

Graduate Employment and Internships: issues from the environmental sciences and sustainability sectors



The Institution of Environmental Sciences



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About the Institution of Environmental Sciences (IES):

The IES is a charitable organisation which promotes and raises public awareness of environmental science by supporting professional scientists and academics. The IES promotes and supports environmental science and sustainable development in universities and colleges both nationally and internationally. Further details can be found at www.ies-uk.org.uk.

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Executive summary

The Institution of Environmental Sciences (IES) recognises there are clear problems related to graduate employment in the environmental sciences and sustainability sectors. Exacerbated by the economic downturn, this report highlights more deep-seated problems in Higher Education, the graduate job market and the pathways from a degree into employment.

The Issue: Recently, a significant number of graduates have contacted the IES for advice after many unsuccessful applications for jobs within the sector. This is in line with comments by employers that suggest recent graduates do not have adequate work-based skills, and are unlikely to get a job without work experience.

Graduate employment can be described as a ‘wicked’ or unbounded problem due to its complexity, ambiguity, tension and risk. The research here aims to identify, quantify and understand these issues, with particular focus on internships, the ethical issues surrounding them and the expectations that graduates and employers place on their value and role within the graduate employment market.

Method: This research was based upon a series of surveys aimed at both graduates from environmental related degrees and employers in the environmental industry.

424 graduates responded to two online questionnaires which gathered information on:

1. the current employment status of environmental science graduates; and
2. graduates’ experiences of internships.

Additionally 14 case studies were submitted describing in greater detail graduates’ experiences of internships.

30 employers were surveyed in the form of a telephone questionnaire that aimed to:

1. gather their views on graduate employees; and
2. identify the value they placed on internships and the format they should take.

Graduate Employment in the Sector: 23% of graduates said they were unemployed, which is greater than the national average for 16-24 year olds (20%). Of the graduates in employment, 44% were not working in the environment sector, 76% of who said this was because they could not find a job there. Nevertheless, 80% were either actively seeking or aiming in the long term to find employment in the environment sector.

Key Finding: It is not a lack of interest, but a lack of available positions, that forces people out of the sector.

Graduate Skills: 13 of the 30 employers interviewed agreed that ‘graduates had the skill set required for entry-level jobs’. However, there was little consensus amongst employers regarding graduates, their skills, workplace value and any responsibility employers bear to train them.

Key Finding: Few employers think that graduates do not have the skills required for entry-level jobs. Of those that do, it is because graduates have: poor communication skills, poor technical ability, and trouble working independently.

Opinions on Internships: Graduates clearly identified internships as a ‘learning experience’ and ‘foot in the door’. Amongst employers there was little consensus surrounding the definition of internships. However, they thought there was a role for internships in the labour market although many expressed concern about the ethics of unpaid work.

Key Finding: Most graduates and employers agree that internships provide a valuable learning experience. Disagreement surrounded the issue of whether internships should be paid or not.

Motivations and Benefits: Graduates sought internships mainly to apply their knowledge in a practical way. However, half of graduates said it was because they could not find a full-time position. 50% of graduates were seeking internships to secure full-time employment. However, of those graduates who were doing an internship at the time, only 23% said that it would secure full-time employment.

Internships provided employers with short-term, inexpensive help for specific tasks or during busy periods, and allowed them to ‘try out’ potential employees on a flexible basis.

Key Finding: There are differences between what graduates seek and what they gain from internships. Employers benefit from internships' flexibility and casual nature.

Paid or Unpaid?, Constraints: 65% of graduates said that their internships were unpaid, while 17% provided no reimbursements (travel/food expenses). 53% of graduates said they had not done internships because it would not be financially viable, 38% because they were unable to find one. Many graduates attributed this to internships being mostly situated in and around London, which was too expensive or far away from their homes.

Only nine of the 30 surveyed employers provided internships, of which only three were paid. Of the remaining 21, employers did not provide internships due to either/or; a lack of staff time for training, no need, training requirements would make short placements unfeasible.

Key Finding: Most internships are unpaid and difficult to obtain, especially outside of London. This is considered unfair by most graduates. Few employers provide internships, mainly due to issues surrounding training.

Length: Of graduates currently undertaking internships, 49% said it was for six months or longer. 48% of graduates believed that internships should be up to three months long. Employers' responses ranged from six weeks to approximately one to three years.

Key Finding: There is no defined length of internships. Graduates believe that internships should be shorter than employers believe or provide.

Recruitment: Employers acknowledged that the employment market has been difficult. There are many highly qualified graduates but it is often easier to train existing staff. Furthermore, employers advised graduates to steer clear of recruitment agencies as they often did not use them.

Key Finding: The graduate market is congested, but it is better for graduates to apply directly to firms rather than using recruitment consultancies.

Are they worth doing? Most graduates who had completed or were currently doing internships said that they were a valuable experience. Of the 129 graduates who were now working in the environmental industry, 49 had worked as an intern, of which 46 said that the internship had helped them secure their current job. However 80 graduates who were now working in the environmental industry did not work as an intern post-graduation.

Key Finding: Internships provide a valuable route into the environmental industry. However they are not the only path into the field, and may be inaccessible for many individuals.

Conclusion: Fundamentally, this research has identified that there is little consensus amongst both graduates and employers regarding the purpose, worth and format that an internship should take. Nevertheless, they clearly provide a valuable route into the environmental industry.

The report concludes with guidelines from the IES on internships, divided into learning, accessibility and treat of interns. These are intended to protect both employers and interns.

Background

The global recession is heavily affecting graduate employment. Labour market statistics released in October 2011 showed one in four of Britain's 18 to 24 year-olds were unable to find work (The Independent, 2011).

A graduate has a number of options available to them on leaving university (Fig 2). Up-to-date figures indicating job opportunities in the environmental sciences and sustainability fields are not published by any Government departments but the Institution of Environmental Sciences (IES) is aware that the recession is severely impacting the career options of IES graduate members.

The IES therefore undertook a survey of graduates, designed to understand the trends, issues and challenges in the environmental science and sustainability graduate markets. The aim of this survey was to provide an evidence base for a strategy to best support graduates in securing a job in the sector.

"Young people trying to get into the labour market is the biggest employment issue in Europe right now."

John Monks, General Secretary of the European Trade Union Conference
(Quoted in Muntz, A, 2011)

Although exacerbated by the global financial recession, the current graduate unemployment problem points to deeper, long-term problems with Higher Education and pathways into the workplace. The issue of graduate employment is a classic 'wicked' or unbounded problem (Rittel and Webber, 1973), i.e. it is a messy problem (Fig 1) characterised by complexity, ambiguity, tension, uncertainty and risk (CATUR factors).

An individual's ability to pursue one of these paths is affected by their intellectual, financial and personal circumstances. Career breaks, further study and internships all have cost implications. Over recent years, internships and unpaid work placements have become ever more shrouded in controversy, particularly regarding pay, accessibility and their role in entrance to the professions. Internships are subject to heated debate in the political arena as well as the national media.

After publishing figures on graduate employment in the environmental science and sustainability sectors, this report gauges the opinions of graduates and employers on the role of internships in today's labour market.



▼ Fig 1: Causes of graduate unemployment in SD sector

At macro-environment level

- Global financial crisis – lack of jobs, recruitment freezes at many employers, subcontracting and government cuts
- Increasing number of graduates
- Underestimating the sustainability challenge

At individual level

- Poor interview skills and CV writing skills
- Unwillingness to do other strategic jobs
- Lack of confidence
- Inappropriate expectations/attitudes
- Lack of experience: knowledge theoretical not applied; references not varied enough; no practical demonstration of capabilities
- Limited contacts in field
- Higher qualifications needed
- Lack of soft skills and workplace readiness

Causes of graduate unemployment in SD

At organisational level

- Sustainability jobs are sometimes the first to be cut by employers or roles traditionally separate combined e.g. HSE
- Organisations unaware of potential of sustainability agenda
- Failure of tertiary education to supply the right skills
- Organisational priorities on cost-cutting not building human capital – 'short-termism'
- Failure of tertiary education to teach to a high enough standard
- Lack of careers information supplied by professional bodies, universities, statutory providers of employment information
- Internships poorly designed
- Overheads of employing graduates too high

This is used to evaluate whether or not they offer an acceptable, desirable bridge from education to full-time employment. This report looks systematically at the requirements for successful, fair internships drawing on case studies of best practice and distilling lessons from these for both employers and interns.

Why is the IES exploring the issue of internships?

As a professional body, the IES has a responsibility both to its members and to the wellbeing and resilience of the whole profession. Problems for the whole sector can therefore be framed as challenges for the organisation.

Recently an increasing number of graduates have contacted the IES in search of advice; typically they are unemployed and have made scores of unsuccessful applications for environmental science jobs. In addition, “more than a third of graduate recruiters (40%) say current university leavers do not have the work-based skills to secure an entry-level graduate role at their firm” (Recruiter, 2011), and a survey by High Fliers Research found that the majority of graduate recruiters felt it was “unlikely that an undergraduate without any work experience would get a job” (Quoted in Vasagar, 2011).

Work experience is therefore crucial to any graduate. Internships are one method of acquiring this. Furthermore, internships may lead to direct employment with the same organisation afterwards (this is borne out by IES employer research and also in Vasagar, 2011). Hence, internships can be a stepping stone to a career in the environmental sciences and sustainability sectors.

This raises two important points for the IES:

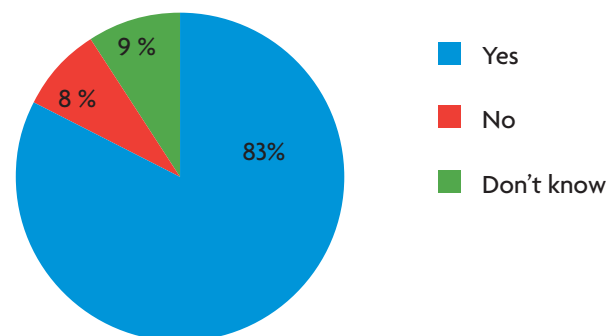
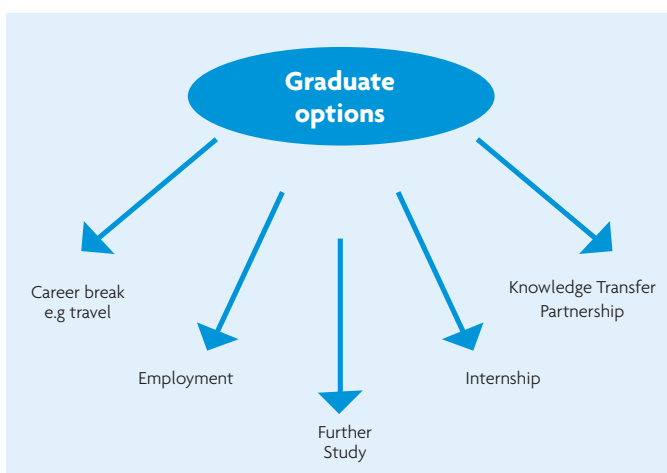
1. Could internships (provided they meet certain conditions e.g. on pay and support) offer a temporary solution to the current unemployment problem affecting graduates within the sector?
2. Given that internships may be a necessary stepping stone into a career in the environmental sciences, it is important that the IES seeks to mitigate the negative impacts these work arrangements could have on graduates and employers. For example: poorly constructed internships with little skills development; issues around exploitation; legal issues for employers around minimum wage legislation; and the erosion effect it could have on level-entry positions.

Finally, 83% of respondents to the two online surveys believed that there was a role for internships in the job market (Fig 3). This reiterates the need for the IES to address this important topic.

Internship Definitions

The Gateways to the Professions Collaborative Forum, (2011) states that: “An internship is where an individual works so as to gain relevant professional experience before embarking on a career.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines an intern as: “a student or trainee who works, sometimes without pay, in order to gain work experience or satisfy requirements for a qualification.” (Oxford Dictionaries Online, 2011)

▼ Fig 2: Potential graduate options



▲ Fig 3: Do you believe that there is a role in the job market for internships? [Question answered by 419 out of 424 survey participants]

Research Methodology

Graduates

The IES conducted two surveys, entitled 'Graduate Survey' and 'Opinions on Internships Survey', in June and July 2011 using an online survey tool. Both surveys gave primary, quantitative (e.g. employment status) and qualitative (e.g. changes respondents would make to the internship they did) information on the graduate labour market. The quantitative data obtained from these surveys fall into two categories: interval data – equally split data which has a natural ordering (e.g. year of graduation); and nominal data – named categories which have no natural ordering (e.g. benefits of your internship).

The Graduate survey was sent to graduates who had been student members of the IES within the past four years and also to alumni from a number of universities teaching environmental science-related programmes. This survey was completed by 125 people.

The 'Opinions on Internships' survey was completed by 299 people. The survey participants were graduates registered with the charity Change Agents UK (formerly StudentForce for Sustainability), which focuses on improving the employability of young people and in particular trying to help them obtain employment that promotes sustainability. The combined response for the two surveys was therefore 424.

The main objectives of the Graduate Survey were:

1. To gain information on the employment market for graduates of environmental science related degree courses, for example: how many were working in environmental science related fields; which sectors of the economy were environmental science graduates working in; and reasons for not working in environmental science sector (where applicable).
2. To gain information on internships, for example: how many participants had completed internships; participants' views on internships; if participants had completed internships; and what were their experiences.

The second survey looked exclusively at objective number 2. This survey comprised of two parts: the first section focused on the individual's experiences of internships (e.g. if and why they undertook one) and the second on their views of internships in general.

Both surveys asked participants who had undertaken internships if they would be willing to submit a case study. In total, 14 case studies were submitted, which provided a more in-depth picture of internships than was possible through the survey. For example, participants were asked to describe: reasons why their internship was positive or negative; their feelings on the support services they were offered; what the internship provided them that Higher Education did not; and their views on internships in the labour market as a whole.

