



Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University



Lessons from Virtual Internships: Research Insights and Practical Toolkit



Deloitte.

Developed by DCU's Leadership
and Talent Institute with support
from Deloitte Ireland.

In response to the rapid shift to virtual internships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, DCU's Leadership and Talent Institute, with support from Deloitte, sought to learn from the experiences of organisations who pivoted their internship programmes to virtual formats.

The research insights and practical toolkit resources in this report are based on the experiences of 22 organisations who participated in this study. We hope they will support more organisations to host effective virtual and hybrid internships in the future, and will increase the number of valuable internship opportunities available to students.

To read the full research report and recommendations, and to access additional resources, please visit:
dcu.ie/virtual-internships

The image shows the DCU logo, consisting of the letters 'DCU' in a large, blue, illuminated font. The logo is set against a background of several tall, vertical wooden pillars that are also illuminated from below. The scene is captured at night, with a dark blue sky and some city lights visible in the background. The logo is mounted on a low concrete base.

DCU

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Effective Virtual and Hybrid Internships Toolkit – Foreword Deloitte



Over the course of the pandemic, businesses, education institutions, and organisations across all

industries, have transformed how they work. We have learnt much about how we can adapt digitally and improve our ways of working. This will serve us well for continued success.

Internships are a critical part of student education, linking the academic to the practical, and allowing students gain invaluable experience. At Deloitte supporting this link between campus and business is also an important part of how we build opportunities for talented students who want to develop their careers with us. Therefore, how we think about the future of work extends to internships.

Through our experience of delivering an internship programme over the last year, and the digital and transformation skills that we have in our business, we have learnt much about how internships can be meaningful when delivered virtually. We continue to learn but are delighted to share our experience, knowledge and resources to the business and academic community around this important topic. Ensuring that opportunities will continue for students across the country in this new virtual world is critical in developing a workforce that is fit for the future and that will serve our economy well. It is even more important for those students who are supported by the DCU Access to the Workplace Programme.

Our collaborative relationship with DCU is a strategic partnership for us. We are proud to collaborate with one of the world's leading universities for impact in addressing inequality and reducing poverty. At Deloitte Ireland, our purpose is to make an impact that matters for our clients, our people, our community and our planet. This is activated through our WorldClass ambition to impact 50 million lives globally through education, skills building and access to opportunity. We are proud to be long-time supporters of the DCU Educational Trust and to have played a role in the creation of an Endowed Access Scholarship Fund.

I hope the users of the toolkit find it inspiring and I wish them every success with their internship programmes. I look forward to leading through a hybrid model in the not-too-distant future, taking the best of both worlds to deliver students worthwhile and engaging experiences.

Mike Hartwell

Head of Audit and Assurance,
Deloitte Ireland

Internships – Vital Opportunities for Students and Organisations



Corporate internships have become a core recruitment tool for organisations and a key steppingstone

for students in developing their professional careers. The work experience gained by students can be transformational in making graduates work ready, while the networking and career development can translate into higher levels of employment on graduation and higher levels of job satisfaction in initial job placements.

In 2020, DCU's Leadership and Talent Institute observed that the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in the postponement or cancellation of corporate internship programmes. Estimates at the time suggested that between a third and half of all internship programmes were cancelled. This left many students without placements in 2020. From our experience at DCU, we knew that the DCU Access to the Workplace Programme, an initiative to provide summer internships for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, was particularly affected. This programme alone saw available internships dropping from 50 in 2019 to 14 in 2020. Supporting companies to continue to provide such transformative opportunities for students was a key motivation for our research and the development of this toolkit.

In designing this research, we were interested in the lessons learned by those organisations who pivoted their programmes to virtual formats. What were the pressure points for them? What worked well? What elements of the virtual programmes would they retain if they were to have the option to return to the workplace and move towards hybrid programmes?

Through our research, we spoke with 22 different organisations and we have identified the benefits and challenges of virtual internships, alongside seven key steps to host successful virtual internships for both employers and interns. At the time of writing, COVID-19 restrictions remain high so our ability to comment on the post-Covid environment is somewhat limited. However, there is little doubt that the restrictions experienced globally over the course of the pandemic have reshaped the debate around the future of the workplace.

We hope that the research insights, ideas in practice examples, action checklists and other resources provided in this publication will help organisations to address any challenges they will face and to deliver successful virtual and hybrid internship programmes in future years.

Professor David Collings
Director, DCU Leadership
and Talent Institute

Research Team



This research was completed by the Leadership and Talent Institute (LTI) at Dublin City University Business School. The LTI builds on the long-established reputation of excellence in HRM and Organisational Psychology at DCU. The Institute brings together a critical mass of leading international researchers in the broad fields of HRM, Organisational Behaviour and Psychology and Strategy.

DCU Leadership and Talent Institute is the first leadership and talent centre of excellence and learning in Ireland. The members of the Institute conduct cutting edge research across the broad areas of work, organisation, and psychology with a focus on leadership and talent issues. They also consult with leading national and international organisations.



David Collings is Full Professor of Human Resource Management and Associate Dean for Research at DCU Business School. He is also Director of the Leadership and Talent

Institute. His research, teaching and consulting focus on talent management, global mobility, and the future of work. His work has been published in leading academic and practitioner journals including Harvard Business Review and MIT Sloan Management Review and has been picked up in media outlets including the BBC, Forbes, and the Wall Street Journal. He has been named as one of the 25 most influential thinkers in the field of HR on four occasions by HR Magazine.



