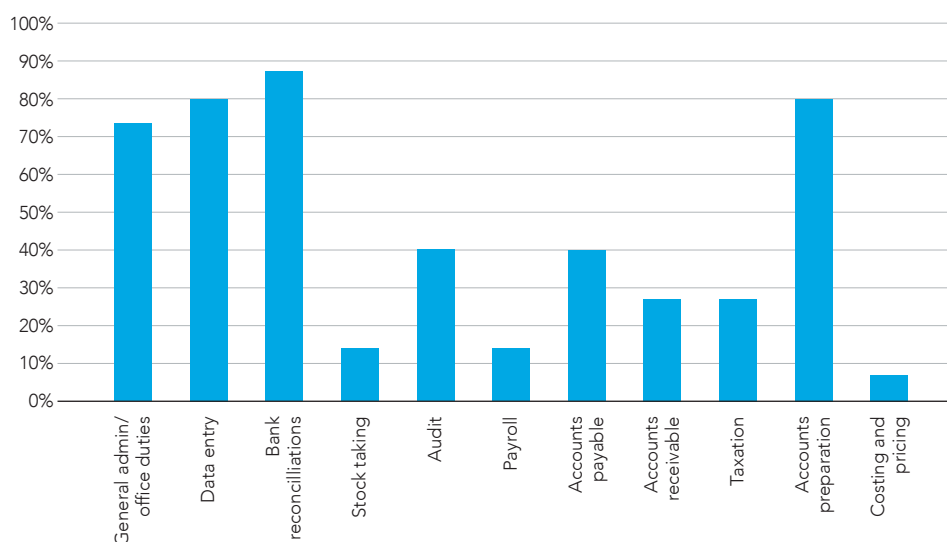
CHOOSING THE RIGHT LENGTH AND TYPE OF INTERNSHIP

Internships should fit the needs of the business and provide the intern with meaningful professional experience. Many factors will determine how long an intern is employed for, but consideration should be given to how long it will take for an intern to get to grips with the role and deliver their objectives.

IN FOCUS: INTERNSHIPS IN THE UK

Findings from an Intern Aware poll (carried out by YouGov) found that the duration of internships across the UK varies significantly, ranging from less than 1 month to over 1 year. The findings found that most apprenticeships in finance and accountancy lasted for up to 2 months (37%), 21% lasted between 2 and 6 months and 10% last for up to 1 year.

Figure 1: What tasks are the interns normally responsible for?



Remuneration is highly recommended and increasingly seen as best practice across the industry.

In terms of their general characteristics internships can be broadly categorised into the following types.

- **Project-related internships:** initiated to lead or assist with specific short-term projects. When designing a project-related internship, the timeframe, as well as objectives, must be clearly defined. There should be a set end-date, with defined outputs that must be delivered.
- **Summer internships:** often lasting 3 months or less and designed to fit with student holidays. Summer interns can provide cover for full-time staff during the summer holiday period and are therefore often an attractive option for employers. If you are considering taking on a short-term internship it is important that you set tasks and objectives that are achievable in the time the intern is working for you.
- **Multi-year or semester internships:** interns may work for you for specific periods, during holidays, or for specific times of the year. Such arrangements will require flexibility in terms of accommodating an intern and task setting over a longer and non-continuous period. The advantages, however, are that these longer-term internships provide ample time for the intern and the business to learn from one another, accomplish goals, and create and deliver projects.

SHOULD AN INTERNSHIP BE PAID?

Internships are a cost- and time-efficient way of bringing new talent into your organisation.

Remuneration is highly recommended and increasingly seen as best practice across the industry. An internship should be as close to a real life work experience as possible and, of course, being paid is a core part of this. A paid internship is more likely to ensure that you are able to attract a high calibre and engaged intern. It will also ensure that your programme is inclusive as it will not deter those who are less able to cover the costs associated with working, such as travel, food, and office clothing.