Employers

In June and July 2011 IES researchers conducted telephone questionnaires on internships in the environmental science sector. Participants were IES members who are employers at the director level. Employers working at this level were selected because they were likely to have a strategic view of their companies' policies on internships. These employers were gathered from the IES database and sorted by surname with the first 30 able to conduct the interview comprising the participants of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of structured interviews lasting on average 10-15 minutes, with the researcher following a crib sheet of predominantly closed questions. This gave primary, qualitative data (e.g. whether there is a role for internships in the labour market) and quantitative data (e.g. which support service would/do you offer interns). This questionnaire comprised of two sections: the first was on employers' general views on internships and the graduate labour market; the second looked at their own experiences of internships within their organisation.



The main objectives of the telephone questionnaire were to discover:

1. Employers' views on the graduate labour market: were they concerned about graduate employment; did they feel that graduates had the skill set for entry level jobs; are they able to recruit high quality graduates.
2. What they thought an internship was and what terms they associated with internships.
3. Whether their organisation employed interns:
 - **If so:** why did they accept interns; what was the length of their internships; what type of work do they do; what did they offer interns e.g. one-to-one support, financial support; what are the main benefits of temporary employment.
 - **If not: why not;** what should an intern be offered by their employer e.g. one-one-support, financial support; what type of work do they think is the norm among interns and what type of work do they think is appropriate.

Participants in the employers' questionnaire were asked how they were happy to be quoted: answers only presented in aggregated form; anonymous quoting; or attributing quotations to them. Quotations from the employers' questionnaire are presented correspondingly in the report.

The questions in the surveys and questionnaires were developed following background reading in the areas of internships, the graduate labour market and the 'green' labour market.

This report also draws on secondary evidence from reports, books and newspaper articles.

There are several limitations to both the graduate surveys and the employer questionnaires:

- The sample size was small (in total 454 people completed the surveys and telephone questionnaires). In particular, response to the employer questionnaire was low (30 in total).
- Some employers and survey participants may have had limited time to take part in the survey and therefore rushed answers.
- The possible bias in respondents to the online surveys, for example, people who have done internships may be more likely to participate. Graduates no longer working in the environmental science field were less likely to keep the IES updated on their contact details. Unemployed graduates may have had more time to participate in the survey than those in full-time employment.

- The tick box nature of some of the survey questions and employer interview questions limited an opportunity to gain an in-depth view of people's reasons for their answers.
- In the telephone questionnaire the employer may have selected answers to please the interviewer given the more personal nature of a telephone call. For example, in questions such as 'are you concerned about graduate employment?' and 'do graduates have the skill set required for level entry jobs?'

Profile of Participants

Graduates

The profile of participants for both surveys combined is as follows:

- 64% of the participants were female, 35% were male (1% of participants did not disclose this information).
- The highest qualification of participants were in a wide variety of subjects, including environmental science (29%), environmental management (16%), geography (9%), ecology (4%) and engineering (3%).

Highest further education qualification obtained in year	Percentage (%)
2010	33
2009	22
2008	16
2007	5
2006	5
2005	3

▲ **Table 1: What year did you graduate?** (A small number of participants graduated in 2011 or before 2005.)

Employers

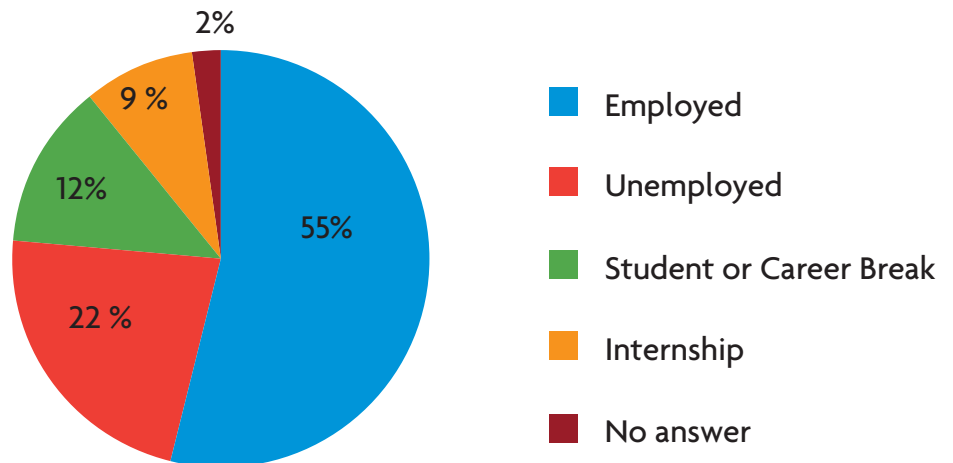
All employers surveyed were members of the IES and worked in environmental science related fields. Nine of the 30 employers had run internship programmes in the past. Seven of the 30 employers who took part in the questionnaire ran a graduate scheme, with the number of graduates employed ranging from 40 down to one.

Graduate Employment in the Sector

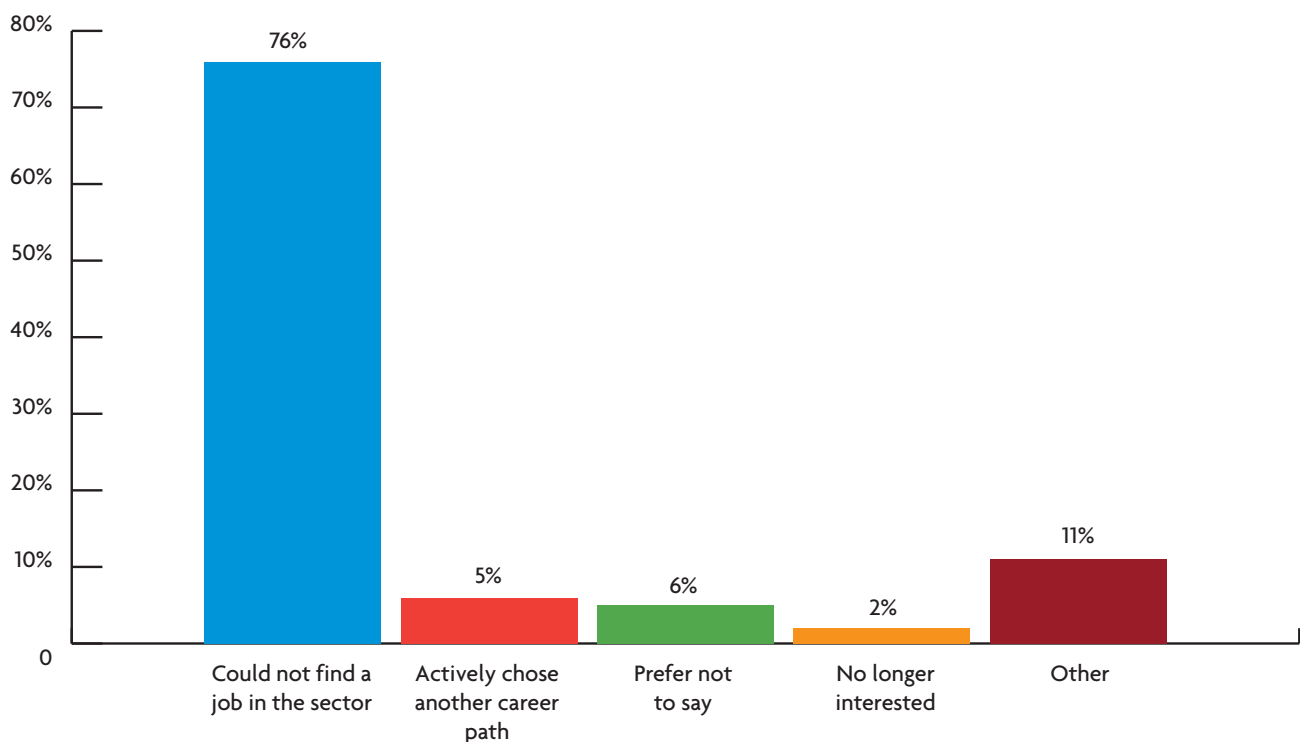
The surveys painted a concerning picture for graduates (Fig 4). Alarming, 22% of all survey participants were unemployed, which is slightly more than the unemployment rate of 20% among 16-24 year olds (Office for National Statistics, 2011) and almost three times the national rate of 8% (Warwicker, 2011).

In addition, of the 52 participants who were either students or on a career break, 44% were 'not confident' that they would be able to secure full-time employment in the field of their choice.

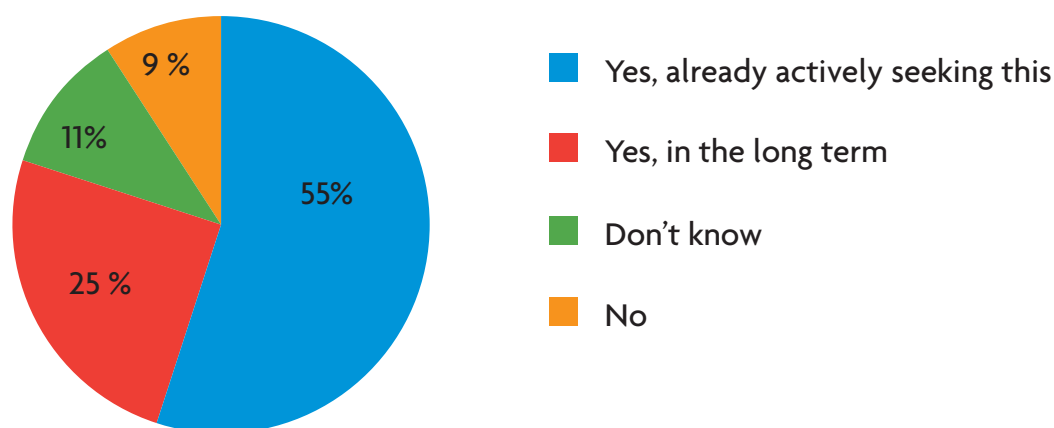
Of the 232 people in employment, 56% were working in an environmental science or sustainability related field.



▲ Fig 4: What is your current employment status?



▲ Fig 5: What, if any, was the main reason for you leaving the field of environmental science/sustainability?



▲ Fig 6: Do you hope to work in a field related to environmental science/sustainability in the future?

The most common positions held were graduate or trainee (24%), assistant or junior manager (23%) and specialist or technician (18%). The most common employment sectors were: consultancy (25%), non-governmental organisation or charity (19%), Government (19%), and industry (17%).

Survey participants who were employed but not in the fields of sustainability and environmental science (102 participants) were asked why they left the field (Fig 5).

The main 'other' reason stated was that they were still looking for a job in these sectors but were working in another job as a stop-gap measure.

Figures 5 and 6 show a bleak picture of job prospects in environmental science and sustainability. Of those in employment, 44% were not working in

environmental science or sustainability and 76% of these respondents stated that their main reason for leaving these sectors was because they could not find a job in the field. Four fifths of these graduates still wanted to work in these fields in the future. This indicates that it is not a lack of interest, but a lack of available positions, that forces people out of the sector.

Of those survey participants who were unemployed, 46% were only looking for jobs in the environmental science or sustainability sector.

This picture of the sector is in contrast to Government rhetoric on green employment. In 2009 Gordon Brown pledged that the budget of April 2009 would set out a 'green' route to economic recovery (BBC News, 2009) with 400,000 new green jobs to be created in the period up to the

year 2017 (The Telegraph, 2009). More recently, David Cameron said he would form a government which would give "a real opportunity to drive the green economy, green jobs [and] green growth" (Booker, 2011).

However, 'green' jobs do not necessarily imply jobs for environmental scientists: one definition of green jobs is those careers involved in consultancy, the supply of pollution control equipment and the renewable energy and low-carbon fields (The Ends report, 2010).

Fourteen of the thirty employers surveyed said the number of graduates they recruit had decreased over the past two years, seven employers reported that the number had stayed flat, and only one that the number had increased.



“Unemployment was a far greater problem (and especially lack of environmental jobs and presence of the environmental sector across other industries) in [the] 1970s and 80s. There were at that time vast areas where there weren’t environmental personnel anywhere e.g. banks. There have been two big booms in environmental jobs and sector – one in late 1980s when environmental consultancies mushroomed and one for the past 10 years where environmental roles have appeared in the city.” Employer

“More useful people to [my] company are people with 3-4 year’s experience. If people [are] unemployed [and] not getting that experience this is storing up problems for the future.” Employer

“Clearly graduates are the life blood of our industry – [the] people coming in who will become more senior. But [you] find graduates do need a lot of support which is why they have been discriminated against during difficult economic times. But lack of employment over last few years will be a problem for those who have missed out at crucial period in their careers. Especially when [the] economy picks up there will be a gap in that grade.” Employer

Employers were asked if they were concerned as an employer about the number of unemployed graduates, with 21 answering ‘yes’ and two answering ‘no’, but stated they were concerned about it as an individual. Answers to this question included:

- “What [I’m] worried about is people putting themselves into the wrong industry, unless you have a discipline you are wasteful. [The] problem is that it [the employment market] is getting [more] competitive and including experience now. Better to have someone who has worked on a building site then gone into Environmental Science than the reverse.”
- “Yes, absolutely, not just as an employer but as an environmental scientist – [I] dearly want people through relevant training [and] passion for the subject [to] find a position in the industry.”
- “Yes if someone has taken the trouble to [go] through a degree and [get] qualified it seems a pity they then can’t find work.”

That there is a near universal concern for the plight of graduates is encouraging and indicates a willingness from employers to engage with this problem.

Graduate Skills

The debate around technical and employability skills has raged for decades. Employers in the telephone questionnaire were asked if graduates had the skill set required for entry level jobs. 13 employers answered 'yes' to this question, five employers 'no', (the remaining employers said it was 'variable').

The picture projected in the national media is that graduates lack the skills (and in particular soft skills) needed for employment (Paton, 2008; Woolcock, 2010).

