

MANAGING, MENTORING AND SUPPORTING YOUR INTERN**TOP TIPS FOR ORGANISATIONS HOSTING A COURSE-BASED STUDENT INTERN****IN THIS DOCUMENT:**

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CONTENT AND CONTEXT

The tips below are based on research with host organisations, University internship or placement course coordinators, academic supervisors and students. They were designed to help make the internship or placement experience rewarding for everyone involved. There are links to additional resources at the end of the document.

We recommend using this document in combination with the – ‘Developing an Internship Project Brief’ document and other material you have received from the University internship course coordinator (for example a negotiated learning plan or project/work plan). If you have questions or concerns, please contact the course coordinator of the internship.

SUPERVISORS, MENTORS, BUDDIES – WHAT ARE THEY AND WHAT WORKS BEST FOR STUDENT INTERNS?

It is very helpful for students and organisation hosts to know the key people who will support the interns through their internship and the nature and scope of these relationships. Knowing what is expected of them and who to talk to increases their confidence and performance.

Some employers divide one or more of these roles across several people, while others might have single individual. The key is to be clear with your intern about who they can turn to for help in different situations. It is also important that all people supporting an intern keep in regular contact with each other. Staff engaged in supporting an intern share that they find it a rewarding and enjoyable experience.

A manager/supervisor is a staff member who is often involved (though not always) in creating the internship project and can be a key supervisor. They understand the project and industry and are the key contact with the university course coordinator. They have a good overview of the key work the student is producing and can monitor performance and give formal feedback to help the development of your intern. The manager can also support the intern with their wellbeing, career interests, skills and connections, but this responsibility can be shared with a mentor or buddy.

Co-supervisors can work well, especially in a busier team, where both individuals perform a combination of supervisor and mentor roles. Interns can benefit from the unique support and communication of different personality types and work styles. One supervisor can focus on the big picture and project planning, while the other focuses on details and check-ins. Co-supervisors work successfully if they are in regular contact, are aligned about the goals of the project and the intern's role and are clear in their approach and responsibilities.

A mentor can be a supervisor or someone different. They might not know the subject or work area as well. They likely have experience or an interest in working with interns, graduates, or people new to the world of work. They are focused on a holistic view of the project and the student's wellbeing and development. Active listening, role modelling and feedback are key aspects of a great mentor.

The intern's buddy can be similar to a mentor. They are likely to be a non-manager, and perhaps a younger member of staff such as a former intern or recent graduate. A buddy has more time to provide informal help, for example, with day-to-day IT/tech, social or business etiquette questions, or simply how things are done in the workplace. They might have subject/work area knowledge, but not necessarily. They can also offer support with social networking and wellbeing.

THE PROJECT BRIEF AND A FIRST MEETING WITH YOUR POTENTIAL INTERN

Having a clear project brief helps your intern thrive and know what is expected of them. A number of course-based internships involve a first meeting or interview with a prospective intern at the initial part

of the process, that includes discussing a project brief. Check in with your University internship course coordinator about any expectations or the format for this meeting.

Use this opportunity to gauge how the student understands the brief, how they feel about it and the level of experience or management and technical support they might need in the role. It's also a good opportunity to discuss their interest in the organisation and goals for the internship. Remember, students can be nervous and may need encouragement to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts.

For more tips on questions to ask at a first meeting please refer to the 'Developing an internship project brief' accompanying resource.

ONBOARDING AND INDUCTION

Note: these tasks can be delegated to co-supervisors, mentors and buddies.

BEFORE THEY ARRIVE

Are team members aware of and prepared for the intern joining them? It is often useful to send an introductory email to the staff about the intern, the project (with the project brief or an overview of it), and how the team may be expected to help if relevant.

Schedule in an introduction session to meet the team.

Arrange desk space and access to your IT systems if they will need it – check with IT/security about logins and emails. Will the intern use their own devices/email? How will this work? Can they still interact with company IT resources such as Microsoft Teams?

Consider if they will work at the office, remotely, or a combination of the two. How will this affect the ways in which they work with data and connect with others?

THE FIRST WEEK

Host a welcome team event or introduce them at a meeting.

Introduce your intern to key people in the organisation such as other interns, graduates and stakeholders.

Talk through key areas such as team culture and communications channels.

Share information they need and make sure they have access to resources such as past projects, research, or databases. (This can often take longer than planned so doing this early can be helpful).

Clarify who is the lead supervisor, mentor, buddy etc. and explain how your intern can get help and connect with them. Support your intern to negotiate the best communication channels for these

relationships (e.g., when to ask questions – whenever or in weekly meetings). This may be different for a mentor versus a buddy. Support your intern to schedule regular meetings in diaries and discuss if/how students can reach key people outside these times.

