Work placement periods in university studies

Recommendations on the planning, implementation and reporting of internships and other work placement periods
- For students, universities and employers

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Aalto University
University of Lapland
Lappeenranta University of Technology
Tampere University of Technology
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Foreword

An internship or other comparable work placement period plays an important role in a university degree – an internship can bridge theoretical knowledge with practical skills that are needed in working life. Particularly these days, as the pressure to shorten study times has increased, internships have become more important, because they offer students a chance to gain some work experience before graduation. A well-planned internship can benefit everyone: the student, the university, and the employer.

At the moment, internship practices differ across universities and degree programmes, which can place students in different fields in unequal positions. Of course, each degree programme should be able to choose the internship model that best suits it. However, many aspects of internships could be harmonised, and developing the internship system would benefit students, universities and internship providers alike.

This guide was written as part of the ESR funded TYYLI project (Työelämäjaksoja ja työssäoppimista yliopisto-opintoihin – Bridging the gap between university studies and working life). This guide maps out the strengths and weaknesses of current internship practices at Finnish universities and gives recommendations for areas of development and operating models, covering the different stages of the internship process and all the parties – the university, the student and the organisations that offer internship opportunities. This guide was commented on by a large and varied group of actors in the university sector, student unions, companies and employers’ associations, and we would like to thank everyone for their valuable contribution.

Practice makes perfect!

November 2016

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Foreword

Effective working life cooperation and internships

Strong and functional links between education and working life has been a long-term goal in education policy for good and obvious reasons: cooperation with the labour market makes education more effective. The present report discusses the benefits of internships from the point of view of the student, the university, and the employer.

A well-managed internship is the perfect example of fruitful cooperation between working life and education. As in education in general, standards should be set high in internships. In order to be successful and effective, the internship must have clear objectives, the student must receive instruction, and the overall process must be evaluated afterwards. The most important rule is that each party must know the purpose and objectives of the internship. It is also important to ensure that the communication between the university and the employer does not depend solely on the student; there should also be direct links between teaching staff and the employees of companies where students are placed. This ensures that all the parties are committed to the process and allows both the university and the employer to reap the benefits of the internship.

Current connections between universities and working life are varied: some institutions have functional and established collaborative ties, while others have mixed experiences with internship and diverse procedures. However, the transformation of the labour market and the operating environment at large challenges all higher education institutions to renew themselves, also with regard to working life cooperation and internship practices. Today, education might not lead to a specific niche in the labour market, but interesting job opportunities can be found in the most unexpected places. Having an open mind is definitely an asset, both when looking for an internship placement and when completing the actual internship.

These guidelines were written by six universities, but the models and examples can be useful for others, as well. I hope that these recommendations motivate their readers and give them new tools and insights for improved internships. I would be happy to see this kind of cooperation on internship matters continue and deepen between universities.

Petri Haltia
Counsellor of Education
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Keys to a successful internship

Smooth cooperation with working life benefits all parties: the educational institution, the employer, and the student. The internship model described in this guide is an excellent example of fruitful cooperation.

Clear and consistent internship practices help employers to supervise students at the workplace and students to perform their tasks during the internship. This is important particularly in cases where one workplace takes several interns from different degree programmes or universities. The aim of these recommendations and examples is to establish a solid foundation for successful internships. Clear objectives, responsibilities and rules and open communication between all the parties build the foundation for a successful internship and meaningful experiences.

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Learning outcomes in working life

The shift toward competence-oriented curricula is one of the most profound changes at universities. Internships must have clear objectives and realistic learning outcomes. Internships offer a fine opportunity for students to develop their competencies and apply academic knowledge to different practical tasks. The development of internship practices should not only focus on the rules and number of study credits granted, but it should include a more profound analysis of the ideal content of academic degrees. Universities must think of ways to include learning that takes place outside of its own sphere into the degrees of its students.

The TYYLI project is an excellent example of cooperation between universities. The current internship practices are varied, but the labour market is the same for all students. Thus, there is a clear need to harmonise the models and share good practices among universities. An internship can provide students with insights into the links between theoretical knowledge and practice and teach them so-called soft working life skills, which is something the employers are also eager to see. A carefully-planned internship that is relevant to the learning outcomes of the degree merits its place in degrees and should become more common in the future.

Aalto University Student Union
Student Union of University of Lapland
Student Union of Lappeenranta University of Technology
Student Union of University of Oulu
Student Union of Tampere University of Technology
Student Union of University of Turku
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1. Introduction

The internship was a highly positive experience that motivated me in my studies. Often, it is difficult to know what kinds of tasks one could do after graduation, which can eat away at one’s motivation. Getting some practical experience through internship really boosted my confidence. I can definitely recommend an internship for other students.

Having an internship in one’s CV lets potential employers know that the applicant has experience in the field, not to mention the fact that an internship is an excellent opportunity to make new contacts that might be useful later on.

Finnish university degrees typically include at least one compulsory or optional internship period. The content and implementation of the work placement period can differ greatly, not only between universities, but also between individual degree programmes within the same university. This guide begins with an overview of the current internship practices at universities, noting on their differences in content and implementation. The description of the current situation is based on a large-scale survey on the internship practices at different universities, which was carried out in autumn 2015 as part of the ESR funded TYYLI project.¹ ²

This guide focuses on recommendations, models and examples that can help universities to harmonise their internship requirements and practices. The guide has three aims: 1) to harmonise internship practices and ensure equal opportunities across universities and degree programmes, 2) to make the internship a meaningful part of studies, linking it seamlessly into degrees, and 3) to promote employment after graduation. However, it is important to bear in mind that each degree programme has its special features, and some internships are governed by legislative provisions and limitations, which means that it is not appropriate or sensible to harmonise all the practices.