OTHER FORMS OF BENEFITS

You may wish to consider offering benefits in addition to pay to act as an incentive for attracting talented interns. Examples of such benefits include:

- contributions towards study and exam costs
- study and/or exam leave
- paid or unpaid holiday entitlement (depending on the length of the internships).

65%

of senior decision makers within the businesses surveyed felt that paying at least the minimum wage was the right thing to do

IN FOCUS: INTERNSHIPS IN THE UK

The majority of businesses surveyed pay their interns. Many were found to pay at least the minimum wage and a significant proportion of those surveyed (38%) paid the National Living Wage. The majority of senior decision makers (65%) within the businesses surveyed felt that paying at least the minimum wage was the right thing to do. Many felt that the reputation of the business could be harmed if they were seen to pay interns less than the minimum wage. For others, paying interns was seen as a way of attracting the best candidates.

Internships should be advertised openly and transparently to ensure you attract a broad pool of applicants.

RECRUITING AND HIRING YOUR INTERN

Internships should be advertised openly and transparently to ensure you attract a broad pool of applicants.

ACCA can help you advertise internship roles through our ACCA careers jobs board (<https://jobs.accaglobal.com>) where there is a dedicated section for work placements and internships.

As with any recruitment process you should be clear on the type of person you want to recruit and the type of work you want them to do. This will help you attract the right people to the role.

Key tips for advertising an internship:

- be clear on what you are looking for in terms of knowledge, academic background, experience, and skills (if you are seeking specific technical skills be clear on what you want)
- be clear on the purpose and the desired outcomes of the internship (this can form the basis of a job description for the role)
- you might wish to speak to local colleges and universities as they may be able to help identify prospective candidates
- try to keep the advertisement interesting – be clear and avoid any unnecessary jargon
- advertising paid internships will likely increase interest in the position
- provide a little information about your organisation, including its goals and purpose
- be clear on how to apply and set a deadline for applications
- provide contact information for any questions.

IN FOCUS: INTERNSHIPS IN THE UK

When recruiting interns many businesses recruit from local colleges and universities. This can build good links and help businesses to identify and develop a source of future talent. Good relations with local education providers can also help to ensure young people are developing the right skills required by businesses. It is still advisable to advertise intern posts as widely as possible to ensure that you do not miss the best talent available.

ACCA's survey of businesses found that over one-third of those taking on interns recruit from their own network of family and friends. While this may seem like a simple option you are likely to be limiting the breadth and depth of the talent pool from which you can recruit from. ACCA recommends that you advertise your intern posts openly as this will help ensure you get the best person for the job. Advertising internship posts openly is important in promoting social mobility, by advertising the role you can be sure that you are not inadvertently shutting out prospective applicants.

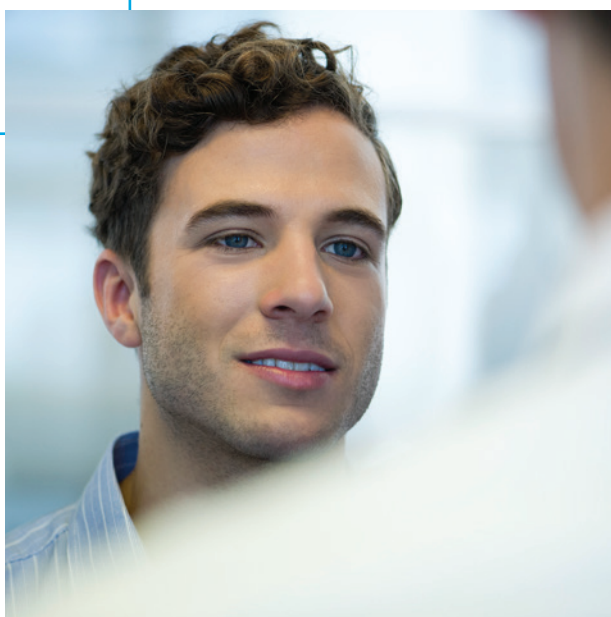
You may find that people seeking internship opportunities contact you. This is good way to build up a list of prospective candidates (even if you are not recruiting at that time acknowledge their request and keep their details).

