

MONDAY | NOVEMBER 20, 2017

Rights, duties of interns are clearly defined under law



In internships, companies get the benefit of an extra pair of hands while the intern gains vital inside knowledge of the workspace, in his or her area of specialisation.

Sarwat Nasir

While classroom learning process is important in university education, internships are proving to be equally necessary as they provide workplace experience, according to career counsellors.

However, students allege that many companies are making them work for long hours without any pay, or asking them to work in positions outside of their study area.

InternsME, UAE's largest internship job website, received more than 17,500 applications just this year from students who were looking for internship opportunities.

What happens when companies are taking advantage of students who are "desperately" seeking for internship experiences? Who is monitoring the rights of students who want work experience?

Jean-Michael Gauthier, the founder of InternsME, told *Khaleej Times* that his firm vets the companies that are offering internships to students through their website. InternsME currently works with more than 1,000 companies who are looking for talented interns and to

fill part-time and graduate roles. "We spend a lot of time vetting the companies who come onboard with us and making sure to host quality jobs because the safety of our community is of utmost importance," he said.

"Everyone who is participating in the workforce in some way can approach the UAE Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization and file a complaint or communicate any mistreatment that they may be facing. If anyone is caught in a tough situation with supervisors and/or heads of departments, and if there are no possible resolutions, then he or she should approach the MoHRE."

Gauthier added that more than 90 per cent of internships on InternsME are paid and that the salaries vary depending on the industry and the role.

Students encouraged

Legal experts are encouraging students to approach the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization (MoHRE) if they feel they are being exploited at their internship.

Maisoon Sulaiman, advocate of office manager, MBH advocates and legal consultants, said students



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Jean-Michael Gauthier, founder, InternsME

who are doing internships have the same rights as full-time employees under the UAE Labour Law.

"Such violations and exploitations will have place, if an intern lets them happen. From the beginning, right from the very first interview with prospective employer, a candidate has to know his

KT NANO EDIT

Help them learn
Internships are wonderful opportunities for students to whet their appetite before taking a plunge into full time employment space. But companies should not take undue advantage of this. Students are there to learn the ropes, get an exposure — not to be pushed around to do menial work. Companies should use this opportunity to vet talent and scout for their next best employees.

basic labour rights and ask related questions to his interviewer. Then, he has to make sure of implementing his labour rights and discussed terms and conditions, as well as nature of his work and wages in his contract/agreement before signing it," she said.

"If an intern is employed in a company officially, with the registered contract and labour permit under the youth or student category, his labour rights will be more important compared to other labour categories."

Naila Sarwar, a solicitor at TWS Legal Consultants, said that in terms of the pay of an intern, it depends on the type of the company and/or the industry the intern is 'employed' at.

"It is a widely held view that media and non-profit organisations offer unpaid internships while professional services companies offer a reasonable salary — in the UAE this can range from Dh2,000 to Dh3,000 per month," she said.

"The Labour Law refers to the employment of 'youth'. If the intern falls under the definition of youth, the maximum working hours shall be six hours per day with one-hour rest. They must not work for more than four consecutive hours nor is the employer permitted to retain the worker for more than seven consecutive hours in the workplace.

"College and university students who are sponsored by their educational institution are permitted to work part-time with the relevant visa. Expats over the age of 18 can seek short-term work permits up to 60 days, which may be renewed prior to the expiry date of the permit. Short-term work permits are not applicable to GCC or the UAE Nationals. The hiring of interns within a freezone has its own rules and work permit requirements and duration."

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How do you look at internship opportunities in the UAE?



Kevin Matthew Phillips

I worked at an events company as a graphic designer. I was given heavy tasks and worked for a week. I left the company with a negative impression of doing internships for small time companies. I would say companies should be more transparent with students. Avoid telling them they'll pay a certain amount by the end of the work and not paying as it creates an ethical situation.



Farhan Hassan

Considering the state of the market, many companies are abusing their interns or taking advantage of people's desperation to find a job. But there are two sides of the story. In my defence, for my companies, I do keep interns as trainees, but honestly I may not hire them. But I have to put them through the training because the visa costs for someone might be extremely costly.



