

Library/information centre Internships: guidance for employers

1. Definition of internship and benefits

Internships refer to supervised practical training in the workplace which permits students, prospective students or graduates to gain valuable experience and upskill in an environment that complements and develops their formal learning. They may be undertaken as a placement as part of a professional degree or other training course. Internships should include reflective and evaluative components.

The Library Association of Ireland (LAI) recommends that internships should have a strong mentoring component. The mentor must be an experienced professional with appropriate communication skills, professional expertise and organisational knowledge and the ability to engage with the intern and impart specific knowledge and skills.

On completion of the internship, the intern should have developed his/her skills in an appropriate manner and be able to demonstrate significant learning outcomes and experience.

2. The recruitment process¹

The application depends on the type of internship on offer — if it is part of a state scheme it will be necessary to comply with the appropriate application process. This will normally include completion of a standardised form and compliance with a clear set of criteria.

If you are planning to offer an internship specific to your library it will be necessary also to comply with your own organisational requirements — HR requirements, recruitment and selection policies and procedures. If the internship is not part of a state scheme most organisations will require or at least recommend using a standard recruitment application form and sometimes a contract will be required.

If the organisation is very small and lacks HR facilities, it is strongly recommended that the recruiting body should use a standard template such as the following in order to ensure that the recruitment procedure is fair and equitable. It is also advisable to set out clear criteria for the form of application, e.g. completion of form and a CV of approx. 2 pp, depending on the level of professional required and the organisation's custom and practice.

It is essential to provide clear and comprehensive information on the organisation, the library or information unit's role and the internship position.

3. The intern's job description should provide the following:

- Information on the type of scheme under which the internship is offered
- Clear indication of the requirements for the post

¹ Before participating in an internship scheme or advertising an internship you should first ensure that the position on offer constitutes a genuine internship. Under no circumstances should an internship be used to displace an existing paid position or to replace a post.

- Period of the internship and schedule of working hours, indicating whether there is flexibility around these, as well as exit strategies
- Outline of role parameters (including job title) and details of the reporting structure
- Schedule for reporting and reviewing
- Training opportunities
- Details of expected learning outcomes, expected experience to be gained, expected skillset on completion of the internship, including the opportunity to obtain the Association's CPD certification.

The mentor should play a key role in the compilation of the job description and in the recruitment process.

Many employers will require that interns should sign a contract of employment and this practice should be adopted where possible. It should be seen as part of the general learning process.

4. Induction

The mentor should ensure that an induction process is completed. This should be in compliance with state or organisational procedures. In the absence of either of these:

- ✓ Introduction to the building and unit in which the person will be based (to include location of emergency exits, facilities, lockers etc.)
- ✓ Introduction to key staff including HR and other staff with whom the intern will be working
- ✓ Information re communication mechanisms in place in the organisation and unit and how and when to use these
- ✓ Provision of key policy documents and procedures in operation in the particular work environment — these will include Health & Safety Handbook, Acceptable Usage Policies, Bullying & Harassment Policies etc.
- ✓ Key library or information service documents which will provide a contextual framework for the intern
- ✓ Demonstrations of IT resources and general 'how to' guidance
- ✓ Data Protection, FOI, copyright and other regulatory and compliance requirements.

Remember to allow the intern time to access, read and absorb documentation and schedule a time at which the person can ask questions and seek clarification on any matter.

The intern should be satisfied that adequate information has been provided and should sign off on this with the mentor and/or HR department as appropriate. The subsequent training provided should match the role responsibilities.

5. Mentoring and ongoing support

It is imperative that the mentor ensures adequate workplace facilities are in place before the intern arrives — desk space, equipment, IT facilities etc.

It is recommended that the mentor should encourage the intern to join the Association and to use the website and avail of CPD opportunities offered by the Association's sections.

From the outset the intern should be provided with opportunities to meet with other staff, attend staff meetings when appropriate and attend workshops and other training events.

Expected learning outcomes should be discussed and expanded upon at an early mentor-intern meeting to afford the intern an opportunity to indicate his/her own expectations of the internship. The intern should be encouraged to maintain a learning journal or portfolio throughout.

Having agreed a schedule for reviews in advance, this should be adhered to and feedback on performance should be given. The intern should be encouraged to provide feedback on an ongoing basis on his/her experience, including indicating issues of concern.

A final review should take place at which the learning outcomes, including benefits to the intern and the organisation should be reviewed. The intern's learning journal should contribute significantly to this.

Before completion of the internship, a final meeting between mentor and intern should be held to reflect on lessons learned and to sign off on the process.

6. Advertising & Finding Internships

While there is no central directory of library internships in Ireland some academic libraries and the National Library of Ireland may advertise internships on the library website or via the career or employment opportunities of the institution website.

Internships may also be advertised on LibraryJobs.ie <http://www.libraryjobs.ie> and guidance and opportunities from the Irish Museums Association may also be helpful <http://www.irishmuseums.org/vacancies-and-opportunities-2>

Libraries considering offering internships may use these sources to contact librarians experienced in organising internships while prospective interns can gauge the range of bodies which enable internship training.

7. CPD Certification for Interns

CPD certificates may be provided on completion of a library internship, where the candidate is a member of the LAI, and can demonstrate that his/her professional skillset has been enhanced. The procedure to be adopted should be as follows:

1. The intern's mentor² should provide information about the CPD certificate opportunity to the intern at the outset. Attainment of the Association's CPD certificate would be a tangible learning outcome for the intern.
2. On completion of the internship a two-page reflective report should be compiled by the intern and this should be submitted to the CPD Committee, with an accompanying letter from the mentor at the library verifying the period of the internship and other pertinent data – email cpd@libraryassociation.ie

² Regardless of whether the mentor is a member of the Association or not, we would encourage him/her to participate in the CPD opportunity for the benefit of the intern.
It is not necessary for an intern to be a member of the Association to avail of this CPD certification.