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Claire was a Fulbright Scholar at Carnegie Mellon University and Lead on the Irish Centre for Manufacturing Research project with 10 MNC's on Tacit Knowledge. She is a Fellow of the Centre for Evidence Based Management. Her work on learning, knowledge, social networks, and evidence-based decision-making includes two books, publications in top journals and media outlets such as Human Resource Management, Human Resource Development Quarterly, Organisation Studies and the Irish Times. She has consulted internationally for over 20 years.

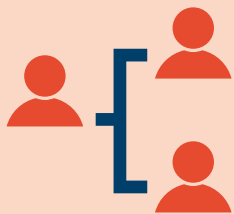


Michael Keegan is a retired Management Consultant, Trainer and Development Coach, and a DCU alumnus (MSc, Work and Organisational Behaviour). He was

previously Training Manager for a blue-chip Financial Services organisation and has many years' experience, both nationally and internationally, in various business sectors. He is also an NLP Master Practitioner and a Developmental Transactional Analyst.

We are also grateful to Emer Sherlock, a student on the MSc in HRM programme at Dublin City University, whose dissertation research focused on virtual internships and who contributed to data collection.

Research at a Glance



Research Methodology

Our research began with a desk-based review of research evidence on virtual internships and virtual working more broadly. We then completed 37 semi-structured interviews across 22 organisations which hosted virtual internship programmes in 2020. Intern programmes covered a range of sectors and industries and ranged in size from single participants to thousands as part of global programmes in larger multinationals.



Benefits



- Increased access to programmes from diverse cohorts of students
- Increased opportunity for collaboration across sites or countries
- Increased access to senior leaders for participants
- Development of skills which are in greater demand in virtual workplace

Challenges



- Enabling relationships and building networks
- Informal learning and sharing tacit knowledge
- Sharing business etiquette and organisational culture

7 Key Stages for Designing Effective Virtual Internship Programmes



1. Defining the purpose and objectives of the internship programme
2. Recruitment and selection
3. Onboarding
4. Role of managers and mentors
5. Designing the placement
6. Formal learning and development
7. Programme evaluation and intern appraisal

Benefits of Virtual Internships

Internships

Corporate internships have become a core recruitment tool for organisations and a key steppingstone for students in developing their professional careers. For clarity, we define internships as “structured and career related work-experiences obtained by students prior to graduation from an academic program.”¹

The typical internship programme encompasses the following key features:

- A position with an organisation for a fixed period with a focus on professional exposure and development.
- Project-based learning experiences that are aligned with clear goals.
- Direct supervisor engagement and interaction complemented by regular opportunities for feedback and reflection.

Internships are widely recognised as beneficial for organisations and students alike. For organisations they represent an efficient means of developing an early career talent pipeline through screening candidates as part of a work placement. They also help to reinforce the employer brand and contribute to corporate social responsibility initiatives. They can also bring new thinking and skills into organisations reflecting the latest knowledge from educational programmes.² For students, they can be a key steppingstone from studying to employment.

From Traditional, to Virtual, to Hybrid

While many organisations approached the transition to virtual internships with a degree of caution about their ability to deliver an intern programme and experience that matched their expectations, on completion of the initial programme, many identified benefits that they would retain when they can return to traditional

site-based programmes, or more likely as they transition to hybrid programmes in the future. Those organisations that felt best prepared for the transition to virtual already had a good degree of flexibility in their work practices, with employees regularly working from home prior to the pandemic. Additionally, some organisations reflected on the value of prior investment in technological platforms, which also facilitated the shift.

Key Benefits

A key benefit of virtual internships reported by a number of respondents in our research was increased diversity in applicants. The virtual format highlighted the advantage that applicants in cities where offices or sites were located enjoyed in traditional intern programmes. In traditional formats local candidates benefited by being able to live at home and shorter commutes. There was a definite sense that the virtual format levelled the playing field for applicants who lived farther from offices/sites and hence offered the potential for a more diverse talent pool.

In larger organisations there was a real sense that the virtual format created many more opportunities for collaboration across sites/offices and even across national boundaries. Traditionally, this collaboration was limited to stages such as induction. Indeed, cross-site and cross-national collaboration was reported to be the norm in the virtual format in many firms. Engaging with other interns across sites was perceived to further increase networks, to broaden interns’ perspectives and increase their awareness of cross-cultural considerations.

“The fantastic thing...with the move to virtual is this creation of “You’re an intern in the region” and everyone is getting the same experience. Everyone is being treated the same because everything is online. So, whether we are doing a speaker series with a senior leader in the company or we’re doing a magic show just to have some fun and be social, you’re getting the same experience whether you’re one of many people based in Ireland who’s interning at [company] or you’re that one or two people in a country in Africa that’s interning.”

There seemed little doubt that the shift to virtual also increased exposure and access to senior leaders for interns. One specific example of this was around senior leaders’ contribution to induction programmes. Traditionally, only those interns at head office locations could engage with the most senior organisation leaders. In the virtual format, induction programmes often involved live sessions with CEOs and other senior leaders. Similarly, virtual coffee and other networking sessions throughout programmes often had greater involvement from local leaders. This was possible as they were travelling less and could commit to the sessions.

A number of interviewees felt that the virtual format actually improved the level and depth of the interns’ experience, and noted that virtual internships actually built capabilities that were increasingly valuable for the emerging workplace. Virtual internships allowed participants to hone skills and improve digital literacy and professionalism, telecommunication, and time management skills.



Key Benefits

- Increased diversity of applicants owing to lack of geographic and other barriers.
- Increased opportunity for collaboration across sites and countries.
- Build wider networks.
- Broadened interns’ perspectives and frame of reference.
- Increased awareness of cross-cultural considerations.
- Increased access to senior leaders for interns.
- Development of capabilities which are likely to be more valuable in the emerging work context.



