

# **No Time for a Talent Quest?**

## **Internships**

**The intelligent  
staffing solution**

## Executive summary

This paper will discuss staffing challenges faced by many New Zealand employers and how securing an intern may offer solutions to these challenges. Areas to be discussed include:

- Difficulty in completing essential short-term projects.
- Problems in locating and securing high-quality permanent hires.
- Challenges in retaining the best and brightest staff.
- How university internship programmes provide a direct and efficient link to university-trained recruits.
- Important considerations in identifying a quality internship programme.
- The specific benefits offered by interns trained in the humanities and social sciences.

## The right kind of help

An extra pair of hands, and a good brain behind them. Focused help when and where it's needed.

## Unfinished business

A strong organisation relies on a strong team. But even with the best team, certain kinds of tasks never seem to get done. There are creative ideas hatched but left unexplored, compliance reporting that never makes it to the top of the list, and the policy paper that stubbornly refuses to write itself.

These are the projects that help an organisation prosper rather than just get by. They are important, but in the short term they may not be important enough to justify the cost of a new hire.

*We have the answer: participate in an internship programme.*

Evidence shows that 'by hiring and training student interns, [managers] can actually gain time, thereby freeing them up for projects long put on the back burner.'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Szadvari, L. (2008). *Intern Bridge*. Management Buy-In: The Most Crucial Component of Successful Internship Programs. 10 July 2009. [http://www.internbridge.com/white\\_papers/files/](http://www.internbridge.com/white_papers/files/)

## Feeding the recruitment pipeline

Internship programmes are also a critical recruiting tool for permanent positions in a world of skills shortages and a highly mobile global labour force. Where productivity is the word on everyone's lips, access to a skilled workforce is essential. This paper focuses on practical issues at a local level; for a discussion of the global context faced by employers, see Appendix A, 'Productivity and labour in the global village.'

## Good help is hard to find: challenges in the office

New Zealand is in the grips of a recession. But this temporary downturn does not change the big picture; skilled workers are in high demand, both now and into the foreseeable future. Today's high unemployment rate doesn't guarantee a surplus of willing workers whose skills match what employers need.

### Challenges in finding temporary staff

- **Locating quality temporary staff.** The skill levels of temporary staff may not be adequate for complex tasks.
- **The fraught world of consultants.** Consultants can provide more expertise than typical 'temporary staff', but the price tag is steep, and results can vary tremendously. It's a challenge to ensure value for money with such a substantial investment and no guarantee of a good outcome.

### Ongoing recruitment issues

- **Accessing the best and brightest.** Formal recruitment processes are costly and time-consuming, and often don't bring in people with the creative thinking and fresh ideas that can move an organisation forward.
- **Identifying the right person for a position.** Typical recruitment processes operate on tight timelines and with limited information about applicants, making it difficult to know how a candidate will perform in a position.



## Internships: a practical link between town and gown

An intern is a student, usually at university level, who undertakes temporary employment as part of their course of study. They usually receive academic credit for their work and any associated study, and may receive remuneration from the organisation where they are employed.

Interns are employed for a fixed term, and placement is facilitated by the student's tertiary institution. The work assigned to interns varies from that typical of many entry-level positions. It is meant to be challenging for the student and of real value to the employer: 'The role the student assumes within the organization is often one with a fair amount of responsibility.'<sup>2</sup>

Internationally, interns are placed in a wide variety of technical, business, creative and professional fields.

### Benefits of internship programmes

- **A good source of highly motivated and skilled temporary staff.** Successful university students have a strong skill set, fresh ideas, and a verifiable record of achievement.
- **Inexpensive access to temporary staff.** Most of the time and cost involved in making a placement of a student into an organisation is handled by the student's tertiary institution. 'Interviewing and hiring interns can be done at a fraction of the cost of recruiting new employees'<sup>3</sup>
- **A highly effective recruiting tool.**
  - '[M]ore and more companies are using their intern programs to replace on-campus recruiting. An internship is now a thinly disguised audition--for both the student and the employer--rather than a charitable learning opportunity. . . . what better way for both sides to find out if a relationship is a good fit than to test it out for a few months before fully committing?'<sup>4</sup>
  - This trial period produces a positive outcome in the majority of cases: 'In 2007, according to NACE [National Association of Colleges and Employers, USA], nearly 70 percent of interns received job offers from their internship employer, up from 57 percent in 2001.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Szadvari, L. (2008). *Intern Bridge*. Management Buy-In: The Most Crucial Component of Successful Internship Programs. 10 July 2009. [http://www.internbridge.com/white\\_papers/files/](http://www.internbridge.com/white_papers/files/)