Pranav Dileep

I know a lot of friends who were hired as interns for as cheap as Dh500 a month on the promise of visa after the visit period only to waste their 90 days and go back. Then they would hire someone else and repeat. It's a cheap labour strategy with no real cost. It's exploitation, no doubt. I mean sweatshops in China have more decency. At least, they are straightforward. They should stop exploiting the youth.

Next Week's Topic

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Students say they feel betrayed during internship

One former intern, Mike Meijer, spoke to *Khaleej Times* about his tragic experience during an internship in Dubai. The Dutch expat said he was given the "opportunity" to intern for a radio station, where he would get to learn about the broadcasting industry. Little did he know that the firm was looking for people who could do secretarial work with absolutely no pay.

"Getting to the location, being handed surveys, and being told we

would be manning the radio boot — purely for promotional purposes with no actual radio equipment present — felt like blatant betrayal, especially because we were told the idea (and the brand) that we would get to see the inner workings of a radio station," he said.

"We were a group of six and we just kind of laughed it off and got to work since we figured it still counted towards our grades. It was a pretty bad experience, which left a



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Mike Meijer, former intern

lasting negative impression on us." Another student, Ahmad El-Rashid, was offered an internship at a marketing firm. As a marketing major, he thought the apprentice-

ship would stand out on his resume after graduation. However, like Meijer, he was tricked by the firm into doing free work.

"I was mostly doing customer

service at the company and wasn't learning anything about marketing. They were short staffed, so maybe they were looking for affordable, or in my case, free labour. Companies need to stop using interns to do work that someone else should be getting paid to do as a full-time employee," he said. "I was working from 9am to 5pm and it was starting to effect my grades, which is when I decided to quit."

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Internship must be mutually beneficial for both student and employer

THE PERSPECTIVE



Andy Pacino, teaching and learning coordinator, Dubai campus, Murdoch University

In an age of high youth unemployment, it is vital that youngsters gain the benefit of higher education in order to secure themselves a decent start in life, and a good career. A high degree grade shows employers that candidates are able to attain a certain level of expertise in a certain sphere over a certain length of time. The grade indicates a level

of dedication and intelligence, and the better the grade; the better a student demonstrates his ability.

With so much competition for so few jobs, there is an added pressure of bringing experience to the table at an interview, and the best way of gaining that all-important hands-on knowledge comes in the shape of an internship. Interns are an integral part of many workplaces, and they provide great proving grounds for prospective employees, and give employers the chance to test out a prospective worker. Even better is direct experience in the field of study. An IT student with a couple of months work at one of Dubai's many tech compa-

nies, for example, offers a competitive edge and a far better chance of landing an IT job than someone who is fresh out of university with only theoretical knowledge to offer.

I am a big fan of internships, however, I believe they must be mutually beneficial for both student and employer. At Murdoch University, I am responsible for ensuring the right candidate gets the post that serves him best. An intern should never replace a full-time worker, neither should they merely hang around and shadow another employee. The idea is that the company gets the benefit of an extra pair of hands while the intern gains

vital inside knowledge of the workplace. It's a heuristic learning curve as the dynamics of the work place is worlds apart from university life, and that cannot be gained in the lecture room.

Time management is also very important, and a 40-hour a week post would be detrimental to students. Ideally, the internship should be a couple of hours a day after studies, or a full day or two, like a weekend job that allows classroom theory to be put into practice.

A real world workplace also means real world money, though internships are an in-between, so while some internships pay nothing, I am a firm believer that there

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should be a small stipend to cover at least travel and food allowance. This has a double benefit: it shows commitment from the company, and encourages the intern to attend the post in a professional manner.

I have received numerous letters of thanks and encouragement from former interns and companies alike, and have heard very few horror stories, and there are plenty of

examples of students and post-graduates who end up working with the companies they intern at, and the huge majority say their experience was extremely beneficial.

Murdoch University has recently launched a dedicated careers portal that links employers to students and graduates with keywords and search terms, matching the ideal candidate to their perfect job, whether it is an internship or full time position. The service operates on a similar platform as many other intern websites, though it is entirely free for employers. In a nutshell, internships are of great value to employers, students and graduates, and my advice is to give it a go.



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