For some candidates this may be their first interview so you should provide an overview of the format of the interview in advance.

SIFTING APPLICATIONS AND INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES

How do you choose who to interview? Generally, this process will follow your organisation's guidelines for hiring employees.

When evaluating CVs and applications candidates should be evaluated on their skills and qualifications:



- relevant studies or experience that relate to the internship
- relevant extracurricular activities
- leadership positions/activities, for example, through community/volunteering work.

It is also important to consider:

- numerical skills (to a standard required for the role)
- writing skills (spelling and grammar)
- submission of a cover letter (shows an interest in the internship)
- specific talents indicated in the application/resume as well as observed in the interview process (such as being a self-starter, a problem solver, or easily adaptable).

Keep in mind that your candidates may not have all of the desired qualifications/skills you seek since they may still be studying and will have little or no work experience. So you should focus on selecting people who are able to demonstrate the right potential to fulfil the role.

Once you have short listed applications you can move on to the interview stage. Internship interviews will help you evaluate whether a person is a good fit for your business. It also provides applicants with valuable interview experience, whether successful or not. For some candidates this may be their first interview so you should provide an overview of the format of the interview in advance.

Some interview questions you may consider include the following.

- Why did you apply for this internship?
- What attracts you to a career in accountancy?
- What is your experience with (software, programmes, etc)?
- What do you hope to gain from this internship?
- When are you available to start the internship?
- How does the internship fit with your academic achievements and goals (if applicable)?

Create an evaluation form to rate the candidates and make additional comments. By the end of the interview process, you will hopefully have identified a top candidate and now you can make an offer.

Now that you have found the right intern, let them know. Send them an offer letter or email. An offer letter should include:

- dates/duration of the internship
- detail of any remuneration
- deadline for acceptance
- a contract for the internship setting out the main terms.

Wait for a formal acceptance from the chosen candidate before informing others that they have been unsuccessful.

An intern should be supported and given regular feedback and coaching, access to a mentor, and training on technical areas.

THE FIRST FEW DAYS

It is very important that interns are warmly welcomed and introduced throughout your organisation, just as you would welcome any new full-time employee. Remember that interns will not only be new to your organisation, but in many cases will be new to the professional world of work.

The sooner your intern understands your organisation and how it operates, the sooner they can begin to contribute to your business. You can streamline this process by providing the following kinds of information about your site/organisation.

- What is the history of your organisation?
- Who are your customers/stakeholders?
- What are the organisation's current objectives?
- How may the intern contribute to those objectives?
- How should they process requests?
- How do the email and telephone systems work?
- What health and safety process do they need to know about?
- Are there security or confidentiality issues of which the intern should be aware?
- Introduce them to your organisation's intranet.

MAKING THE MOST OF THE INTERNSHIP

As with most things, what you get out of something is relative to what you put in. This is certainly the case for internships. An intern should be supported and given regular feedback and coaching, access to a mentor (whether this is their supervisor or someone else within your organisation), and training on technical areas. This will provide the support that your intern will need to succeed in their role and therefore to make a valuable contribution to your business.

One of the biggest causes of unsuccessful internships is lack of supervision or guidance and/or insufficient workloads. The best way to avoid such issues is to encourage open dialogue with your intern from the outset so you can address any concerns early on.

WORKING WITH STUDENTS

For many who are in higher education an internship can provide valuable work experience. The internship position should enhance their learning experience through exposure to the working world. At the same time, you should understand that for most interns this is a new experience and they may need support in balancing their academic work and the internship. While on placement, students usually need to complete assessment activities and learning logs to meet their course requirements. It is important for you to be aware of these requirements.

Take time to understand your intern's obligations outside of the internship, and work together to ensure both business needs and academic needs can be met in tandem.

