



Australia's National
Science Agency

The Internship Toolkit

Industry guide for hosting a tertiary student intern



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About

About us

This guide has been developed by the Generation STEM Links team, a CSIRO program that has facilitated over 200 tertiary STEM student placements with industry since its launch in 2022. Our tailored recruitment, matching process, mentoring and coaching has been praised by both students and industry partners, with 100 per cent of supervisors surveyed in 2024 recommending the program to other businesses.

About this toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help businesses create high-quality, equitable internship programs that benefit both interns and employers. Drawing from interviews with program participants, and direct experience supporting industry-led internships, it distils best practices, practical guidance, templates and resources to support every stage of the internship process, from recruitment to completion.

Stage	Chapter	Summary
Deciding whether to hire an intern	1 Why hire an intern?	The benefits of internships for both businesses and students.
Defining the role and recruiting	2 Finding the right fit	Defining roles, recruiting effectively, and promoting diversity.
Preparing for their arrival	3 Prior to arrival	Planning training, onboarding, and mentorship.
Bringing the intern into the team	4 First day essentials	Setting interns up for success from day one.
Providing ongoing support and feedback	5 On the job	Task management, feedback, and creating a safe work environment.
Wrapping it up	6 At the end	Wrapping up successfully and supporting interns' career progression.

Why hire an intern?

CHAPTER ONE

Hiring an intern isn't just about boosting your team, it's a smart move that can bring fresh perspectives to the workplace while helping shape the next generation of talent. Interns are eager to learn and contribute. They can bring many benefits to businesses that go far beyond cost-effective labour.

'It's imperative for businesses to engage young individuals capable of bringing fresh perspectives and innovations beyond their current scope of imagination. Fortunately, Australia boasts outstanding educational facilities. Our task is to bridge the gap to industry.'

Agscent | World leader in livestock breath diagnostics and Generation STEM Links program participant.



THIS CHAPTER WILL COVER:



- What defines an internship.
- The benefits of hiring an intern.
- Some key points to help weigh up whether an intern is right for your business.

What makes an internship different from just hiring a casual or contract worker?

An internship is usually advertised as a short-term position designed for junior professionals who are typically in the later years of their tertiary education or training. They provide students with an opportunity to gain practical experience in their field of study and are structured to emphasise learning opportunities and training. Contract or casual workers tend to be expected to perform tasks with existing skills, while interns are still in the process of learning.

The benefits for businesses

Hiring an intern adds to your workforce but the benefits go far beyond just an extra set of hands. Some key advantages of bringing interns on board include:

- Ability to support with discrete, short-term projects that require specific skills.
- Helps your team review and update processes and standard operating procedures.
- Brings fresh perspectives and innovative ideas that may stray from company norms, offering new approaches and insights to your business.
- Provides a chance to assess and strengthen company culture.

- Enables staff development by offering leadership and mentoring opportunities, fostering continuous growth.
- Can act as a trial period for potential ongoing hires allowing you to gauge fit while minimising onboarding time since interns are already familiar with the team and environment.

For industries that struggle to hire suitably skilled employees, internships can help to better prepare prospective employees for entry into the workplace and increase the pool of skilled workers available.¹ They also provide an opportunity to introduce talent to regional areas, exposing interns to a career path and lifestyle they may not have otherwise considered.

Important considerations

Capacity

Taking on an intern is taking on a potentially significant role in fostering their career progression. Ensure your business can provide adequate training and support for them, rather than simply viewing them as inexpensive labour.

Task suitability

It is important to consider whether you have meaningful work to assign an intern and not just busy tasks. Interns can work on a variety of projects that both contribute to organisational goals and provide valuable learning experiences.

These projects may be smaller elements of existing projects or new ideas the business would like to explore but has not found the time. As long as the work can be reasonably completed within a limited time frame (200 hours is a good starting point) and does not require extensive hands-on experience, an intern can most likely work on it.



Some examples of projects an intern could work on can be found on pages 28–29.

Environment

The prior experience interns bring to the workplace varies greatly and some will adapt to their new workplace quickly and independently while others may need more guidance. Make sure a supervisor is available to provide support to them throughout the entire length of the internship and that work assigned does not require the intern to work extensively on their own to facilitate better learning and growth.

Compensation

Fair compensation attracts a wider and more diverse pool of candidates and is crucial to keeping interns motivated and engaged. Before considering whether to hire an intern ensure your business is equipped to pay them fairly for their contributions.

There's a critical point in the STEM pipeline between university and employment, where negative perceptions about the work environment can arise and cause much-needed STEM graduates to seek employment in other industries. Addressing these perceptions *before* they enter the post-graduate workforce is essential for nurturing future talent.²

¹ Jobs and Skills Australia (2023) [Towards a National Jobs and Skills Roadmap. Annual Jobs and Skills Report 2023](#), Jobs and Skills Australia, Australian Government, accessed 24 June 2024.

² Science & Technology Australia (2023) [STEM Career Pathways](#), Science & Technology Australia, accessed 24 June 2024.

Finding the right fit

CHAPTER TWO

2

You've decided that hiring an intern is the right move for your business, so what's next?










THIS CHAPTER WILL COVER:



- A suggested process for recruiting interns including rough timing estimates.
- Defining the role clearly to bring value to both the business and intern.
- Timing and structuring engagements to help balance business and academic commitments.
- How to get the right person in the door including:
 - remuneration
 - role descriptions
 - where to advertise
 - reviewing and interviewing candidates.
- Some key diversity considerations.

Recruitment overview

Below is a breakdown of the standard steps in the intern hiring process, with a rough indication of time requirements for each stage.