Challenge 1

Enabling Relationships and Building Networks

The first key challenge we identified pertained to opportunities for interns to build relationships with members of the organisation and thus their social network.

Specific challenges included fewer opportunities to “fall into dialogue” around water coolers or coffee docks and the lack of random social encounters on corridors, at desks or canteens. Short conversations prior to or post meetings were also missed. Without intervention, the lack of opportunities to connect with individuals could result in interns feeling isolated.

Few organisations felt they had solved this challenge, but some strategies to build social relationships were identified. A key overarching theme was the importance of deliberate intervention compared to a reliance on chance encounters in more traditional programmes.

“[In the traditional format] you could roll four to six people into the management floor on the 1st of June in a physical way and [the] organisation will look after them...And you could turn back up on the tenth week and say, “How did you get on?” and they would go, “We had a pretty good experience. All these people...looked after me.” So I think...the type of role somebody would have to play [now] is more hands-on because the company won’t be able to look after them in the same way.”

Creating Connection

Induction programmes play a key role in socialisation of new interns. Many organisations traditionally had intensive programmes that included icebreakers, training sessions and social events to build initial social connections. Reimagining such programmes for a virtual environment was thus a key challenge.

As part of induction, a number of organisations formalised networking opportunities for interns. One organisation included specific guidance in their induction manual on how, whom and when to connect during the programme. Others went further and pre-populated interns’ calendars with pre-arranged meetings.

The most common approach to socialisation was creating opportunities to connect through regular coffee mornings or the like. We also saw examples where managers tried to replicate more informal communication by calling interns on a more ad-hoc basis and encouraging them to do likewise – the equivalent of dropping by someone’s desk.

There was a widely shared view that “virtual interns needed a lot more hand-holding” and the value of a manager who could integrate them and broker networks was highlighted. Selecting line managers with excellent interpersonal and communication skills and the capability to build networks was identified as critical. Similarly, peer – mentors provided a key linking pin in building networks within the organisation.



Idea in Practice: Selecting Mentors

Mentoring programmes did not have to be overly elaborate. In one technology company, the internship coordinator identified early career employees who had demonstrated leadership qualities. They were approached to be mentors based on these competencies and their closeness in age to the interns. The mentoring programme was not highly structured. Rather, mentors were encouraged to check in regularly with interns and to offer a sounding board for questions. They were also encouraged to help the interns build a network across the organisation. This proved to be a very successful approach for all concerned.



Unsurprisingly, social events also played an important role in building social networks, providing opportunities for fun, informal conversations, and a chance to get to know people. Interestingly, intern-led social networking events were perceived to be even more successful than the organisationally led social activity in some organisations.

Action Checklist: Enabling Relationships and Building Networks

1. Match socialisation strategies to the internship programme priorities:
 - a) For learning: Build relationships across departments and levels in the hierarchy.
 - b) For job performance: Build relationships within the department/unit to colleagues who can help with work tasks.
 - c) To build commitment to the organisation and help them fit in: Provide opportunity and space for informal socialisation and fun to develop friendships.
 - d) Include interns in project teams which facilitate relevant network building for each priority.
2. Develop trust early during onboarding through:
 - a) Focus on teambuilding and team relationships rather than work tasks.
 - b) Encourage interns to share information about their competencies and to learn about others' competencies.
 - c) Provide tasks which allow interns to demonstrate and to view others' willingness to do good for each other.
 - d) Provide opportunities to informally engage in conversations about personal activities, to actively participate in online discussions, to cooperate with others.
3. Train interns for virtual communication
 - a) Share norms around e.g. etiquette, cooperation, conflict management, frequency of communication and preferred technology.
4. Choose line managers based on commitment to the programme and experience of developing their teams.
5. Assign mentors based on similarity to the intern such as attributes, values, beliefs, educational background and functional area. Mentors should focus on supporting the intern rather than work allocation.
6. Create networking opportunities
 - a) Create opportunities for interns to engage with colleagues across the organisation. E.g. regular coffee mornings, huddles.
 - b) Create or encourage intern only and intern-led networking opportunities. These can be more informal such as zoom quizzes, escape rooms, cookery demonstrations.
 - c) Develop a schedule of initial formal meetings to help build the intern's network.
7. Review the intern's work and workplace experience and consider how to provide adequate and appropriate autonomy, resources, people, and organisational support.

See page 34 for further information.

Challenge 2

Informal Learning and Accessing Tacit Knowledge

Learning from others and with others, seeking knowledge held by others, learning by doing, asking questions and practicing with others are all examples of informal learning behaviours. The foundation of the learning facilitated by these behaviours is tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is the 'know-how', the experience based knowledge and insight held in individual employee's brains. By its nature, it is best shared through socialisation.

Virtual programmes provide less opportunity for this and for interns to build networks, socialise, source knowledgeable others, and engage in either ad-hoc or deep back-and-forth conversations.

The most common strategies we identified to supplement learning involved using more formal learning programmes via platforms such as LinkedIn Learning or in-house learning management systems. However, there are limitations to online technology for learning, capturing, and sharing tacit knowledge. Indeed, research evidence finds that while employees who engage in formal training average 23% higher performance than those who don't engage with training, those who engage in informal learning behaviours display 32% higher performance.³

"[A lack of informal learning] is probably where the key barriers still arise basically because again, that engagement is not in-person. And when it comes to internship experiences, one of the key pieces around it is that they really do learn by seeing and learn by...shadowing others and that is ultimately non-existent in remote environments. You see your team for 20 minutes and then you're back looking at Microsoft Teams and there's just not that spontaneous human centric learning experience that you're going to be getting. So we really try and understand how can we create that remotely and so with that collaboration, making sure that people managers are as transparent as possible with their interns in terms of goals, expectations, what you need to do, who you need to discuss with in order to be able to work with other people on your team, build up a relationship professionally, and then also in elements personally too and making sure that they're really there to guide them in the right direction."