The recommendations given in this guide are primarily intended for internships in Finland, but they are also applicable to internships abroad, as an entrepreneur, or any work placement period that can be included in the degree. The guide discusses the overall internship process, starting with the preparation stage and ending with the tasks taking place after the internship period. Internship is seen as a whole and approached from three perspectives: the student’s, the degree programme’s, and the employer’s. Each internship is comprised of stages, and all the stages must support the degree, in order to make the internship experience meaningful as a whole. A well-planned and executed internship benefits all parties.

The final chapter in this guide contains a summary of good internship practices for students, universities, and employers.

1.1. Benefits of internships

A well-planned internship that has clear goals benefits the student, the university, and the employer, as long as each party knows its responsibilities and tasks, as described herein. The following tables present the benefits for each party.

Oh, that is what the apparatus pictured in the process diagram looks like in real life!
I was surprised by how varied my tasks were. In my opinion, this is what makes an internship so important – without it, I would not know what kinds of jobs I can apply for.

Benefits for the university and degree programme

- Students advance their studies and can gain study credits through internship, also during the summer months.
- After completing the degree programme, the students have become competent experts with good working life skills (social influence).
- An internship is an excellent opportunity to learn working life skills, which are difficult to teach at a university otherwise.
- Input and comments from employers in the student’s learning outcomes plan allow students to receive direct feedback on the skills needed in working life.
- Internship reports provide degree programmes with concrete feedback on how well the content of their studies corresponds to working life requirements. For example, a summary of the internship reports can be seen as a feedback channel and used in the annual development of studies and degree programmes.
- The contacts with employers made during internship periods can also support other forms of cooperation between the university and working life, such as theses and R&D projects, teaching cooperation, or alumni work.
- The university can compile statistics on the employers of past internships and communicate these to the students.

Benefits for the student

- The student gains a better understanding of how his or her competences and expertise have developed.
- The student understands the importance of working life skills (both field-specific and generic skills).
- An internship gives the student a sense of achievement, which increases his or her confidence in own abilities.
An internship is a unique experience that can open new doors.

The student’s employment prospects improve.

Studies become more concrete, and the student can apply theoretical knowledge to practice.

After the internship, the student has an improved perspective on his or her remaining studies and their importance for future careers -> improved motivation.

The student advances in his or her studies and gains study credits during the internship, possibly in the summer months.

The student learns more about the local employers in his or her field of study.

Benefits for the employer

Employers have a possibility to recruit motivated students who possess the latest theoretical knowledge in the field.

Employers acquire a better understanding of the students’ skills and competences.

When an employer is looking for new employees, a former intern is a safe choice, because the employer already knows them and does not have to provide such an extensive induction training as for newcomers.

Students can give the company/organisation a fresh perspective on their operations and provide new development ideas.

Employers can comment on the student’s learning outcomes plan and let the university know which skills are required in the field and in working life in general and should be taught at universities.

1.2. The current situation and challenges with internships in the degree programmes of Finnish universities

In autumn 2015, the ESR-funded TYYLI project carried out an analysis on the internship practices at the universities within the project. The results are based on responses from a total of 96 degree programmes at Aalto University, University of Lapland, Lappeenranta University of Technology, University of Oulu, Tampere University of Technology and University of Turku. The analysis covered a wide range of questions related to the implementation and content of internships and support measures. The following section summarises the principal results of the analysis.
1.2.1. Internship as part of the degree programme

Often, the internship is not properly integrated into the degree programme, and internship practices vary greatly. The importance of internship and good preparation are not emphasised in degree programmes, but the internship is seen as a way of completing the number of credits required for the degree. Sometimes, students are not properly informed of internship matters. They do not always know that an internship can be part of their degree programme, unless it is compulsory.

The extent of internship required varies greatly between different degrees. For example, some master’s programmes can include up to 24 credits of internship, while other programmes barely have any. Degree programmes also differ in terms of optional and compulsory internships. Typically, the internship is optional in bachelor’s degrees and compulsory in master’s degrees. There is a great deal of variation between degree programmes and universities in how internships are converted into study credits, which puts students in unequal positions. For example, some degree programmes only grant study credits for internships that exceed a certain minimum period, others allow students to choose the number of credits at the internship application stage, while some only grant study credits for part of the internship (for example, if the internship is considered to fulfil 60 percent of the requirements, the student receives 60 percent of the maximum number of study credits.)

It can be difficult to find an internship placement, particularly at the early stages of one’s studies. Therefore, many bachelor’s programmes, in particular, allow students to complete the internship also outside of their own field of study, shifting the focus to so-called generic or transferable skills. Master’s programmes, on the other hand, typically require the student to find an internship placement in their own field of study.

1.2.2. Application, support measures and funding

The internship can take place in the private or public sector, in Finland or abroad, supported by the university or without any financial support. Some universities have established internship connections, the teaching staff might help students to find an internship position though their contacts, or students find their internship positions independently. The career services at universities also help students in job-hunting and forward them information on open jobs and internship opportunities, for example, through the national Aarresaari portal.3

Financial support schemes are also varied. The costs of an internship can be covered partly by the employer and partly by the university. Many universities have so-called internship support programmes, which cover part of the salary and other costs incurred by the employer. The student applies for internship support from the university before the internship period, and the employer will bill the university for the corresponding amount at the end of the period. Usually, in order to receive internship support, the student’s salary must be equal to or greater than the minimum salary of employees who meet the work requirement, as specified by Kela (EUR 1173 per month in 2016) or in the collective agreement of the sector. The use of

3 www.aarresaari.net, a network of academic career services representing Finnish universities
of internship support programmes varies from sector to sector. Similarly, the duration and amount of support vary between universities and may also depend on whether the student is employed by an external employer or by a research group within the university. In some fields, there are few paid or supported internships available, which means that some students only receive study credits as compensation for their internship, although this is not the recommended practice.