	Define the role, skills required, pay and appropriate supervisor.	TWO HOURS
	Write job description.	ONE HOUR
	Advertise on relevant career hubs and other platforms.	ALLOW 20 MINUTES PER LISTING
	Review applications and resumes.	DEPENDANT ON NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS. ALLOW APPROXIMATELY THREE HOURS.
	Shortlist for interviews and inform initial unsuccessful applicants of outcome.	ONE HOUR
	Conduct interviews.	TWO HOURS OR 30 MINUTES PER APPLICANT (DEPENDANT ON NUMBER INTERVIEWED).
	Determine the most suitable candidate.	30 MINUTES
	Offer role and contract. Advise unsuccessful candidates of outcome.	30 MINUTES
	Prepare for start date.	DEPENDENT ON ROLE, SEE <u>PRIOR TO ARRIVAL SECTION.</u>

Suggested procedure for recruiting interns

Defining the role

Deciding what an intern will work on should depend on both the needs of your business and the intern's goals. Having an idea of what they'll be contributing to can help attract the right person to the job. Start by identifying projects or areas where extra help is needed and consider how these tasks can offer valuable learning experiences that both challenge the intern and align with their studies.

Clearly define the scope of their responsibilities but remain open to adjustments as the internship progresses and you learn more about their goals. This flexibility allows the intern to explore different aspects of your business which can lead to discovering hidden talents or interests.

'An appropriate student project for us was a project that was discrete from the main body of work and scoped to take less than the duration of their internship to allow the student to experience other work within the organisation. The main reason for this was to provide flexibility for the intern and the supervisor, if the project was only partially complete this would not affect business activities and the student doesn't feel like they failed on the project.'

Advitech | Engineering and environmental consulting firm and Generation STEM Links program participant.



Timing

The duration of the internship should balance the time needed for the intern to make a meaningful contribution with their academic commitments. A minimum of 200 hours tends to work well for most interns to really get an understanding of the business and their projects. However, this may change according to the business needs and university requirements.

Consider whether a part-time, casual, or full-time arrangement is the best option for both parties. Part-time or casual roles often work well, as they offer the flexibility to accommodate the intern's study schedule, reducing stress and promoting a more productive experience. Many businesses also choose to conduct their internship program over summer, when many students are on break. Remaining adaptable for both timing and workload can help you find the right person for the role and help them perform at their best.

Balancing course requirements and work commitments



Depending on what time of year your intern is onboarded, interns may still be required to attend in-person or online lectures and/or classes. Some VET/TAFE courses also require students to be on-site for certain days of the week.

Be ready to be flexible with their schedule and ensure you establish their availability during the hiring process. Have a chat with them to establish whether they will need modified hours to attend classes and study and discuss how they plan to handle the workload. They may benefit from advice on managing their schedule using techniques such as **time blocking**.

You might also like to consider rescheduling their internship until their holiday period, pending business needs and availability.

'We don't expect or require our interns to take any work home with them or complete work outside of their scheduled hours. Through allocating tasks within their agreed timeline, it allows for our interns to comfortably balance their study and work requirements.'

Iberdrola | Global renewable energy leader and Generation STEM Links program participant.



Paid vs. unpaid internships

Businesses sometimes hesitate to pay interns. However, this attitude often leads to disengaged interns and does not consider the value a fresh perspective can bring into the workplace. Paid work is also more motivating for students increasing their productivity and workplace satisfaction.

Unpaid placements will not bring the diversity into your workplace that it needs to thrive. Students may have to give up paid work to complete them, and this often rules out students from diverse backgrounds from applying. Poverty and stress are also a hindrance to student learning, so unpaid interns are more likely to produce work that does not meet business standards.³

Remuneration

When determining *what* to pay your intern, the same considerations should be applied as would be for a permanent employee. It can help to break down the type of work they will be doing, and how it aligns with current staff members' responsibilities as this can help determine an appropriate rate of pay.

Businesses must abide by the [National Minimum Wage](#), [National Employment Standards](#) and any [awards](#) or [registered agreements](#) that are in place. It is important to note that regulations change regularly so should be checked routinely to ensure that all requirements are being met. These include, but are not limited to:

- superannuation
- leave entitlements
- penalty and overtime rates
- allowances (e.g. uniform, travel, tools/equipment, dangerous conditions).

Find out more about your responsibilities as an employer at the [Fair Work Ombudsman website](#).

Creating the perfect job description

Effective position descriptions are essential to attracting the right candidates. Focus on listing only the skills and qualifications that are genuinely necessary for the role avoiding unnecessary criteria typically required of full-time employees. It is also important to remember that

interns are likely to be junior professionals who may not have extensive workplace experiences and skills when determining the requirements for the role.

Ensure the position description includes key details, such as the pay, to attract serious applicants and keep descriptions concise, ideally within two pages.



Use this example of an [internship job description](#) on page 22 to help guide your efforts.

Getting the word out

When promoting your internship opportunities, it's crucial to use the channels where potential interns are most likely to look. University and VET/TAFE career hubs are often the best place to start and are generally quite straightforward to navigate.

Finding career hubs

1. Google the name of the institution + 'career hub'.
2. Look for the employer section.
3. If you can't find the right spot, try emailing the university to ask how to post an internship opportunity to their students.

If you have the budget there are services that can post to multiple university's career hubs for you. Please note these services can be quite expensive and most universities allow employers to list opportunities free of charge. This approach can level the playing field and attract a diverse range of applicants without incurring significant costs.

If you're struggling to find where to post internships on university or vocational training websites send them a quick message through their 'contact us' process or give them a call and ask where to post internship opportunities for their students.

Other places you could look to advertise your job ad could include:

- LinkedIn
- professional organisations
- university student-led associations and societies (e.g. Women in Technology Society)
- student unions.

³ Morley, C., Hodge, L., Clarke, J., McIntyre, H., Mays, J., Briese, J., & Kostecki, T. (2023). 'THIS UNPAID PLACEMENT MAKES YOU POOR': Australian social work students' experiences of the financial burden of field education. *Social Work Education*, 43(4), 1039–1057.

It usually takes about one week before you start seeing applications come through for the advertised role but this will also depend on the industry, location and the time of year the advert has gone out. The application process can take significantly longer for roles in regional and rural areas. If you haven't received any applications after a couple of weeks review the role description and consider whether you might need to broaden the eligibility criteria or reconsider the language used to describe the position.