A small number of organisations attempted to replicate work shadowing to share tacit knowledge through screen sharing and walking through the tasks. This was mostly used for specialist tasks such as coding, auditing, or engineering tasks.

One professional services organisation had put in place a number of initiatives to replicate opportunities for more tacit knowledge sharing. Each day began with what they termed a stand-up call where teams, including interns, met briefly to share what they were working on that day.



Idea in Practice: Audit Rooms

A professional services organisation attempted to recreate the office environment through what they called audit rooms. At a set time on a daily basis teams all joined a Microsoft Teams call

for a set period. Cameras were generally off, and microphones muted. However, the room provided an opportunity for team members to simply ask questions and discuss issues with colleagues as the need arose during the flow of their work in a similar way to the office environment. The audit rooms also helped to build team cohesion.

In a small number of organisations which already had a hybrid element to their internship programmes, we heard about the value of co-location for tacit knowledge sharing. This is likely to be a key part of hybrid programmes when organisations more generally shift to such models.

The nature of work undertaken by interns also appeared to impact on tacit knowledge sharing. The opportunity to work on large project teams or engage with external clients, aided in building diverse networks and accessing others' tacit knowledge.



Action Checklist: Informal Learning and Accessing Tacit Knowledge

1. Focus on building relationships and cohesiveness in the team early on. This could include:
 - a) Early face-to-face sessions, when possible. In hybrid scenarios this is a key starting point.
 - b) Team building techniques and team training focused mostly on team working, relationships, social protocols, team social support, managing interpersonal team conflict, building trust, and clarifying roles.
2. Dedicate time at the beginning and end of meetings to engage in more informal conversations and to discuss process elements related to the project/task in hand.
3. Use guided debriefing sessions. These should focus on:
 - a) Learnings and improvement not evaluation or judgement.
 - b) Activities or events over results or performance.
 - c) Integrate multiple sources of evidence such as multiple participants, organisational data, or scientific evidence.
4. Consider the work environment in which interns work and pay attention to:
 - a) Increasing interaction and reciprocity with all team members.
 - b) Encouraging the intern to seek tacit knowledge, to question and to share their tacit knowledge.
 - e) Involving relevant managers in enabling these work conditions and others including avoiding blame.
5. Include evaluation of learning and transfer of learning to the job in the programme evaluation to identify which virtual/hybrid programme design elements are effective in sharing tacit knowledge.

See page 35-36 for further information.

Challenge 3

Sharing Business Etiquette and Organisational Culture

Sharing and showcasing business etiquette and organisational culture in a virtual environment also emerged consistently as a challenge. For many interns their internship is their first introduction to a professional environment, so sharing business etiquette was as important as organisational culture. Culture guides how things are done in organisations and is embedded in signs and symbols, shared practices and underlying assumptions, which become taken for granted.⁴ Yet the shift to working from home and social distancing in the workplace has made key signs and symbols of culture less visible and disrupted rituals that reinforced culture.

Overall, we saw a number of innovative approaches to the challenge of showcasing and sharing culture virtually. One key means was through senior leaders. A number of multinational organisations had global CEOs or CHROs join induction sessions, which were shared with intern programmes in other countries or regions, also showcasing their global footprint. The focus was often on introducing the organisation's history and stories that become

core to organisational heritage. Calling out key aspects of culture and organisational values was seen as vital in making them visible.⁵ A number of interviewees suggested the best way to bring culture to life was through colleagues sharing their experience of what values and culture meant in practice, and how they impacted on their decision making or work lives. Many organisations chose previous interns or recent graduate hires to ensure those stories resonated with interns.

In some organisations, the shift in culture for interns from an educational to an organisational setting was a key challenge. Some felt that in university settings, students' success is often based on individual achievements in exams, while in the organisational context this shifts towards team-based activities. Similarly, encouraging interns who were more comfortable sitting in the background to step forward and be visible was a key part of socialisation into the business context.



“Getting [interns] to use their camera was another thing...a lot of them didn’t want to use their camera and another big challenge that we had was that when they were in meetings or in training sessions, they didn’t speak...it’s trying to get that other culture across that we bring you in because you have ideas from college, you are looking at it from a fresh lens and we want to hear what you have to say.”



Idea in Practice: Building a Culture of Questioning and Curiosity

One technology company had a long-standing partnership with Toastmasters, which was very much aligned with their culture of asking questions and being curious. While pre-Covid these meetings operated at a site level, the

pandemic meant that all the groups in the Irish sites came together in one community. Interns were actively encouraged to join Toastmasters with an engagement rate of 60% reported. In addition to building their confidence in asking questions and being curious, interns also expanded their networks considerably through the programme. There was wide engagement with Toastmasters across the organisation including to senior VP level.

Another key area mentioned was the importance of line managers and mentors as role models and sounding boards. In one particularly innovative example in an insurance organisation, a line manager identified meetings with internal and external stakeholders that would expose the intern to key parts of the business. Following each meeting they held a debrief where the intern could probe to build a better understanding of business culture more broadly.