<sup>3</sup> Mollien, J. (2008). *BNET*. The Need for Internship Programs. 3 August 2009. [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_hb4831/is\\_6\\_99/ai\\_n31643968/?tag=content:coll](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb4831/is_6_99/ai_n31643968/?tag=content:coll)

<sup>4</sup> Pollak, L. (2009). *The Thin Pink Line*. Internships are More Important Than Ever. 3 August 2009. <http://thethinpinkline.com/2009/07/14/internships-are-more-important-than-ever/>

<sup>5</sup> Occupational Outlook Quarterly (2008). *BNET*. Internships on the Rise. 05 Aug. 2009. [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa5448/is\\_200807/ai\\_n27996380/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa5448/is_200807/ai_n27996380/)

- **Improved retention rates.** NACE surveys indicate that '[m]ore than one third of employers reported higher retention rates among those converted from intern to employee within the first year of hire, and nearly half said former interns had higher retention rates after five years post-hire.'<sup>6</sup>
- **The backing of reputable institutions.** Unlike consultants, whose reputation and history may be difficult to access, internships are linked with established tertiary institutions.

Participating in an internship programme can offer these and other benefits<sup>7</sup>, but a successful outcome depends on several key factors.

## Things to consider

As with all business decisions, the benefits of taking on interns need to outweigh the costs. These factors are crucial in making the internship worthwhile:



1. **A good match.** The single most important factor in producing a successful outcome is a good match between student and hosting organisation. Does the student's university internship programme have strong systems in place to make successful placements? How do they select students for specific placements, and what role does the hosting organisation play in this process?
2. **Reinventing the wheel?** Are there procedures, templates, and guidelines available from the student's university so that hosting organisations can place interns quickly and efficiently?
3. **Preparation for the workplace.** Does the student's hosting institution provide training in c.v. writing, interview skills, and professional standards of behaviour and appearance?

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<sup>6</sup> Szadvari, L. (2008). *Intern Bridge*. Management Buy-In: The Most Crucial Component of Successful Internship Programs. 10 July 2009. [http://www.internbridge.com/white\\_papers/files/](http://www.internbridge.com/white_papers/files/)

<sup>7</sup> Within New Zealand, internship programmes are recognized by The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence, Ako Aotearoa, as being of benefit to students, employers, and academic institutions. For more information, see their information on Cooperative Education / Work Integrated Learning' at <http://ako.aotearoa.ac.nz/communities/cooperative-education-work-integrated-learning>.

4. **Work readiness.** Is the internship programme structured so that students are prepared to be productive in their assigned job as quickly as possible?
5. **Intellectual property and confidentiality.** Are students briefed on the issues surrounding commercially sensitive information and confidentiality by their university?
6. **Conflict resolution.** Are there clear procedures and lines of accountability for the rare cases where problems arise in the workplace?

## University of Canterbury Bachelor of Arts Internship Programme

Who should consider an arts intern? What can arts students actually do?

Arts students can do the things that employers say they value most. In a Victoria University study conducted in 2006, New Zealand employers prioritised these skills:

1. Strong interpersonal skills
2. Strong verbal communication skills
3. Strong written communication skills
4. Flexible and adaptable 'can do' attitude
5. Sound academic achievement
6. Self-motivated/self-starter
7. Team player
8. Energy and enthusiasm
9. Problem solving skills
10. Analytical and conceptual skills<sup>8</sup>

In other words, employers are calling out for people skills: "New hires can learn about debits and credits as they go, but what are most important, especially when working with clients, are social skills."<sup>9</sup>

The skills these employers identified are central to study in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

- **Communications.** Bachelor of Arts students are immersed within the media of written and verbal communications.
- **Flexible thinking.** Most Bachelor of Arts students study multiple disciplines, allowing them to think 'outside the square' and put ideas into social and historical context.