Reviewing applications

When reviewing applications it is important to remember that high academic achievement does not always correlate with strong performance in the workplace. Many students have additional responsibilities and tendencies that can affect their grades. Look for skills and experiences that indicate potential for growth and aptitude in the role. It can also be helpful to attach a couple of questions for the applicants to respond to as part of the application submission to help gauge their enthusiasm and relevant experiences.

Interviewing candidates

During the interview process start with open-ended behavioural questions to understand how the candidate thinks and works. Beginning with questions that have no wrong answer will also help them settle into the interview and calm their nerves.

For example, you could ask the student to tell you about a time when they used their initiative, or when they had to work through a conflict in a specific project or task. These questions can be answered using the STAR framework (Situation, Task, Action, Result) and students can use examples from their studies, interests and experiences they may have.

Remember that for some students this may be the first time they sit a formal interview, so you may want to prompt them to unpack the actions taken and results if they need some help articulate their answers.

Hypothetical questions like, 'Imagine being given a task by a supervisor that you don't know how to complete – what would you do?' can help determine their fit for the role. Discuss their highlights, achievements, and things they are proud of focusing on their persona beyond academic knowledge.

After building initial rapport, move on to technical questions relevant to the position. Remember that the candidates may not have an extensive backlog of relevant work experiences to refer back to and you may need to encourage them to highlight experiences from their studies that can demonstrate the skills and aptitudes the business is looking for. You may even choose to design the interview questions proactively with this in mind.



Use this guide on page 23 to help your getting started with questions to ask at interviews.

As part of the interview process, it's also important to discuss practical considerations, such as the potential for remote supervision. You should also proactively identify any subtle issues that might make the work environment uncomfortable or challenging for certain individuals, such as if there is a requirement for them to drive regularly within the role or spend long periods of time on their feet.

Maintaining prompt communication throughout all stages of the hiring process is vital. Respond quickly to applicants to keep them engaged as many students apply for multiple opportunities and are not committed to you simply because they applied. Timely and clear communication can make a significant difference in securing your preferred candidate.



Diversity in hiring

Diversity in the workforce refers to the mix of different social and professional elements of each person's identity. Their social identity is made up of factors like their cultural heritage, age, LGBTQIA+ status, socioeconomic status and gender. Their professional identity is made up of factors such as their education background, profession, level in the organisation, and geographic location.⁴

However, **unconscious bias** (automatic, unintentional judgments or decisions influenced by personal experiences, cultural norms, and societal stereotypes) can hinder the benefits of diversity by influencing hiring and promotion decisions based on stereotypes or assumptions rather than merit. Addressing these biases is crucial to ensure that organisations can reap the benefits of increased productivity and innovation that diverse teams foster.⁵ In fact, research has found that, on average, companies with the most diverse workforces had a 29 per cent higher return on assets from 2013–2022.⁶

Attracting diverse candidates

Ultimately if your business has a positive reputation for inclusivity, you are more likely to attract diverse candidates. However, asking the following questions can help ensure you are on the right track to an inclusive recruitment process and build that reputation.

- Consider your interviewing processes. Are there any unnecessary hurdles in your current practices? Stress-inducing tactics, like providing a topic for the candidate to present on after a timed preparation period, can unfairly disadvantage disabled and neurodivergent candidates for positions where these skills are not essential.

- Look beyond traditional indicators of merit and success. Academic grades and awards are only one marker of the suitability of a candidate and are often more easily attained by those in already privileged positions. Does the candidate have interests and experiences outside of schooling/training that would complement the role? What about their soft skills?
- You may need to be more targeted in your search. Most universities and professional associations have specialised societies and groups for diverse students studying in STEM. For example, the University of NSW's **Women in Engineering Society** have a jobs board on their website and all universities have support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that may have platforms for you to directly promote to their students. Google your local institutions and reach out to these groups to see whether they can advertise your opportunity to their members.

Only 27 per cent of Australia's STEM workforce in 2021 were women, and women earned 23.5 per cent less than men on average.⁷ This gap is worse for those with overlapping underrepresented identities, like women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.⁸



⁴ Diversity Council Australia (2017) [What is Diversity & Inclusion?](#), Diversity Council Australia, accessed 24 February 2025.

⁵ IP Australia (2023) [Australian IP report 2023](#), IP Australia, Australian Government, accessed 24 February 2025.

⁶ Lawson S, Huang J, Boskovic T, Li M, Zurowska E and Wilson F (2023) [Lifting financial performance by investing in women](#), Blackrock, accessed 24 February 2025.

⁷ Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) (2023) [Gender equity insights 2023: Accelerating the pace of change](#), WGEA, Australian Government, accessed 24 February 2025.

⁸ Department of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR) (2024) [Pathway to Diversity in STEM Review. Final Recommendations](#), DISR Australian Government, accessed 27 June 2024.

Prior to arrival

CHAPTER THREE

3

Having a plan in place and being organised prior to the intern's arrival will make the process easier for everyone involved and save the team time and stress in the long run. It also models the standard of organisation that is expected at the business from right at the start.

THIS CHAPTER WILL COVER:

- Setting realistic expectations for your intern's skills and experience.
- Planning meaningful and achievable tasks.
- Organising training, onboarding and key resources.
- Defining roles and responsibilities for supervisors, mentors and buddies.
- Managing mentor workload to ensure a successful experience for both parties.



Use this [pre-employment checklist](#) on page 24 to help you get things in order.

Setting realistic expectations

While your intern will most likely be studying or training in an area that is relevant to your business they often come to the workplace with little to no prior industry experience. Many have had part-time or casual work prior to their internship but some may not have.

It is fair to expect your intern to have knowledge of the theory behind their work, however their 'work skills' such as communication, time management and teamwork are likely to require support and structured development. Remember that they are still in training, you cannot expect to receive a fully-fledged, ready for full responsibilities worker. An intern is not simply a cheap hire and putting time into considering how to support them in developing these skills will pay off in the long run.

Selecting appropriate tasks

It is important to remember that while an intern may not have extensive workplace history they do come with knowledge and experiences from their studies and outside interests. When determining what tasks to assign your intern it can help to establish what your intern would like to get out of their internship, their prior experiences and their interests. This can be discussed during the hiring process and then refined once they are employed.

