

Internships in Germany

To enable students to obtain work experience during their studies, the majority of degree courses now include an obligatory internship. Even if this is not compulsory, it still makes sense for you to gain experience by electing to do internships. Nowadays, a degree is not enough to give you the edge over your competitors on the job market; internships providing essential skills are a must for a successful career start.

Internships introduce you to the world of work. They also give you the chance to familiarize yourself with various professional sectors and employers, to orientate yourself, and to form a clearer idea of what you want from your future career. Furthermore, an internship will give you a better picture of your own abilities and a chance to put your theoretical knowledge into practice. Not only will an internship help improve your professional skills, but it will also encourage and train your soft skills, such as your ability to work in a team, social skills, creativity and determination.

How do I find an internship?

Planning your internship gives you the chance to familiarize yourself with the current job market and typical job-application process.

The first things to think about are:

- What sectors or professional fields do you want to get to know?
- Which companies operate in these areas?
- What skills, knowledge and abilities do you wish to acquire or improve?
- How long should the internship be?

There are many ways of finding a suitable internship.

- The University of Duisburg-Essen's recruitment service:
www.uni-due.de/stellenmarkt/in_praktika.shtml
- Company websites
- Daily press
- Professional journals
- Professional associations
- Online employment sites:
Absolventa.de
akademiker-online.de
berufsstart.de
berufsstart.stepstone.de
c-cn.de
go-jobware.de
meinpraktikum.de
praktikant24.de
praktikum.info
studentenvermittlung.de
unicum.de

Personal contacts within companies that you have made during your studies are also often useful when you are looking for a suitable internship. Your lecturers may also have contacts in companies which offer internships.

It is becoming increasingly common to advertise internships. Nevertheless applications on the off-chance still stand a good chance of success. If you have set your sights on a particular company that is currently not advertising any internships, it is always worth phoning them to find out whether they would be willing to take you on.

When should I apply?

Internships in popular sectors and well-known companies are much sought after. If you want to secure one of these positions you should apply as early as possible – at least six months before the internship is due to start.



How do I apply?

Applying for an internship is much like applying for a proper job. Whether you are applying on the off-chance or in response to an advert, you need to send a formal covering letter, CV and certificates. You will find advice on how to write your application on the Career Service website under downloads.

When is the best time to start my internship, and how long should it last?

If the internship is compulsory, its duration will be stipulated.

A voluntary internship should last at least two months. Only then will you gain a proper insight into the way things work. Two months is also necessary to consolidate the learning process and to give you the opportunity to work on interesting projects. Many companies often want interns to stay for at least three months, so that the time they have invested in training the intern can pay off.

When you start your internship depends on your course requirements. Some students have to do their internship before their studies start; others have to do it during the semester. Notwithstanding course requirements, it is always worthwhile doing an internship during your studies. In the first semesters of your course, an internship can help you orient yourself. Later on, an internship will allow you to apply your theoretical knowledge and it will help you form a clear picture of professional opportunities and provide intensive contact with specific employers. It is not unknown for companies to offer their interns a job at the end of their studies.

How can I tell if the internship is suitable?

A successful internship is one that allows you to reach the goals you have set yourself: for example, you are able to put into practice what you have learned in your main course subjects, you can train your soft skills, or you can network in a particular sector. A good internship should also fulfill the following criteria:

- You should have a fixed supervisor within the company.
- You should have your own place to work.
- During the internship, you should have the chance to work independently and to gain an insight into tasks demanding high responsibility.

- You should receive fair remuneration for your work.
- Although the company is not obliged to provide an internship contract, it is nevertheless advisable and useful for both the company and intern to sign an internship agreement. This agreement should regulate the key elements of the internship:

- ✓ Working hours
- ✓ Nomination of a supervisor
- ✓ Start and duration of the internship (possibly including a probationary period)
- ✓ Work and training schedule
- ✓ Liability
- ✓ Illness
- ✓ Giving of notice
- ✓ Learning aims and how to achieve them
- ✓ Accident insurance
- ✓ Holiday
- ✓ Remuneration and expenses
- ✓ Relevance to course of study (voluntary or compulsory internship)
- ✓ Right to final consultation and reference/certificate.

