CAREERS ADVISORY SERVICE
Investigation into Students’ Attitudes to the Value of Unpaid Placements

March 2011

Prepared By: Lindsey MacKay
Supervisor: Myra O’ Regan
ABSTRACT

The objective of this project was to conduct an investigation into students’ attitudes towards unpaid graduate placements and the value placed upon these types of placements. The study focused on final year Trinity College students. The research and report were conducted on behalf of the Trinity Careers Advisory Service (CAS).

The findings of this study showed that senior sophister students are not aware of all the options available to them following graduation. Many students would be willing to undertake an unpaid placement whilst some of students raised issues regarding fairness.
The Careers Advisory Services (CAS) in Trinity College Dublin is responsible for providing guidance and advice to students with over 1,200 students seen on an individual basis each year. The CAS also offers an important two way communication channel between the College and the Labour market as staff in the department often network with employers who visit Dublin.

As youth unemployment is at an all time high the CAS are interested in investigating the emergence of unpaid placements as an employment option for recent graduates. Many established companies provide these placements in tandem with their existing graduate programmes. It is of interest to determine whether students would be willing to consider unpaid placements following graduation.

This project aimed to examine students’ attitudes towards placements after graduation and conclude whether the CAS should be promoting unpaid placements to students. In addition to this the optimum characteristics of a placement were to be identified as well as students’ awareness of any unpaid placements already on offer to them.

I would like to thank Sean Gannon and Ciara Kelleher of the Careers Advisory Service for their assistance throughout the course of the project.

Finally I would like to thank my project supervisor, Myra O’ Regan for her continuous support and feedback on the project.
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## APPENDICES

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References
1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

This chapter describes the client and the background of the project. The chapter also includes the terms of reference of the project and an outline summary of remaining chapters.

1.1 The Client

The client for this project is Mr. Sean Gannon, Director/Careers Advisor of the Careers Advisory Service in Trinity College Dublin.

1.2 The Project Background

According to a set of statistics released in 2008 unemployment amongst primary degree graduates in that year was approximately 9% with an almost certain rise in subsequent years due to the economic downturn. The number of unpaid placements available to graduates has increased significantly in recent times as a reaction to rising unemployment. IBEC and FÁS both have programmes that are primarily focused on providing unpaid work placements to recent graduates. Many of these placements are advertised alongside the existing graduate programmes provided by companies. The Careers Service is interested in investigating whether students find these placements valuable and whether they would be willing to apply for one. This could help the CAS better advertise placements for students and be useful when talking to companies that provide placements.

1.3 Terms of Reference

The main aims of this project are to:

- Prepare a literature review of issues related to unpaid placements
- Conduct preliminary interviews to gain a better understanding of student opinions and to aid in the development of a survey
- Investigate student attitudes to the value of unpaid internships by means of a survey

1.4 Report Summary

- Chapter 2: Summaries of conclusions of the study and any recommendations made
- Chapter 3: A review of literature surrounding this topic
- Chapter 4: Examination of methodology used in conducting the investigation
- Chapter 5: An analysis of findings from the study
2. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will outline the main findings from the study and will provide some recommendations for the Careers Advisory Service (CAS) in relation to graduate placements.

2.1 Conclusions

- Four fifths of surveyed students have heard of graduate placements before but only 25% have actually applied for some. Nearly 40% of students stated that they are not likely to apply for any placements in the near future. (See Section 5.2, pg. 11)

- Of those that have applied for placements, nearly half (47%) have applied to 1-3 placements with only 10% applying for more than ten. (See Section 5.2, pg. 11)

- Students that have not applied for any graduate placements had not done so as they were most likely pursuing further study after graduation (36%). Of those that provided an open-ended response 33% are not considering placements as they think the costs of undertaking a placement are too high. (See Section 5.2, pg. 12) In addition to this, 33% of these open-ended answers stated that they have not applied for graduate placements as they have not heard of them before whereas 17% do not think they are available in their chosen career field (See Section 5.2, pg. 12)

- Dublin and the United Kingdom are the most popular destinations for graduate placements (28% and 22% respectively) (See Section 5.2, pg. 12). Nearly half of survey respondents (44%) stated that they would not be willing to move for an unpaid placement. Students are not prepared to move as the costs are assumed to be too high. (See Section 5.5, pg. 15)

- Over three quarters of survey respondents are not aware of any unpaid placement programmes. When prompted with the names of the FÁS WPP and IBEC’s Gradlink over half have not heard of WPP and nearly all (90%) have not heard of Gradlink. (See Section 5.3, pg. 12)

- When asked about unpaid placements 43% of students agreed that they would be willing to apply for one but nearly 90% would rather apply for a placement that provided some form of remuneration. Females are more likely to accept an unpaid placement than males. (See Section 5.4, pg. 13).

- The possibility of a work contract after a placement is the main reason students would decide to do an unpaid placement (73%). (See Section 5.4, pg. 14)

- According to 40% of students the optimum length of a placement is six months with only 4% considering over a year an acceptable time. (See Section 5.5, pg. 16) Over half (53%) believe that a wage reflecting a graduates contribution to a company is the appropriate wage for someone on a placement. (See Section 5.5, pg. 16)
Nearly all (97%) of the respondents are not aware of any legal issues or legislation surrounding unpaid placements with 56% of respondents of the opinion that unpaid placements are not fair. The reasons for this range from exclusivity to exploitation (See Section 5.7, pg. 19)

2.2 Recommendations

- As placements are becoming more popular in industries today it is important that the CAS makes students aware of these placements as a career option after graduation. (See Section 5.2, pg. 11)

- Students often cited the cost of unpaid placements as a deterrent to this type of work so it may be of interest to the careers service to fully inform students of the opportunities available to them whilst on placement (for example, the possibility of being able to claim Social Welfare payments). (See Section 5.2, pg. 12)

- The optimum characteristic for a placement, such as pay (wage reflecting a graduates contribution to a company), length (six months) and location (Dublin or the U.K) that have been defined by the survey respondents should be used by the CAS when deciding which placements to advertise to students. (See Section 5.5, pg. 15)

- Students have deemed that the possibility of a work contract after a placement would influence their decision to undertake one. The CAS can advise companies on how best to attract students to their placements by citing these factors. (See Section 5.4, pg. 17)

- The majority of students surveyed were not aware of their rights whilst working on a placement. The CAS should work to educate students on their rights as well as advising them on how to get the best experience out of a placement. (See Section 5.7, pg. 18)
3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will discuss and review the literature surrounding unpaid placements to help gain a better understanding of the topic.

3.1 What is a graduate placement?

There is no universal definition of what constitutes a graduate placement, programme or internship. These placements can vary in length, depth of experience gained and work involved. From a review of literature surrounding this type of work and investigations into what they can consist of, the following characteristics have been defined:

**Purpose and Content**
Placements are targeted at university graduates and are usually provided by large organisations looking to gain access to new talent. They are a type of work experience for a recent graduate in their expected career field. As all types of companies in different industries can provide placements it is difficult to formally define their content. In general, graduate placements aim to develop skills and allow graduates to apply academic knowledge in practical environments. Work is planned and supervised by experienced employees from the organisation.

**Length**
Placement length is highly variable ranging from six weeks to twelve months. The majority of placements tend to last from 3 to 6 months with very few running for less than a month.

**Working hours and pay**
Graduates usually have set hours, which are often the same hours as a full time member of staff. There are a variety of ways in which graduates on placements can be remunerated including the national minimum wage, a wage higher than the national minimum but less than full time salary or travel expenses. Wages for entry-level graduates can range from €11,000 per annum to €35,000 per annum with the engineering graduates usually getting the highest pay (Association of Graduate Careers Services in Ireland, 2007).

Placements can be either paid or unpaid with the length of the placement usually having an affect on the pay conditions.

3.2 Benefits to Graduates and Companies

Placements provide significant benefits to graduates including the opportunity for them to improve their skills as well as their CV. Graduates can make a lot of useful contacts whilst working on a placement, which can help further their career when the placement ends. Often, companies use these placements to test out potential employees and many graduates are offered a full time position within the organisation as a result of their placement. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) found that three quarters of surveyed companies used work experience programmes as a way to test potential staff (Learning and talent development survey, 2010). Placements are becoming more popular among unemployed graduates as they can “improve the quality of their CV, increase their general attractiveness to potential employers and keep their skills current”
(National Youth Council of Ireland, 2010). Graduates gain hands on experience in their chosen career field as well learning how to interact with others in the working world. According to the CIPD poll recent graduates lack skills needed in the workplace with 61% of companies believing college graduates are deficient in business competency and acumen (Learning and talent development survey 2010). Many new skills are gained when working on a placement that cannot be learnt in a classroom or lecture hall. Nearly 80% of those surveyed considered internships and placements to be beneficial to graduates in the long run. (Learning and talent development survey 2010).