In order to receive internship support, the student must meet certain general criteria (e.g. the internship is accepted as part of the degree) and, in some cases, criteria specific to the degree programme (concerning, for example, the number of study credits completed or success at studies). However, these eligibility criteria vary between universities, within universities and often, from one year to another. Some degree programmes grant support on the basis of the number of study credits and some for as long as there are funds available.

Feedback from employers has been mixed: some consider internship support to be absolutely necessary, while others base their decision on whether to employ an intern primarily on other matters than direct costs, such as the amount of time and commitment it takes to supervise an intern.

1.2.3. Learning outcomes and reporting

There is immense variation in the learning outcomes of different degree programmes. Some programmes specify clear objectives that apply to all students and require each student to have their personal learning outcomes plan approved before starting their internship. At the other end of the spectrum are programmes that refer to the objectives only vaguely and do not set any personal learning objectives.

The instructions on how to prepare the internship report are also extremely varied at the moment. Not all degree programmes have written reporting guidelines available, and sometimes, the instructions are difficult to find. The best reporting guidelines encourage students to reflect on their own development during the internship and link the internship to their studies. Some programmes provide lesser guidelines that do not ask the student to reflect or even describe the organisation or their tasks.
In many degree programmes, students do not receive any feedback on their internship reports. Thus, the student’s reflections and ideas may remain one-sided, unless the student receives feedback from their internship supervisor or from other students at peer discussions. Furthermore, degree programmes do not use internship reports as a tool to develop education or cooperation with businesses.
2. Recommendations on internships

This guide approaches internships (and other work placement periods) from three perspectives – the university’s, the student’s, and the employer’s – and divides them into three phases – before, during and after the internship. Each phase has a set of tasks that 1) make internships more equal between students across different degree programmes and universities, 2) promote internship as a learning experience, and 3) improve dialogue between the university, the student and the employer (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The ideal internship process from the point of view of students, universities and employers.
2.1. Before the internship/work placement period

2.1.1. Purpose and objectives of internships

The purpose of the internship period is to help students link their studies with working life and recognise the different career options and employers in their field. The internship is also a good opportunity to learn working life skills in an authentic setting and understand their importance in the light of working life requirements. During the internship process, students learn to highlight their own competencies and identify their own needs for development, along with other useful job-seeking and working life skills.

If the students complete their internships early into their studies, they can plan their remaining studies, so that their eventual degree will correspond to the student’s career wishes after graduation, as far as possible. An internship can also help the students to identify roles they do not wish to work in, which can facilitate the planning of further studies. An internship that is followed by extensive reflections helps the students in future job-seeking by teaching them to understand their competencies better.

2.1.2. Integrating internships more firmly into degrees

Degree programmes should emphasise the purpose and importance of internship as a way of building the student’s competencies from early on, well before the actual internship starts. The internship should be more course-like to fit it among other courses and integrate it into other studies. Degree programmes should appoint a person/persons in charge of internships to manage and develop them, similarly to other courses. Their tasks could include communication on internship matters, the management of the internship process from initial info sessions to the reception and archiving of internship reports and, importantly, reviewing and using the internship reports (see chapter 2.3.2 Using internship reports at degree programmes). Furthermore, it is important to organise a briefing session for students, informing them of practical internship matters and the internship process in each degree programme.

2.1.3. Internship requirements and criteria

Internship requirements should be set carefully to make them correspond to the learning outcomes of the degree. Bachelor’s students could be allowed to complete their internship in a field other than their field of study, particularly if the internship is compulsory. In this case, the emphasis would be on learning generic skills. Master’s students, on the other hand, should find an internship placement in a working life setting that is relevant to their field of study.

The learning outcomes should allow students to reflect on the things they learned during the internship in relation to their other studies. The university should guide its students to approach the internship from this point of view. The requirements
for internships in bachelor’s and master’s degrees should always be balanced with regard to the extent of previous studies.

Degree programmes should bear in mind that some students work around the year in several shorter periods. Therefore, the option of making the internship comprise several separate work periods is also viable, provided that the student has set his or her learning outcomes separately for each period and these have been approved. Interns can also work part-time, in which case the number of study credits is based on the hours worked, calculated as a percentage of corresponding full-time work. It is also recommended to approve working as an entrepreneur as a form of internship, if the work meets the requirements in other respects.

2.1.4. Support before the internship

Universities can support students to find an internship placement by offering orientative training, such as CV workshops, visits by recruitment specialists, or information on job-hunting. Employers and students can also be brought closer to each other by promoting future internship periods and different channels for advertising internship placements. Students in their first and second years, in particular, often struggle with expressing their competencies, and landing a summer job or internship in one’s own field unaided can feel close to impossible.

Another way of offering support before the internship is to make links between course content and working life, also in other courses. This will help students to use the lessons learned in course in their internships and build on their competences in specific topics. Furthermore, the links between studies and working life can be made even stronger by using the student’s personal study plan as a tool for expressing personal competencies. The student and the teacher tutor or academic instructor should also discuss the internship at one of their meetings. The university can build the professional and working life skills of its teachers by organising, for example, working life excursions to responsible teachers.

Universities can make the internship process smoother by preparing detailed instructions (describing the internship process as a whole) and offering forms (financial support, internship contract, the approval of the internship placement). All the material should be available in one place, for example, in the internship section on the degree programme’s website.