Employers: Positive comments

"Expectations from employers are not possible for graduates to deliver. Graduates still have a lot to offer – maybe not as work savvy but have insights, challenge status quo, more effect agents of change, than jaded eco-warriors that have been in the game for some time. They offer unique attributes which are undervalued."

"They have the basics. We've needed to give extra training to everybody we've taken on [but the] foundations are there."

"Educationally, graduates are probably better than they were 30 years ago ... [but] learning begins only after education."

"As long as they can get some work experience, if they've done a sandwich course or year in industry this is an advantage for them and for the employer – [there is] only so much you learn at university and work tends to be completely different."

"Nobody has the perfect qualifications but there's nothing wrong with the basic training they get. There is too much time looking at computer screens and believing this is reality. Apart from that, what you get from people with degrees is people with knowledge, then have to teach them how to apply to your work – [you] have to put effort in to get them up to speed for a year or so then [they are] valuable."

Employers: Negative comments

"Technically they are ok, in terms of applying it and writing reports. Commercial realities probably not."

"No: lack of report writing skills and technical ability."

"No: they have knowledge but don't have the experience or technical skills. Graduates have trouble when first starting. For example, when a graduate was given an air quality assessment to do they didn't know where to start."

"No: first year at university is spent getting people up to the same level so now degrees are effectively two years rather than three years; [we] expect graduates to have a higher level of numeracy than they have."

"Unfortunately they don't have any work experience." "Graduates didn't have specific skills and lacked the ability to work independently."

"Some graduates don't live up to expectations."

"They have communication problems (both verbally and written)."

"They haven't had the ability to problem solve or think for themselves."

17 employers said that they have not had negative experiences with graduates, seven had.

Three of the employers who felt graduates had the skill set required for entry level jobs said they mainly (or only) employed graduates who had done Masters degrees since

"they have more specialist knowledge [and] they have a better ability to write reports than those who haven't" and graduates with Masters are "more relevant to [their] business, better qualified and it shows a better dedication to the career."



Five employers felt graduates did not have the skill set required for entry level jobs. The most common grievance of this group, and those who had had negative experiences with graduates, was that graduates had poor communication skills (mainly written), poor technical ability and trouble working independently. However, only a few employers linked problems with graduate skill sets with a lack of work experience.

It is worth pondering then how problems with the skill set of graduates can be tackled. Can they be addressed by the education system? In theory, learning to write reports and work independently are skills which should be learnt at university by all students. Alternatively, can internships and work experience tackle these problems? Given that only a few employers linked the problem to a lack of work experience, perhaps it cannot. Also, would a short period of work experience actually teach graduates to work independently or improve their communication skills?

"Anybody who has worked in the industry for a while would say no, but I don't think there's been any change. All graduates are relatively inexperienced. They may not have the knowledge but they will gain this and they do have the competence." Employer

"There is a shortage of engineers and mathematical people. Most of the difficulties are with people not with vocational degrees. [You need] two skills, one to think straight and the other to spot rubbish. So these are two key skills." Employer

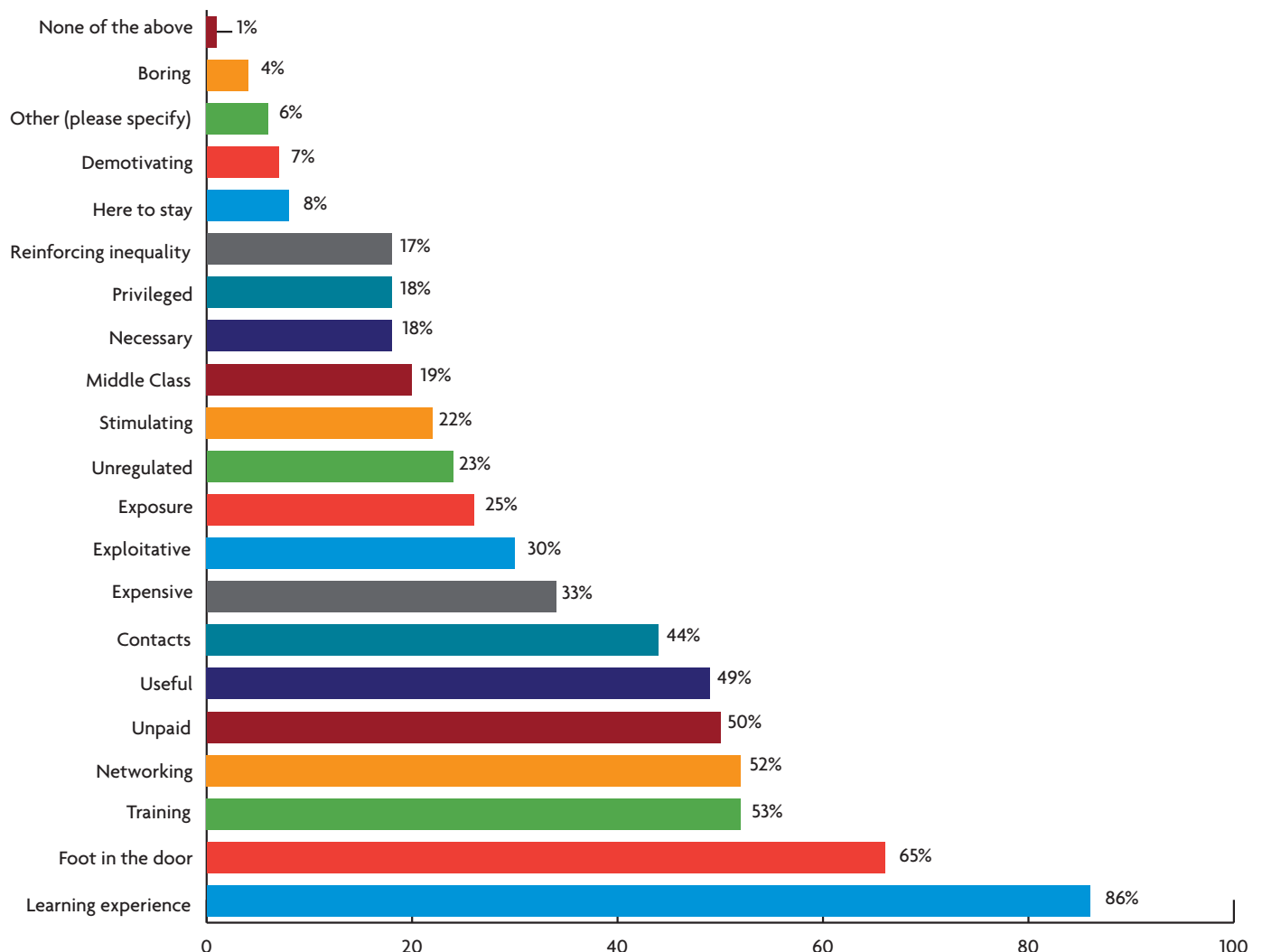
Opinions on Internships

Internships have been a hot topic in the national media in recent years. In the media, interns are largely presented as individuals from privileged backgrounds, because many positions are unpaid so they need parental support to support them for the duration of the internship. Internships are portrayed as providing a springboard to entry into competitive industries (Kelly, 2010).

The feelings of the graduate population as a whole towards internships and how graduates interpret internships is less well known. To gauge this information, survey participants were questioned on this subject (Fig 7).



▼ **Fig 7: Which, if any, of the following words/phrases would you use to describe internships?**
(Please tick all that apply)



Other comments included: “unfair to those who live far away from cities or who are unable to live at home”; “increased my self-esteem”; and “unpaid internships are illegal.”

It is noteworthy that 65% of graduates associate internships with a ‘foot in the door’ indicating, rightly or wrongly, that many believe internships are a method of breaking into particular sectors of the economy. This is consistent with some of the views expressed later in the survey, for example: “a good amount of time doing internships is expected in order to secure a full time position in any of the industries I was interested in”; and “I felt I could not find paid work without one [an internship]”. Also noteworthy are the response counts to ‘unpaid’, with 50% associating that word with internships, and ‘networks’ and ‘contacts’ indicating that people see internships as a way to break into a sector.

At the outset of the telephone questionnaire, employers were asked: ‘what springs to mind when you hear the term internship?’ in order to establish how internships are perceived in industry and establish whether there is a consistent view on the definition of an internship. Answers revealed many different and varied understandings of the term.

The question showed that there were many varied views on internships. These comments highlight several important points. Firstly, a number of employers associated internships with unpaid work. Secondly, only one employer felt that internships (generally) come about through word of mouth or through contacts. This is in contrast to the picture painted in the national media and political arena (Stratton, 2011).

Employers: What springs to mind when you hear the term internship?

“New graduates working for free because [they are] desperate for work.”

“Conjures up idea of a young inexperienced person spending a modest period of time doing defined tasks, which are beneficial to the company as well as individual. Generally comes about through word of mouth rather than an organised program.”

“Some poor sod who gives time for free to get into an area he is interested in which is normally over-subscribed. The reality is that they should not try to get into over-subscribed [areas].”

“Internships range from informal placements of different sorts which may or may not be connected to a degree to very formal arrangements (e.g. with good salary). Covers a multitude of sins: from ones which are potentially exploitative to ones which are extremely valuable.”

“Free work experience but [I] don’t think [it] should not be paid.”

“Now internships are expected – university career teams encouraging and framing them as prerequisite.”

“Only that companies are taking on interns with the idea that they train them up but there’s no salary involved. Possibly to give them work experience which is fair enough but they are getting something from the graduates.”

“Paid placement for a certain length of time.”

“Undergraduate sponsored by company who goes back to that company after they graduate.”

“Essentially a potential employee who work for no charge.”

Thirdly there are discrepancies between employers on what they believe an internship is, for example, ten employers associated internships partly or wholly with unpaid work whereas others associated internships with paid placements.

Twenty-one employers said they believed there was a role for internships in the labour market (although many of these were conditional, for example provided it was paid). Only three gave a definite 'no', but it is again worth noting that there was some ambiguity over the definition of an internship. Some employers gave expanded answers to these questions, these included:

Employers: Do you believe there is a role in the job market for internships?

"Increasingly there is a role because it is structured in away to allow both sides to see whether they like each other without need for a high level of commitment from the organisation and employee."

"For some companies, no doubt there is. This is an American aberration which has entered into the sphere of the industry but if there is a person who can do a job and it exists then they should be paid for it."

"They benefit both parties: company and individual. I do have a worry that some may see it as a way of getting people in for short periods with little intention of taking them on full time."

"It is becoming more common as a result of [the] bad job market. [My] personal opinion is that it should be an exception not a rule and for a lot of graduates [it is] becoming the rule. [I] wouldn't work for free so [I] feel bad that they might have to."

"[I] think so - good for people who don't have [certain] skills but risk of them being exploited. Need best practice guidelines."

"The word 'experience' comes up so often when students apply for jobs and those who haven't any are often very downhearted. Internships will at least give you that experience. Some provide incredibly good experience and a job at the end."

"Internships do not need to just be for graduates. A degree is not even required for consultancy."

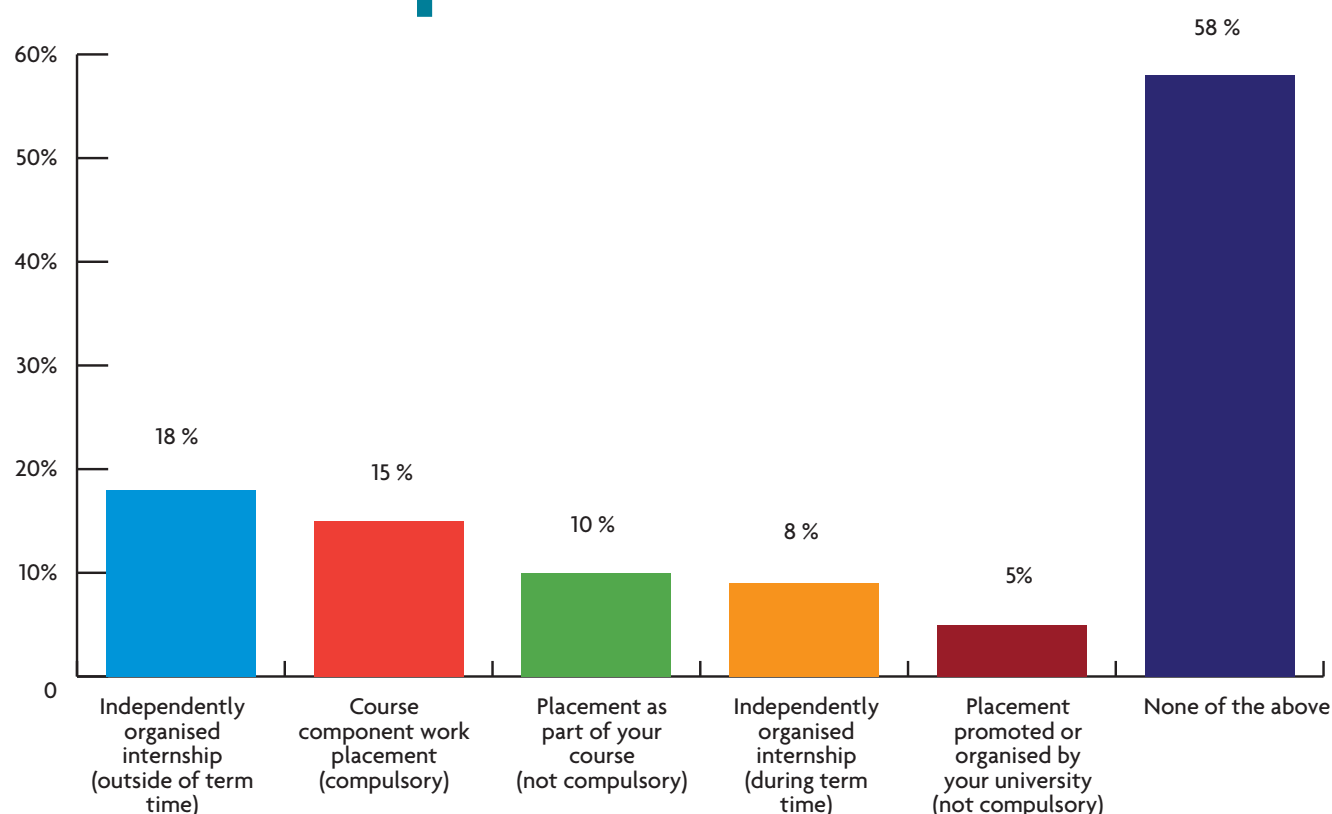
"Most definitely, particularly for charities. [I'm] concerned about exploitation. A lot of interns have been able to get into [the] work they want because of experience. [They should] use a quality assurance framework."