Try to balance longer term projects (completed with support from the team) with routine basic tasks (that they can complete independently). It can also be helpful to mix up tasks that their experience and knowledge will contribute and be an asset to, with assignments that will step them out of their comfort zone and contribute to their professional development.

REGIONAL BUSINESS RECOMMENDATION

Provide practical support: If possible, increase accessibility by offering on-site accommodation, covering food and travel expenses. Alternatively provide information about accommodation options such as links to rental listings or shared housing opportunities.



Training

Reflect on the training regular employees are expected to undertake when beginning with your business and make a list of what will be necessary and beneficial for the intern to complete.

You should also take into account the specific tasks the intern will be engaged with and organise an onboarding roster of time with colleagues who can train them on the specific processes they will be undertaking.



Use the **onboarding plan template on page 25** to help organise responsibilities, tasks and timelines.

'Our environment is very controlled – we have documentation in place for all procedures which is stored within our system. This allows us to provide adequate training and resources, so our interns feel empowered to complete their work.'

Nautitech | Global provider of smart electronic and electrical solutions in the underground mining industry and Generation STEM Links program participant.



Mentors

A **supervisor** in the workplace allocates tasks and helps an employee manage their workload while a **buddy** supports them to settle in and feel comfortable socially in their new environment. A **mentor** on the other hand, provides overall guidance, career advice, and helps the intern navigate their professional development. These roles may be held by different people in the team or by one person with the time and capacity to do so.

High quality mentorship is often the make or break of a memorable internship providing interns with the guidance and support needed to kickstart their professional development and feel comfortable and welcomed in the workplace and STEM industry in general. Being a mentor also provides existing employees professional development and leadership opportunities, contributing positively to workplace culture and upskilling future leaders for the business.

Choosing the right mentor

Being a mentor to an intern can be a rewarding and educational experience for any employee, but it is important to ensure that the person chosen is positively motivated to support the intern and has the skills and personality to do so successfully. You might choose to open the opportunity up to a wide range of staff with an expression of interest or approach a person you are aware is keen to move into a leadership position in the future.

‘Depending on the size of the business, the direct supervisor could also be the intern’s mentor or it could be someone else that is more closely aligned with the student. Someone who has been in the business for a longer period, someone in a similar age group or someone with similar interests.’

Iberdrola | Global renewable energy leader and Generation STEM Links program participant.



Managing workload

Mentoring requires time and effort which can risk burnout if added to a full workload. This can negatively impact the relationship between the mentor and the intern.

Reducing the mentor’s workload to accommodate the change ensures they can develop a productive relationship with the intern while maintaining job satisfaction and shows staff that the business is serious about professional development. Furthermore a temporary redesign of the mentor’s responsibilities to include specific time allocated to meeting with the intern along with placing them on projects together encourages a mix of interactions that is most likely to spark a meaningful connection.⁹

Support for the mentor

To ensure mentors are equipped to supervise interns effectively it’s essential to provide them with resources and support. Here are some key elements to consider:

- **Clear communication:** Mentors should be informed about the intern’s background, skills and goals. Providing a comprehensive overview of the intern’s profile helps mentors tailor their guidance and support accordingly. It should also be clear to the mentor what they are expected to do with the intern (e.g. set tasks for them, help them manage time, have career development discussions).
- **Support from management:** Managers play a crucial role in supporting mentors by providing guidance, addressing concerns and facilitating resources when needed. Clear communication channels between mentors and management ensure alignment and timely resolution of any issues that may arise.
- **Mentorship training:** Offering mentorship training equips mentors with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively guide interns. Training sessions can cover topics such as effective communication, goal setting, receiving and delivering feedback and conflict resolution. There are also many online courses they can be enrolled in that cover the basics but these are best paired with reflective discussions specific to their current situation.

Support should be ongoing for the mentor throughout the internship particularly if this is the first time they have taken on the role.

⁹ Waters L (2004) ‘Protégé-Mentor Agreement about the Provision of Psychosocial Support: The Mentoring Relationship, Personality, and Workload’, Journal of Vocational Behavior, 65(3): 519–32

First day essentials

CHAPTER FOUR

4

A successful first day sets the tone for a positive internship and provides a valuable opportunity to establish a good relationship with the new employee from the beginning. It is also a chance to model the kind of organisation you would like to see from their work.

THIS CHAPTER WILL COVER:

- Key activities and resources to ensure a smooth beginning.
- Communicating expectations and setting learning goals.



First day

For their first day, some useful inclusions could be:

A startup guide: Include essential information on the organisation's structure, culture and values. It is helpful to reiterate the expectations that were outlined prior to commencement. This could be an email, website or pdf document that should also include:

- Leave details (what leave is available and how to access it).
- Clocking in/out and task tracking procedures along with any working hour expectations.
- Communication standards and tools (details on how the team communicates both professionally and socially along with any requirements around external communication).
- A list of important contacts.
- (Optional but a nice inclusion) a calendar/list of important dates like pay days, shutdown periods, public holidays, and team events that are coming up.

A tour of the facilities: Have a chat about the organisation and take this opportunity to get to know your intern better. Don't forget to show them their workspace! This is also a good opportunity to cover occupational health and safety guidelines.

Introductions to key staff members: Include an explanation of their role and what possible interactions the intern might have with them. A less formal way to do this is to organise a lunch or coffee break with the team. If it is a hybrid environment it can be helpful to organise the intern's first day for when most staff will be present.

The first day can be daunting, make sure the intern has a buddy on-site who will support them with the small things that can feel overwhelming like taking them to the best coffee spot, pointing out the bathrooms and showing them where the team eats lunch. This person should let the intern know if they'll be stepping out and how to contact them if they have any questions.

REGIONAL BUSINESS RECOMMENDATION

Foster a sense of belonging: It's beneficial to provide information about the local area like transport, supermarkets and healthcare services. Encourage interns to connect with local organisations and participate in community events to help them feel connected to the region and the role.