2.1.5. Planning the internship and learning outcomes

When the student has found the internship placement, he or she must make sure that it meets the degree programme’s internship requirements. The requirements are typically stricter in master’s degree programmes than in bachelor’s degrees. The student applies for approval for the internship from the person responsible for internships at the degree programme. The responsible person signs the internship placement approval form and internship contract with the student. The student makes the employment contract with the employer. The employer and the student make an internship contract, even if the internship is unpaid, in order to agree on the responsibilities and insurances. No employment contract is made for an unpaid internship.
Each degree programme must have clear instructions on how to plan the internship and set the learning outcomes. The Laadukas harjoittelu (“Successful internship”) guide by the University of Helsinki career services offers tips on how to prepare these instructions (in Finnish): http://www.helsinki.fi/urapalvelut/materiaalit/laadukasharjoittelu.pdf. Each student prepares a personal internship plan that specifies his or her learning outcomes and the connection between the personal study plan and the intended tasks during the internship period. The description of the internship period in the curricula guide of the degree programme can be used as the basis for specifying the learning outcomes. The instructions on the internship plan also emphasise various working life skills that have been found to be important in field-specific surveys by unions and in questionnaires by the Aarresaari network (aarresaari.net -> Career monitoring). The learning outcomes plan can also be examined in a broader context, as part of the degree programme, focusing on how well other courses develop the necessary working life skills and which skills need to be improved during the internship.

The person responsible for internships helps the student to prepare the plan, if necessary, and approves the plan. The employer appoints a contact person who checks the student’s plan (usually, at the start of the internship), provides comments and suggests editing, if the tasks are not in line with the student’s learning outcomes. This ensures that the student and the employer have similar expectations for the internship. The objectives and the learning outcomes can be specified during the internship.

The procedures on salaried or unpaid internships, the amount of compensation and other support matters must be similar across the university. In principle, the internship should always be salaried. However, if the internship is unpaid, the number of study credits granted should be high enough to make the student eligible for financial aid during the period, so that it can be included in studies during the summer.

2.1.6. Examples of the learning outcomes of an internship/working life course

Below are some examples of learning outcomes for internships or working life courses that are applicable to all fields (from courses taught at universities within the TYYLI project). The learning outcomes should be based on the relevant level of requirements (own field/general/bachelor’s/master’s) and on the specific skills needed in working life in the field.

Recognising one’s own competences and assessing one’s own work and learning

- After the internship, the student can document his or her own work, on-the-job learning and working methods.
- After the internship, the student understands the importance of documentation as a tool to improve one’s own performance.
- After the internship, the student can assess and develop him/herself as a learner and employee.
- After the internship, the student can assess, specify and develop his or her working life skills and expertise.
Independent and responsible approach to work

- After the internship, the student can perform independent design and development tasks and other kinds of responsible tasks.
- After the internship, the student knows how to face various challenges relevant to his or her field, in a development role in the public sector, or in another demanding expert role.
- After the internship, the student takes responsibility for his or her own, systematic learning as a member of the university or working community.
- After the internship, the student can assess and plan his or her time management and efficient ways of working.

Applying theory to practice and understanding one's own field

- After the internship, the student knows how to apply knowledge and focus their studies on the needs of working life.
- After the internship, the student knows how to apply the information and skills learned at the university to tasks at an authentic organisation in the labour market.
- After the internship, the student can link his or her studies with working life.
- After the internship, the student can apply theoretical knowledge to practical tasks.
- After the internship, the student can assess the importance of their own major from a practical point of view and evaluate how well the content of his or her studies applies to their tasks at the private or public organisation.
- After the internship, the student can identify tasks he or she could perform after graduation.
- After the internship, the student is familiar with the working environment and tasks that are typical in the professional field.
- After the internship, the student can describe one potential future job and working environment from the point of view of his or her studies.
- After the internship, the student recognises tasks that are relevant for his or her field at the workplace.
- After the internship, the student can represent his or her field in a group of experts from different fields.

Interaction, communication and teamwork

- After the internship, the student can work in a team and support other team members.
- After the internship, the student can work systematically and in a goal-oriented manner, both in a team and independently.
After the internship, the student can apply the principles of teamwork and team leadership in his or her working environment.
After the internship, the student can work as a member of a multi-professional team.
After the internship, the student can work and communicate as a member of a professional community.
After the internship, the student understands the importance of communication in working life.
After the internship, the student knows how to give and receive feedback.

Functioning of a working community

- After the internship, the student is familiar with the functioning and communication of a working community.
- After the internship, the student can recognise problems and areas of development on a working environment and suggest ways of improving these.
- After the internship, the student understands the key drivers of the organisation and working community.

2.1.7. Compulsory or optional internship

I recommend an internship for all students, because it gives a realistic view of working life. In my opinion, an internship should be compulsory, because the experience gained through internship is extremely valuable and useful for the future.

All degree programmes should consider making the internship compulsory, at least in master’s studies. If the student is unable to complete the internship, the degree programme could offer, for example, a course on working life skills. The degree programmes that use an internship support programme must ensure that support is

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4 If the student has completed a qualification at a university of applied sciences immediately before the master’s degree programme, the previous qualification can be taken into account separately.
offered primarily to those students whose internship is a compulsory part of their degrees.

2.1.8. Credits for the internship

An approved internship plan serves as a good basis for determining the number of credits granted for an internship or other work placement period. If the degree programme has specified a fixed duration for internships, the workload suggested in the plan must be in line with the number of hours corresponding to the duration. If the duration of the internship period can be selected more freely, the number of credits is based on the actual work performed according to plans.

The person responsible for internships at the degree programme compares the tasks recorded in the plan with the learning outcomes and determines how to convert hours worked into study credits based on the comparison. The internship plan guides the student’s working, and if the plan needs to be changed, the student and the employer will make the changes. If the new plan differs materially from the original one, it is a good idea to discuss the changes with the person responsible for internships at the degree programme. The student must then take the changes into account in his or her internship report.

It is important to note that no procedures related to the internship process should burden the responsible persons, students or employers excessively. The emphasis should be on the tasks performed at the workplace, as defined by the employer. When degree programmes determine the number of credits granted for internships and, in particular, the minimum duration of the period, they should bear in mind that students must complete at least five credits per month in order to receive financial aid for students from KELA (in 2016).