"In relation to the individual in terms of getting work experience and getting a flavour of the market place – does the business get anything out of it – questionable. I don't think [businesses say] 'let's get [an intern], they are fantastic.'"

"Yes it is important for the graduate and for the employer – who can see whether the person is suitable for potential employment. But conversely if [you] have someone [who is] not great [you] would not want to pursue that [person] and [it] could be a hindrance for the employer – if [they] need a lot of guidance and assistance. They should be interviewed as if it's a full time role."

"[There is a] role for undergraduate training in the job market which should be more formalised than internships where [you] just get people in for a few months then chuck them out. In my time [we had] apprenticeships – [they weren't] casual [they were] well done, [I] enjoyed it and [they] added a lot. Internships – seem more casual and being unpaid [is] not acceptable – should possibly be paid poorly but paid nonetheless and if the employment system does not allow for that then it should do."

Experiences of Internships and Placements



▲ Fig 8: Prior to graduating, which, if any, of the following did you undertake? (Tick all that apply)

It is worth noting here that 58% of the respondents had none of the experiences listed above. Consequently, this section of participants may have little or no work experience prior to graduation.

It was not possible to obtain data on the number of university students who completed placements or whether university placement years are becoming more common. Anecdotally, Professor Alan Smithers, director of the Centre for Education and Employment Research at the University of Buckingham, says: "Sandwich courses were set up by universities working with industry, but many of them were popular with neither students nor employers. Students were put off their subject because, for example in engineering, they spent a year filing bits

of metal in a factory, and it turned out most employers recruited engineering graduates from more academic universities anyway" (Warwicker, 2011).

It is not yet clear how the popularity of placement years will be affected by the forthcoming changes in university tuition fees. Aston University, who plan to charge £9,000 for courses beginning 2012, said that the fee increases meant it could increase the number of placements (BBC News, Birmingham and Black Country, 2011). For the academic year 2011-12 (before the changes in fees take place) the fee for a placement year ranges from as high as 50% of the full fee (The Complete University Guide (Durham University, 2011; University of Aston, 2011)) to around 20% (for example Nottingham Trent University, 2011; University of Kent, 2011; University

of Bath, 2011) to nothing (University of Hertfordshire, 2011). Among those who have released placement year fees for the students beginning the year 2012-13 are Oxford Brookes (2011) (£2,000 – 22% of the full fee), University of Sheffield (2011) (£1,100 – 12% of the full fee), University of York (2011) (£4,500 – 50% of the full fee) and University of Hertfordshire (2011) (no fee).

Table 2 indicates that there is no particular employment advantage in the undertaking a placement as part of a degree course.

	Graduate had undertaken some form of placement as part of their degree	Graduate had not undertaken a placement or internship prior to graduating
Employed (as a percentage of those in the respective column)	51%	58%
Unemployed (as a percentage of those in the respective column)	22%	23%
Currently studying on a career break (as a percentage of those in the respective column)	13%	14%
Currently undertaking an internship (as a percentage of those in the respective column)	16%	7%

▲ **Table 2: Placements, internships and employment statistics.**

Note: the graduates have been divided into the columns here by their answer to the question in Fig 8.

A Green Gap Year

A proposal that has been mooted by James Derounian (2011), Principal Lecturer in Community Development and Local Governance at the University of Gloucestershire, is that of a 'Green Gap Year'. This would involve a student between school and university "undertaking six months' green sustainability community service with a local community, in exchange, the individual would receive an educational credit worth, say £4,000, to be deducted from their first year tuition fees."

This would provide much needed work experience to students in sustainable development and hence could act as an alternative to internships and university placements. The scheme would also benefit the

community as a whole. Green gap years resemble university placements in that they both consist of taking a break of at least six months from full-time study (unlike internships which are generally undertaken in the summer break or post-graduation).

Students participating in this scheme would be volunteers and thus unpaid, raising some of the same issues as internships (except that they would have reduced fees for their first year at university). In addition, the scheme only lasts six months and therefore participants would need to find alternative activities for the other six months of their gap year. It is, however, common for gap year students to undertake paid employment for six months of their

gap year in order to fund the other six months. Given these points though, it is debatable that a Green Gap Year would be significantly more beneficial than a university placement. Derounian (2011) argues that those who undertake a green gap year will enter university with higher levels of maturity, as well as giving them the opportunity to decide if they would like to do something besides university.



An idea related to the ‘Green Gap Year’, and suggested by two employers in the telephone questionnaire, was that community focused work experience (such as that done at Groundwork, an environmental charity) might offer a desirable alternative to unpaid internships at for-profit companies. While the same or similar skills and competencies can be acquired and demonstrated through an internship (initiative, communication skills, organisational skills, commitment), this work experience would put the efforts of graduates toward projects which provide greater public benefit to the tax payer as a whole (as opposed to an unpaid internship for a profitable company where the work is pre-determined and confined to specific business interests).

Participants who had completed an internship were asked what tasks they were responsible for during their internships. The most common responses were: research, writing reports, data input/management, administration and communications.

Employers

Nine of the 30 employers surveyed took on interns but there was some ambiguity over what an intern meant (some were keen to stress that their interns were paid and some said that they took people on for work

experience or on a short-term basis). Employers who had taken on interns were asked which support services they offered (see Table 3).

The number of interns engaged by those employers who had taken on interns varied with values including: 1-2; 3-4; 10; and 40. Two of these employers said the number of interns they employ has increased over the past year, five said the number of interns had remained the same over the past year and two said the number of interns had decreased.

The type of work done on the internships included: research; graduate level work but “not easy stuff”; planning applications; writing supporting documents; briefing sheets on policy issues; compiling documents; baseline data gathering for assessment work; and shadowing. Several other comments were made by employers, including:

- “Interns start off doing desk-based work and then move on to site work.”
- “The work done depended on the background of the intern – if they had just come from a three year degree then they would be doing rather rudimentary work.”
- “Interns would not do much client facing.”

- “Interns do pretty much the same work as ordinary employees but not exactly the same.”

From this the conclusion can be drawn that interns are involved in a variety of different tasks and these tasks are not necessarily of a rudimentary nature. Therefore, it is not possible to define a typical intern in the environmental science and sustainability sectors. Research work and office-based work, however, appear to be the most common tasks performed by interns.

Placement versus internship

A placement is generally seen as a period of time spent working for an organisation as part of a university course. The placement is arranged by the university and may contribute credit to the degree of the student. The definition used in this report is that a placement is organised by a university and is part of a university course whereas an internship is neither organised by a university, nor part of a degree. Several graduate employers (e.g. Allianz) offer summer jobs to students in their penultimate year of university and these are termed as summer internships. In recent years there has been a growth in internships which take place after an individual has finished their degree (Heath and Potter, 2011).

What do you offer your interns?	Response count
One-to-one support	7
Appraisal at end of their placement	7
Face-to-face time with management	8
Learning outcomes	8

▲ Table 3: Support services offered by employers who take on interns

The Internship Charter is a voluntary code of practice established because with “the expansion of internships being promoted by the Government - more organisations will be considering internships, yet many of them will be unfamiliar with good management practice in this area. [The CIPD] see the establishment of The Internship Charter as only the beginning of a longer process of making internships fairer, more accessible and more productive, and leading to a properly regulated Kitemark scheme.”

1. Recruitment – Interns should be recruited in broadly the same way as regular employees of an organisation, with proper consideration given to how their skills and qualifications fit with the tasks they will be expected to fulfil. Recruitment should be conducted in an open and rigorous way to enable fair and equal access to available internships. The job advertisement should give a clear indication of how long the internship will last, and at interview, the intern should be told honestly whether there is a real chance of obtaining a full-time contract.

2. Induction – Interns should receive a proper induction to the organisation they enter to allow them to fully integrate. Whether joining a large organisation, or a small or medium enterprise, an Intern just entering the job market may find the workplace intimidating. It is important to introduce an intern to the staff and the values of the organisation to help them integrate into the team, and allow them to hit the ground running.

3. Supervision – Organisations should ensure there is a dedicated person(s) who has allowed time in their work schedule to supervise the intern and conduct regular performance reviews. This person should provide ongoing feedback to the intern, be their advocate and mentor during the period of internship, and conduct a formal performance review to evaluate the success of their time with the organisation.

4. Treatment – During their time with an organisation interns should be treated with exactly the same degree of professionalism and duty of care as regular employees. They should not be seen as ‘visitors’ to the organisation, or automatically assigned routine tasks that do not make use of their skills. Organisations should make some allowance for interns to, on occasion, attend job interviews or complete study requirements.

5. Payment and Duration - As a bare minimum, the organisation should cover any necessary work-related expenses incurred by the intern. This includes travel to and from work, and any travel costs incurred whilst attending external meetings/events. When making decisions about how much to pay interns, it is important to adhere to the relevant legislation at all times.

6. Certification/reference and feedback – On completion of their internship organisations should provide interns with a certificate/reference letter detailing the work they have undertaken, the skills and experience acquired, and the content of the formal performance review conducted at the end of the internship. Interns should also be offered the opportunity to give feedback on their experience in an ‘exit interview’, giving organisations the opportunity to reflect on its own performance in delivering internships.

(Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2009)

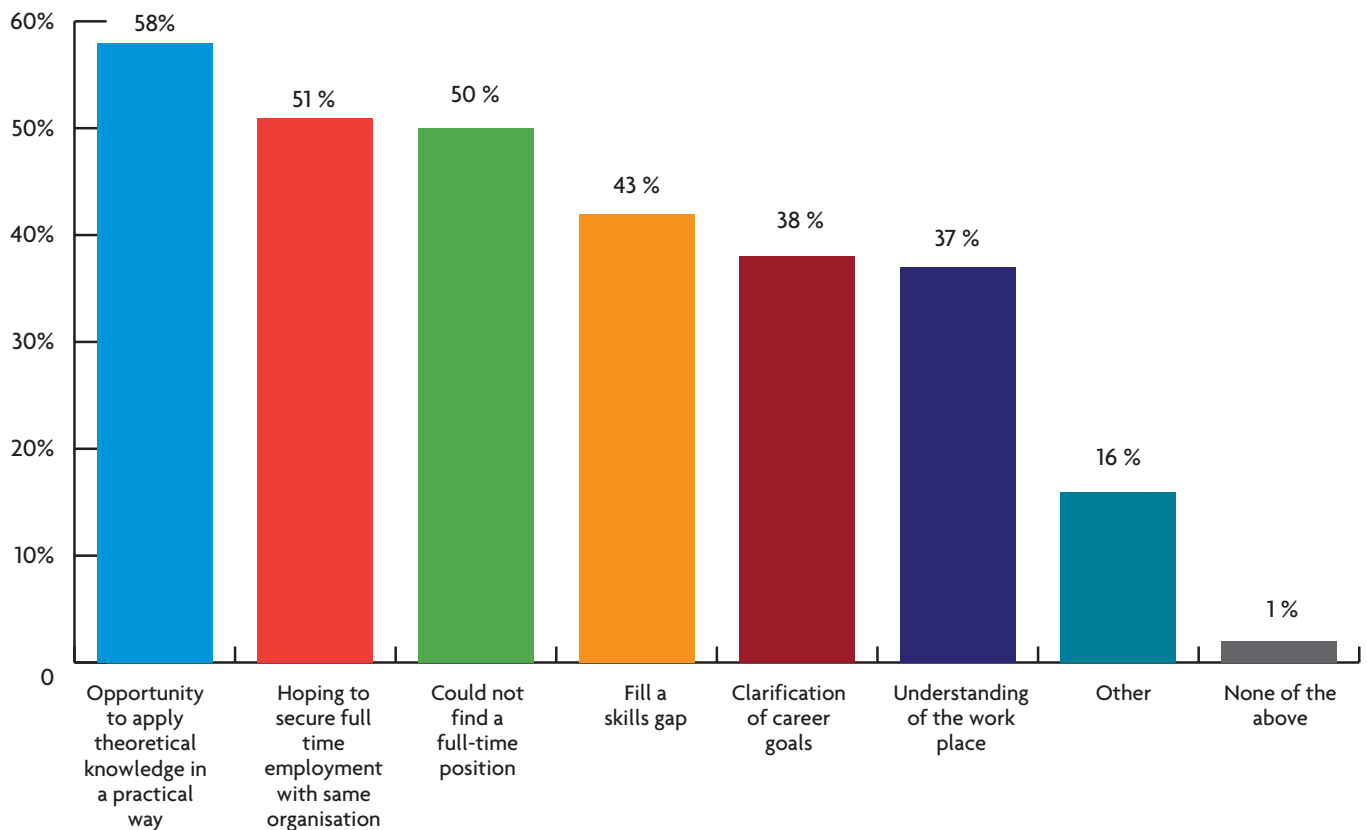
Motivations and Benefits

There are many different motivations for undertaking an internship. In the political arena and national media, internships are often viewed as providing a stepping stone to a professional career. This section seeks to establish the motivations of those who have completed an internship. These participants were also asked what benefits they gained or are gaining from their internship, allowing a comparison of the motivations with the actual benefits to be drawn.

