

## ASET Viewpoints

### Paid and Unpaid Placements

ASET is the Work Based and Placement Learning Association, and our aim is to advance the prevalence, effectiveness and quality of work based and placement learning in Higher Education by promoting research into that system of education and publishing the useful results thereof. Work based and placement learning is that which is part of the Higher Education experience, an integrated and planned part of a programme of study, and that is structured to appropriate learning outcomes and assessment.

ASET believes that the gold standard for **work based and placement learning**, or work experience, is that it should be integrated, assessed and accredited. We acknowledge that there is crucial benefit to all parties involved but also acknowledge that there is cost to all parties too; students, employers and Higher Education Institutions.

There has been considerable public debate of late in respect of the rise in **unpaid internships** being undertaken by graduates struggling to find paid employment. The scope of ASET's work concerns students within Higher Education, not graduates, but we acknowledge that many of our members work with both students and graduates. ASET does not condone the practice of employers offering unpaid graduate internships (unless this is as part of a post-graduate course); these are not students on work experience as part of their programme of study and they should be paid for their work.

ASET believes that the guidance on the **National Minimum Wage** is clear; students doing work experience that does not exceed one year as part of a UK-based Higher Education course may not be entitled to the National Minimum Wage. This exemption does not cover students who take work experience which is not part of their course. Constituent members of ASET, Higher Education Institutions across the UK, may place different interpretations on what "part of a course" means and this may include, but not be limited to, a range of methods of formal recognition:

- assessed and contributes toward the degree
- awarding of a protected degree title, e.g. (Sandwich)
- recorded in an additional award, either internally or externally
- recorded on the transcript, or as part of the Higher Education Achievement Report

Of course this should not impact on the excellent work done by the thousands of student volunteers for charities, voluntary organisations, fundraising and statutory bodies every year; the role of the volunteer is clearly given in the National Minimum Wage guidance.





ASET believes that it is important for each Higher Education Institution to determine what work experience is recognised as part of a course and how it is to be recorded. ASET advises its members to be mindful of the National Minimum Wage guidance, and to only provide or broker opportunities for their students which meet this guidance. This includes the advertising of vacancies, employer relations and the approval of work experience opportunities.

Whilst the National Minimum Wage guidance allows for students undertaking work experience as part of a programme of study to be exempt from payment, ASET believes that it is important that their efforts are acknowledged. It is important for employers to consider **reward commensurate** with the length and location of the opportunity; students have costs related to living and travel expenses and may need to forego other part time work opportunities to undertake **work based or placement learning**. It is also important for Higher Education Institutions to consider academic recognition commensurate with the learning that students have derived from the opportunity. Students should also be mindful of the ways in which they are indirectly supported to undertake work based and placement learning opportunities; from the staff that supervise and mentor them to, in some cases, course fee bursaries and waivers.

ASET encourages Higher Education Institutions and employers to offer work based and placement learning opportunities that students can engage with as part of their course. Getting valuable experience of the workplace alongside their academic studies increases students' understanding of the application of theory in practice and helps them to develop the attributes and skills that employers are looking for on graduation. In an ever competitive labour market having work experience before graduation is one of the keys to success. Supported work based and placement learning as part of their Higher Education programme is becoming an essential part of the university experience.

ASET welcomes the Quality Assurance Agency's move to include work based and placement learning with all other forms of learning and teaching in its 2012 UK Quality Code for Higher Education (section B3) as we believe that it acknowledges the parity of work based and placement learning with traditional campus based learning.

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**For more information please contact:**