Graduates are not the only ones that benefit from these work placements. New talent can bring fresh thinking and innovative ideas into an organisation. Companies that provide comprehensive programmes to graduates stand to benefit through additional productivity and performance. In addition to this, placements can develop talent in an industry, which is beneficial to the wider economy. Graduates on these placements probably conduct work, which would normally be done by a paid member of staff so they are a cost effective resource and are valuable to the company. Moreover, graduates can ease the workload of existing employees, which would increase overall performance, and satisfaction of the labour force.

3.3 Unpaid Placements

Nearly a quarter of 15 to 24 year olds in Ireland were unemployed in late 2010 – the highest rate in Europe. It is predicted that this figure is not likely to change any time soon. Many companies have tried to counteract this problem through the establishment of unpaid graduate placements. FÁS and IBEC both provide unpaid programmes that aim to improve a graduates CV and employment prospects by offering work experience. Around 2000 positions are advertised by the Work Placement Programme (WPP) provided by FÁS with half of these targeted at graduates. IBEC created its own work placement programme – Gradlink – in 2009 after a poll revealed that companies were interested in offering placements to graduates (The Irish Times, 2010). A survey conducted by gradIreland in 2007 found that about 3% of Irish employers offered unpaid placements to graduates (Association of Graduate Careers Services in Ireland, 2007). There are certain disciplines where unpaid placements are the only option for graduates such as journalism, politics and the media industry (ippr, 2010). Two online organisations, Activelink.ie and Talent Tank, concentrate solely on finding people that are willing to work unpaid and these sites have become increasingly popular in the last number of years.

3.4 Fairness of Unpaid Placements

Unpaid placements have caused some controversy in the media as many are of the opinion that they are unfair and exploit the labour market. There is the risk that many companies are hiring graduates without salaries in place of full time, paid employees. Both the FÁS and IBEC graduate programmes are controlled to a certain extent to ensure that employers are not doing so.

Unpaid internships are often deemed unfair, as there are many people that are unable to work for free and therefore do not get the experiences from these opportunities. Often it is
not possible for people from low-income families to do an unpaid placement as they have
difficulty covering their living expenses. This is especially true for any graduate that has to
move for an unpaid placement and no longer has the financial support of living at home. This
creates a barrier to entry for certain individuals and many resort to working in a paid job that
provides no experience or is not relevant to their chosen career.

There is also an issue that unpaid placements are not treated the same as other jobs within
an organization. This can result in a graduate doing mundane, idle work and not gaining any
experience in the placement. Furthermore, contracts may be drafted differently and the
graduate may be exploited by being overworked and not remunerated for this time. The
Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009) found that placements are often based on an
“informal economy” where opportunities depend solely on who you know and not what you
know. This results in graduates with the right contacts securing placements over those with
better abilities. When internships are paid there is the necessity for companies to provide
more formal recruitment processes limiting this problem.

The association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS, 2010) found that 87% of
college careers advisors agreed that governments should take action against unpaid
placements.

3.5 Legal Position

There is no specific explanation of a how much a graduate should be paid when working for
a placement. Whether or not someone is entitled to be paid the national minimum wage
depends whether that person is seen as a ‘worker’ under legislation. Workers are entitled to
at least the minimum wage. A worker is someone who has a contract to work for someone
else (i.e. they are not self-employed). The only exemptions to this are:

- Voluntary work for a charity
- Work shadowing
- Placements as part of course of study
- Apprenticeships

This suggests that graduates on work placements should receive some form of
remuneration, namely the minimum wage. Many organisations use the loophole of
classifying workers as ‘volunteers’ making it legal to employ a graduate without paying them.
In this situation graduates are not likely to raise an issue regarding pay as they generally
enter into these placements voluntarily and do not want to cause any bad relations between
them and their potential employer. As the legislation surrounding unpaid placements is not
very clear it is suggested that the only way a graduate can know if they are legally a worker
is to take their case to an employment tribunal. With this said, the outcome applies only to
their specific case and cannot be made general to all placements. The Irish Institute for
Public Policy Research note that the main issue with legislation and unpaid placements is “a
failure of enforcement” (ippr, 2010).
4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methods that were used when collecting and analysing the data.

The study included both quantitative and qualitative research as both questionnaires and interviews were used to gain a better understanding of student attitudes.

The online questionnaire was chosen as the primary means of research as it could easily be sent to all senior sophister students within the college and would hopefully return a high response rate. The interviews were used to aid survey development and to investigate further into students’ attitudes.

4.1 Interviews

Interview Draft and Layout

Interviews were set up with four students from different departments within the college. Questions were developed with the help of the project outline and project supervisor. The questions were then sent to the ethics committee to ensure that all questions were acceptable and complied with the college’s ethical code. The interviews followed the same format as the survey, beginning with short introductory questions, which evolved into more detailed thought provoking questions.

Interview Topics

As the interviews were used to aid survey design many of the questions chosen for the interviews were similar to those included in the questionnaire. The interviews consisted of one on one to gain a deeper understanding of students’ reasoning for their answers as the survey did not contain too many open ended questions. The interviews allowed the research to delve further into students’ opinions and attitudes without any preconceptions or biases.

4.2 Survey

Drafting and Layout of the Questionnaire

As the topic being covered by this research is quite broad and focuses on individual opinions it was very important to include open-ended questions in the survey to encourage respondents to explain their choices and provide responses that were not necessarily covered by the question. In many questions where students were provided with a list of answers there was also an “other” option allowing students to enter their own response.

The survey was designed with short introductory questions at the beginning to ease in the respondent and more though provoking, detailed questions were placed at the end of the questionnaire. Dillman (2000) suggests that this layout is favourable as the subject will be then more willing to answer the longer questions.

The survey began with a definition of the term graduate placement to ensure that all participants in the study understood the topic. A graduate placement was defined as a type of work experience, for a recent graduate, in their expected career field. The opening questions in the survey were broad and related to all types of graduate placements. Further
into the survey it was explained that these graduate placements can be either paid or unpaid and the questions following related specifically to unpaid placements. Questions types were alternated throughout the survey to ensure respondents were kept interested and paid attention to the different questions. The survey included single response, ranking and open-ended questions.

Questionnaire Topics

The questions for the questionnaire were based on the client requirements supplied in the project outline and were developed with client and supervisor help. The online survey was divided up into five key areas of interest.

Introductory Questions

These questions were created to gain an understanding of students' knowledge of placements and whether any of the respondents had applied for any graduate placements. There was a question, which allowed respondents that had not applied for a placement to cite a reason and also included a question on whether students' would be willing to move for a work placement.

Awareness

Section two consisted of questions relating to a student’s awareness of graduate placements. This included the salaries provided by companies as well as identifying companies that provide unpaid placements.

Likelihood to accept a graduate placement

One of the most important aspects of this research was to determine students’ likelihood to both apply for, and accept an unpaid graduate placement. Students were able to identify which factors would influence this decision and the perceived benefits of unpaid placements.

Unpaid placement features

A further aspect to investigate was which characteristics students found to be most favourable. This included the optimum length of the placement and the amount graduates should be remunerated.

Legality

A lot of the literature surrounding this type of work focuses on the legality of employing people without pay. It was of interest to find out if students viewed these unpaid placements as fair and if they were aware of any legal issues.

Questionnaire Implementation

It was decided that the questionnaire would be sent to all final year students within Trinity College Dublin. An online questionnaire was chosen as the best method of collecting responses as it could easily be sent out in an e-mail from the Careers Advisory Service to all senior sophister students. To encourage response rates students that completed the
questionnaire had the opportunity to be entered into a draw for a €50 One4All voucher. Survey Monkey, free online questionnaire software, was used to draft and distribute the questionnaire. Customized surveys can be created using Survey Monkey which also allows the user to collect responses and download data to be further analysed.