Of the participants of the surveys, 142 had done an internship, including both those prior to graduating and after graduating. These participants identified their reasons for undertaking an internship (Fig 9).

'Internships are an important way of young people getting into the professional jobs market'

David Willetts MP, Universities Minister (Quoted in Vasagar, 2011)



▲ Fig 9: What, if any, were your reasons for seeking an internship? (Please tick all that apply)

"I couldn't get a job that I wanted so preferred to do an internship as opposed to getting a sales, administration or recruitment role - which is hard in itself anyway! I was lucky in that I lived at home in Birmingham so could live for free with my parents and had access to the city centre where my internships were based." Graduate

Other reasons included: “Could not find a challenging and rewarding paid job”; “A good amount of time doing internships is expected in order to secure a full-time position in any of the industries I was interested in – film, advertising or not-for-profit”; “Unable to get a paid job in the field of sustainability, despite degree”; “Networking with potential employers and to get a reference”; “To gain confidence”; and “General experience and to not appear [as if I was] lazing around.”

It is clear that there are many reasons for undertaking an internship. It is interesting to note that one of the most popular was ‘Could not find a full-time position’ (50%) whilst a similar number said they undertook an internship because they were hoping to obtain a full-time position at the same

organisation (Fig 9). This high percentage suggests that many people are doing internships just because they cannot find any work. This is supported by the fact that of those survey participants who were unemployed, 84% (of the 64 that disclosed this information) said that they would or have considered doing an internship to improve their employability (only 9% of the 64 answered ‘no’).



*“[I undertook an internship] to get a feel for the environmental field first because you don’t know exactly where you want to go and how organisations operate and it allows you to see where the options are in the environmental field, [and] get a better idea of what is out there and what direction to go in.”*Graduate

“One in five employers hire interns and out of the 800 graduates we have placed in internships over the last two years, over 65 per cent have led to permanent jobs with their host company afterwards.”

Andrew Scherer of Inspiring Inters, quoted in Evening Standard (2011), p. 57.

*“I think internships can be an excellent way for people to try out work in a sector and to find out what it’s really like. They also are a good way to gain experience which can help people to get into a sector.”*Graduate

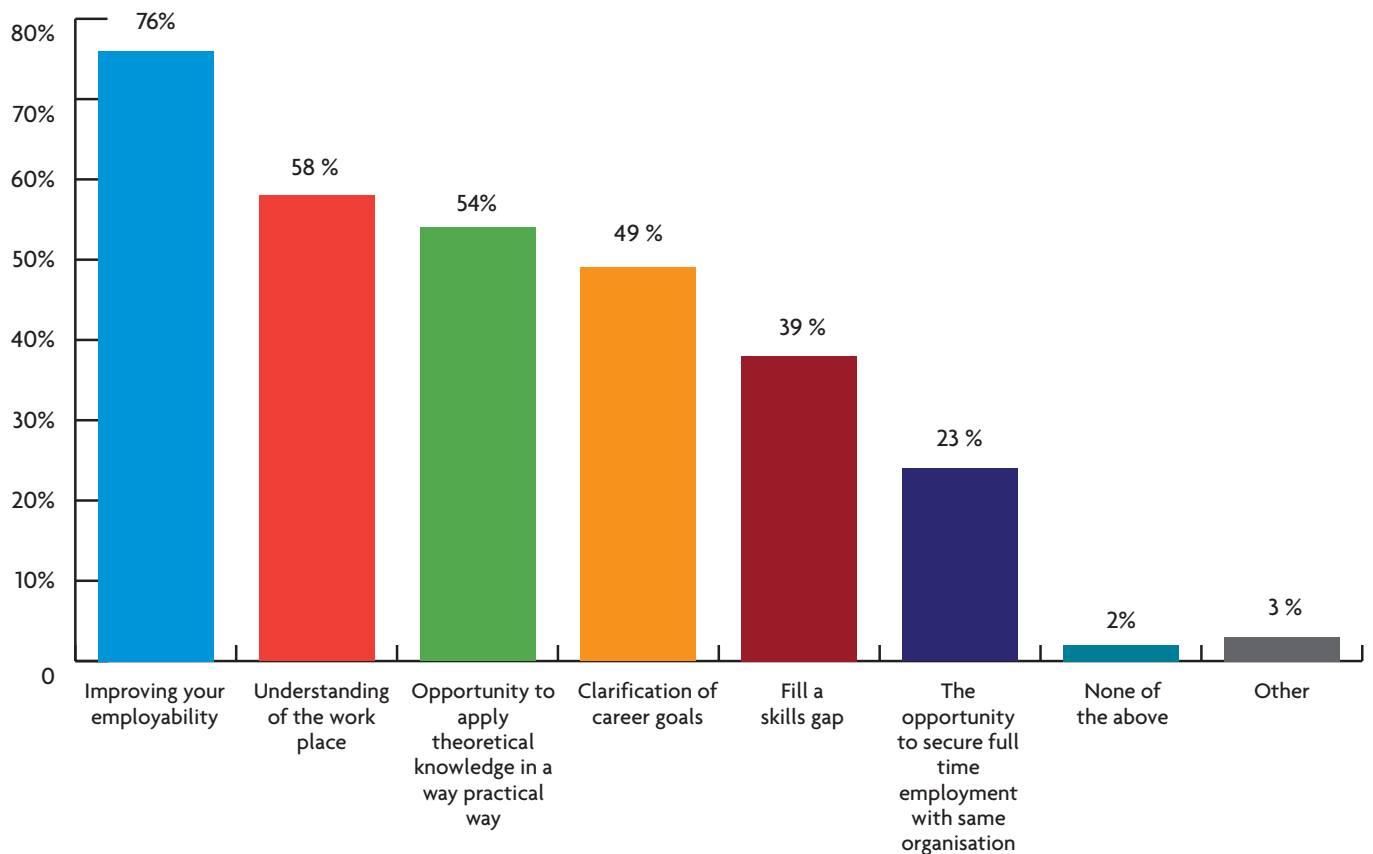
*“The benefits of the internship were related to having the routine of working life back again, and having some structure. This increased my self esteem, and also filled a gap on my CV.”*Graduate

*“I had been searching for paid employment for four months, and had been unable to secure anything ... I was not in a position to turn down any sort of work at this time, even if it was not directly related to what I wanted to do”.*Graduate

*“I didn’t like the idea of doing nothing whilst seeking employment so I saw no reason not to improve my job prospects whilst simultaneously applying for paid roles. I had to work very hard in more than one part-time and casual paid roles in bars, restaurants and hotels around my internship to support myself during this time. I felt that it was better for me to prioritise increasing my experience in the sector I wish to work in rather than taking on a better paid, full-time office job to work for money alone.”*Graduate

*“I had taken voluntary redundancy from my previous job, and wanted to keep active but also gain experience in a charitable organisation rather than corporate.”*Graduate

*“My experience as an intern left me with a very clear idea of my future career aspirations and a clear path of how to achieve my goals.”*Graduate



▲ **Fig 10: Which, if any, of the following benefits do you feel you gained or are gaining from the internship?** (Tick all that apply)

'Improving your employability' was selected by 75% of all participants which is consistent with the motivations for undertaking an internship (Fig 9), i.e. internships are (to a large proportion of people) delivering the expected outcomes.

There are some interesting comparisons that can be made between Fig 9 and 10:

- 50% of respondents gave as a reason for seeking an internship 'the hope of securing a full-time position with the same organisation' but when asked what benefits they gained or were gaining from an internship only 23% said the opportunity to secure full-time employment with the same organisation. This indicates that many organisations who employ interns do not offer the interns a full-time position at the end.
- 38% of respondents said that they sought an internship to clarify their career goals. When asked whether their internship experience had provided this clarification, a total of 49% answered 'yes' which suggests this is an unexpected benefit of internships.

Whilst three-quarters of respondents said their internship had or was improving their employability, the remaining quarter still thought that their internship did not help their employability. This suggests there is scope for the internship experience to be improved.

Employers who had taken on interns in the past were asked why they did so. Employers who had never taken on an intern were asked what they considered to be the main benefits of taking on graduates on a temporary basis. Response to both questions are captured on the next page.

This is not a large enough sample (30) to draw strong conclusions about why employers take on interns. In the national media internships are presented as benefiting employers in terms of recruitment allowing them to 'test people out' as well as giving potential recruits enhanced work-preparedness (Kelly, 2010). This is consistent with some of the quotes above.

The employers who had taken on interns were also asked what the main benefits of taking someone on a temporary basis. Several benefits were given including:

- "Small amount of additional capacity to carry out a task [a company] might want done. But a lot of capacity needed to get [interns] up to speed."
- "Manage surges in work and to help in the holiday period."

Employers: Reasons for taking on interns

Had taken on intern

"We were approached by a person who asked to be taken on as an intern"

"Involvement with MSc - [we] knew of him and he knew of us. Believed [it would be] useful to have someone of the grade helping on a variety of projects. Frankly they're cheap. Belief that it would be the right thing to do for graduates."

"Partly for graduates to get experience. Partly because there is a short term need for hands to do some work."

"[Financially] beneficial because [we can] try people out for specified period of time. Long enough to test people's aptitude ability, and where aspirations lie."

"Almost a triumph before you start - if the person fits in at the company then they would be given a job offer; if it doesn't work out for the intern then they still get work experience which they can highlight on their C.V."

Had not taken on interns

"Short term contracts - allows us to evaluate people (whether we want to take people on) - temporary means that we are not tied down by financial burden"

"New insights and perspectives"

"Find someone who can work for company on permanent basis"

"Giving graduates an insight into the working environment"

"[Benefits] for them [the graduate], not for us [the employer]"

"Potential to get a good employee - can see who [you] want and don't want. Easy to make mistakes when taking on new employees and [to] recruit people [you] don't actually want."

- "Fundamentally for employer to find out about the graduate's strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes and ability and chance for the graduate to see whether it is the type of organisation they want to work for."
- "Business perspective: additional short-term resource which is cheap. Develop relationship with someone you might want to take on permanent employment."
- "Reduce costs - if we didn't have enough work to take on a graduate full-time on a permanent basis but had 50% of the work needed to take someone on full-time then we could take on a (paid) graduate full-time on a temporary basis to do that work."

The utilisation of interns benefits companies not just in the recruitment process, but also by reducing workloads. This has implications if the internship is unpaid regarding the National Minimum Wage (it is not necessarily the case that the internships above were unpaid). This also suggests that interns make a valuable contribution to their organisations.

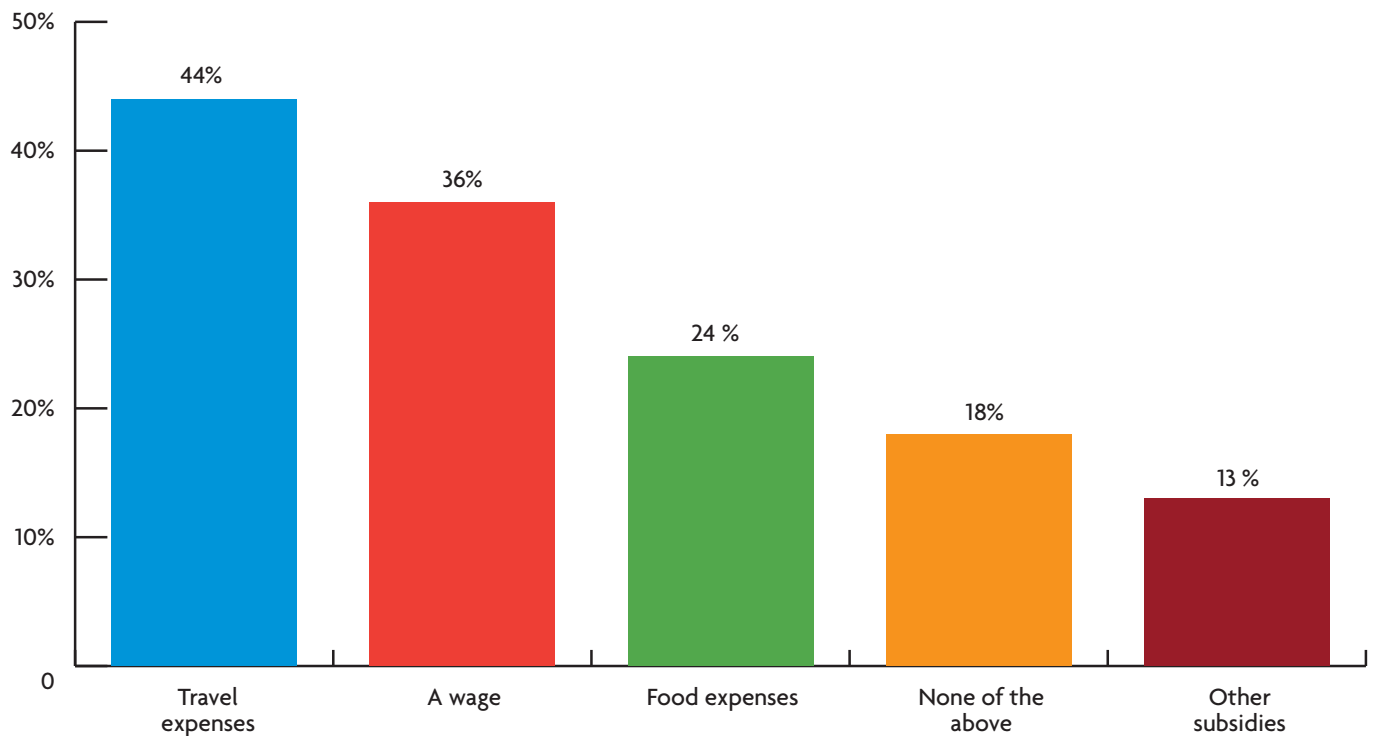
Seven of these nine employers said that on the whole their internship experiences had been either positive or very positive.