MANAGEMENT SUPPORT FOR INTERN STUDENTS: SUPPORT IS APPRECIATED!

Most students like clear tasks and goals, combined with opportunities to be creative and add their own unique perspectives. Many students talk of managing feelings of being overwhelmed and imposter syndrome, so regular check-ins to provide reassurance and support is often helpful.

Tips to help your student intern thrive:

- Schedule and keep regular scheduled meetings.
- Offer informal check ins, reassurance and feedback.
- Explain how their work fits into the bigger picture of the organisation.
- Gauge their opinion on things.
- Include them in meetings and events wherever you can.
- Connect your intern with key people in the team and any important external stakeholders and give them autonomy to build relationships with internal and external project stakeholders.
- Encourage their networking. Challenge them to arrange meetings or coffee with two people who aren't their supervisor/buddy or mentor.
- Stay on top of project progress and your intern's key tasks, as well as their wellbeing. Encourage them to use a project planning or progress document and discuss with you. Be clear who oversees what, for example do all responsibilities fall on one supervisor or are they shared with others.
- Ensure they know how and when they can communicate with you and other people supporting them and how this fits alongside general meetings and task check-ins.

INTERNSHIP MEETINGS

MEETING GUIDELINES – GOOD PRACTICE.

- Use a project process and/or learning development record as a check-in/discussion guide (encourage students to use the one in their student intern toolkit).
- Start with a “what's on top” – wellbeing check.
- Consider where interns are at in the ‘intern's journey’ e.g. excitement, uncertainty, overwhelm, plateau, confidence, fun, busyness, stress, accomplishment.

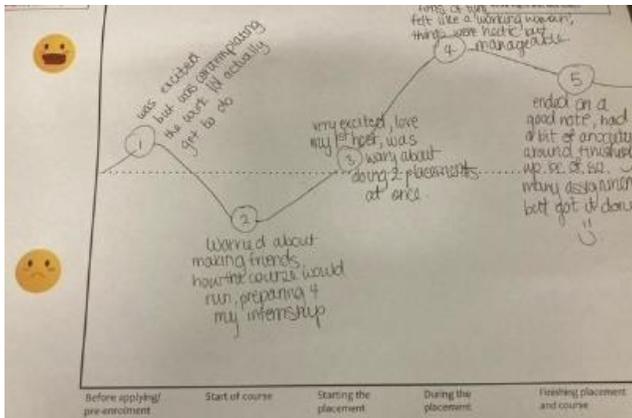


Image of student plotting the high and lows of their internship experience

- Try to meet at least once a week, but this can alternate between supervisor and buddy meetings.
- Consider how you will adapt communication, from planned to spontaneous chats. Do you want them to wait until a meeting to ask questions about a task?

SUGGESTION MEETINGS TOPICS AND POTENTIAL ORDER

- Introduction
- Networking meeting
- Project renegotiation if needed
- Research and analysis support
- Student-led meetings on whatever interests them.
- Report draft review
- Presentation practice
- Career goals meeting.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION TOPICS AND KEY QUESTIONS FOR INTERNS

Consider emailing key points or an agenda before a meeting. It can be helpful to get your intern to keep the agenda in mind, to stay focused and make the most of their time with you.

Even if you decide to stick to meeting themes linked to the project, you might like to have some regular key questions or points to focus yourself and your intern and maximise your time.

- How are you going today? Stress – level 1 – 10 check-in.
- What is top of mind for you today?
- Is there anything I can help with practically - do you have everything you need?

- How do you feel about the project timelines?
- What new skills/tech/stakeholders can I help you with or introduce you to?
- What are you enjoying about the work? What are you proud of this week?
- Is there something that's a bit tricky I can help with?
- Are there any specialists in the organisation you would like me to connect you with to provide support?
- What are your plans for the weekend!?

UNIVERSITY SUPPORT FOR INTERN HOSTS

Please keep in touch with the course coordinator in charge of the course your intern is part of. Despite best efforts sometimes things don't always go to plan during internships. Talking through any issues with your intern in the first instance, as well as talking to other supervisors or mentors is helpful. However, the coordinator is a key contact to support both organisation hosts and students. So, if you have any concerns, please get in touch before they become a bigger issue.

Course coordinators are also your key University contact for general support or any other question you may have during the internship. They are there to help organisations and students make the internship experience positive and worthwhile for all involved.

FURTHER RESOURCES

[Developing an internship project brief \(Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington accompanying document\)](#)

[Mentor intern checklist \(Source: Dublin University\)](#)

[Manager of intern checklist \(Source: Dublin University\)](#)

[Employers guide to building quality internships \(Source: Local Government Network, Sacramento\)](#)

[Examples of key questions to help your 1 to 1s with your student intern \(Source: WellingtonNZ and Summer of Tech\).](#)