**Questionnaire Distribution/Circulation**

It was identified that for the aim of this research, only senior sophister students would be targeted to complete the questionnaire. This survey sample was chosen as it was deemed that only final year students would be focusing on their career opportunities after graduation. With the help of Ciara Kelleher of the Careers Advisory Service an e-mail was sent out to all final year students from the CAS e-mail address. A cover letter was sent with the e-mail detailing the purpose of the research and included a link to the questionnaire. This e-mail was sent out on a Thursday morning and was set to have a two week response time. Reminder e-mails were sent out after the first seven days and on the last day the survey was open to increase the response rate. In addition to this, the survey link was added to the news feed of the careers website as well as being included on both the CAS Twitter and Facebook social networking pages.
5. **ANALYSIS**

This chapter will provide an in-depth analysis to the questionnaire results and will outline the main findings of this analysis.

5.1 **Respondents**

The survey was set with a two week response time and was sent to 1,912 senior sophister students. This list excluded students in their fifth year, such as Medics and Dental Science and resulted in a 15% response rate. The demographics of the respondents were analysed by age and gender (See Appendix E.1). There were more female respondents with a ratio of 2:1 females to males respectively. 90% of those surveyed fall into the 18-24 year old age bracket with only two respondents being over the age of fifty.

The data was also analysed by course and department. Figure 5.1.1 shows that nearly half of the respondents are from the faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. The three courses with the most respondents were Business, Economics and Social Sciences (BESS), Management Science and Information Systems (MSISS) and Occupational Therapy (OT) (See Appendix E.1, Figure E.1.3). It is important to understand the demographics of the respondents when analysing the results of the questionnaire so as to interpret the results accordingly.

![Faculties Graph](image)

**FIGURE 5.1.1 - Graph of Respondents by Faculty**

The rest of the data was analysed by examining the responses under the following six key themes:

- Introduction to placements
- Awareness of unpaid graduate placements
- Likelihood to accept an unpaid placement
- Optimum characteristics of graduate placements
- Perceived Benefits and Drawbacks of unpaid placements
- Legal Issues surrounding placements
5.2 Introduction to placements

The first section of the questionnaire was designed to find out how much students knew about placements and whether they considered them as an employment option after graduation. Although four fifths of those surveyed have heard of graduate placements only a quarter have applied for them with nearly 40% of students not likely to apply for any (Figure 5.2.1).

Out of these 62 students (24.5%) that have considered them, nearly half have applied for 1-3 placements with only 12% of respondents applying for more than ten. This varies somewhat with the individual and the course they are studying (Table 5.2.1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. Placements Applied for</th>
<th>Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences</th>
<th>Engineering, Mathematics and Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 31</td>
<td>n = 23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In total, 55% of Arts, Humanities and Social Science Students have applied to between 1 and 3 placements with 26% of students applying for more than seven placements. This is quite similar for Engineer, Mathematics and Science students with nearly half of respondents (48%) applying for 1-3 placements and only 13% applying for over ten. Two students from the Health Sciences faculty have applied for over ten placements and one student that was
interviewed estimated applying for around thirty of these graduate placements. Students that have not applied for any graduate placements were asked to cite a reason for this (See Appendix E.2, Figure E.2.1). The question had a predetermined list of answers and ‘pursuing further study after graduation’ was the most popular choice (36%) but the ‘other’ option was also significant (26%). On a closer analysis of the answers given for the other option there was a clear pattern of reasons. A lot of the responses (33%) identified cost as a reason for not applying for placements as they are considered a low-pay form of employment – “cannot afford to work for nothing and there are not usually well paid”. Students that were interviewed echoed similar opinions. Two of the interviewees stated that they had not applied for any placements as their preference was to get a full time, paid job.

Furthermore, a few of the respondents have not applied for placements as they have not been made aware of them as an option after graduation (33%) nor do they think they are available in their field of study (17%) – “Not sure that there are any in my area [English Studies], or at least I couldn't find any”.

Finally, all respondents were asked which locations they would like to work in for a graduate placement. Figure E.2.2 in Appendix E.2 highlights that Dublin and the UK are the two most popular regions. The ‘Rest of Ireland’ option had low responses suggesting that students are willing to either stay and work in the capital or move out of Ireland all together

5.3 Awareness of unpaid graduate placements

As mentioned in section 5.2 20% of survey respondents are unaware of placements on offer to them after graduation. As unpaid placements are becoming more available it is important to identify if students are aware of these emerging types of placements. Firstly, respondents were asked if they knew the salaries that were provided by graduate placements with only 30% saying they were familiar with them. Further to this, over three quarters of those surveyed had not heard of any unpaid placement programmes. Only two people were aware of the programmes provided by FÁS, with one respondent specifically naming the Work Placement Programme (WPP). When prompted with names of unpaid placements, more students stated that they have heard of them but over half have not heard of the WPP (55%) before and a significant amount (90%) have not heard of Gradlink. The FÁS WPP was more recognised by respondents than IBEC’s Gradlink with a ratio of 4:1 respectively (See Appendix E.3, Figure E.3.1). Of the students being interviewed, one student noted that they had not come across any unpaid placements whilst they had been looking at graduate programmes. Another student stated “I know there are some but I wouldn’t know what they are in”.

Again, this further reiterates a lack of awareness of placements amongst students. It is important that students are thoroughly informed about all employment options when in their senior sophister year of college.

5.4 Likelihood to accept an unpaid placement

Students’ willingness to consider unpaid placements after graduation was a key topic of interest to the Careers Advisory Service. Two questions were asked regarding pay – firstly students were asked would they be willing to apply for an unpaid placement followed by a
question regarding placements that offered some form of pay. The questions used a ranking scale and the results were interesting. Figure E.3.2 in Appendix E.3 shows that there is actually a close split between those students that are willing to work unpaid and those that are not. This pattern recurs in questions relating to unpaid placements and it suggests that there is a clear divide between students that consider unpaid placements in a positive, favourable light and those that don’t. With this said, there are slightly more students that are likely to apply for unpaid placements than those that aren’t (43% versus 41%). Students’ attitudes towards unpaid placements was also analysed by faculty (Table 5.4.1). Students in all departments look favourably on placements with 39% of students agreeing that they would apply for these unpaid placements in both the faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences and the faculty of Engineering, Maths and Science. In addition to this, 64% of health science students agree that unpaid placements would be an option for them after graduation.

TABLE 5.4.1 – Students Willingness to Apply for an Unpaid Graduate Placement (by Faculty)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Willingness to Apply for unpaid</th>
<th>Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences</th>
<th>Engineering, Mathematics and Science</th>
<th>Health Sciences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 90</td>
<td>n = 70</td>
<td>n = 22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For remunerated placements students are clearly leaning towards an agreement meaning they would be very likely to apply for a placement that provided some form of compensation. Section 5.5 examines this further as it identifies how much respondents think that graduates should be paid when working in a placement.

Another aspect that was crucial to this analysis was students’ likelihood to accept an unpaid placement. Again respondents were asked to rank their opinions which resulted in the following (Figure 5.4.1):

![Likelihood of Accepting an unpaid offer](image)

FIGURE 5.4.1 – Graph of Students’ Likelihood of Accepting an Unpaid Placement Offer
Again, there is a near split between those that are likely to accept and those that are not. As this does not provide much detail this question was analysed further to determine if there were certain demographics which lead students to pick one of these options. Figure E.3.3 (See Appendix E.3) shows that females are more willing than males to consider unpaid placements. Furthermore this question was analysed by faculty (Table 5.4.1). Arts, Humanities and Social Science students are likely to accept an unpaid placement offer (38%) as are Health Science respondents (58%) whereas Engineering, Mathematics and Science students are more likely to reject unpaid placements (42%).

TABLE 5.4.1 – Students’ Likelihood to Accept an Unpaid Placement Offer (by Faculty)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likelihood to Accept unpaid</th>
<th>Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences</th>
<th>Engineering, Mathematics and Science</th>
<th>Health Sciences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Likely</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Likely</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Unlikely</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 101</td>
<td>n = 85</td>
<td>n = 26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An examination of age and likelihood shows that there is no specific relationship between the two variables. No particular age group is more willing to accept an unpaid placement than the other.