Olofson (2011) wrote in the Evening Standard that "Critics suggest that internships are replacing graduate jobs as employers are using them as a cheap way to fill entry level jobs". It is worth examining the logic behind this. Would employers replace graduate jobs - which entail a graduate working for the organisation for a significant amount

of time and building up the skills and experience to become an important member of the future workforce - with a rolling scheme (internships) of people working for a short period of time? It seems more logical that interns would be used as a cheap way to carry out work that needs to be done and as a recruitment tool for employers to get a sample of potential employees (this is borne out by the telephone questionnaires).

In 2011 a poll of 100 recruiters found that a third of graduate vacancies this year went to students who had already worked for their firm (Vasagar, 2011). This suggests that at least some of those who do internships for an organisation will be likely to get one of the graduate jobs at that organisation; these internships are therefore effectively the new graduate jobs. It is in this way that internships could be seen as replacing graduate jobs.

Paid or Unpaid?



▲ Fig 11: What, if any, were/are the financial benefits of your internship? (Tick all that apply)

There are some important ethical issues around paying interns. An unpaid internship shifts the financial burden of supporting an individual from the employer to the family. Working for free can create a race for the bottom: Why would an employer pay for something they can get for free? It also raises the question of whether certain types of work have lost all value in the modern economy.

Throughout the surveys it is apparent that there is confusion over whether internships are paid or unpaid. Of graduate participants, 50% described internships as unpaid. When asked 'what comes to mind when they hear the term internship?' nine employers said either 'unpaid work' or even 'cheap labour'. One employer said that if an

internship was paid, then it should not be called an internship. In the sector some internships are paid: 36% of survey participants who had undertaken an internship were paid a wage (Fig 11).

When asked what improvements they would make to the quality of the internship they undertook or are doing, the majority said that they would have liked a wage.

"I want to see internships overhauled, too many extremely talented people are paid little for contributing a lot. Considering this is the future workforce, it's not very clever to think so short term and alienate people just starting their careers, it generates mistrust. A small wage means the world to graduates." Graduate who had undertaken an internship

The majority of internships in Fig 11 (65%) are unpaid but a significant proportion (35%) are paid, challenging some of the widely held assumptions that internships are unpaid work. 56% of the interns were not paid travel expenses. Perhaps a cause for even more concern is the 17% of respondents who said that they were given no reimbursements whatsoever. These financial statistics emphasise accessibility issues around internships (Fig 12). The Gateways to the Professions Collaborative Forum (2011) recommend that all internships be paid the minimum wage. It is possible that nearly two-thirds of internships might disappear if this proposal was adopted.

Of the employers who took on interns, the breakdown of the financial terms of their internship programmes is summarised in Table 4.

One of the employers said that their interns would not be paid if they were shadowing someone in the company but would be paid otherwise. Fifteen of the twenty-one employers who did not employ interns said that interns should be given financial support (see Table 6).

What financial terms do you offer your interns?	Response count
Expenses (travel and/or lunch expenses)	3
Paid	3
Pro-rata rate salary	2
Monthly sum agreed in excess of expenses	1

► **Table 4: Financial terms of internships**

One survey participant who had undertaken both a paid and unpaid internship said that on her paid internship she *"didn't have a line manager or any professional development support, people didn't go out of their way to help me like in my unpaid internship ... because I was paid it was sort of like people thought I should be grateful for the experience."* Graduate

"Internships where not even expenses are paid must be stopped, and more stringent application of the national minimum wage must be implemented to all organisations." Graduate who had undertaken an internship

"I think that internships should, as a minimum requirement, provide expenses so that the intern isn't out of pocket, as otherwise, it may not be equally available to everyone. The exception to this would perhaps be small charities, an area that many people want experience in, but perhaps could not afford to pay even expenses." Graduate who had undertaken an internship

National minimum wage guidelines

"For national minimum wage purposes there are no special rules in respect of interns. Whether or not someone is entitled to be paid the national minimum wage depends on whether they are a "worker" under national minimum wage legislation. If they are a "worker" they are entitled to be paid at least the national minimum wage unless a specific exemption applies.

A "worker" is someone who works under a contract of employment or any other kind of contract (express or implied) whereby they undertake to do work personally for someone else (and they are not genuinely self-employed).

A contract does not have to be written and can be oral or implied. Key elements in establishing whether someone has a worker's contract include:

- Whether there is an obligation on the individual to perform the work and an obligation on the employer to provide the work, and*
- Whether the individual is rewarded for the work by money or benefits.*

You can advertise unpaid internships but if the actual working arrangements are such that the person is a "worker" then you will have to pay them at least the national minimum wage by law."

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011)

In addition to national minimum wage legislation a host of other legislation should be considered by both interns and employers including sick leave, overtime and other workplace rights. Volunteers, for example, do not have the rights of an ordinary employee or worker since they do not have a contract of employment, but they do have the same health and safety and data protection rights as ordinary employees (DirectGov, 2011). The surveys reinforce the view that there is a need for greater awareness of the legal and financial issues surrounding internships.

"Interns must be aware that they are ripe for exploitation and must be aware of their rights and question practises they are uncomfortable with." Graduate

Constraints

The issue of the accessibility of internships (particularly unpaid internships) has been a subject of debate in both politics and the media in recent months. In April 2011, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg commented “For too long, internships have been the almost exclusive preserve of the sharp-elbowed and the well-connected. Unfair, informal internships can rig the market in favour of those who already have opportunities” (Stratton, 2011). Furthermore, there have been reports of internships at financial organisations being auctioned for large sums of money (up to £3,500 for a few weeks work experience) (Walters and Brendan, 2011).

There have been arguments that there is a regional bias to internships which are mostly in London: “A working class Londoner could feasibly live at home and intern in a middle class dominated field like journalism or politics, but a middle class northerner would need a massive amount of parental capital or private income to finance a flat, food, and travel [in London]. A working class northerner would struggle even more to find these resources” (O’Mahony, 2011).

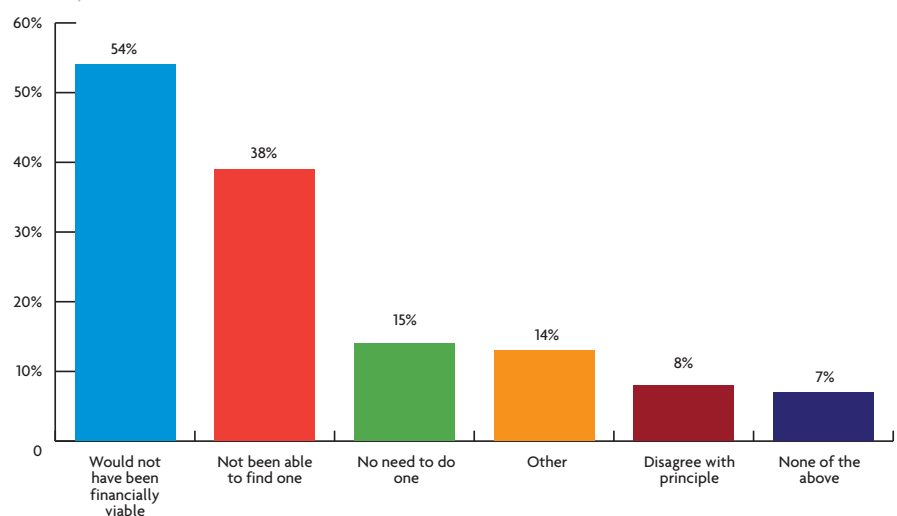
Graduates

The 218 participants who had not undertaken an internship were asked why they had not (fig 12).

Reasons included: “I cannot sustain myself working in expensive cities like London without pay in an internship full time [and] with no future prospects”; “no guarantee of a job at the end”; “too much competition”; “struggling to find internships outside London”; “internship(s) seems to be an excuse to employ cheap labour”; “[I] would prefer a temp-to-perm contract”; and “internships were less prevalent when I graduated in 2001.”

53% of survey participants who had

We need to ensure that the jobs market is fair all the way up to the very top. Success should be based on what you do, not who you know. A large number of the professions remain dominated by a small section of society”
H M Government, Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility, 2011, p. 7.



► **Fig 12: Which of the following, if any, best describes why you have not done an internship? (Tick all that apply)**

not undertaken an internship said that they did so because it was not financially viable. This suggests that there is a problem with the accessibility of internships. The results show that over half of survey participants were excluded from the candidacy of internships because of their financial situation, or by their perception of the financial implications of an internship.

This figure also suggests that paid internships are either competitive or hard to come by. O’Mahony (2011) claims that one of the main causes of the financial restrictiveness of unpaid internships is that they are mostly in London, restricting accessibility of individuals residing outside the capital, is also supported by the comments above.

It is interesting to note that 38% (Fig 12) said they could not find an internship. There are several possible reasons for this: internships are biased towards those who are well connected; that internships are competitive; internships are not available for particular occupations; or that there is a scarcity of internships.



Employers

21 of the 30 employers surveyed had never employed an intern.

There is no overriding reason why these employers do not take on interns although the most popular reasons were the training required ('lack of staff time for training' and 'training required would make short placement for graduates unfeasible') and that they are viewed as unnecessary ('no need' and 'do not need additional staff time beyond employees').

The fact that there was no need for extra staff at many of these companies suggests it will be difficult to ensure that all graduates obtain work experience (apart from perhaps shadowing) in the form of a placement or internship and that competition for the internships that are available will be high.

Many employers cited the training required as a reason, suggesting that internships are simply unfeasible (and not attractive) in many areas of the environmental sector. This reinforces the point given by an employer (see Graduate Employment in the Sector) that graduates are discriminated against in difficult economic times because they require a large input of training.

It is worth noting that the data above provides an argument for internship accreditation or brokerage where interns would be given an induction and professional support by a professional body, charity or university. A scheme of this type has the potential to resolve the issues of lack of staff training or the infeasibility of training for short placements.

Which of the following are reasons why you do not take on interns?	Response count
Lack of staff time for training	9
No need	8
Do not need additional staff time beyond employees	7
Training required would make short placement for graduates unfeasible	7
Financial reasons	5
Do not believe work suited to internship	5
No office space	2
Ethical reasons	2
Believe them to be a waste of time	0

▲ **Table 5: Reasons for not taking on interns** Note: question asked to 20 of the 21 employers who did not have interns.

A business compact on social mobility

As part of the compact, businesses commit to:

1. Support communities and local schools

- Participate in mentoring schemes for young people, allow staff time off and reward them for getting involved and enable schools and businesses to work together
- Encourage staff at least once a year to talk about their careers as part of a programme to raise aspiration and build knowledge about the world of work

2. Improve skills and create jobs by providing opportunities for all young people to get a foot on the ladder

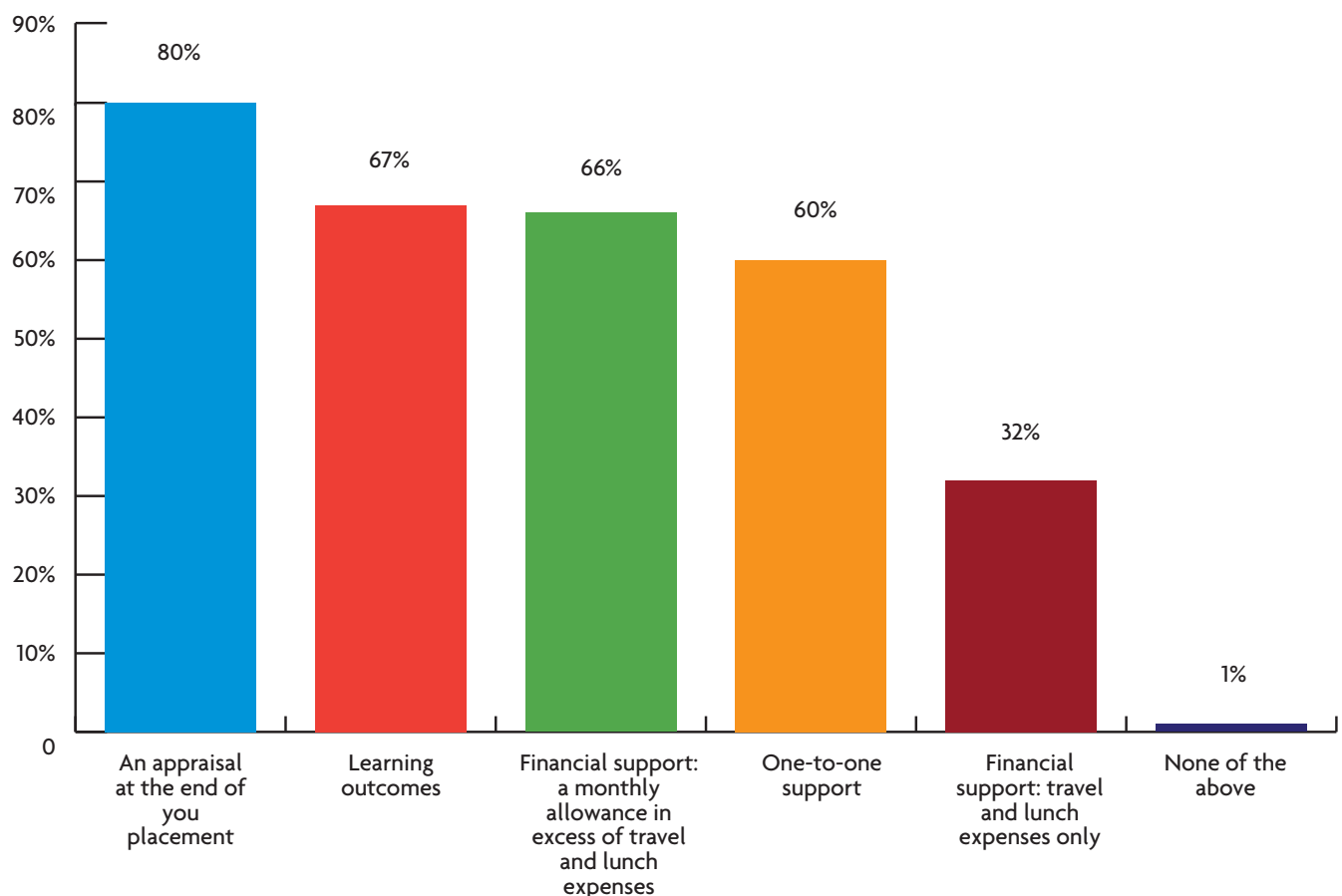
- Advertise work experience opportunities in local schools rather than filling them through informal networks
- Offer internships openly and transparently and provide financial support to ensure fair access.