Organisations also emphasised the more informal and social aspect of their cultures. This varied by sector but there was wide recognition

that the social and fun aspect of internships was a core part of participants’ experience and key to showcasing organisational culture.

Finally, it is worth noting that how interns’ behaviours aligned with culture and values was a key criterion in deciding on graduate offers in some organisations. For example, one technology company asked managers as part of the final evaluation to rate students against culture. In that organisation, this included questions such as: Are they taking risks? Are they speaking up? Are they executing and delivering what they said they could deliver?



Action Checklist: Sharing Business and Organisational Culture

1. Make culture visible by calling it out.
 - a) Use senior leaders to introduce history and key aspects of culture.
 - b) Bring culture to life through employees sharing their experience of the organisation.
 - c) Call attention to aspects of culture on display in particular work situations and why they matter. For example
 - i) how colleagues engage with and behave towards each other.
 - ii) how work gets done and what work is prioritised.
 - iii) what non-work activities are emphasised and prioritised.
2. For many interns, business culture is new to them. Help them understand business etiquette and how culture influences work.
3. Develop learning opportunities tied to culture.
4. Reinforce the importance of role modelling to line managers and mentors alike.
5. Integrate feedback on behavioural alignment with culture in manager one-to-ones.
6. Create opportunities for social activities that showcase culture.

Step 1

Begin with the End in Mind

Purpose and Expectations

The point of departure for any internship programme should be understanding the objectives it sets out to achieve. For organisations in our research, the objectives identified remained remarkably consistent in the virtual context.

By far the most widely identified motivation was around developing a graduate pipeline. In an increasingly competitive market for graduate talent, internships represented a key means of showcasing the organisation and providing employees with a realistic expectation of working for that organisation. They also provide an effective selection tool as the work placement facilitates the assessment of interns' cultural fit and other important selection criteria.

In a small number of cases, there was an explicit focus on the development of competence in the interns with the aim of ensuring they were work ready when they did join the graduate programme on completion of their studies. In one professional services firm, this was reflected in interns being recruited in the first year of their studies and returning back over multiple summers to build their skills. Other objectives raised by interviewees included, to fill a skills gap in the organisation or bring new ideas or skills to the firm based on the latest knowledge from education.

A related objective for internships was building diversity in the talent pipeline. Almost all respondents mentioned the desire for gender diversity. The diversity and inclusion (D&I) orientation was often aligned with organisational values or wider corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes. A number of organisations with smaller intern programmes mentioned CSR as their key motivation. The emphasis on diversity was manifest in a number of ways including recruiting from a diverse range of universities and colleges and partnerships with networks such as 'Code like a Girl' to deliver gender diversity in STEM disciplines.

Identifying the programme goals, objectives, and expectations for both the company and interns alike, provides the first step in the design of the programme and was also core to thinking about the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that should be measured in evaluating the programme. A virtual programme outline and roadmap with clear objectives and expectations, a vision of what success looks like underpinned by an analysis of the requirements and resources, summarises this first step in the path to the creation of a successful virtual internship programme.



Action Checklist: Objectives, Purpose and Expectations

1. Establish clear goals, objectives, and purpose for the programme.
2. Identify intern expectations about the internship programme.
3. Consider objectives around diversity and inclusion.
4. Consider links to organisational CSR programmes.
5. Develop key performance and evaluation metrics around objectives.
6. Identify key performance metrics for the intern.
7. Use objectives to inform programme design and resource requirements.



Step 2

Recruitment and Selection

Given that many organisations saw internships as a key means of developing a graduate pipeline, it is unsurprising that there was a significant focus on the recruitment and selection of candidates.

Thus, in many organisations the selection process for interns was similar to, or an abridged version of, the selection process for their graduate programmes.

Recruiting a Strong Pool

Higher profile programmes especially in larger technology companies and professional service firms generally generated strong applicant pools. These organisations benefited from broader brand awareness, partnerships with educational institutions and wider employer branding initiatives. They also often advertised on major jobs platforms. Those with smaller programmes often relied on partnerships with educational institutions or participation in access programmes or similar initiatives to generate candidates.

A number of organisations emphasised the importance of generating a diverse pipeline through their recruitment efforts. Almost all mentioned the importance of gender balance. This was reported to be more challenging in areas such as technology and engineering, where student groups were disproportionately male. A number of technology companies ran initiatives to support the awareness of technology amongst females and to build brand awareness amongst female candidates. For example, women in technology internships specifically for female interns.

The diversity of the background of applicants was also a key focus for some organisations. This was often aligned with their wider diversity and inclusion (D&I) or CSR initiatives. Partnerships with Access Programmes in educational institutions was one means of building such diversity.



Idea in Practice: Building a Diverse and Inclusive Intern Programme

One telecoms company placed a core emphasis on building a diverse intern programme. This was very much aligned with organisational values. Building a diverse applicant pipeline began for them with engagement with transition year students in schools designated as disadvantaged. In these schools they supported programmes such as Code Like a Girl to help open opportunities for girls in technology. A secondary objective was that those students may apply for the internship programme down the line. The organisation also partnered with formal access programmes such as the DCU Access to the Workplace programme to provide opportunities for a broader mix of students. They also actively engaged with LGBTI+ societies and ability services offices in third level institutions to encourage the broadest possible applicant pool.



Idea in Practice: Learning Agility

One organisation in the food and beverage sector introduced learning agility, a key competency to aid in selecting interns. This was in part driven by the challenge of differentiating between high performing candidates in the selection process. All candidates had excellent academic pedigrees so learning agility was a competency identified to differentiate those with greater potential. The competency was measured through an instrument developed by an external provider. The measure emphasises potential to grow, develop and adapt. It measures mental, results, change and people agility and self-awareness. This was linked to graduate recruitment priorities.