Respondents were given a list of factors that would influence their decision to accept an unpaid graduate placement and asked to choose the most important answers. The list ranged from the size of the company to the type of work involved (See Appendix E.3, Figure E.3.4). The three most popular choices were the possibility of a work contract after placement (73%), the nature of the experience provided (60%) and the company’s reputation (50%). Interview results feature similar responses:

“If I’m getting a full time job afterwards with that company or any company that would definitely give me the job after [the placement] then I would take it.”

“If it was worth it, like if [the company and the programme] had a good reputation... I’m sure people would go for it.”

These responses are of great importance as they can aid the CAS in deciding which placements to advertise to students.

To further investigate students’ attitudes towards unpaid placements and their likelihood to consider them as graduate options the following question was asked:

*Of the following two options, which would you choose?*

- One year working in a paid job that provided no experience.
- One year working in an unpaid job that provided lots of experience.
The results skew towards unpaid placements with two thirds of respondents choosing the latter option. This result reinforces a student’s likelihood to accept an unpaid placement as seen in Figure 5.4.1 below.

![Experience and Pay vs. Likelihood](image)

**FIGURE 5.4.1 – Graph of Students Likelihood to Accept an Unpaid Placement versus the Option of Pay and No Experience or No Pay and Experience**

Those that choose the unpaid, experience option are more likely to accept an unpaid placement and those that would rather a paid job with no experience are not considering unpaid placements. This result was to be expected.

Interestingly age does have an effect on this answer with a 50:50 split for those in the 36-50 age bracket and neither of the respondents in 50+ age bracket choosing the unpaid job. One respondent provides a reason for this result noting that they cannot afford to do unpaid work being an independent mature student.

### 5.5 Optimum characteristics of unpaid placements

To better advertise unpaid placements to students it is important to understand what features are most desirable. This includes the length of the placement, the type of pay (if any) offered and the location.

The majority of respondents declared that they would not be willing to move for an unpaid placement (44%) with 35% unsure. This echoes the literature discussed in chapter 3 and was also confirmed by the interviewed students. Students will not move for unpaid placements as they cost of living would be too high.

“It is not always possible for graduates to undertake unpaid work due to a high cost of living and an inability to maintain a separate part time job”.

The optimum length of a placement (either paid or unpaid) is 6 months according to 40% of the respondents of the questionnaire. With this said, nearly 4% of those surveyed believe
that over a year is the optimum length. With most graduate placements currently on offer lasting for nearly a year it is crucial to note that the majority of students do not look on unpaid placements of this length favourably (Table 5.5.1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Optimum length of graduate placements</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over a year</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 233

To gain an understanding of students’ perceptions of graduate salaries it was important to ask how much they believe recent graduates should be paid. Over half (53%) think that a wage reflecting the graduate’s contribution to the company is the most appropriate pay and 26% consider minimum wage as the best option. Only one respondent, a young pharmacy student, thinks that graduates should not be remunerated whilst 6 students think graduates need only be paid travel expenses (See Appendix E.3, Figure E.3.5).

5.6 Perceived Benefits and Drawbacks of unpaid placements

As discussed in chapter 3.2 unpaid placements can provide many benefits to graduates as well as the companies providing them. It was of interest to investigate whether students identified the same benefits and to gauge an overall perception of unpaid placements.

![Perceived Advantages of unpaid placements](image)

FIGURE 5.6.1 – Graph of the Perceived Advantages of Unpaid Placements to Graduates
Enhancing employability was cited as the most important advantage associated with unpaid placements (43%). Gaining experience is also considered beneficial (37%) as is the possibility of improving a CV (11%). Learning new skills and applying knowledge learnt in college are not seen as big advantages with only 3% and 5% of respondents selecting these options respectively (Figure 5.6.1)

In addition to this, students were asked to rate how much they thought an unpaid placement would increase their employment prospects (1 being no effect, 10 being a substantial increase). The results show that half of respondents think it has an affect of 8 or higher, suggesting that respondents perceive placements in a positive light and determine them to be very beneficial to their careers (See Appendix E.3, Figure E.3.6). The interviewed students reiterate the advantages associated with placements but do no value these advantages as high as the survey respondents. One student suggests that the placement will not have a sizeable affect on the chances of securing a job but will add to a CV:

“It might get you the interview but I think it all comes down to how you project yourself in an interview. But it will certainly help you get your foot in the door”.

Students’ opinions of companies that provide unpaid placements are divided. Whilst some students see these companies in a positive light, many consider the placements to be exploitation. When asked to identify the top advantages to a company providing unpaid placements there were four key thoughts in the open-ended answers (Figure 5.6.2)

a. Free/Cheap Labour

Nearly half of respondents (44%) believe this to be the main advantage to a company. Again, the responses seemed to separate into two groups. Some described this type of work as a ‘cost cutting’ resource where as others expressed that it was ‘exploitation’ and ‘slave
labour’. One respondent believes that the main advantage to a company providing an unpaid placement is to take “advantage of people”. This division is important to note as it highlights that some graduates have very negative views and perceptions of unpaid placements.

b. Company profile

A lot (31%) of the survey respondents believe that companies that provide unpaid placements are hoping to increase their company profile amongst graduates and gain some publicity.

“It looks well for the companys reputation that they are giving young a most likely inexperienced minds an opportunity to prove themselves” [sic].

c. Long interview/Potential Employees

In total 13% of respondents cited this answer as one of the main advantages to a company. The company providing the placement gets to test out new staff using an extensive assessment period – “test the candidate’s capabilities beyond a paper CV”. In addition to this, students believe it is also a way for companies to pick and choose the best graduates and trial them without contracts or obligations.

d. Fresh thinking and ideas of graduates

Another perceived benefit to companies, according to 12% of respondents, is the injection of “young, energetic workers” into the workforce. This includes graduates bringing in fresh ideas as well as encouraging existing staff to increase their performance:

“Always great to bring in new fresh minds to shake long term employees out of their slumber and into a bit of healthy competition”.

In addition to these four main answers there were some other interesting responses. A few students are of the opinion that graduates will be employed in these placements to do the menial, monotonous tasks and existing employees will “unload unwanted work” onto them. Some answers highlighted the fact that the company is not investing in the graduate and therefore will not experience any financial loss if they are not “up to scratch”. A small minority of respondents suggested that the companies providing these unpaid placements will benefit by contributing to the industry talent pool and through teaching graduates new skills.

5. 7 Legal issues and Fairness

As the literature in chapter 3 suggested there may be some legal issues surrounding unpaid placements. The questionnaire aimed to determine whether students were aware of these concerns. Furthermore it is important to investigate how students view these unpaid placements in terms of fairness.

Overall, 97% of respondents were not aware of any legislation surrounding unpaid placements which reiterates the fact that there is either not a lot of literature surrounding this type of work or is the information is not easily available. Out of the students that were interviewed only one stated that they were confident that they knew their rights at work
whereas the remaining students admitted they do not know what rights they are entitled to when on a placement or full time job.

The respondents were again quite closely divided when asked whether they think unpaid placements are fair or not. 56% of respondents do not think they are fair as opposed to 44% that believe they are. Table 5.7.1 shows a breakdown of the respondents by faculty.

TABLE 5.7.1 – Percentage of Students’ per faculty that consider unpaid placements to be unfair

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Unfair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering, Mathematics and Science</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Science</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 117

Health science respondents are more likely to deem unpaid placements as fair with 58% of students choosing the fair option. Students in the Faculty of Engineering, Mathematics and Science also believe they are fair but the split in opinions is closer with 49% of respondents claiming unpaid placements are unfair. Respondents studying the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences are the only students that think unpaid placements are unfair with over two thirds of students (63%) choosing this answer. The question was open ended and provided some interesting opinions on the subject.

Unpaid placements are not fair – responses

Many respondents that think unpaid placements are unfair cited a reason that was very common in the topic literature – exclusivity:

“They exclude people who cannot afford to work for free thereby allowing only a small proportion of well-off people who are most likely supported by their parents to participate.”.

“It’s not based on merit, but rather the ability to pay”.

A number of students state that they think this type of work leads to unequal opportunities for graduates and leads to certain careers being “elitist”.

In addition to this, some students are aware that certain disciplines require graduates to undertake unpaid placements as a means of furthering their career:

“Unfortunately, in popular industries (media especially) the companies call the shots”.

Many see unpaid placements as unfair as they are exploiting graduates that are finding it difficult to secure work in the current economic climate:

“Such companies are taking advantage of the state of the graduate job market to get graduates to do the work which no one else wants to do”.
These responses very much echo the literature in chapter 3.4 that label unpaid placements unfair as they are exclusive and do not offer equal opportunities to all graduates.