3. Improve quality of life and wellbeing by recruiting openly and fairly, ensuring non-discrimination

- Including increased use of name-blind and school-blind applications where appropriate.

HM Government (2011), p.58.

Content



▲ **Fig 13: If you were to do an internship, which, if any, of the following would you expect from your employer?** (Please tick all that apply)

Graduates

Individuals undertaking internships hope that they provide a learning experience that leads to future employment. Alternatively employers may view internships as flexible, temporary and inexpensive labour. How does this conflict between productivity and personal development materialise in the sector? Are internships anything more than a rite of passage, serving more of a cultural function than professional development?

Various comments were made by the participants regarding what they would

expect from an employer during an internship including: “support should be balanced against financial reward – lower pay means more support and training”; “a reference”; “opportunity of a job on completion”; “real work to do”; “more training”; “openness and exposure to a broad range of work”; and “help and support for finding paid work after the internship.”

Some general comments included: “I have only had appraisals and learning outcomes in one of four internships”; “from what I have heard, when you do work peripheral to the organisation

you get limited support”; and “if the internship consisted of work shadowing for a short time I would not expect to be paid.”

As mentioned earlier in the report, 83% of the participants felt there was a role for internships in the job market (Fig 3). Fig 14 suggests that this is conditional on several factors, for example 79% of participants thought that employers should provide an appraisal at the end of their placement.

When asked what improvements they would make to the internship

graduates provided many answers including: “one-to-one training or feedback on performance”; “provide more transparency on employability – internships need to be clearer on future employment options”; and “allow interns to be involved in a wider range of projects.”

66% said they would expect financial support and many of those doing an internship said that being paid would improve the quality of the experience. This indicates that among graduates there is a widely held view that internships should be paid.

Employers

Expectations on the content of internships need to be met for both interns and employers. Employers were asked what they would expect an organisation to offer its interns (Table 6).

It is interesting to note the differences between these views and what was actually provided by those who took on interns (Table 3). 62% of employers thought that one-to-one support

What from the following do you believe an employer should offer an intern, they were to run such a scheme?	Response count
Face-to-face time with management	16
Appraisal at end of their placement	15
Learning outcomes	15
Financial support	15
One-to-one support	13

▲ **Table 6: What should an employer offer interns?**

should be offered (Table 6) but 78% of those running an internship offered this (Table 3). The figures respectively for appraisal are 71% compared to 78%; face-to-face time with management 76% compared to 89%; learning outcomes 71% compared to 89% (this perhaps demonstrates a gap between what employers think they need to provide and what they end up supplying once their schemes begin).

The 21 employers who had not taken on an intern were asked what type of

work they thought was the norm among interns and what type of work did they think was appropriate. (shown below).

Again it is interesting to compare what is actually done on internships with what is perceived to be done. Intriguingly one employer said that he thought the norm was for interns to be given non-challenging work – perhaps this is indeed the case but those who ran internships were not prepared to say so. Otherwise there were no significant differences.

Employers: Types of work given to graduates

“Field work and practical work.”

“Work that is appropriate to skill set of intern. Less client-based and more office or desk-based.”

“Analysis of consultations; writing papers about proposals; more analytic than negotiation; admin.”

“We would expect them to do project work, production work mainly, but also things like keeping administration of the office.”

“In a supportive role to our projects and teams. Increase their own knowledge and learn how to review the legislation or with some software many aspects.”

“Mainly office based.”

“Its normal for them to be given non-challenging work which is easy for staff to pass on; tedious work - but this is not appropriate for learning. It would be more appropriate for them to experience a range of work but this is difficult to organise.”

“Put them through all environmental fields – give them a chance to experience all type of work Supporting different discipline teams and also different individuals, to learn how they work.”

“Need to be seeing what the work really involves e.g. going on site visits and [they] do need to have an input, so they can take notes and become able to complete reports.”

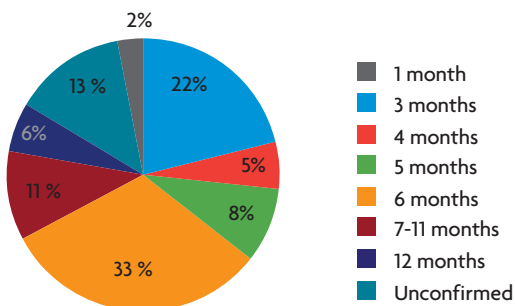
Length

There is a difference between what is viewed as an appropriate length and the actual length of an internship. 51% of those who were currently undertaking an internship said their internship was lasting six months or longer whilst the most popular view on an appropriate time length for an internship given in Fig 15 was three months.

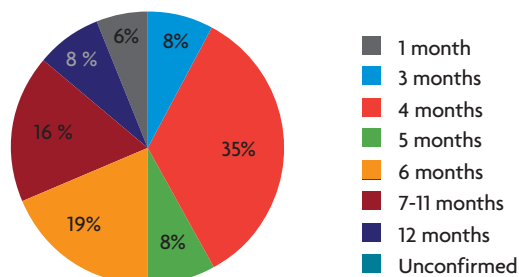
Responses from both employers and graduates included: “depends on whether it is paid”; “depends on the work being done”; and “depends on the likelihood that the internship will be followed by a paid position”.

The nine employers surveyed who had taken on interns were asked how long their internships were, their responses ranged from six weeks to “approximately 1-3 years”. Responses ranged from two weeks to 18 months from employers who had not taken on interns.

These varying employer views suggest different professions require different internship lengths. The authors therefore refrain from suggesting a suitable length for an internship, unless it is unpaid, in which case the question of accessibility becomes important.



▲ Fig 14: For those currently doing an internship, how long is your internship placement?



▲ Fig 15: What, if any, do you consider to be an appropriate length of time for an internship?

Recruitment

All employers surveyed were asked if they were able to contact high quality graduates. Seven employers answered 'no' to this question and 12 employers answered 'yes'. There were some answers of interest to this question including:

- "In the last couple of years the employment market has been difficult but now there are a plethora of applicants."
- "There's no shortage of highly qualified people able to do the work for you. But [it is] easier to train a knowledgeable engineer to be an environmental scientist than the other way round."

These comments point to deeper problems within the environmental field. Firstly, it suggests perhaps, at the moment at least, there is an oversupply of environmental science graduates. Therefore an 'internships-for-all strategy' would not solve the environmental science unemployment problem. Secondly, that there are problems with the training of environmental scientists.

The comments below suggest several courses of action for the IES and its members. Graduate members should take note of the comments regarding recruitment agencies. It also suggests that it might be beneficial to all parties if the IES could ensure more graduate level jobs are advertised on their website.

"No, [we] find [getting in touch with high quality graduates] very difficult. [I have a] frustration with graduates who are hopeless at contacting employers - lazy, just circulating c.v.'s [sic]. [I] find it depressing how seldom people write a letter to employers. That is an incredibly powerful thing.

[It is] hard for any individual with no experience to stand out but a well written letter makes them take notice because [it is] so rare. If able to write well and provide a coherent argument as to why they are interested in work will automatically get an interview."

"Most graduates come through agencies but we can't afford the fees. We have posted job adverts on our website but have little success with this." Employer

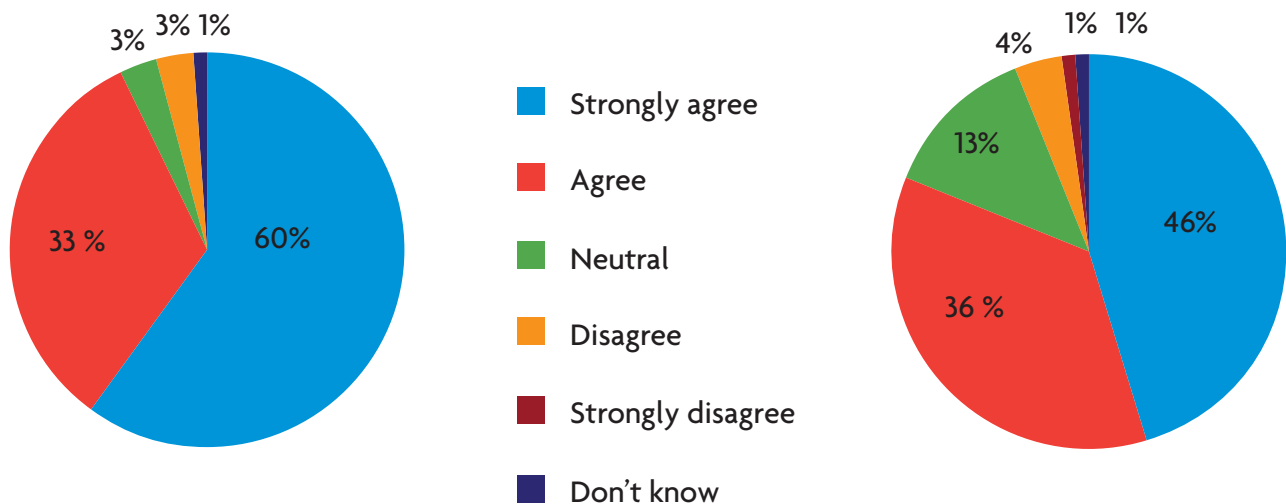
"A lot of companies don't like using recruitment consultants so my advice for graduates is don't go through these, apply to companies themselves." Employer

"It is difficult to track graduates down - [we] don't rely on recruitment consultants as they cost a lot of money and filtering isn't good. [We] go directly to universities for graduates." Employer

"[We] have a few employees in universities with MSc courses and HE institutions. But [there is] no formal way of getting hold of good graduates.

Why do graduates use recruitment companies? The thing that frustrates me is that MSc students, for example, don't normally do sufficient homework on what they are applying to or present, ridiculous to use recruitment consultants. They just don't work hard enough." Employer

Are They Worth Doing?



▲ **Fig 16: To what extent do you agree with the following statement? 'The internship will constitute a valuable experience for me'** Question was asked to those who were currently undertaking an internship.

▲ **Fig 17: To what extent do you agree with the following statement? 'The internship(s) constituted a valuable experience for me'** Question asked to those who had completed an internship.

92% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed their internship would constitute a valuable experience (Fig 16), but 82% of those who completed an internship agreed or strongly agreed that the experience was valuable (Fig 17). This suggests either the expectations of internships are higher than the reality, or some internships are poorly designed. However, less than 5% of respondents disagreed with the statement in Fig 17.

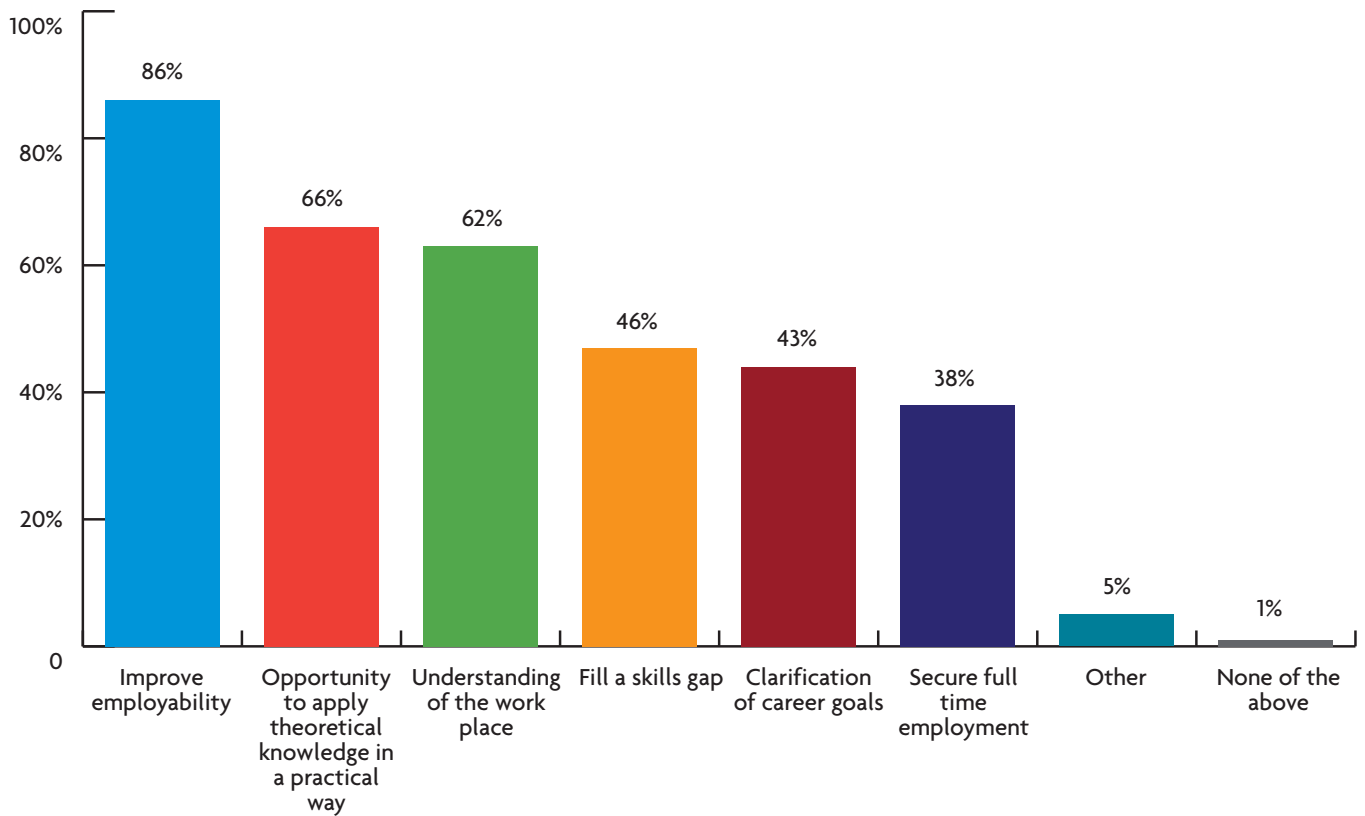
Of the 129 survey participants who were working in the environmental science or sustainability field, 49 (38%) had worked as an intern post-graduation to improve their employability. Of this group of 49 people, 46 said the internship had helped them to secure their current job (in the environmental science and sustainability sector).