TOP TIP – PROVIDE YOUR INTERN WITH A MENTOR

A mentor can enhance the experience of an internship for both employer and intern. Mentors must have the time necessary to mentor a student. Ideally they should be an accountant so they can share their own experience and journey. Mentors should work in the same department as the intern so they have a good understanding of the work the intern is involved with. Mentors serve as several roles.

As teachers:

- helping the intern learn about the business
- explaining projects and processes.

As supporters:

- helping to make the transition to the workplace as easy as possible
- answering questions or concerns
- serving as a positive role model.

As evaluators:

- providing constructive feedback to the intern on a regular basis.

ACCA recommends that mentors regularly meet with interns to receive and provide feedback concerning their performance.

EVALUATING YOUR INTERN

An internship can only be a true learning experience if constructive feedback is provided. An effective evaluation will focus on the intern's initial learning objectives identified at the start of the internship. Their manager/supervisor/mentor should take time to evaluate both the intern's positive accomplishments and areas for improvement.

Evaluation throughout the internship

ACCA recommends that mentors regularly meet with interns to receive and provide feedback concerning their performance. During these meetings the intern may:

- report on a project's/role status
- ask questions
- learn how their work is contributing to the organisation
- participate in evaluating their strengths
- discuss areas needing growth and development
- get insight about what work lies ahead.

Final evaluation

As the internship draws to a close, you should ensure that the intern is provided with a final evaluation. Final evaluations are helpful to review an intern's time within your organisation and to acknowledge key successes and any development pointers. If appropriate you may also wish to use this to discuss any future opportunities within your organisation. Any evaluation should ideally be done face-to-face and followed up with a written summary.

WHAT IF AN INTERNSHIP IS NOT WORKING OUT?

What can you do if interns are dissatisfied with the experience or are not meeting expectations?

There are various reasons an intern may not be successful or fully engaged in the position. The most important advice here is to be open and honest with the intern. Be clear on your expectations (which will align to the initial advertisement and job description). Make sure the intern feels as though they can openly discuss any issues or concerns with you. In most instances open dialogue can be enough to resolve any issues around expectations and/or performance.

If the intern is not responsive to the situation, or their performance does not improve, you should consider your options. This may mean putting special development measures in place in an attempt to turn the intern's performance around, or you may wish to end the internship – either way you should be open and clear on your reasons with the intern and follow this up in writing, either by email or letter. If your firm has an HR function then you should seek advice before taking any action.

Should an intern behave badly in the workplace they should be subject to the same disciplinary process as full time staff. In the case of gross misconduct your normal company procedures should apply.

Evaluating your internship programme on a regular basis will help you connect more effectively with future interns and provide you with the best opportunities for discovering future professional accountants for your business.

INTERNS BECOMING FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES

Internship programmes can help employers identify future talent. Internship programmes should provide a positive experience for both the intern and the employer, and employers should consider and evaluate each intern as a potential future full-time employee.

Recommendations for evaluating interns and making an offer of employment include the following.

- Discuss potential opportunities with your intern and establish whether they are interested in joining your organisation as a full-time employee.
- Use evaluations from managers and/or mentors to establish the business case for hiring the intern.
- If feasible, make offers before the end of the internship or before their final exams (if they are still studying).
- Be clear about what any future role within the organisation might involve, will it be a continuation of current work, or will it mean taking on different/additional areas of responsibility?

EVALUATING YOUR INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

Creating and building an internship programme is just the beginning. Evaluating your internship programme on a regular basis will help you connect more effectively with future interns and provide you with the best opportunities for discovering future professional accountants for your business. Evaluation and feedback will help improve your internship programme.

Tips for evaluating your internship include:

- seeking feedback from interns on completion of the programme
- seeking feedback from mentors and/or supervisors on how successful the internship was in terms of meeting business needs
- if possible, discussing your internship programme with local colleges and universities to see if you are providing the type of work experience desired by students.



<https://jobs.accaglobal.com>

<http://www.internaware.org/>

http://www.prospects.ac.uk/work_experience_internships.htm

<https://www.gov.uk/find-internship>

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