Unpaid placements are fair – responses

In contrast to the unfair responses many respondents think unpaid placements are fair as it is the graduate’s opinion whether to do one or not:

“Nobody is forced to take such a placement”.

“If someone can live without making income and do it that’s their choice and opportunity”

A significant amount of the respondents believe that the advantages gained from an unpaid placement would outweigh any negative issues:

“Graduate gains experience from the placement, which in some cases can be more valuable than wage”.

These students are of the opinion that once the placement is beneficial and the graduate gains some experience from it then they are fair.

TABLE 5.7.2 – Students Willingness to Apply for an Unpaid Placement versus Opinions on Fairness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Not Fair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly Unlikely</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Likely</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Likely</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ perception of fairness directly affects whether they are likely to accept a graduate placement or not (Table 5.7.2). This table shows that respondents that deem unpaid placements as fair are more likely to consider them as an employment option after graduation which is the expected result.
APPENDICES
A ORIGINAL PROJECT OUTLINE

Client: Careers Advisory Service

Project: Investigate student attitudes to the value of unpaid placements.

Location: East Chapel, TCD

Client Contact: Sean Gannon, Ext. 2556, sean.gannon@tcd.ie

Department Contact: Myra O’ Regan

Client Background

The Careers Advisory Service is based in East Chapel and 5 College Green. It operates within a fast-changing and client-centred work environment and is responsible for providing guidance to undergraduate and postgraduate students at the College. Over 1200 students are seen on an individual basis each year in addition to those who attend workshops, class sessions and visit the careers information centre. Facilities available to students include individual meetings, group guidance seminars and activities to aid the development of transferable skills, a full range of information on employers and postgraduate study, training seminars, vacancy information for final year and postgraduate students, psychometric assessment and computerised vocational guidance. The department also provides a specialised service – VACWORK, which aims to help Junior Sophister students to obtain career related work experience during their summer vacation.

While the Careers Advisory Service operates primarily for students it also offers an important two-way communication channel between the College and the labour market. Staff in the department are heavily involved in liaising with employers who visit Dublin.

Project Background

In a recent article in the Irish Times, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions’ General Secretary David Begg wrote “13.7 per cent of our workforce – 3 per cent over the EU average – exists in a state of idleness and dependency. And this is almost certainly an understatement: count in those forced abroad, those staying in or returning to education and you are closer to 20 per cent.” Unemployment amongst primary degree graduates (for the class of 2008, according to the latest set of statistics) is about 9% which, while below the national figure is still very significant. One response to graduate unemployment has been the establishment of unpaid internships (which often allow participants to retain unemployment benefits). Both the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (http://www.ibec.ie/gradlink) and FAS (http://www.fas.ie/en/WPP/) advertise internship programmes. Many large established graduate recruiters (e.g. Abbott Ireland, PriceWaterhouseCoopers) provide these internships alongside their existing graduate recruitment programmes. These schemes are also a feature of other labour markets e.g. the UK http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/ChoicesA
Client Requirement

In considering employment options after graduation, how do students view unpaid internships? Do they provide valuable experience or do students feel exploited especially when large companies can seemingly afford to recruit to “real” jobs? In deciding to take up an offer of an unpaid internship what criteria should a student use to make their choice – size of the company, the sector in which it is located, the nature and depth of the experience provided, opportunities for training etc? From the student perspective, what is the optimum length of an internship? Based on the range of opportunities advertised are there types of job missing or disciplines not catered for?

What is involved for the student?

The project will involve a survey of selected final year and postgraduate students in relation to the questions raised above.

If time permits, the project may include a survey of some providers of unpaid internships to understand their thinking on the value of this type of experience.

Further Reading:

- http://targetjobs.co.uk/work-experience/work-experience-and-internships-advice/unpaid-internships-are-they-worth-it
- http://graduatefog.co.uk/2010/850/sneering-coverage-betrays-youn/

INTERIM PROJECT REPORT

Management Science and Information Systems Studies

Project: Investigate student attitudes to the value of unpaid placements
Client: Careers Advisory Service
Student: Lindsey MacKay
Supervisor: Myra O'Regan

Review of Background and Work to Date

The Careers Advisory Service (CAS) operates within a client-centred work environment and is responsible for providing guidance to undergraduate and postgraduate students in Trinity College. Furthermore, staff are heavily involved in liaising with employers who visit Dublin, which provides an important two-way communication channel between the college and the labour market.

In recent years, unemployment rates in Ireland have increased considerably with unemployment amongst graduates at a significant level. In these difficult economic times unpaid placements have become more prevalent as an employment option for graduates with many large organisations advertising these programmes (e.g. FÁS work placement programme and IBEC’s Gradlink).

It is of great interest of the Careers Advisory Service in Trinity to investigate student’s opinions of these unpaid work placements. Would students be willing to consider these placements as an employment option after graduation? What factors would encourage/discourage a student's decision? Are these opportunities viewed as valuable experience or do students feel it is a form of exploitation?

It was decided that the best method for gathering information for this project was to conduct a survey of final year students and postgraduates. From reading literature surrounding the topic and the information provided in the project outline, the main areas of interest for the survey have been defined. To aid in the development in the survey one on one interviews will be carried out with various students across disciplines. Survey questionnaires will also be sent to providers of these placements to gain company perspectives on the issue. Research into the area of unpaid work placements has been conducted and a literature review has been completed on the topic.

Terms of Reference

The aim of this project is to:

- Prepare a literature review of issues related to unpaid placements;
- Investigate student attitudes to the value of unpaid placements;
- Conduct preliminary interviews with students to aid survey development;
• Obtain the opinions of providers of unpaid internships.

Further Work

Christmas Break:

• One on one interviews with students;
• Finalize the survey for circulation within the college and create it using Survey Monkey;
• Finalize questionnaire to be sent to FÀS and IBEC (providers of unpaid work programmes).

Week 1 Hilary Term:

• Survey is sent out to students in the college with 10 days response time;
• Survey questionnaire is e-mailed to FÀS and IBEC with 2 week response time.

Week 3 Hilary Term:

• Data collection and analysis.

March 2011:

• Report Writing.

Conclusions

There is a lot of literature surrounding the issue of unpaid internships in terms of legality and fairness. Although these graduate programmes are beneficial to participants there are still many disadvantages associated with them including the problems they cause for the labour market and the resulting barriers to entry for many graduates. The study needs to investigate whether final year students are aware of these issues surrounding unpaid work placements and their likelihood to work for an organization free of pay.
Graduate Work Placement Survey

1. Introduction

The aim of this survey is to collect data on student attitudes towards work placements after graduation.

You are encouraged to answer all questions but if you do not feel comfortable answering a particular question you may leave it blank.

Your responses are greatly appreciated.

The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

You may opt out of the survey at any stage.

This survey complies with the regulations set out by the Data Protection Act.

2. Informed consent page

Please read the following declaration carefully:

* I am 18 years or older and am competent to provide consent.
* I have read, or had read to me, this consent form. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction and understand the description of the research that is being provided to me.
* I agree that my data is used for scientific purposes and I have no objection that my data is published in scientific publications in a way that does not reveal my identity.
* I freely and voluntarily agree to be part of this research study, though without prejudice to my legal and ethical rights.
* I understand that I may refuse to answer any question and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.
* I understand that my participation is fully anonymous and that no personal details about me will be recorded.
* I understand that if I or anyone in my family has a history of epilepsy then I am proceeding at my own risk.

* 1. Please confirm you have read, and agree to, the declaration above. You are free to close this window, or to decide not to answer any question on the survey.

  ![I have read, and agree to, the terms of the declaration.](button)
## Graduate Work Placement Survey

2. How likely are you to apply for a graduate placement?
   - Very Likely
   - Likely
   - Not Likely
   - Highly Unlikely

3. Have you applied for any graduate placements?
   - Yes
   - No

4. If yes, how many graduate placements have you applied for?
   - 1-3
   - 4-6
   - 7-9
   - 10+

5. If no, why not?
   - [ ] Pursuing further study after graduation
   - [ ] Have already secured a job in Ireland, the UK or continental Europe after graduation
   - [ ] Taking a year out before entering the workforce
   - [ ] Emigrating
   - [ ] Other (please specify):
     - [ ]

6. Which of the following locations would you be willing to work in for a graduate placement? Please select all that apply.
   - [ ] Dublin
   - [ ] Rest of Ireland
   - [ ] UC
   - [ ] Continental Europe
   - [ ] Outside Europe
Graduate Work Placement Survey

4. Awareness of Graduate Placements

Graduate placements can vary in length and can be either paid or unpaid.