Establishing learning goals



While it may not necessarily happen on day one the first few days of the internship should include a meeting with the intern to clarify expectations and set goals for their time with the business. This helps them keep on track and supports their supervisor with prioritising tasks and opportunities. It can be helpful to prepare them for this conversation on day one by setting them a task to think about and write down some things they would like to achieve in their time with your business.

Discuss the business' expectations of the intern and then make space to establish what the intern wants to get from the experience. The goals should be agreed on by both parties, and may focus around:

- developing industry or job-specific skills or knowledge
- applying theoretical learning from their education into the workplace
- learning more about the industry and specific career paths available to them
- cultivating soft skills, such as critical thinking or effective communication.

The meeting should be held with the supervisor and intern and any goals established communicated with their mentor if that is a separate person.



Use the Learning goals and expectations template on page 26–27 to help guide the conversation.

'We invite our interns to visit the business before they start to gain insights into the environment, location, and who they will be working alongside.'

Advitech | Engineering and environmental consulting firm and Generation STEM Links program participant.



REGIONAL BUSINESS RECOMMENDATION

Onboard with team integration: Include interns in team events during the onboarding process to help them feel welcomed and engaged.



On the job

CHAPTER FIVE

5

Introducing the intern to their responsibilities and getting them accustomed with your business' expectations and culture doesn't end on day one. Setting up an intern for success takes time and the more time and thought that goes into their onboarding, development and support, the better the work output that you get from them will be. You may even get your newest member of staff from the experience.

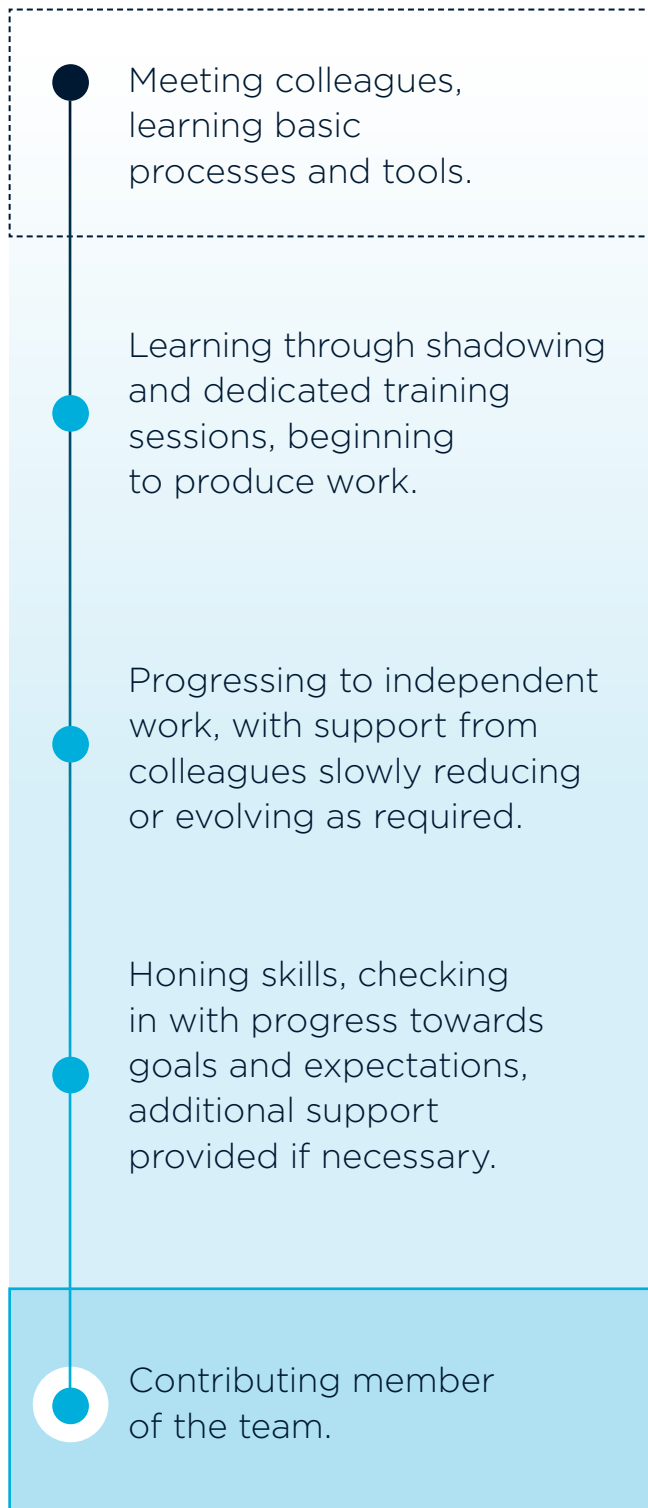
THIS CHAPTER WILL COVER:



- Strategies for managing tasks and time effectively.
- The importance of regular check-ins and structured support.
- How to give and receive feedback to foster growth and trust.
- Creating a safe and inclusive work environment for interns.

The journey

An intern's experience follows key stages, from their first day to the completion of their placement. Understanding this pathway helps businesses provide the right support at each stage, ensuring a positive and productive internship.



‘Once the intern understands the fundamentals and we see their capability, we then tap them on the shoulder and stretch them a little bit, putting them in the environment where they can liaise more with people across the organisation.’

Nautitech | Global provider of smart electronic and electrical solutions in the underground mining industry and Generation STEM Links program participant.



Task and time management

Setting up guidelines for who can give the intern new tasks, and how their tasks are managed is an important procedure to establish and communicate clearly with any staff who will be working with the intern.

Practically, having a clear task list that the intern can check off is a simple but effective means of making them feel supported while also ensuring they remain on track. Tasks can be very high level, then discussed in detail as they arise. You might choose to use:

- a Word/Google document
- a physical or digital whiteboard
- task management software such as Trello.

A key lesson for many interns will be learning how to break down their larger projects into daily tasks and manage their time. Providing a timeline for completion helps with this along with modelling from their supervisor (or mentor) on how to allocate appropriate time to tasks. The amount of support needed will vary according to the individual and often begins quite hands-on, with adjustments made as the student becomes more comfortable with the work throughout the internship.

