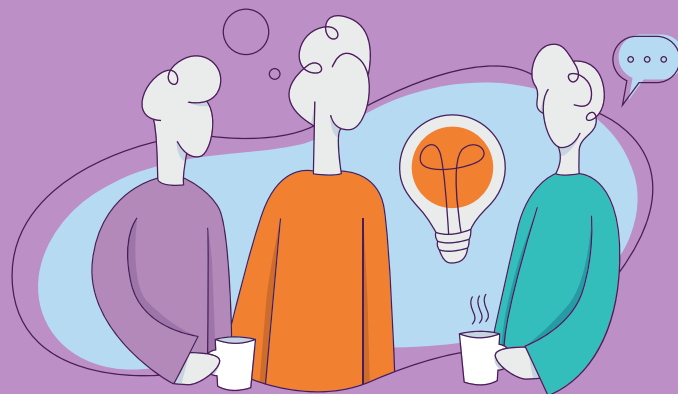


MAKING VIRTUAL INTERNSHIPS A SUCCESS



The global challenges of COVID-19 on businesses have meant a temporary end to face-to-face internship opportunities, so lots of companies have started to get creative and explore virtual opportunities.



Every business can be a force for good
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Virtual internships can produce tangible results for your business and have great benefits for students as well as they'll still gain a CV-enriching experience, developing key employability skills and creating networks and connections. They also provide an accessible and flexible way of getting a valuable opportunity, all from the comfort of home! It's important that virtual internships are paid, not only because it will mean the opportunity is available to people from all backgrounds.

If you've offered work experience placements to young people as part of their school or college work experience programme we suggest contacting the school or college to see if this can still go ahead and if they have any systems in place to support this.

If you've offered internship opportunities or have an internship programme that you're keen to continue despite COVID-19, here are our top tips to make sure the placement is successful for your business and your intern:

1. Don't underestimate the power of a good induction

Many businesses have adapted well to the new normal of remote working, but for new interns, this will probably be unfamiliar territory. A remote onboarding experience for your interns won't be filled with handshakes around the office and a team lunch, but a structured, engaging virtual experience can still build a sense of connection. It's worth taking the content from your standard inductions and repurposing it to use online, so your new intern feels integrated from the first day, with effective processes and ongoing support.

2. There's no such thing as too much communication

It's important that your intern's experience of working with you is engaging, so to help them continually improve you should provide feedback and support throughout their internship. Your intern has chosen to take part because they want real world experience and insider knowledge, so it's vital that you give them 1:1 guidance, help them identify strengths and weaknesses and give them the tools they need to expand their knowledge. There are lots of ways you can do this – you could choose peer-based feedback, manager evaluations, or online self-assessments. Finally, to help your intern feel part of the team and get to know your company's culture, you should organise engagement activities such as virtual tea/coffee sessions with people at different levels and departments and ask one of your colleagues to act as a buddy or mentor.

3. Use real-world activities to build practical experiences

Virtual interns won't have the opportunity to shadow an employee at work, but activities like simulations, case studies, scenarios, and online training will all give them real-world experience if you do it in a supportive setting. Before you set these activities, agree the outputs and learning objectives with your intern and make sure they align to your company's priorities – you could even do this during the recruitment process by asking prospective interns what they hope to get out of their internship. Once you've set your intern these activities, make sure they're putting them into practice in client meetings and when troubleshooting a team problem.



4. Make it project based

Set a project that's challenging enough to help your intern develop and learn new skills. Projects that feature research, strategy development and interpretation of data work well with the interests and skills of a broad range of students. When you give your intern a project, it's important to set the parameters and focus on the project's design, because it'll mean you both benefit and your intern is less likely to feel overwhelmed.

5. Review your technology

There's no doubt that technology has made remote working easier and tools like Zoom, Slack and Skype will help your help teams collaborate. You should use this technology to create a memorable, engaging and valuable experience for your intern. Before you do that, make sure you've explored the technology yourself and learn to use it to its full extent so you can deliver your virtual internships in the best way possible. Try not to rely on just pre-recorded content; make use of live sessions and invite several people from your business to take part, keeping communication informal to create an inclusive culture. Keep sessions short, mix them up, and use interactive tools where you can - adding in virtual Q&As, polls and quizzes are good ways to check on engagement.

6. Don't forget to evaluate

Just as it's important to put energy into the induction process, so is concluding the internship in a way that supports your intern and helps them assess their learning and achievements. Reflecting the value of the experience and the measurable importance of what they've delivered are vital elements in turning this virtual internship into an asset for their next career move.

There are lots of examples of best practice, especially from bigger businesses that have been running virtual internship opportunities for some time, but it's important to keep in mind what works for your own organisation. So our final tip is to think about the resources and time you have so you can make a remote internship work for you!