Please answer the following questions regardless of whether you plan to do a graduate placement next year or not.

1. Are you aware of the salaries provided by graduate placements?
   - Yes
   - No

2. Are you aware of any unpaid placements provided by companies
   - Yes
   - No
   If yes, please specify ________________________________

3. Have you heard of either of the following graduate placements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAS Work Placement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme (WPP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBEC Gradlink</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Graduate Work Placement Survey

5. Likelihood to accept a Graduate Placement

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would be willing to apply for an unpaid graduate placement</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be willing to apply for a graduate placement that provided some form of compensation</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Which of the following factors would influence your decision to accept an unpaid graduate placement? Please choose the 3 most important factors.

- [ ] Company size
- [ ] Company reputation
- [ ] Sector
- [ ] Nature of experience provided
- [ ] Depth of experience provided
- [ ] Type of work involved
- [ ] Opportunities for training
- [ ] Location
- [ ] Length of placement
- [ ] Possibility of a work contract after placement
- [ ] Not able to find a paid job
- [ ] Other (please specify)

3. What is the likelihood that you would accept an unpaid graduate placement offer?

- [ ] Highly Likely
- [ ] Likely
- [ ] Not Likely
- [ ] Highly Unlikely

4. Which of the following advantages associated with unpaid graduate placements do you consider the most important?

- [ ] Gaining experience in a specific industry or sector
- [ ] Learning new skills
- [ ] Enhancing employability
- [ ] Improve CV
- [ ] Apply knowledge learnt in college to real world
Graduate Work Placement Survey

6. Unpaid Graduate Placements

1. Of the following two options, which would you choose?
   - One year working in a paid job that provided no experience
   - One year working in an unpaid job that provided lots of experience

2. Would you be willing to move for an unpaid graduate placement?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don’t Know

3. For you, what is the optimum length of a graduate placement?
   - 3 months
   - 6 months
   - 9 months
   - 1 year
   - Over a year

4. To what extent do you think a graduate placement should be remunerated?
   - Full wage/similar wage to permanent employees
   - Minimum wage
   - Wage reflecting the graduate’s contribution to the company
   - Travel expenses
   - Graduates should not be remunerated

5. On a scale of 1-10, (1 being no effect, 10 being a substantial increase) by how much do you think graduate placements affect employment prospects?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement affect on employment prospects</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Graduate Work Placement Survey

7. Legality of unpaid graduate placements

1. In your opinion, what are the 3 main advantages to a company that provide unpaid graduate placements?

1

2

3

2. Are you aware of any legislation in place surrounding unpaid graduate placements?

☐ Yes
☐ No

3. Do you think that graduate placements that do not offer pay are fair?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please elaborate your answer

Graduate Work Placement Survey

8. Personal Information (Optional)

1. What gender are you?

☐ Male
☐ Female

2. What course are you studying?

Course

3. What age are you?

☐ Under 18
☐ 18-24
☐ 25-35
☐ 36-60
☐ 60-65
☐ Over 65

4. What are your plans for next year?
D  INTERVIEWS

D.1  INTERVIEW 1

[Intro] “I’m just going to ask you a few questions today about graduate placements. Graduate placements are internships or work experience in a company for a specific period after you graduate. They are not full time job positions.”

Q. Have you heard of these graduate placements before?
A. Yes

Q. Have you ever thought about applying for a placement?
A. Yes

Q. Have you applied to any this year?
A. Placements, not full time jobs? No

Q. How come you have not applied for any?
A. My preference was to get a full time job

Q. Do you know the salaries being provided by these placements?
A. I wouldn’t be aware of them but I’ve heard that some of them are unpaid.

Q. What is your opinion of unpaid placements?
A. It’s a bit of a broad question. I think unpaid placements can be beneficial because you are gaining experience and that experience can then lead to a potential full time job. But, you are spending 6 months or a year not earning any money and having to pay living expenses if you do live outside of home so I don’t think a lot of people will look on them favourably but I would think that some people have no choice in that, if they got offered that and got offered nothing else that was paid they may have to take up the unpaid position.

Q. If you weren’t to go for a full time job after graduation would you ever consider an unpaid placement?
A. If it was for a short period yes. I wouldn’t do it for more than 3months.

Q. What factors would discourage you from doing an unpaid placement?
A. The fact that I wouldn’t be paid. Maybe the placement would be in a company that is not very well known because they possibly can’t afford to pay people. You may not be treated like a proper employee. You may just be told to do coffee work and photocopying and those sorts of things. It might not actually be proper work experience.

Q. Would you think that there are any advantages of unpaid placements?
A. Yes because I think it looks good on the CV if you have actually gone out there, not found a job that you want, not found a paid job that you want, and then gone out and said “oh well
I’ll work for free”. I think it reflects very well on a CV if you can put that on and then go to another employer and then they ask you what did you do over the past few months and you say I couldn’t find a job so I said I’d work unpaid. I just think it shows dedication and it might actually be better than working paid for 3 months.

Q. If you had to choose: 6 months unpaid in the area that you want to work in and you get lots of experience or a 6 months paid job in an area that you are not thinking of pursuing with no experience, which would you choose?

A. If you’re talking 6 months I would more than likely take the paid one. If you’re talking 3 months, maybe less I would probably favourably look upon doing the unpaid one because there could be a potential opportunity for moving on to being employed with that company after the placement depending on how good you work.

Q. By how much do you think an unpaid placement would increase you employment prospects? On a scale of 1 to 10.

A. I’d say about 2 or 3. If its directly related to the position that you want to go into and if it’s either a competing company or a company very much related to it then it could have a bigger affect, like it might get you the interview but I think it all comes down to how you project yourself in an interview. So I don’t think having the placement will impact you getting the job a lot but it will certainly help you get your foot in the door.

Q. Would you be willing to move for a placement? Would it be feasible?

A. No. It’s too expensive.

Q. So you would stay in or around the Dublin area?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you know if there are any disciplines or industries where unpaid placements are the only option for graduates?

A. I don’t really know of any to be honest.

Q. Do you know of any unpaid graduate placements or programmes that are provided by any companies?

A. Whilst looking in the last couple of months no. I haven’t seen any. But I know there are ones.

Q. What would you think are the main advantages to companies providing these placements? Besides the fact that they are saving costs.

A. I think they get an idea of how the person is going to work and as I said they could employee these people with a potential to be full time employees. So I think it helps with the decision making of recruitment and it also allows them to maybe test the person who wants to work with them to see how great their skills are.

Q. Do you think that unpaid placements are fair?
A. I think it’s fair to the people applying for them because I think they’d only apply to the unpaid placements as a last resort. So as I said before it does get them in the door and it does get them to talk to people in the business to try and show off their skills. I can’t see why it’s not fair to the people already working there because it is only a perspective new employee; it’s not going to lose somebody their job. I don’t think it is unfair. I think it’s a good idea.

Q. Would you think there are any legal issues surrounding these placements?

A. As long as they’re not exploited to the max.

Q. What would define as being exploited?

A. Exploited would be working for a long time. I think the placement; unpaid placements certainly, should be set at a certain length of time. I don’t think they should go over a certain amount of time because then [the company] might be getting peoples hopes up. If they stay there for 6 months they think they are definitely going to get a job, that’s what they are working towards and if they could be told at the end no you’re not getting a job it seems like such a waste of 6 months.

Q. Do you know what rights you are entitled to when you are working in a placement? Or even when you are going into a job next year?

A. I wouldn’t be too aware of them no.

Q. If you thought you were being exploited at work would you know who to report it to?

A. I presume you go to citizensinformation.ie and there is information there.

Q. What do you plan to do when you graduate next year?

A. I have a job. A full time paid job.

D.2 INTERVIEW 2

[Intro] “I’m just going to ask you a few questions today about graduate placements. Graduate placements are internships or work experience in a company for a specific period after you graduate. They are not full time job positions.”