‘The variety of projects and fields of research that I focused on made every day feel fresh and exciting, and I realised that working on multiple projects at once is something I enjoy. I’m now much more open to a career in a similar role.’

Intern | Bachelor of Science and Advanced Studies student and Generation STEM Links program participant.



Checking in

The first few weeks in any new job can be overwhelming, often leaving you with more questions than answers. The same applies for interns and is often more pronounced if it is their first time working in the industry.

Towards the start of their internship, it is important supervisors meet with their intern regularly. This may be daily or multiple times a week for the initial weeks until they start feeling more comfortable working independently. Setting a simple agenda for one-on-one meetings helps to ease anxiety and provide some structure for both the intern and their supervisor.

These can be formal meetings to discuss current tasks and operations or chats over a coffee to check in about how they are feeling or finding the work and workload. The regularity of the meetings will help build a strong working relationship between the intern and supervisor and ensure they feel comfortable asking questions.

‘I think it is important that even if direct communication isn’t happening daily, the intern should have open access to their supervisor at all times via channels such as Teams or similar to help them if they get stuck.’

Iberdrola | Global renewable energy leader and Generation STEM Links program participant.



Providing feedback

Providing feedback that is timely, specific, and supportive fosters an environment where interns feel valued and motivated to develop their skills while also ensuring they remain on track and producing high quality work. Regular, consistent feedback (both positive and constructive) in small doses helps to normalise the process and develop their resilience when faced with constructive criticism. Instead of waiting for formal reviews, supervisors should engage in brief, constructive conversations frequently, such as during weekly one-on-one meetings.

Utilising a structured model, like the Action, Impact, Do (AID) model can help to guide feedback conversations.

FEEDBACK STAGE	DESCRIBE
Action	What exactly has happened? What has been done well/not well?
Impact	What effect the actions have had (on the team, project, or individual)?
Do	What should continue? A clear actionable plan for what should be changed for improvement.

Remember that receiving feedback can be difficult. [See this article about the art of giving feedback](#) for some tips on how to give feedback in a considered and empathetic way.

‘Feedback should always be constructive, and it should help the intern learn so they are able to be successful in the future. The supervisor should demonstrate how to correctly complete the tasks and take steps to understand why the intern may have misunderstood in the first place and help to correct their understanding.’

Iberdrola | Global renewable energy leader and Generation STEM Links program participant.



Receiving feedback

Feedback should go both ways. Facilitating a safe environment for your intern to provide their feedback on projects and processes within the business promotes psychological safety and can also highlight improvements and areas of growth the business could benefit from.

Google’s Project Aristotle followed 180 teams over four years and found that the biggest driver of high performing teams is **psychological safety** – feeling safe to take risks and speak up without fear of embarrassment, rejection or punishment.¹⁰

10 Duhigg C (25 February 2016) ‘What Google learned from its quest to build the perfect team’, The New York Times, accessed 11 July 2024.

Supporting the intern to thrive

All employees have complex layers to their lives and identities that affect their performance and wellbeing in the workplace. To ensure the intern's success and well-being, it's essential to create a supportive environment where they feel safe and valued.

Grievances

Knowing where to go if something is wrong helps people feel safe and ensure that issues are dealt with quickly and respectfully. Make sure the intern is aware of grievance processes, and that there are avenues for them to discuss issues that don't initially involve their supervisor or mentor.

Mental health

Making note of any services employees have access to, such as mental health leave or employee assistance programs, explicitly during onboarding and in meetings helps to normalise help-seeking and increases the likelihood of your intern getting support if they need it. There are a number of free services available for small businesses in this area, find out more [find out more on this website about mental health for small business](#).

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity refers to the natural variations in how our brains work noting that no way is 'correct'. A few commonly known neurodiverse conditions are ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyscalculia, and Tourette's syndrome. Often workplaces are organised in ways that are best suited to neurotypical people, and adjustments can be made to better include and support neurodiverse interns.

[Neurodiversity Hub](#) have a range of information and practical resources available for employers.

Underrepresented groups

Interns from communities underrepresented in their field face unique challenges in the workplace. These communities include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, women, people living with disabilities, [culturally and linguistically diverse people](#), and [people who identify as LGBTQIA+](#). It is important to recognise [people can belong to more than one of these cohort](#), and this may change their experience.

Supporting members of these communities involves commitment from both leadership and employees to maintaining an inclusive workplace culture. Some ways to do this include implementing clear policies and making training available for staff around diversity and inclusion, alongside practical supports tailored to specific needs such as accessible workplace environments and flexible work options.¹¹

The following resources offer practical advice and suggestions for how to support diversity and inclusion in the workplace:

- The Australian Academy of Technological Science and Engineering have put together a [Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit](#) specifically designed for small and medium-sized businesses.
- [The Diversity Council of Australia's](#) research-backed resources are aimed at improving diversity and inclusion in the workplace.
- [Respect@Work](#) is an Australian Government initiative providing tools and resources to help businesses address workplace sexual harassment.
- The [Australian Human Rights Commission](#) have a range of practical suggestions for supporting people with a disability in the workplace.

¹¹ Department of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR) (2024) [Pathway to Diversity in STEM Review. Final Recommendations](#), DISR, Australian Government, accessed 27 June 2024.

At the end

CHAPTER SIX

6

Wrapping up an internship thoughtfully ensures a positive experience for the intern and reinforces the business' reputation as a supportive and engaging workplace. A well-structured close out can help interns transition smoothly to their next role whether that's with your business or not.

THIS CHAPTER WILL COVER



- Conducting final check-ins and reflecting on achievements.
- Considering ongoing employment opportunities.
- Supporting interns with career advice, resume reviews and recommendations.
- Recognising contributions through farewell events and opportunities to share learnings.

Extending the engagement

If you choose to offer your intern ongoing employment, let them know at least two weeks before the end of their contract to ensure there is enough time to process any necessary paperwork and for them to give notice to existing employers.

If they performed well but the business does not have capacity to take them on immediately, take the time to discuss the future opportunities and express your interest in staying connected.