One credit corresponds to 27.5 hours, which means that five credits correspond to 137.5 hours. Full-time employees work for an average of 40 hours per week or 160 hours per month. Based on these figures, when a student works in his or her own field, the university should grant them at least five credits per one month of work. If the tasks cannot be considered to correspond to the content and objectives of the degree programme and practical learning period, the hours worked can be converted into study credits using a different factor. For example, if approximately half of the tasks are relevant to the student’s own field, the university could grant credits corresponding to 80 hours. In this case, the student could complete independent additional tasks to make up for the remaining hours.

Examples of additional tasks to be performed before the internship or work placement period:

- **Attending a briefing event on internships**
  A representative from the degree programme introduces the course to the students, reviews the requirements, forms, etc., and tells the students where to find the necessary materials.
• **Expert lectures**
  Students can be assisted with finding an internship placement by organising expert lectures on, for example, how to prepare a good CV, portfolio or competence profile, and on other job-hunting skills.

• **Additional materials**
  The degree programme, faculty or the university can compile a list of useful guidelines, videos, online courses and other online resources.

• **Workshops**
  Preparing a good CV, writing a job application, making the internship plan, etc.

Examples of different ways to complete an internship and their conversion into credits:

**Example 1. A master’s student has a job in his or her own field of study, the degree programme has set a fixed limit of five credits for internships.**

The student makes an internship plan that describes the tasks at a general level, as agreed with the employer. The student works full-time for one month, making some casual notes about his or her tasks. At the end of the period, the student hands in internship report that includes some reflection on the connection between his or her tasks and studies.

**Example 2. A bachelor’s student works as a temporary employee during peak hours, and the work is not fully relevant to his or her field of study. The degree programme has specified the scope of the internship to be 5–15 credits.**

The student wants to complete his or her optional studies as “on-the-job training” and prepares an internship plan that covers 10 credits. In the plan, the student writes that he or she will work on weekends for about six months. The students works for 16 hours every weekend, which means 64 hours per month. However, the person responsible for internships at the degree programme estimates that 75% of the tasks promote learning that is relevant to the student’s degree. Thus, the number of hours eligible as internship is 48 per month. Ten credits correspond to 275 hours, which means that the student has completed the required number of hours after six months. At the end of the period, the student hands in the report, which contains a reflection on the period as a whole.

**Example 3. It is difficult to find employment in the student’s field of study. The student wants to complete the optional internship (5 credits) that is part of his or her bachelor’s studies by working part-time for one month. The student wishes to graduate in three months, so he or she cannot build the internship from several periodic jobs over a longer period.**
Because the student works part-time (50%) for only one month, the number of hours worked is around 80. In the internship plan, the student sets out to complete the remaining hours by performing additional tasks offered by the degree programme, and by attending the university’s internship workshops. The student attends four workshops, each lasting for four hours (16 hours), a training session on CVs and job-seeking (4 hours), expert lectures on skills needed in working life (presentation and interaction skills, promoting one’s expertise) (4 hours) and completes an online learning assignment suggested by the degree programme (24 hours).

2.1.9. Tasks and responsibilities of the parties before the internship

In order to make the internship successful, each party must know the tasks required of them, even before the internship period and be aware of their responsibilities.

The degree programme’s tasks before the internship

- Organising events on internship and job seeking
- Announcing internship placement opportunities (in cooperation with student organisations)
- Preparing instructions and forms regarding the internship (the instructions must be easily available)
- Offering background material for the internship
- Approving the internship placement (enabling tasks that meet the internship requirements)
- Signing the internship contract (the person responsible for internship)
- Checking the student’s internship plan
- Providing instructions on the report and reflective section

The student’s tasks before the internship

- Preparing the personal study plan and including the internship in it
- Expressing one’s own competencies, personal study plan -> CV
- Looking and applying for an internship placement
- Having the placement approved and signed by the university
- Signing the contract of internship/employment
- Applying for internship support, where applicable
- Familiarising one’s self with the supportive materials
- Reading previous internship reports (if available)
- Preparing an internship plan and setting the learning outcomes
The employer’s tasks before the internship

- Announcing internship placements
- Signing the contract of internship/employment
- Appointing a person responsible for the internship
- Checking and approving the student’s internship plan

2.2. During the internship/work placement period

Before the internship or work placement period, the student has set the objectives for the period, and these are in line with the learning outcomes the degree programme has set for internships (see chapters 2.1.5 and 2.1.6 on how to set learning outcomes). The objectives can be specified further with the employer at the start of the internship. The degree programme must have instructions on how to complete the internship, both for the student and the internship supervisor, if any (see chapter 2.2.3 on the supervisor’s tasks). The instructions should prompt the student to reflect on the achievement of the learning outcomes and on the learning of various skills needed in working life. Both generic skills and field-specific expertise are important here.

2.2.1. Reflection on the learning outcomes

It is important that the student can identify what he or she has learned and done during the internship, in order to reflect on the links between the new skills and the previous and future competencies learned at the university. For example, based on a feedback survey for new graduates by TEK (Academic Engineers and Architects in Finland)\(^5\) the recent graduates reported that their oral communication skills, social skills and problem-solving skills had developed poorly during their studies. These are good examples of skills that typically develop during an internship, even if the internship is not fully relevant to the field of study. However, the students might not always see the internship as being part of their studies or recognise the useful skills they have learned during the period. This is why it is important that students reflect on the connection between the content of their previous studies and the internship, and on their expectations for remaining studies. This will integrate the internship more firmly into the degree.