The shift to virtual has resulted in an increasing focus on the competencies required to be effective in a virtual environment. The concept of virtual intelligence is one example of a competency reflecting a cognitive mechanism underlying the individual adaptation to virtual work.⁶ Behavioural examples which could be applied to the selection of interns, are evidence of a propensity and skill in self-directed learning and media competence and demonstrating ability and adaptability in a range of technologies. Including the assessment of such behavioural competencies could further enhance the process.

Selection

The selection process varied depending on the size of the internship programme. Selection in the smaller programmes was generally based on a review of CVs and interviews. However, larger programmes generally had much more formalised and elaborate selection systems.

As with graduate programmes, many organisations had cut-offs in terms of degree performance (2.1 honours for example) or Leaving Certificate points attainment (450 points) as initial screening criteria. Some programmes only recruited interns from very specific degree programmes while others had no such limitations. Cultural fit was a key criterion that organisations emphasised during the selection process.

In larger programmes, assessment centres played a key role in the selection process. Almost all were operating on a virtual basis. They generally consisted of a series of psychometrics, individual presentations, and interviews, designed around key competencies.

Action Checklist: Recruitment and Selection

1. Build relationships with educational institutions to raise awareness of programme and generate applicants.
2. Consider advertising on jobs platforms to increase applicants.
3. Build diverse applicant pools through engagement with clubs and societies and advocacy and networking groups.
4. Consider running targeted internship programmes for under-represented groups, for example women in technology.
5. Align selection criteria to graduate selection criteria where aim is to translate to graduate pipeline.
6. Use multiple selection tools (assessment centres, psychometrics, interviews, panels), interviews alone are poor predictors.⁷
7. Consider virtual competencies in the context of performing in a virtual context.

Step 3

Onboarding

Once selected, the next stage in the cycle for onboarding virtual interns is induction. This was an area where we saw considerable evolution from the traditional approaches to intern management.

Organisations reported their struggles to replicate the bonding and socialising of the bootcamps that were core to traditional programmes. Indeed, the value of bringing virtual teams together face-to-face in the initial stages of their formation to build such trust and collaboration, is well established in the research on virtual working.⁸ That said, virtual onboarding was also one of those areas where interviewees predicted that at least some of those innovations would likely endure as intern programmes returned to traditional or hybrid models.

Begin Onboarding Early

In those organisations that were more mature in their virtual internship programmes, the preparation of interns began before the beginning of the programme. For example, a number of organisations provided interns with toolkits to aid with tasks that would be required early in their programmes such as how to schedule a meeting with a colleague or manager. These ranged from simple 'how to' lists to short video resources. Some organisations had dedicated learning platforms that included much of the information required by interns and welcome videos from key stakeholders.

Line managers scheduled calls with all incoming interns in a number of organisations. The aim of these calls was to check in and give interns a sense of what to expect from the programme. A template often provided those line managers with the steps they should complete, a timeline, and some prompts for the call. Intern programme managers also engaged with interns at this stage in many organisations.

A key consideration for programme designers related to the technological and other resource requirements for successful internship programmes. In many organisations a laptop computer was provided to interns for the duration of the programme. Some firms offered ergonomic consultations to interns to aid in setting up their home working space. Swag provided to interns was also adjusted to facilitate working from home. Examples included mouse mats, china mugs and branded headsets.





Induction

For the most part, the steps above all occurred before the beginning of the internship programme. The early days and weeks of programmes focused on socialising interns into the organisation and equipping them with the knowledge and skills required to be successful in their programmes.

One advantage of the virtual format was the increased exposure to senior organisational leaders, who contributed to induction programmes in a manner that was not possible in the past. Such contributions were seen as key in reinforcing the importance of the programme, exposing interns to these leaders, and highlighting some key aspects of culture. These virtual sessions were an example of an innovation that many organisations said

they would like to retain when they return to traditional or hybrid programmes. Culture was also introduced through social activities such as virtual table quizzes and escape rooms, which also helped to develop social relationships for the interns.

The final common element was a curated learning programme focused on providing interns with the tools and skills required to engage virtually with the organisation and with technology such as how to organise a Zoom or Microsoft Teams meeting, time management and resilience. Organisations often leveraged content already available on learning platforms and worked with Learning and Development teams to curate such content.

Action Checklist: Onboarding

1. Begin onboarding in advance of start date.
 - a) Provide detail on the process (welcome, vision and values, health and safety, site tours, access, software training).
 - b) Schedule calls from line managers and intern programme managers.
 - c) Arrange necessary resources- laptop, monitor, ergonomic assessment etc.
 - d) Distribute welcome packs including swag.
 - e) Provide a learning manual with details on where and how to access required resources, learning platforms and materials to engage with before commencing.
2. Design engaging induction programmes
 - a) Involve senior organisational leaders to welcome interns and showcase culture.
 - b) Introduce organisational culture and history as an introduction to culture and values.
 - c) Curate content to build skills and competencies to work virtually, to do their jobs and to develop personally and professionally.
 - d) Design social activities to build relationships with other interns, project teams, their department and to share the culture.

Step 4

The Role of Managers and Mentors

For most intern programmes, the line manager is the key point of contact between the individual intern and the organisation. In larger programmes the line manager's role is supplemented by a mentor or buddy who is generally focused on the more informal aspects of supporting interns.

The Line Manager

While the line manager was always viewed as critical in traditional internship programmes, there was a broad consensus that the importance of their role was amplified in the virtual context. The line manager's role was increasingly structured and planned. Their role emphasised clarifying expectations, establishing goals linked to specific projects, monitoring performance, and providing feedback.