Is the internship remunerated?

There is no law regulating payment for interns. In practice, remuneration of the intern varies largely depending on the sector and the internship duration. Internships in public services, the media and NGOs are generally not remunerated, though these organisations will often reimburse travel expenses.

Internships in industry are generally paid. The average intern salary is around 400 euros a

month. In the IT and chemical sectors, an intern can sometimes earn as much as 800 euros a month.

The amount of remuneration should be set down in the internship agreement.

The choice of internship, however, should not simply depend on how much you earn. The main criteria are whether the internship will cater for your individual learning requirements.

What are the legal considerations?

When you are planning and preparing for an internship you have to give due consideration to legal issues.

BAföG

If you receive BAföG support you must tell the *Studentenwerk Essen-Duisburg* that you are doing an internship. The BAföG office of the *Studentenwerk Essen-Duisburg* will be able to inform you whether your earnings during the internship will impact upon the amount of support you receive.

Leave of absence

Some internships may require you to take leave of absence, particularly if they are abroad.

To find out whether it is possible to take leave of absence for an internship, please consult the website of the *Studierendensekretariat*.

(www.uni-due.de/studierendensekretariat/beurlaubung.shtml)

Statutory insurances

Students who do an internship as an obligatory part of their training or degree – often known as the work-experience semester – automatically qualify for full social insurance, regardless of the number of weekly hours worked. HOWEVER: the amount of salary received may have a bearing on whether students can continue to be insured in their family health insurance scheme. Students are therefore advised to contact their *Krankenkasse* for current details.

For information on statutory social insurance during internships, both at home or abroad, please contact your *Krankenkasse* or the *Studentenwerk Essen-Duisburg*. Your employer will also be able to give you the main details of statutory insurance.

The *Leitfaden für Unternehmen und Praktikanten* (Published by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs: Version: July 2011 [PDF] (331KB)) provides comprehensive and up-to-date guidelines on social insurance matters during an internship.



What should I watch out for with the internship certificate?

Although all employers have the right to an employer's certificate, there are no clear guidelines governing internship certificates. Nevertheless, it makes sense to obtain such a certificate, particularly with a view to your future job search.

Usually employers are happy to issue an internship certificate. The right to an internship certificate should, nevertheless, be set down in the internship agreement.

There are formal standards which must be observed regarding the content and format of an internship certificate.

There are two different kinds of internship certificates: the basic certificate and the detailed certificate. The basic certificate only lists the type and duration of the internship. The more detailed certificate will also list the skills that the intern has acquired, along with the intern's achievements, responsibilities and social skills.

The certificate must be written using a PC and printed on paper bearing the corporate letterhead. The certificate should include the following:

- ✓ Name, address and date of birth of the intern
- ✓ Duration of the internship
- ✓ Description of responsibilities
- ✓ Assessment of the intern's commitment and dedication
- ✓ Assessment of the intern's cognitive and practical skills along with details of motivation
- ✓ Assessment of conduct towards superiors and colleagues
- ✓ Scope of the acquired skills
- ✓ Assessment of the intern's success
- ✓ Overall assessment
- ✓ Formal conclusion and wishes for the future
- ✓ Date, signature of author
- ✓ Company stamp

The employer is obliged by law to couch the certificate in positive terms. For this reason, a type of certificate jargon has emerged in which a secret code turns seemingly positive statements into negative ones. This is particularly true in the assessment of the intern's success, where interns are judged according to a special 'satisfaction scale'. The German Confederation of Trade Unions, the DGB, has issued a helpful guide to common formulations in employment certificates and their actual meaning on their website www.dgb.de/themen/arbeitsrecht/informationen/zeugnis.htm

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us for individual advice:

<http://www.uni-due.de/abz/career.php>

Good luck with your applications!