Q. Have you ever heard of these graduate placements before?

A. Yes

Q. Have you ever thought about applying for a placement?

A. Yes

Q. Have you applied to any this year?

A. Lots
Q. Around how many did you apply for?
A. 30-40

Q. Where were these placements located?
A. Lots around Ireland, mostly in Dublin and some over in England.

Q. So you would be willing to move for a placement?
A. Yes.

Q. Have you ever thought of applying for an unpaid graduate placement?
A. No

Q. Have you heard of unpaid graduate placements before?
A. Yes

Q. Why wouldn't you apply for an unpaid placement? What factors would discourage you from accepting one?
A. If I couldn’t enter the workforce as a paid graduate I’d do a Masters. I think that I am a valuable graduate and if a company isn’t willing to pay me then I’d do a masters.

Q. Would an unpaid placement ever been an option for you?
A. Not for me.

Q. Would there be anything that would influence you to undertake an unpaid placement?
A. If it was something I really want to do and that was the only way into it, say being a solicitor or something I’d consider it because that’s natural progression. But no, in the area I want to get into no.

Q. Do you know if there are any disciplines or any industries where graduates have to go into unpaid placements first?
A. I don’t but I’d imagine like people in speech therapy, teachers and lots of professions do placements as part of college, and interning and that but lots of courses do placements that aren’t paid so I’d say that’s similar.

Q. If an unpaid placement was your only option how long do you think it should be? What would be the optimum length?
A. About 9 months. That would be the maximum length.

Q. Would you think that an unpaid placement would increase your employment prospects? Both with the company you are doing it with and in the workforce in general.
A. I think placements irrespective of if I get paid increase [prospects]. I don’t think doing an unpaid placement will increase your chances more than a paid placement. If I was an employer I’d think the previous company were willing to pay this person so they must be good.

Q. How much do you think graduates should be paid?

A. I think in these professional institutions with graduate programmes graduates should be paid a graduate wage which in my opinion is between 23,000-35,000 depending on the work you do and the industry.

Q. If you had to choose: 9 months unpaid in the area that you want to work in and you get lots of experience or a 9 months paid job in an area that you are not thinking of pursuing with no experience, which would you choose?

A. That’s a good question. I’d probably go for the paid one if I enjoyed what I was doing even though I wasn’t getting experience then for future reference I could just swing it round to make it seem like it’s more relevant than it was.

Q. Are you aware of any unpaid placements offered by companies?

A. I think FÁS do some. I can’t really think of any other ones.

Q. What would you think would be the main advantages to a company providing unpaid placements, besides the cost savings?

A. Getting their name out there amongst graduates and getting the pick of graduates. If they get in 20 students and they realise two of them are fantastic workers and well worth a few pennies they can make them an attractive offer.

Q. Do you think that these unpaid placements are fair?

A. Yes, no-one is being forced into these [placements]. You can do it if you want to, if you don’t want to then don’t.

Q. Do you think there would be any legal issues surrounding this type of work?

A. I would hope not but I suspect there is because if you try to do anything out there there’s probably red tape in the way.

Q. Do you know your rights at work?

A. I wouldn’t be an expert but I know the basics.

Q. Would you know where to look or report if you had any problems?

A. Yes and companies are quite good, or in my experience, quite good at telling you that type of stuff.

Q. What are your plans for when you graduate?
A. I have 3 plans. Plan A is to get a job. A paid job, I wouldn’t be interested in an internship now really. First preference would be Dublin with some travel. Plan B if I can’t get a job is to do a Masters and look at international management in Trinity. Plan C is to go to Australia because apparently there’s work out there!

D.3 INTERVIEW 3

[Intro] “I’m just going to ask you a few questions today about graduate placements. Graduate placements are internships or work experience in a company for a specific period after you graduate. They are not full time job positions.”

Q. Have you heard of these graduate placements before?
A. Yes

Q. Have you ever thought about taking applying for one?
A. Yes I have

Q. Have you applied for any?
A. I haven’t because my main concern is to get a full time graduate position after I graduate.

Q. How come you would choose a full time one over a placement?
A. Well I suppose I would be more intent on getting a job that I can have in the long run rather than one I can have for just the short term. I just want to get straight into it. I’ve already done a few internships so just get straight into a graduate position.

Q. Did you research any graduate placements before you began looking for a full time job?
A. No, not at all

Q. Would you know any of the salaries provided by them?
A. I wouldn’t

Q. How would you feel about applying for an unpaid placement? Would you apply for one?
A. An unpaid one? Not very well being a student with loans to pay off.

Q. How long do you think these placements should last for?
A. 3 months. 3 months is the standard internship I’ve done so far and I think that’s sufficient.

Q. What factors would discourage you from applying for an unpaid placement?
A. It’s too long. If it was a year long that’s a very long internship. I wouldn’t be interested in doing an internship that’s a year long unless I was going to stay with that company afterwards.
Q. Would there be any factors then that would influence you to take one?

A. Well like I said if I’m getting a full time job afterwards with that company or any other company that would definitely give me the job after the internship then I would take it. I suppose it would look decent on the CV if the company was reputable.

Q. So how much do you think that someone doing these graduate placements should be paid?

A. Well when I did the internships it was standard intern pay. I had to pay for all my living expenses. So that’s what I presume. Normal job, you take care of your expenses and rent, travelling. Unless you’re travelling on behalf of the company then I presume they provide it for you. Yeah, just normal salary or intern salary. I know the internship I did it was half exactly what a graduate position was.

Q. Do you think that, if you took part in a 3 month placement after you graduated it would increase your prospects of getting employed by that company?

A. Yes

Q. Do you think it would increase your prospects of being employed by another company?

A. Well yes it would look decent on the CV I suppose.

Q. Do you think it would have a big affect?

A. Well I just think it would look good on your CV. I think interviews come down to something else. So just that it would look good on your CV.

Q. Would you be willing to move for an unpaid placement?

A. No. Because it’s unpaid. I don’t have any money being a student so graduating from college I have loans and I have to pay them off.

Q. Are you aware of any companies that provide unpaid placements for graduates?

A. No

Q. What do you think would be the main advantages to an employer taking on unpaid graduates? Beside the fact that they don’t have to pay them

A. They can take all the monotonous work off [other employees]. They can get to know [the graduate] to see if they’re material for working in that company. They are the main two reasons.

Q. Do you think the number of unpaid placements will have increased in the last couple of years?

A. Yes because of, dare I say, current economic climates.

Q. Do you think that unpaid placements are fair?
A. They are fair to those that want it. If they want an unpaid placement and they are applying for it then they know what they are getting so they can’t complain it’s unfair.

Q. Would you know if these placements are more prevalent in some disciplines? In different industries/sectors?

A. I honestly wouldn’t know because I haven’t looked.

Q. Do you think there would be any legal issues surrounding this type of work?

A. I suppose the same legal issues that would surround any other type of work. That’s just my guess though

Q. What are your plans for next year?

A. Get a job hopefully and if not go to Australia

D.4 INTERVIEW 4

[Intro] “I’m just going to ask you a few questions today about graduate placements. Graduate placements are internships or work experience in a company for a specific period after you graduate. They are not full time job positions.”

Q. Have you ever heard of these graduate placements before?

A. Yes

Q. Have you applied for any of them?

A. Yes

Q. How many around did you apply for?

A. I must have applied for up to about ten

Q. Where were these placements located?

A. Most of them were Dublin; some of them had headquarters in Dublin. One or two of them, like Kerry Group were in Kerry.

Q. Would you be willing to move for them?

A. Yeah, I probably would have. Well, I would have decided when I got an offer

Q. Do you know the salaries being provided by placements?

A. Well I know a rough estimate for the Big Four for like the accountancy and consulting ones. Anyone else, I think is about five or six grand lower than them.

Q. There are some placements out there that are unpaid. Have you ever considered applying for any of these unpaid placements?

A. No
Q. What would be the main factors that would discourage you from applying?

A. Well the fact that I’d hopefully be able to get a paid one. And because I live at home I’d probably be able to move out once I get paid and stuff so after being in college for four years you kind of just want to get money and stuff and move out.

Q. Would you think there would be any factors that might encourage you to apply for an unpaid placement?

A. Well it depends on the length of time. If it was short enough and if it was worth it. Like if it had a good reputation like Diageo has a huge reputation for being one of the best graduate programmes so say that was unpaid I’m sure people would still go for it.