The competency requirements of interpersonal skills, communication, network brokering, and organisation, became more significant as there was a sense that virtual interns require more planned attention or "handholding." Line managers also acted as critical guides for interns as they navigated on their journey through the programme. They also provided a vital touchpoint for interns for discussions on workload and professional development.

We saw a greater emphasis on selecting managers for the virtual context. This involved selecting managers that would and had the capacity to give the interns the time and support they required. A number of organisations provided dedicated training and support to managers who signed up as line managers for internship programmes. These generally emphasised the unique characteristics of intern populations by comparison to more general employees that the manager would have experience with.



Idea in Practice: Manager's Toolkit

One telecoms company developed a manager toolkit to assist managers in managing their interns. This toolkit outlined the purpose of the programme, the programme outline in terms of the journey that interns would take and the role that the manager would play in that journey. The toolkit mapped the intern's journey week by week on the programme. It provided specific guidance on how one-to-ones and feedback should be approached. It also highlighted the importance of goal setting. This helped the manager understand the expectations in terms of close support in early weeks and the development of more independence later in the programme.

The virtual environment created two key challenges for intern managers. The first was work allocation, which required much clearer and task focused communications and direction than in the traditional internship format. The second was the key role the manager played in helping interns build networks within and beyond their work teams.

Mentors

Most organisations also operated a more informal mentoring or buddy system to support interns on their journeys. These roles provided both practical and psychosocial support, and a listening ear. Previous interns or graduates hires were often appointed as mentors and generally shared their experiences as previous newcomers to the company, their insights on the culture and more informal aspects of organisational life.

“I encourage them to go to as many meetings as possible, certainly in the early weeks, I think it’s very important. So much business is done through meetings. I would help them to understand how they run and then I would talk about what was really happening. Having somebody explain what’s really going on is one of the most useful things you can [get]...You’ll never get a chance for that to happen in real life. So why not have it happen when you’re an intern?”

Mentors generally adopted a non-directive and developmental approach with a focus on providing opportunities for collaborative and egalitarian support for the intern. We saw an example of this developmental alliance in one pharmaceutical company, where the intern and buddy would meet regularly to share their respective learnings on the research projects they were working on.

While the mentor and line manager roles were generally separate, in organisations with smaller intern programmes, a single person sometimes occupied both roles. Generally, in these instances the line manager had proposed a specific project for the intern to work on and was thus heavily invested in the individual.

Action Checklist: Managers and Mentors

Line Managers

1. Line manager selection is key. Identify line managers with strong interpersonal, communication and organisation skills and who have displayed competence in network building.
2. Develop a line manager training module which
 - a) Introduces the intern programme.
 - b) Reinforces the intern characteristics in terms of limited business experience, transition from education etc.
 - c) Outlines the line manager’s role.
 - d) Highlights the importance of work allocation – including clear understanding of the intern’s role, expectations, goals and how they link to outcomes.
 - e) Reinforces the need for line managers to connect the intern to others in the organisation.
 - f) Reinforces the importance of feedback and developing the intern’s confidence in performing in their role.

3. Encourage the line manager to build the interns’ networks within the organisation.
4. Develop a toolkit to support line manager engagement.

Mentors

1. Select mentors based on previous internship or graduate programme experience.
2. Ensure a focus on providing both practical and psychosocial support, and a listening ear.
3. Emphasise the importance of building the intern’s network.
4. Create a feedback loop to programme managers to share concerns or find out where to access resources for interns.
5. Provide training for the mentor on mentoring role and skills.
6. Develop a toolkit to support mentor engagement.



Step 5

Designing the Internship: Projects and Work

The nature of work allocated was key to the intern's experience. Thus, designing and allocating meaningful work should be a core priority for intern programmes.

Daily Tasks and Work-Related Projects

Given that a key objective for most organisations was to build a talent pipeline, ensuring interns had experience in the core job or area was a priority. A number of interviewees felt that interns possibly got better and deeper experience of work owing to the virtual format. This was in part owing to a rebalancing of the social versus work related nature of the experience.

The type of work undertaken was relatively well defined in many organisations. For example, in a number of professional services firms, programmes were specific to areas, such as audit, and the nature of work was relatively clear. However, in intern programmes that spanned the organisation more generally, the importance of selecting appropriate work-related projects was highlighted.

Some were more selective than they had been in the past to ensure that projects translated well to the virtual environment and maximised opportunity for learning. Central to selecting projects for interns was ensuring the project manager was willing to include and support the interns' engagement on the project.



Idea in Practice: Communities of Practice (CoP)

One technology company recognised the challenge of providing interns with the one-to-one support and experience provided in traditional programmes. They introduced a CoP model to structure work tasks for interns. The CoP framework aims to create more intimate community groups with shared goals. Each community comprises "pods" of two to four people with a specific project focus. Each community was led by a senior facilitator/project manager. An executive sponsor met with the team to review objectives. A number of pods also had coaches who acted as informal mentors. These coaches were typically recent graduates. Pods operated via periodic video meetings followed by intensive work sprints. There was a sense that these CoPs were effective in building commitment to the projects at hand and also to building community within the teams.

Intern Specific Projects

Organisations with larger cohorts on their programmes generally created intern specific projects to be completed over the course of the programme. These projects provided interns with the opportunity to work with their peer interns, outside of day-to-day roles, to learn more about the organisation, display their creativity and innovation and to gain exposure to senior leaders when the final results were presented. For organisations these projects also served to bring innovative and creative ideas to business challenges.