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<sup>8</sup> VicCareers: Career Development and Employment, Victoria University of Wellington (2006). Employment Skills Survey.

[http://www.vuw.ac.nz/st\\_services/careers/resources/employment\\_skills\\_survey.aspx](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/st_services/careers/resources/employment_skills_survey.aspx)

<sup>9</sup> Mayes, M. (2008). *Intern Bridge*. FACE OFF: Companies Step up the Competition to get in Front of College Students. 10 August 2009. [http://www.internbridge.com/white\\_papers/files/](http://www.internbridge.com/white_papers/files/)

- **Teamwork.** Many BA degrees require extensive coursework involving group projects and team-building.
- **Problem-solving and analytical skills.** Analytical and research skills are central to nearly all Arts programmes.

In addition, the College of Arts at Canterbury (COA) has the comprehensive infrastructure in place to produce a successful outcome with minimum hassles for employers.

- **Effective screening of students.** The COA Internship Director and staff will conduct all initial screening of students, allowing employers to make their choice from a short list of qualified students that are suited to their particular project.
- **Project assistance.** The COA Internship Director will work with employers to develop an appropriate project for interns. Individual academic staff will also provide support to students and employers throughout the duration of each project. Detailed guidelines and checklists will be provided to assist with the practical requirements of hosting an intern.
- **Preparation and work-readiness.** Students will be given workplace skills training at the UC Careers Centre. They will also have 3 weeks in class prior to taking up their position in order to review any preparatory guidelines/materials provided by the employer so they are prepared to work on day one.
- **Protecting employers and students.** Students will be briefed in confidentiality and intellectual property issues. Clear procedures for conflict resolution are in place.

## Contact information

If you are interested in securing a University of Canterbury Arts intern for your organisation, please contact us at:

Email: [artsinternships@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:artsinternships@canterbury.ac.nz)

Telephone: 03 364 2253.

Further information is also available at [www.arts.canterbury.ac.nz/internships](http://www.arts.canterbury.ac.nz/internships)

## APPENDIX A

### Productivity and labour in the global village

As the world becomes more interconnected, it also becomes more competitive, and over the last several years prospects appear bleak for New Zealand.

We're falling behind in OECD rankings, getting poorer relative to our Australian neighbours, and experiencing a brain drain to countries that pay higher wages.

Improving economic productivity is seen as the central means of reversing this trend. Improving labour productivity is crucial in making that happen. As a recent Department of Labour forecast explains, 'Increased labour productivity will be required to keep pace with our global competitors and to compensate for reduced labour force growth.'<sup>10</sup>

Two important challenges present themselves for New Zealand:

1. The ongoing need to develop a highly skilled workforce that meets the needs of the global economy: 'Overseas analysis points to increased demand for more highly skilled occupations . . . and skills associated with "knowledge work" (eg cognitive skills such as abstract reasoning, problem-solving, communication and collaboration).'<sup>11</sup>
2. The difficulty of retaining skilled labour in a marketplace that is increasingly mobile and volatile. 'Globalisation of markets, combined with new technologies, will influence international labour flows, at the same time expanding labour market options for New Zealand workers who will be able to market their services in cross-border labour markets.'<sup>12</sup>



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<sup>10</sup> Department of Labour (October 2008). Workforce 2020: Forces for Change in the Future Labour Market of New Zealand. 31 July 2009. <http://www.dol.govt.nz/publications/research/forces-for-change/forces-for-change-08.asp>

<sup>11</sup> Department of Labour (October 2008). Workforce 2020: Forces for Change in the Future Labour Market of New Zealand. 31 July 2009. <http://www.dol.govt.nz/publications/research/forces-for-change/forces-for-change-06.asp>

<sup>12</sup> Department of Labour (October 2008). Workforce 2020: Forces for Change in the Future Labour Market of New Zealand. 31 July 2009. <http://www.dol.govt.nz/publications/research/forces-for-change/forces-for-change-08.asp>