Q. What would be the optimum length that you would work for an unpaid placement?

A. I don’t know, probably like another college year. Like people are doing masters and stuff so another college year.

Q. What would you think are the main advantages to a company of providing these unpaid placements? Besides the fact that there might be cutting costs on wages.

A. I don’t really know. I guess if they treat the graduates well they’re likely to get the people they have trained and then they are probably going to be more loyal to them. Once they are actually paid they are probably going to work harder and stuff. I’m sure not getting paid you’re not going to work that hard unless it’s something you’re passionate about it. I guess just getting the employees available to them after they’re done.

Q. Are you aware of any programmes out there that are unpaid? Or any companies that provide them?

A. Not off the top of my head. I know there are some but I wouldn’t know what they are in or anything.

Q. Do you think that these unpaid placements are evenly distributed across all industries and sectors?

A. No, I’d say the professional companies, like the Big Four and stuff, their main incentive is their name and their salary. Like that’s what people go for I’d say. I think the free ones would be, I don’t know, I don’t want to say in the public sector, but they’re probably not are they? I don’t know. I wouldn’t be aware of that.

Q. Do you think that these unpaid placements are fair to graduates?

A. Well it’s fair if it’s worth it, if you can get a job out of it at the end of it. It would be good on your CV, like why would people do masters? They pay to do a masters so if it’s the equivalent, if it’s going to help you get a job then yeah definitely, probably even better because you don’t have to pay for it.

Q. How much would you think doing an unpaid placement would have an effect on your employment prospects?
A. Well it would probably stand to you because if you were willing to work for free and then you’re going for an interview for a work job they’ll be like why did you work for free. It will show that you have more of a commitment to it. So it’d probably stand to you in that way and then just the idea of actually doing work and testing it, you’re not actually under a contract and you don’t have to stay there so if you don’t know that maybe a free placement would be a lot better.

Q. If you had to choose: 12 months unpaid in the area that you want to work in and you get lots of experience or a 12 months paid job in an area that you are not thinking of pursuing with no experience, which would you choose?

A. It kind of depends on what you want. Like I want to move out that’s pretty much the only reason I’m going for a graduate placement otherwise I’d probably go travelling. So that kind of factor would make me choose the paid one. But if I really knew what I wanted to do and I really liked the job then yeah I’d definitely go for the one where you get experience and that stands to you. Like in the long run if your thinking long term then you’d go for that one [unpaid] but personally I want to move out so I’d probably just go for the paid one,

Q. Would you think there is any legal issues surrounding unpaid placements?

A. Well I’d say they probably have a bit of trouble if they’re mixing the unpaid placement people with people that are getting full time pay I’d say there’s a bit of trouble there, and working them just as harder, or even harder. Free labour and all that stuff. I’m sure there’s problems with that.

Q. And would you know your rights at work? Like if you were on a placement next year would you know them?

A. No, I wouldn’t have a clue. I should.

Q. Would you know where to look for them?

A. The internet

Q. Ok so finally, what do you plan to do next year?

A. I’m going to do a graduate programme. I’ve signed the contract with one of the technology consultants. And it’s paid.

Q. How long is that for?

A. I think the contract is six months but then I think they extend it after some kind of evaluation.
E ANALYSIS OF ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

E.1 Demographics

FIGURE E.1.1 – Percentage of Male/Female Respondents (n=227)

FIGURE E.1.2 – Percentage of Respondents by Age (n=228)

FIGURE E.1.3 – Percentage of Courses with the most respondents (n=216)
E.2 Introduction to Placements

FIGURE E.2.1 – Students’ Reasons for Not Applying for Graduate Placements (n= 192)

FIGURE E.2.2 – Locations Respondents are willing to move to for a Graduate Placement (n= 237)
E.3 Unpaid Placements

![Unpaid Programmes](Image)

FIGURE E.3.1 – Percentage of Respondents that are not aware of the Unpaid Placements provided by FÀS and IBEC

![Willingness to Apply for placements](Image)

FIGURE E.3.2 – Students’ Willingness to apply for Placements – Paid versus Unpaid
FIGURE E.3.3 – Students’ likelihood to apply for an Unpaid Placement by Gender (n=225)

FIGURE E.3.4 – Percentage of factors influencing Students’ likelihood to choose to do an Unpaid Placement (n=233)
FIGURE E.3.5 – Graph of How Much Student’s think that a Graduate should be Remunerated (n=233)

FIGURE E.3.6 – Perceived positive affect of Placements on a Student’s Employment Prospects (n = 236)
F SUBSETS OF QUESTIONNAIRE OPEN ENDED RESPONSES

F.1 How come you have not applied for graduate placements?

- After four years I don't intend on working for free for a company especially with no guarantee of work after it.
- am still considering my options and procrastinating
- Cannot afford to do unpaid work experience as I am an independent mature student
- Cannot afford to live on nothing!
- cannot afford to work for nothing and there are not usually well paid
- Can't afford it
- can't afford to work for free when i could be using that time working for money
- did not know about them
- did not know you could
- didnt think of it as an option
- doing inter pharmacy year
- Evening student already in full time employment
- focusing on study and didnt think far ahead
- going to look for a job
- Had not heard of it.
- Have a huge student debt because I had to pay for my course, so can't afford to not be earning now.
- Have not applied for any jobs yet, unaware of graduate placement scheme
- Haven't decided what I'm doing yet, just focusing on dissertation and exams and then I'll think about whats next
- Haven't found a suitable one yet.
- Haven't got round to it yet!
- Haven't really considered the option of a placement. Would prefer full employment but failing that a placement would be good.
- Haven't yet
- I am not in a position where I can afford to work for free. Would have to save for a long time first.
- I have only heard grad placements in relation to psychology, I haven't seen any advertised in my area which is OT.
- Never heard of graduate placements

F.2 In your opinion, what are the main advantages to a company that provides unpaid graduate placements?

- Ability to fully evaluate potential employees.
- Ability to scout out potential employees
- allows them to look for high quality employees
- Always great to bring in new fresh minds to shake long term employees out of their slumber and into a bit of healthy competition.
- assess potential employees with no contract
- Attracting skilled workers
- Awareness of employer among prospective recruits
- Becoming in touch with the current graduates
- better choice of work hours
- Building on their reputation in a positive way.
- chance to recruit graduates
- Cheap employees to do the basic work
- Save money by not paying employees
- It could be used as a good system to head hunt potential employees.
- Cheap Labour (free)
- Increasing presence/reputation amongst graduates leading to higher calibre employees
- More efficient recruitment process
- a younger perspective
- not paying taxes or prsi
- Maybe some sort of tax avoidance
- Menial jobs
- Large pool of qualified people who've been tried out in the work environment on which to draw when a vacancy comes up
- free slave-labour
- Unload unwanted work

F.3  Do you think unpaid placements are fair?

No

- Absolutely not, they exclude people who cannot afford to work for free thereby allowing only a small proportion of well-off people who are most likely supported by their parents to participate. Furthermore, it is unfair to expect graduates to give a job their all when they are neither remunerated nor most likely given any real responsibility (if the job carried real responsibility it would be paid)

- Any work should be paid fairly -- unfortunately, though, in popular industries (media especially) the companies call the shots

- Companies are taking advantage of reduced prospects for graduates

- Essentially eliminates people who cannot afford to pay living expenses on their own

- Fair days work should mean a fair days wage

Yes

- Graduates gain vital skills in a real working environment and enhance their employment prospects. Companies benefit from fresh outlook and up to date knowledge of the graduate. mutually beneficial

- graduate gains experience from the placement, which in some cases can be more valuable than wages

- if someone can live without making income and do it thats their choice and opportunity.

- It's the company's right to offer such placements and its the graduates prerogative to accept them

- Nobody is forced to take such a placement.
I don't have a problem with short-term unpaid placements, but placements that go on for more than a month unpaid are exploitative. Such companies are taking advantage of the state of the graduate job market to get graduates to do the work which no one else wants to do in the firm for free. Graduates cannot be expected to live on fresh air!

Although ideally it would be easy for graduates to find paid employment this is not the case for many at the moment. It can be difficult to gain relevant work experience during college so unpaid graduate programmes at least offer students some chance of gaining some experience.

I think some companies are a bit cheeky in that sense, they know we really want a job but they offer unpaid placements that may not necessarily lead onto an employment contract.

the employer is training the graduate rather than using them to make coffee or a free skivy its fair. Both parties involved should be benefiting from the placement.
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