‘Are they enjoying it? Are you enjoying having them there? If it makes business sense, it’s great for both the intern and business.’

DesignStreet | Full-service design and marketing agency and Generation STEM Links program participant.



Checking in

In their final weeks schedule a check-in with the intern to chat honestly about what has gone well, and where there is still room for improvement. Begin the conversation by asking them how they think their internship has gone, what they are proud of and what they’re keen to work on next. Set some tasks and actions for their final days to tie up any loose ends or set them up for their new role with the business.

‘This role showed me how diverse and rewarding the work can be. I’m now considering a future in regional areas, seeing how technology can improve both agriculture and conservation.’

Intern | Bachelor of Mechatronics student and Generation STEM Links program participant.



Preparing for their next adventure

If the intern will be moving on from the business, set up time to provide guidance on career paths within the industry. This discussion helps maintain a professional relationship and encourages the intern to consider returning or recommending the business to others.

You might also offer to review their LinkedIn profile and resume or perform a mock interview and give them feedback on their performance, providing employer insight into how they come across professionally. If appropriate write them a letter of reference addressing their strengths, achievements, and how they worked with the team.

Celebrating their achievements

If there is time having the intern present on what they learned and will take forward with them from their time with the business is nice way to finalise the internship and gives the business a chance to formally acknowledge their contributions.

If your team meets in person, organising a farewell social event is another nice way to acknowledge the value of the intern within the team, and provide the intern with a final opportunity to expand their professional network.



Templates



Example job advertisement

Electronics Designer – paid internship

About the placement

This internship is with **<business name>**.

You will work within an interdisciplinary team and assist with the design, development and commercialisation of electronic products. As an Electronics Designer you will work with an experienced team, contributing to electronic design, testing and documentation. This opportunity will allow you to gather insight into where a career in electronic design can take you, and gain experience working in an interdisciplinary and collaborative environment.

Work arrangements

- Start date
- Working arrangement: Full Time or Part time for 200 hours on a fixed term contract, with the possibility for further employment for the right candidate.
- Remuneration
- Location.

Desired capabilities

- Studying electronics related qualification.
- Experience designing printed circuit boards.
- Experience with Altium.
- Good written and oral communication skills.
- *Any other skills required for the specific role.*

Requirements

1. Must be in your penultimate or final year of an undergraduate qualification.

About the business

<Business name> aims to make everyday tasks more accessible to people with a disability by providing innovative technology and practical solutions for the home. We have grown from two friends studying mechanical engineering with a dream of making the world a better place, to a team of 15 employees across two sites, bringing together a huge range of skills and insight to create exciting new products.

At **<business name>**, we are proud of our commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce, where every team member is valued and respected. Join us in our mission to create an environment where diverse perspectives are celebrated, and everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Apply here

If you are interested in this internship, please submit your EOI and CV to **<link>**



Interview question guide

Note that this is a list of sample questions and should be used as a guideline – some questions may not be applicable to your context and/or you may want to add some other more specific to your workplace.

The first phase of questions should confirm the intern’s eligibility.

1. Can you confirm what degree you are studying?
2. How many years is your degree and what year are you currently in?
3. Are you an Australian citizen or permanent resident (if required for the role)?
4. Do you currently have a paid internship with another business or organisation?

The second phase of questions should assess the intern’s current skills in a workplace setting.

1. Why do you want this placement with our business?
2. Can you describe a situation where you showed initiative?
3. Can you describe a situation where you had to work through conflict or difficulty?
4. Can you describe a situation or experience that you are proud of?
5. You have been given a task by your supervisor that you do not know how to do. What do you do?
6. *If your business is a start-up, you may want to ask this question:* Can you describe a time when you had to adapt quickly to a new or unexpected situation? How did you handle it?

The third phase of questions should be workplace/role specific, e.g. technical questions (knowledge of a specific computer software, process, etc.)

These questions should be tailored to the role and work environment.

The final phase establishes details and opens the floor for anything they’d like to discuss.

1. What dates can you start/work and how many days a week can you work?
2. I am interviewing several candidates for this role, is there anything extra you would like to add that you think makes you a standout candidate compared to other candidates I might be interviewing?



Pre-employment checklist

Note that this is a comprehensive list – some items may not be applicable to your context.

TASK	DATE COMPLETED
Assign a supervisor and consider assigning a mentor. Ensure they are clear on their role and responsibilities as part of the internship.	
Share with the intern what they will be working on, and who their supervisor will be for any questions. Let the team know the intern’s start date, name and any other important information they’d like shared (e.g. pronouns).	
Send the intern an email one week prior to their first day including important details such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start date, time and meeting place for their first day. • Public transport and/or parking availability nearby. • Cafes, shops, eateries, food storage or cooking facilities on site. • Names of important people (supervisor, mentor). • A copy of their contract. • Any important policies they will need to agree to (e.g. Code of Conduct, confidentiality agreement). • Dress code/expectations/norms (even if that is just jeans and t-shirt). 	
Prepare any essential equipment the intern will need (e.g. access pass and/or keys, PPE, name tag, uniform, device, stationery).	
Organise any insurances, software licenses, logins, permissions that the intern will need.	
Prepare the intern’s workspace, ordering any equipment and/or software that is missing.	
Develop an onboarding roster with time set aside for staff to train the intern on specific processes they will need for the projects they will be working on. It can be helpful as part of this process to create a short list of basic tasks that the intern can complete during their first week.	
Prepare the welcome package for their first day (see <i>First day essentials</i> for suggestions) and organise a buddy who will be there physically to help with the basics.	



Learning goals and expectations template

Business expectations

What is the intern expected to achieve in their time with the business? What projects will they be working on, and what skills will they need to develop for these? What will the intern be expected to participate in? How will progress towards goals be tracked and discussed?

Learning and development goals

Goals should be **SMART**, and may be focused around (but are not limited to) developing industry or job-specific skills or knowledge, applying theoretical learning from formal education/training into the workplace, learning more about the industry and specific career paths available, or cultivating soft skills such as critical thinking or effective communication.

Example



GOAL

Building up my professional network.

