

European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships

Preamble

Given that:

-transition phase for young people from education to the labour market has become increasingly difficult – youth are disproportionately affected by unemployment and face structural challenges in finding quality, stable employment, and to earn decent income.

-early labour market experience such as internships and apprenticeships are useful to facilitate youth access to labour market, to ease the transition between education and employment and to develop labour market relevant skills.¹

-not all pupils or students have the possibility and the necessary financial means to take part in quality work trainings (apprenticeships & internships) as part of the school curricula and university programmes, including those that are taking place abroad.

-there is mounting evidence that work placements (internships) outside formal education are frequently replacing quality employment for young people.

-lack of clear quality guidelines undermines the main purpose of internships and apprenticeships as educational opportunities that give practical skills to young people.

-there is a need for more research and labour market monitoring in this area.

We urge all the providers of internships and apprenticeships to commit to quality standards and to apply a clear and coherent code of conduct, leading by example.

We urge European countries, European institutions and social partners² to commit to establish (or where applicable reinforce already existing) legal quality frameworks for internships and apprenticeships.

We call on internship and apprenticeship providers and public decision makers to adopt a system of certification and to ensure the recognition of the knowledge and skills acquired through internships and apprenticeships.

Implementation of this Charter does not constitute valid grounds to reduce the general level of protection afforded at national level.

¹ This Charter defines apprenticeships as work oriented trainings that are part of vocational education and training and that are solely school-based programmes or combined school and work-based programmes, both carried out in the formal education system bringing credit points.

This Charter defines internships as either:

a) part of higher education that brings credit points where interns have a student status, access to services like student loans, student housing, health insurance, scholarships etc.

b) taking place outside formal education (also after graduation) that do not bring credit points for the diploma. Some of these internships do not have a legal status or may even be considered illegal.

c) and any other form of similar work experience that is offered to young people as a work based learning opportunity.

² EU Social Partners, in their Inclusive labour markets agreement, signed in March 2010, already committed themselves for more and better traineeships and apprenticeships

Article 1

We are convinced that **internships and apprenticeships should be primarily a learning experience and believe that:**

- Internships/apprenticeships should never lead to job replacement;
- Well organised internships/apprenticeships help young people acquire practical experience and add practical skills to the knowledge and qualifications that have been previously acquired through either formal or non formal education;
- Internships/apprenticeships help to orientate oneself professionally and also widen one's perspectives of different sectors;
- Internships/apprenticeships provide recognised working experience that develops the skills of young people and elevates their professional capacity;
- Internships/apprenticeships should be carried out under guidance of a competent supervisor and have access to robust evaluative and complaints channels to monitor progress and quality of the internship/apprenticeship experience;
- Interns/apprentices should be informed at the beginning of their internship/apprenticeship experience of their social and labour rights, workers representatives, their responsibilities to the organisation, any health and safety risks posed to them through the position or at the work place and are provided the relevant social protection accordingly;

Article 2

We believe that **internships (as part of higher education) and apprenticeships should meet the following criteria:**

- existence of a written and legally binding contract between the educational institution, intern/apprentice and hosting organisation outlining the main principles of the internship/apprenticeship, including how many credit points this will contribute to the diploma of the intern/apprentice; a description of learning objectives and tasks should be attached to the contract;
- length and tasks of the internship/apprenticeship correspond to specified learning objectives that are shared with the student at the beginning of his/her internship/apprenticeship;
- guidance throughout the internship/apprenticeship period by a supervisor(s) trained specifically for the role;
- the right of the intern/apprentice to receive reimbursement of costs incurred during the internship/apprenticeship or right to receive food, housing, and public transportation tickets instead;
- decent remuneration for work carried out additional to the requirements outlined in the internship/apprenticeship contract, including compensation for overtime;
- clear evaluation criteria of the internship/apprenticeship period.

Article 3

We believe that **internships taking place outside/after formal education should ideally not exist however where they exist they should meet the following criteria:**

- existence of a written and legally binding contract outlining the length, remuneration of the internship, a description of learning objectives and tasks should be attached to the contract;

- decent remuneration not below the EU poverty line of 60 % median income or national minimum wage, if more favourable, in accordance to the tasks which are performed by the intern and to working hours (overtime should be additionally compensated). Internship remuneration should be regulated either in law or collective agreements in accordance with national practice;
- use of internships should be limited to pupils, students and very recent graduates, length of internships period should be restricted to a reasonable and fixed number of months;
- reimbursement of costs incurred during the internship;
- inclusion of the intern in the social security system, especially those of health, unemployment, pension systems;
- mid-term evaluation, discussion of the possibilities to be hired as a permanent employee during the internship period and a final evaluation at the end of the internship period;
- limited number of interns per internship provider;
- transparent advertising that includes a detailed task description and working conditions.

Article 4

We urge the competent stakeholders to **progressively develop the following support and monitoring policies for a better implementation of quality internships:**

4.1. Legal framework and recognition of skills

- Internships should be given a place in the national legislation and employers should be provided assistance to any legal enquiries related to the implementation process;
- At the European level there should be mechanisms in place to promote the exchange of best practices in the area and the implication of the main criteria that define quality internships;
- National and European systems for certification and recognition of knowledge and skills acquired through internships should be in place to further support to smooth integration of young people in the labour market and support youth labour mobility.

4.2. Monitoring and statistics

- Statistics should be available on internships, nationally and at European level, with a special focus on: the number of internships available, the average length of internships, the social benefits being made available for interns, the allowances paid to interns, the age groups of interns;
- An overview should be available, nationally and at European level, on the different internship schemes and their place within the legal systems.

4.3. Partnerships

- National partnerships run between schools, universities, civil society organisations and the social partners should be encouraged and supported;
- More career development loans and investment in training by employers should be encouraged and supported;
- Schools should provide assistance to the young people when they are looking for a suitable apprenticeship.
- Student and pupil organisations, trade unions should be available to provide assistance to interns throughout the internship period.