During the internship, the student should reflect on the achievement of the learning outcomes and the improvement of his or her own skills as a continuum, starting with the internship planning stage and ending with the written assignment, such as the internship report, learning diary or competence profile (see also chapter 2.3.1 on the internship report). The written assignment can also be, for example, a blog or a group blog, where the student shares his or her experiences and receives feedback from peers. Reflecting on the internship experience helps students to recognise and analyse their own skills and to express their competencies in the light of

\(^{5}\) https://www.tek.fi/fi/uutishuone/tutkimukset/vastavalmistuneiden-palautekysely (in Finnish)
working life requirements. Furthermore, students tend to notice which skills they still need to develop and adjust their internship objectives accordingly. As a whole, the internship and the reflection on one's own skills during it help students to understand the importance of different working life skills for their future careers.

The student should also reflect on his or her tasks, studies and competences in relation to the employer's operation. The degree programme's instructions should encourage students to familiarise themselves with the factors that guide their employers' operations, with the aim of understanding the sector in a broader context. Students should also be active and seek to make the most of their internships, for example, by interviewing the employees and management of the company/organisation regarding different roles. The student can also ask for a chance to visit other departments of the company/organisation, in order to gain an overview of the sector and future career opportunities.

Depending on how the internship is implemented (compulsory, optional, as a course, part of an existing course unit, etc.), the instructions can also assign various tasks and thematic questions to the student, for example, on occupational safety, the skills needed in a working community or workplace well-being. The instructions can refer to background reading to give the student more information on a specific theme or broaden the perspective (see chapter 2.2.2 for an example of a course structure).

Based on feedback collected from students after their internships, reflecting on the learning outcomes and various working life skills during the internship makes students pay attention to things they would not have noticed without the guided reflection. The reflection can also be supported further by assigning the students’ different thematic tasks. For example, if the students notice that a particular theme among the themes of additional internship tasks interests them in particular, they can use the internship as a chance to learn more about it.

6 Based on feedback from students attending the working life courses of the School of Chemical Technology at Aalto University and anonymous student feedback from the University of Oulu.
2.2.2. An example of working life courses that include a work placement period

**Working life courses at the School of Chemical Engineering at Aalto University**

The bachelor’s programme at the School of Chemical Engineering at Aalto University contains two compulsory working life courses for students in their first and second years. The teaching starts at the beginning of the spring term, in the form of lectures and workshops. Most of the work takes place in the summer, in the form of internships or summer jobs. The aim of these courses is to teach the students a variety of generic skills needed in working life (such as teamwork, interaction and communication skills and how to give and receive feedback), highlight their importance and strengthen the students’ ability to work independently and systematically, take responsibility for the work, and analyse and assess their own competencies.

![Figure 2. Structure of working life courses at the School of Chemical Engineering at Aalto University.](image)

At the first lecture, the students learn about the importance of internships and receive practical job-hunting tips. The themes of workshops in the spring term: 1) skills needed in working life and working life requirements, in the field of study and in general, expressing one's own competencies and growing as an expert, 2) first-year students: teamwork, giving and receiving feedback, second-year students: multicultural working environment, 3) communication and interaction (Figure 2). During the course, the students write their competence profiles, which allows them to reflect on their own skills and expertise in relation to the requirements of working life and helps them to identify their own strengths and areas of development. The competence profile is useful, for example, in future job applications, because it helps the students to describe their skills with practical examples. In their competence profiles, the students also make future career plans, reflect on their growth as experts, and plan their future studies on the basis of their personal interests and strengths. The course teachers or assistants give the students feedback on their as-
signments. The first-year students read and assess each other’s competence profiles in small groups, giving each other peer feedback.

2.2.3. Supervision offered by the employer during the internship

The company/organisation that offers the internship placement appoints a supervisor for the student. The supervisor helps the student to assess how his or her skills develop during the internship. The supervisor can also tell the student which working life skills (generic and field-specific) are needed at the company/organisation and in the sector in general. Furthermore, the supervisor can tell more about other career opportunities in the sector. During the internship, the student can receive comments on his or her report, diary, profile or other document also from the university. The person responsible for internships at the university or another university representative gives the student feedback on the reflective section at least after the internship, if not earlier.

Below is a list of topics and themes for the supervisor to discuss with the student during the internship. The supervisor should act as the student’s mentor, encouraging the student to plan his or her career and highlighting the importance of generic and field-specific skills, in open dialogue with the student.

**When meeting the student, the supervisor can:**

- ask questions about the student’s career plans and make the student think about his or her future choices of studies and (summer) jobs from this point of view,
- ask the student to describe past challenges at work and at the university and the ways of overcoming these,
- ask the student to describe his or her own skills and encourage the student to see the importance of having different kind of generic and field-specific skills. Pay special attention to teamwork, cooperation and interaction skills, the organisational culture, giving and receiving feedback, and an independent work approach,
- describe his or her own career to the student – how they came to work in this particular role and which working life skills and field-specific expertise were the most important,
- talk about the importance of the work placement period for the student’s future career and about the importance of summer jobs for the employer,
- talk about skills – which of them were difficult to learn and which have proved to be useful,
- describe the different job opportunities in the field and the most important skills needed in them, both generic skills and field-specific expertise,
- encourage the student to think about the importance of factors such as attitude, occupational safety and responsibility,
- ask colleagues who work with the student to give feedback on the student’s performance and working life skills and discuss the feedback with the student.
It is recommended to hold a discussion at the end or after the internship, to review the key content of the work and assess whether the objectives were achieved. Evaluating the experience and his or her own performance together with the supervisor helps the student to see how he or she has grown as a professional and identify the skills and competencies that can still be developed. For the employer, these discussions are an excellent chance to hear about the latest research and theoretical knowledge in the field and gain new perspectives on working life. When the students have a positive image of the employer and a rewarding internship experience, they share the word among other students and staff at the educational institution.7

2.2.4. Tasks and responsibilities of the parties during the internship

The degree programme’s tasks during the internship

- Giving feedback on assignments the student completes during the internship.
- Contact person – supports the student, if necessary.