These figures address one of the main motivations for carrying out this research: discovering whether internships act as a stepping stone to a career in the environmental sector. Albeit from a small sample, this data shows that post-graduation internships are providing a route into a career. 36% (more than one-third) of survey participants working in the environmental sector helped secure their job through an internship. There are also some accessibility issues here because, for example, only 35% of these internships were paid a wage.

The counter-argument is 80 out of 129 people working in the environmental sector did not need to undertake an internship post-graduation to secure their job.

Of those who were in employment and had undertaken an internship, 74% said the experience helped them to secure their current job, whilst 21% said that it had not. This lends further evidence to the view that internships are worth doing in certain circumstances. However, 18 of the 35 participants who were currently doing an internship had done one or more internships before. This shows that internships do not always lead directly to permanent employment.





▲ **Fig 18: What, if any, do you think are the key advantages of doing an internship?** (Please tick all that apply)

Other comments included: “often, it allows an employer to use unpaid labour for time consuming tasks”; “networking”; and “a reference”.

Fig 18 emphasises the large proportion that believe internships can lead to improved employability. This is important when considering whether internships can help to tackle the skill deficiencies identified by some employers.

Conclusions

Employment

There is currently a significant problem with graduate employment in all sectors: 20% of new graduates (graduated 1 month to 2 years ago) who were available for work were without a job in January 2011. At the start of the recession the graduate unemployment rate stood at 11 per cent (Paton, 2011). Of particular importance to the IES, there appear to be significant graduate employment problems within the field of environmental science: graduates have contacted the IES with stories of scores of unsuccessful applications; 23% of all survey participants were unemployed; 44% of students were not confident they would be able to secure full-time employment in the field of their choice; 76 out of 100 survey participants employed outside of the field said they had to leave the field because they could not find a job in it; 27% of unemployed survey participants who answered the question said that they had been unemployed for longer than six months; and employers (both those who were surveyed in this report and in other reports) testify of problems with the recruitment and skills of graduates.

The environmental science field is going through a particularly tough time as the global recession affects private and public sector jobs. Green jobs “have been hit by cuts, the sluggish economy & lack of policy clarity” (The Ends report, 2011). The Managing Director of Acre Resources, a recruitment consultancy, says “the environmental and sustainability jobs market is very different from 5 years ago – many of the traditional, technical environmental positions are yet to bounce back, such as those in contaminated land and roles related to construction” (The Ends report, 2011). A worrying picture of current and future trends in the environmental field is presented in The Ends report (2011) (Fig 19).

There appear to be three main reasons for the graduate employment problem in the environmental field:

1. The poor state of the environmental sector jobs market and the jobs market in general.

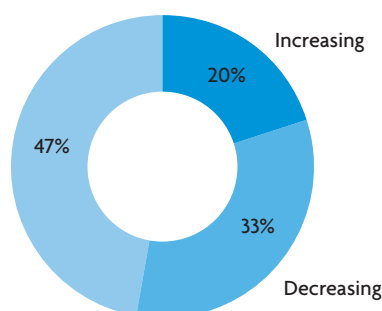
2. Graduates requiring more training than other staff (and training necessitates the investment of time and money) and thus are discriminated against during difficult economic times.

3. Graduates lacking certain work-place skills: they generally have limited work experience and this puts them at a disadvantage for certain roles; they lack soft skills such as the ability to communicate to a high standard (both written and verbal).

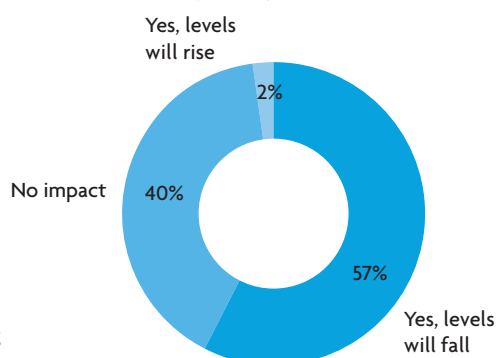
It can be concluded, at the current time at least, there are simply more environmental science graduates than there are environmental jobs. Of the those in employment, 76% had left the sector because they could not find a job in it and comments from employers highlight that jobs in the environmental sector are being hit hard by the recession.

There were some encouraging signs from the employers' questionnaire showing most employers were concerned about graduate unemployment in the sector.

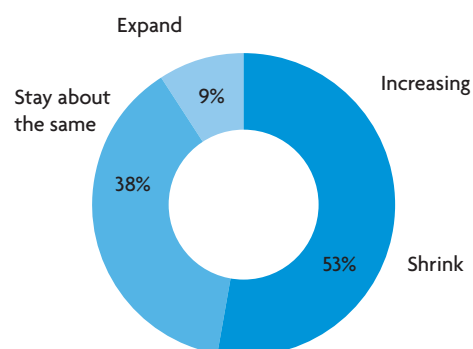
Are the numbers of environmental professionals employed by your organisation increasing decreasing or stable?



Do you think the public spending cuts will have a direct impact on environmental employment levels in your organisation?



Over the coming year, do you think UK environmental job opportunities as a whole will expand or shrink?



▲ **Figure 19: job prospects, The Ends report, 2011. Figures collated from Ends survey of 2,200 environmental professionals** (comprising of ENDS readers, visitors to ENDS' website and individuals affiliated to CIWEM and SocEnv).

General findings on internships

Terminology

There is ambiguity over the term, in particular with regards to the type of work and financial remuneration.

Learning

Internships are seen by graduates as a learning experience and something which improves employability.

Internships are an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in a practical way.

Uses

Interns help employers to complete work or are recruited when additional capacity is needed.

Interns carry out a variety of different tasks but the most common work assigned to interns is research and writing reports.

Post-graduation internships are acting as a stepping stone to a career in the environmental sector. They are not, however, the only route into the field.

Opinions

Overall, graduates believe there is a role for internships in the job market although this support is conditional on the career progression or financial benefits offered by the employer.

The majority of those who had done an internship found the experience valuable.

Over two thirds of employers said that there was a role for internships in the job market, although much of this support was subject to key criteria.

There are differences between opinions and perceptions of internships and the reality:

- The perceived suitable shorter length for an internship versus the longer length internships generally are;
- The association of internships with unpaid work versus the number that are paid;
- The low expectations of the services provided by employers for interns versus those that are in reality.

Accessibility

There is a scarcity of internships, especially paid internships or internships outside of London

Some people may be being forced into doing an internship because of the poor state of the job market.

Significant numbers of people do not undertake internships because they are not financially viable.

There is a significant regional bias to internships.

The data from the report is inconclusive over whether internships are restrictive to those without social connections.

Problems

The most common reasons for employers not taking on interns are the training that would be required and because they have no need for them.

A number of employers have difficulty recruiting high quality graduates.

Employability Skills

Reports and articles on the skill-set of graduates often state that graduates lack the skills (and in particular soft skills) needed for employment (Paton, 2008; Woolcock, 2010). The most common grievances of employers were that graduates had poor communication skills (mainly written), poor technical ability and trouble working independently. A few employers linked these problems with a lack of work experience.

Should or can education tackle these problems?

Firstly, we look at the question 'can education tackle graduate skill set problems?'

Issues raised by employers around technical ability will be problematic to deal with, given the range of environmental science and sustainability jobs requiring different skills sets. It therefore may be an unrealistic expectation for every graduate to be work-ready.

It was interesting that several employers said they only employed graduates with a Masters degree. One reason for this was they have better report writing skills. Maybe this suggests project work should be made compulsory in university degrees. It is debatable whether this would be feasible and likely to provide good results within a time-pressured university degree consisting of three 8-month years. Would there be enough student and staff time to learn this skill adequately? Furthermore it raises the question of whether it is within the remit of a scientific academic or the employer to teach these skills.

Problems with verbal communication skills could be addressed with a greater focus on presentation skills within university.

Given the nature of university study, working independently and written communication are skills which are surely already being taught at university. Furthermore, many employers in the telephone questionnaire said that graduates had the right training and foundations. Perhaps the problem is that either:

- Employers have unrealistic expectations of graduates at this stage of their career.
- Students know what is expected of them in university work whereas they do not know exactly what their employer requires from a piece of work. The fault therefore may lie in graduate staff induction and training.
- A different style of report writing is suited to Higher Education than to the workplace. It takes some time for a graduate to adapt their individual writing style to a particular company or sector.

A point worth addressing is whether universities would want to address problems with the skill-set of graduates themselves and indeed whether it would be worth their while to do so. Dr Wendy Piatt, Director General of the Russell Group, says that "Developing these high-level skills [such as problem-solving, analytical techniques, creative thinking and innovation, so that they are adaptable to new work environments] and qualities, rather than training for a specific job, is one of the vital roles universities should play" (Warwicker, 2011).

Professor John Brennan, director of the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information at the Open University, says that "Employability of graduates is a shared responsibility

between employers and universities, but you really have to consider whether you are in the business of preparing students for their first job or for lifelong careers" (Warwicker, M., 2011). Mick Warwicker (2011) in his article on education and employment, stated that "Brennan compared UK and German HE systems, concluding that graduates in each country might be at 'about the same point' by their late twenties, the German having spent a long period in vocational higher education, while the Briton gained experience of employment after a much shorter degree course." This suggests that the UK operates under a particular system for preparing graduates for the work force and that this is not necessarily worse than other systems.

A wider point here is that employers are perhaps laying all responsibility onto universities and schools, expecting them to do (a significant amount of) the training that is needed rather than shouldering the responsibility and the financial burden that this entails themselves. There is a potential impasse where either employers cannot provide the training needed, or simply will not, and therefore discriminate against employing graduates.

Can internships or work experience tackle these problems?

If employers state that graduates lack essential work-based skills and a third of graduate vacancies are going to those who have already worked for the firm (Paton, 2008; Vasagar, 2011; Woolcock, 2010) then it seems clear that a well-structured internship or period of work experience could help address this. However, many graduates seem to view internships as a chance gain insight into the content of a job rather than a learning experience (see Motivations and Benefits section).



Are they worth doing?

Table 7 shows no particular employment advantage to undertaking a placement as part of a degree course. The final column is very surprising; students who have not done a placement or internship prior to or after graduation have better employment records than those who have had one of these experiences. This data suggests that some of the benefits of undertaking a placement (and to a lesser extent internships) are questionable.

As some employers in the telephone questionnaire highlighted, employers now have an abundance of applicants and can afford to be very selective. Perhaps consequently employers are using work experience as an easy way to differentiate between applicants and in fact previous work experience is not necessary for many careers. This is supported by the majority of employer comments which asserted that graduates had the right foundations and training.

However, whilst the quantitative data suggests internships may not be worthwhile, the qualitative data contradicts this. Of those who were in employment and had undertaken an internship 74% felt the experience helped them to secure their current job and generally we received positive feedback about the experiences of internships and the constructive effect they had had on individuals.

"First priority is jobs not internships. [There are] equitable issues around internships which concern me. Starting point is that graduates need jobs. But if they can't get a job, better to do something in a voluntary capacity." Employer

	Graduate had undertaken some form of placement as part of their degree	Graduate had not undertaken a placement or internship prior to graduating but had postraduation	Graduates who had not undertaken a placement or internship prior to graduation or post graduation
Employed (as a percentage of those in the respective column)	50%	58%	73%
Unemployed (as a percentage of those in the respective column)	22%	23%	27%
Currently studying on a career break (as a percentage of those in the respective column)	12%	14%	0%
Currently undertaking an internship (as a percentage of those in the respective column)	16%	6%	0%

▲ Table 7: Placements, internships and employment statistics.

The views of the IES

Learning

Internships should have clear learning outcomes which work to supply both technical and general employment skills to graduates.

Key review stages should be integrated within the internship to allow the intern to understand their progress and to identify skill gains and gaps.

Accessibility

Employers should adopt the recommendations of the business compact (H M Government, 2011) on social mobility when advertising jobs. In particular:

- to advertise work experience opportunities rather than filling them through informal networks;
- to offer internships openly and transparently and provide financial support to ensure fair access;
- to recruit openly and fairly, ensuring non-discrimination including increased use of name-blind and school-blind applications where appropriate; and
- all placements and internships should be paid a decent wage (at least the minimum wage or London living wage). It must be noted that charities and voluntary organisations are often unable to offer a living or minimum wage, due to financial or operational constraints. Whilst this is recognised they should, where feasible, lead by example and investigate suitable remuneration.

Treatment of interns

Employers should follow the guidelines set out in the Internship Charter on recruitment, induction, supervision, treatment, references and feedback (see page 25).

There is a clear belief amongst IES members that there is a role for internships in the job market provided certain conditions are met. The IES believes there is a distinction to be made between employers who use well-planned internships as a recruitment and learning tool and those who use them to cut costs. The IES will work with employers to help them reach graduates and create transparent and non-exploitative internships which are truly accessible to all.

The environmental sector has long been associated with open and forward thinking values, which concentrate on preventing harm and promoting equality, not just for the planet but for people as well. For this reason, the IES believes that the sector can act as a beacon of best practice for others to follow.

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