Tasks/activities to support development

Setting-up meetings with colleagues and leading the conversation. Attendance at the annual whole-company strategy day and adding five people on LinkedIn from the event. Writing an elevator pitch about what I do and practising with my mentor.

BUSINESS EXPECTATIONS

GOAL

Tasks/activities to support development



GOAL

Tasks/activities to support development

GOAL

Tasks/activities to support development

GOAL

Tasks/activities to support development



Example projects for interns

PROJECT DESCRIPTION	DESIRED SKILLS
<p>Research and development project to assess antenna and RF system performance. Key activities will involve the design and implementation of various experiments and the collection and analysis of results.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Software engineering (Python or Bash or C). • CAD (Fusion 360). • Program, set up, and run CNC machine. • Soldering. • Data modelling and ETL tools/processes.
<p>Utilising understanding of chemistry to conduct experiments and explore fabrication techniques for solar cells.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe laboratory skills. • Experience with writing experimental procedures and technical reports. • Data processing. • Understanding of chemistry.
<p>Utilising knowledge of environmental sciences and sustainability by spending time in the field gathering samples, conducting vegetation surveys, and gathering data. Assisting with the analysis and management of data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience with data analysis. • Experience with report writing. • Prior field work experience beneficial.
<p>Managing and analysing multiple data sets to help inform data driven, sustainable practices in aquaculture. Clean, manage, integrate, and analyse these data sets to discover insightful trends and learnings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience with data management (cleaning, organising, integration). • Experience with statistical analysis. • Experience with programming and AI.
<p>Conduct desktop research focussing on plant ecology to determine which species of freshwater plants would be most suitable to be grown in the open ponds newly developed to grow-out the Murray cod.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience conducting a literature review. • Interest in plant ecology.
<p>Monitor the health, growth, yield and condition of a commercial orchard. Role involves pest scouting, assessment and crop monitoring and measuring moisture content.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion for horticulture. • Understanding of data analysis. • Willingness to learn new skills.
<p>Leveraging engineering expertise, knowledge of heat exchange systems, and enthusiasm for 3D printing to assist in 3D printing a metal heat exchange prototype using recycled feed stock, and testing performance against traditional heat exchange.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundamental understanding of heat exchange systems. • Basic research and development skills. • Keen interest and understanding of 3D printing is essential.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION	DESIRED SKILLS
<p>Researching and analysing the best approaches to support neurodiverse students and understand core learnings from standardised tests. From analysis, developing new problems that can be input into a video game setting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong understanding of mathematics. • Enjoys problem solving. • Tutoring experience. • Good communication and collaboration skills.
<p>Assisting in collecting and analysing data from various sources including trials, experiments, and on-farm data. Helping to maintain records and assisting in report preparation. Also aiding in the assistance of industry trends, competitor activities and market opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong interest in agriculture and technology. • Problem-solving skills and a willingness to learn. • Knowledge of data analysis tools and software.
<p>Scan, test and import data of different paint samples, helping to develop and improve the AI technology that will analyse and backward engineer these paint samples.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of spectrometry. • Understanding of theoretical optics. • Understanding of experimental design.
<p>Assisting with opportunities for optimising processes and efficiencies on the manufacturing floor. Working to understand the manufacturing process, from storage through to assembly and quality assurance and suggesting improvements, using experience in 3D design and CAD to help design solutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studying a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering or equivalent qualification. • Experience with 3D design and modelling. • Experience with CAD software such as Creo. • Interest in manufacturing. • Interest in optimisation of processes.
<p>Supporting a wider team with the design and manufacturing of tilt trays for large vehicle ladder systems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studying mechanical or mechatronic engineering. • Experience with CAD drafting. • Experience using hand tools. • Interest in fabrication, hydraulics, and electronics. • Enjoys being creative and innovative.
<p>Working with a team to design and implement machine learning models capable of predicting cell growth and behaviour. Involves analysing vast databases containing a wide range of input variables and measurable outputs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative mind for idea generation. • Willingness to share ideas and provide feedback on the ideas of others. • Basic understanding of machine learning. • Understanding of python. • Motivation and passion to learn.

Note that these are just some examples from various industries of the kinds of projects interns could work on. What works will depend on your business and context, along with the skills and experience of the intern.

FAQs

What's the difference between a supervisor and a mentor?

A supervisor focuses on overseeing the intern's work ensuring tasks are completed correctly and efficiently, providing feedback on performance, and addressing any immediate job-related issues. In contrast, a mentor offers broader guidance and support, helping the intern navigate their career path, develop professional skills, and build confidence.

What considerations are needed for the intern to work remotely?

If you would like the intern to work remotely, it is important they are provided with the right tools and structures to do so. This should include, but is not limited to:

- A device/laptop (including headphones and a mouse).
- A stable internet connection.
- Face to face interaction where possible:
 - Face to face time with your intern is important. The relationship that forms can be the deciding factor between smooth, efficient communication or not.
 - In a survey, 95 per cent of 2,300 business executives highlighted that face-to-face meetings are essential in establishing and maintaining long term relationships.¹²

How can we foster interpersonal connections between the team and the intern?

Fostering relationships between an intern and their colleagues involves creating formal and informal connection opportunities. This could include:

- setting up less formal introductions, such as coffee meetings, when they start
- proactively inviting them to preexisting social outings
- modelling informal check-ins with colleagues
- organising team-building activities, such as collaborative projects and off-site outings.

What should the supervisor discuss with the intern during meetings?

Early meetings during the internship should be spent developing trust and understanding. *Who are they? What are their aspirations?* Some important points to establish revolve around their goals, and your expectations as their supervisor. *What do they want out of the internship? What skills do you as their supervisor see them needing for their role?*

As the internship progresses catch ups can be focused around assigning new tasks, reviewing progress, asking and answering more specific questions and providing feedback. Space should also be made regularly to proactively check in around how the intern is coping with their workload and their general wellbeing.

¹² Harvard Business Review Analytical Services (2009) Managing across distance in today's economic climate: The value of face-to-face communication, Harvard Business Review, accessed 24 February 2025.

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