The student’s tasks during the internship

- Assessing the development of one’s own skills and competencies, reflecting on this in writing, as instructed by the university (for example, in a blog, learning diary, competence profile).
- Reflecting on one’s tasks and job description in relation to the employer’s operations at large.
- Examining the factors that guide the employer’s operation in a broader context.
- Interviews and visits to other departments, etc.
- Reviewing one’s own career plans in relation to the skills learned during the internship and the opportunities available in the field.
- Getting the most out of the internship – being active, interested, curious and open towards new things and learning.

The employer’s tasks during the internship

- Appointing a supervisor for the internship.
- The supervisor discusses the importance of various working life skills with the student and helps the student to assess how his or her own skills and competences have improved (see below for detailed instructions).
- The supervisor talks about different career opportunities in the field with the student.

2.3. After the internship/work placement period

The internship report is an integral part of the internship process. As noted in earlier chapters, the students should use the entire internship process as an opportunity to learn, reflecting on the development of their own skills from the planning stage to the end of the internship period. In other words, the reflective section and the report should not be written only after the internship, but also during it. The following chapters discuss the required content of the internship report, learning diary, (group) blog or other such reflective assignment which the person responsible for internships approves after the internship period.

2.3.1. Reporting on the internship

In order to receive credits for the internship, the student must write an internship report. The writing should be started during the internship, not afterwards, in order to make it useful and easy.

The degree programme must have clear, written instructions for the reporting, and these should be in line with the instructions for the planning stage. The instructions must be easily available to both students and the persons who approve internships. The different degree programmes within the same university should discuss the possibility of sharing instructions among some (if not all) degree programmes. This would improve equality among students, make the instructions easier to find on the university website and facilitate advertising them among students and staff.

The internship report starts with a description of the employer’s sector and mission and the student’s job description and tasks. The student should also reflect on his or her own role within the working community and career opportunities in the field. This can strengthen the student’s professional identity. Even if the internship placement is not in a company/organisation that is relevant to the field of study,
the student should still describe the employer’s sector and his or her role and tasks. The student can use this information to reflect on how the generic skills learned during the internship could be applied to other fields. Importantly, the description of tasks and job content should not reveal any confidential information about the company/organisation. If the internships of the degree programme typically involve confidential information, it is advisable to request students to provide the job description at a general level and have their reports approved by the employer before publishing them, for example, on the student intranet.

The focus of the internship report should be on the student’s assessment of how well the learning outcomes set for the internship were achieved. The student reviews the development of his or her own skills, both field-specific expertise and generic skills, based on the generic skills and expertise needed in the field, as specified in the internship plan instructions. In the internship report, the student assesses the importance of these skills for his or her future career and potential future tasks. The student also discusses how well he or she was able to use the lessons learned at the university during the internship and identifies skills he or she should have learned during the internship. The student can also discuss the correspondence between the studies within the degree programme and the needs of working life more extensively.

Reflecting on the job content in relation to past and future studies should always be an essential part of the internship report. The reflective section integrates the internship into the degree and allows the student to see the concrete link between theoretical knowledge and practical training. This will help the student to recognise and analyse his or her skills, both those learned earlier at the university and the ones learned during the internship. Furthermore, the student learns to identify areas of improvement in his or her skills, which can increase motivation. At its best, the internship affects the student’s future studies and serves as an experience on which to build new knowledge.

The following page lists the required content of internship reports – what the report should contain at the minimum and what it can contain additionally, depending on the nature of the internship and the course.

Required content of the internship report:

- learning outcomes and an assessment of their achievement
- the employer’s mission and sector (bearing in mind confidentiality issues)
- the student’s job description, tasks and responsibilities (bearing in mind confidentiality issues)
- the student’s role within the working community and growth as a professional
- using the lessons learned at the university during the internship (applying theory to practice)
- the development of field-specific expertise and skills
- the development of generic skills that apply to all sectors
• skills the student should have practised more
• the importance of the internship for future studies and career plans
• supervision organised by the employer
• internship process as a whole
• the correspondence between the degree programme content and working life needs.

The internship report can also discuss the following:

• the structure of the employer organisation
• management model and observations on supervisory relations at the employer organisation
• the organisation’s past and present, operative goals and mission
• quality and sustainable development
• occupational health and safety
• employees at the organisation, occupational safety and health conditions, workplace well-being
• training provided by the unit and, possibly, outside the unit, and the need for fundamental training in different tasks (taking into account the quality and occupational safety), career opportunities at the organisation after graduation
• the student’s reflection on possible areas of development at the organisation

2.3.2 Using the internship report at the degree programme

Typically, the information recorded in internship reports is so-called tacit knowledge, and only the persons who approve the internship learn it. However, internship reports contain information that is valuable for the degree programme in general and can be used to develop education. For this reason, they should be reviewed annually. For example, the education development team could discuss a summary of all the internship reports at its meetings. It is easier to draw the summary of the internship reports are returned in electronic format. Possible content of the summary includes: the companies/organisations where students have worked in the past, typical tasks, how useful the students felt their previous studies to be during the internship, and the students’ wishes for studies on the basis of their internship experiences.
Often, students do not know what kinds of organisations or positions to approach with their degrees. Typically, they see their expertise in a narrow way and do not recognise the full extent of their competencies and abilities. If the internship reports are published on, for example, the university’s intranet, they give students valuable information on possible internship placements in the field (including roles after graduation) and on the skills regarded as the most important by other students in similar roles. The persons who approve internship reports also learn which sectors have employed students as interns in the past and can then give advice on where to look for a placement to other students.

However, confidentiality issues should always be taken into account when sharing internships reports. Confidentiality must be discussed with students thoroughly at an early stage, and the degree programme can consider having the internship reports approved by the employer’s representative before publishing, where necessary. Some sectors (such as the healthcare sector) are bound by strict confidentiality requirements, and any reports that are published must respect these.

At the moment, several universities are planning to build a shared system that would include information on different internship stages. If this system is built, it is recommended to collect all internship reports through the system in order to compile long-term data to support annual development work. Collecting part of the information on an online form facilitates the further use of the information. However, it might not be possible to collect all the necessary information on forms, in which case, other feedback channels should be used, as well.
2.3.3. Feedback on the internship

After the internship, the student and the degree programme representative should give feedback on the internship, for example, at a feedback discussion. This enables seeing the benefits of the internship for the different parties, along with the challenges and potential development ideas for the future. The student also benefits more from the discussion and reflection in the internship report, if he or she receives feedback on them from the staff. Likewise, the employer should receive feedback on the internship from the student and from the university.

2.3.4. Tasks and responsibilities of the parties after the internship

**The degree programme’s tasks after the internship**

- Assessing the internship report and giving feedback on the report to the student.
- Approving the internship, granting credits and recording them in the academic records as soon as possible after the internship.
- Giving possible feedback to the employer when approving the internship report; in what area did the student improve the most and how does he or she suggest the organisation could develop further. If all the parties are satisfied, they can agree to continue their cooperation during the same occasion.
- Using the internship reports to develop education within the degree programme, share the experiences among students, and draw statistics on internship placements.

**The student’s tasks after the internship**

- Writing an internship report and reflecting on the experience (on the basis of notes taken during the internship).
  - Achievement of the learning outcomes.
  - Analysing one’s own professional growth.
  - Recognising one’s own areas of improvement.
- Having the internship approved.
- Updating one’s CV and competence profile.
- Updating the personal study plan.
- Sharing experiences with other students.
The employer’s tasks after the internship

- Writing a reference or certificate of internship for the student (describing the position carefully, both specific tasks and generic skills).
- Exchanging feedback with the student and the degree programme; how was the internship from the employer’s perspective.
- Consent to sharing the students’ internship stories.
3. Summary – this guide in a nutshell

The figures on the following pages summarise the key benefits of internships for all parties (the university, the student and the employer), along with the tasks performed at each stage.
3.1. For the university and degree programme

A well-planned internship that has clear objectives can benefit everyone: the student, the university, and the employer!

Students progress with their studies, also during the summer.

New graduates have relevant skills for working life.

Reports and feedback from employers provide information on skills which skills are currently relevant in working life – a good development tool.

Contacts with employers can also be used in other forms of cooperation at the university.
To do list for the degree programme

During the internship
- Giving feedback on assignments the student completes during the internship.
- Contact person – supports the student, if necessary.

Before the internship
- Organising events on internship and job seeking.
- Announcing internship placements.
- Managing the internship and preparing forms.
- Approving the internship placement.
- Signing the internship contract.
- Checking the student’s internship plan.
- Providing reporting instructions.

After the internship
- Assessing the internship report.
- Feedback to the student.
- Feedback meeting with the employer (if applicable).
- Approving the internship, granting and recording study credits.
- Using the internship reports to develop education within the degree programme, share experiences among students and compile statistics on internship placements.

The full internship guide is available at: www.tyylihanke.wordpress.com
3.2. For the student

A well-planned internship that has clear objectives can benefit everyone: the student, the university, and the employer!

BENEFITS FOR THE STUDENT

- Experiences of success!
- Improved competencies.
- Understanding skills that are needed in working life.
- Theory into practice, better understanding of the content of studies and their importance for future careers, improved motivation.
- Employment prospects improve.
- Study credits also during the summer.
- The student learns more about the local employers in his or her field of study.
To do list for the student

During the internship
- Reflecting one’s own competencies and skills development (e.g. in a blog or skills profile).
- Discussing one’s tasks and job description in relation to the employer’s operations at large.
- Getting the most out of the internship – being active, interested, curious and open towards new things and learning.
- Reviewing one’s own career plans in relation to the skills learned during the internship and the opportunities available in the field.

Before the internship
- Recording the internship in the personal study plan.
- Expressing one’s own competencies (personal study plan, CV).
- Approval for an internship placement.
- Having the placement approved by the university.
- Signing the internship/employment contract.
- Applying for internship support, where applicable.
- Preparing an internship plan and setting the learning outcomes.

After the internship
- Writing an internship report and reflecting on the experience.
  * Achievement of the learning outcomes
  * Analysing one’s own professional growth
  * Recognising one’s own areas of improvement
- Having the internship approved.
- Updating one’s CV and skills profile.
- Updating the personal study plan.
- Sharing experiences with other students

The full internship guide is available at: www.tyylihanke.wordpress.com
3.3. For the employer

A well-planned internship that has clear objectives can benefit everyone: the student, the university, and the employer!

BENEFITS FOR THE EMPLOYER

- Chance to recruit talented and motivated students – the workforce of the future.
- Tapping into the latest research-based knowledge in the field.
- Getting a fresh perspective on the company’s/organisation’s operations and new development ideas.
- Gaining real-time insight into the skills and competencies of students.
- Opportunity to let the university know which skills are needed in the field.
To do list for the employer

During the internship
- Taking the student as a member of a working community.
- Checking and approving the student’s internship plan.
- Supervision:
  * guiding in the actual work tasks
  * reviewing the objectives of the internship
  * easy to reach for the student
  * discussing with the student

(More information on supervision is in the internship guide.)

Dedicated supervision benefits both the employer and the student!

Before the internship
- Announcing internship placements.
- Signing the internship/employment contract.
- Appointing a person responsible for the internship.
- Planning the tasks of the intern.
- Appointing the supervisor.

After the internship
- Issuing a reference (job description, including both specific tasks and overall working life skills).
- Feedback from the employer to the student and the degree programme: how was the internship from the employer’s perspective.

The full internship guide is available at: www.tyylihanke.wordpress.com
4. References


The quotes in the images are from the anonymous feedback on internships at the University of Oulu.
Working life, here I come!