In the context of the virtual environment, some organisations experimented with new variations on these intern projects. These included hackathons and Dragon's Den initiatives.



Idea in Practice: Intern Project Work

One professional services firm designed an intern project around an audit proposal for prospective clients. It had a strong teambuilding element and brought intern teams together every Friday evening to work through the project. Interns particularly valued this opportunity to connect

with other interns. The project built social relationships but also gave interns a good insight into the pitching process. They were provided with input from project sponsors and mentors along the way to help them refine their ideas. The project culminated in a pitch to partners who awarded some prizes to the best pitch. The overall quality of pitches was judged to be very high.

Intern Self-Selected Projects and Engaging in CSR and Social Club Projects

A number of organisations encouraged interns to be forthcoming if they identified a project happening in the organisation which they saw as

something they would like to get involved in. This included encouraging interns to engage in CSR projects and social club activities as a means to broaden their networks, have fun, showcase their competencies, and showcase elements of the organisational culture that were important.



Action Checklist: Designing the Internship: Projects and Work

1. Identify appropriate projects for interns to work on during the programme.
 - a) Ensure the projects are appropriate for a virtual context.
 - b) Ensure the projects are appropriate for the level of experience of the intern.
 - c) Consider alternative structures such as communities of practice to build commitment and community.
2. Develop intern specific projects which span the course of the programme.
 - a) Choose business problems to open the possibility of innovative solutions.
 - b) Ensure they are substantive to keep interns engaged.
3. Identify initial daily tasks to provide structure for the intern in early days. The level of direction can reduce as the intern gains more experience.
4. Encourage interns to communicate to their line manager or mentor if they identify additional activities they wish to get involved in.
5. Encourage interns to get involved in CSR or social club projects and/or include such projects in the list of projects they engage in during their programme.
 - c) Create space in the workweek for teams to come together.
 - d) Provide formative feedback along the way.
 - e) Identify a project sponsor.
 - f) Conclude with a presentation to senior leaders to build profile, provide exposure for participants and transfer knowledge from the interns to the organisation.

Step 6

Formal Learning and Development

In tandem to interns learning in the flow of work tasks and projects, most organisations supplemented this learning through more formal training.

The Value of Curation

There is little doubt that the shift to virtual requires a more curated learning and development (L&D) pathway, as the opportunities for more organic and informal learning are reduced. A number of organisations had clearly defined and curated learning journeys, which were communicated with interns and line manager alike. These generally identified a series of events or specific courses that interns should complete at particular times during the programme. One organisation designed a learning guide that included information on what to learn and how and where interns could access learning materials.

Designing Learning Experiences

Although the content of L&D programmes varied across organisations and reflected the level of maturity of L&D in the organisation more generally, we did see some commonalities. As outlined in Step 1, all organisations had an induction programme.

Many programmes provided specific content around working in an online environment, for example, resilience, time management, stress management, setting up meetings and arranging calendar invites. Other methods for training interns which were not unique to virtual internship programmes such as lunch and learn sessions, were used to introduce interns to other employees' areas of expertise or key initiatives.

Most organisations leveraged pre-existing technology to support intern learning journeys. These included platforms such as GetAbstract, LinkedIn Learning, Skillsoft and in-house Learning Management Systems. Beyond curated content, organisations encouraged interns to engage with this material during quieter periods of work.

There was some recognition that training that was traditionally classroom based could not simply be moved online without further consideration. This is important insight as academic evidence suggests for web-based courses to be as effective as classroom face-to-face instruction, their design must provide trainees with control over the pace of their learning, practice on the training material and feedback.⁹

“And then you have the classroom bit... you cannot just take what you did in the classroom and make it virtual. That doesn't work. You need to kind of start again and go, what is the objective or purpose of the training? Is it upskilling them on tools? Is it that they want to have knowledge and awareness of what the teams do? Is it that they want them to get to know each other? And based on that objective, design something virtually that works.”



Idea in Practice: Building Creativity

A telecoms company developed an innovative intervention that involved regular programmes with specific challenges to help spark employee creativity. The objective was to have teams working on a complex problem-solving task

while additionally building networks. Many projects were more fun oriented than business oriented, for example writing a company song. Teams included directors, managers, other employees, and interns with an emphasis on mixing levels of experience and functional areas. This facilitated knowledge sharing while developing problem solving and collaboration capabilities but with a very playful or fun focus.

The Value of Reflection

Relatively few organisations emphasised formally tracking skills acquisition or learning amongst interns. However, having interns reflect on their own learning journey can be invaluable to enhance self-awareness of their development and how their learnings could transfer to other

contexts. We saw examples of organisations where such reflection was an integral part of the programme. One telecoms company had a scheduled check-in halfway through the programme and at the end, with a focus on discussing the interns' developmental journey. We also saw the use of learning logs or diaries in a number of organisations.



Action Checklist: Learning and Development

1. Identify specific competency needs, matched to the objectives of the programme, and include these in a training plan. For example:
 - a) Working in a virtual/hybrid context.
 - b) Technical skills for job tasks.
 - c) Soft skills such as team working, presenting and networking.
2. Provide information on learning platforms available and how to access and navigate them.
3. Partner with L&D to ensure appropriate design and delivery of online content.
4. Create learning moments for interns or invite them to wider workforce events:
 - a) Lunch and learns.
 - b) Specialist presentations.
5. L&D and managers should partner in developing curated learning plans and ensure to get manager buy-in to the plan.
6. Managers should consider how interns can transfer their learning to their work or projects.
7. Help the intern to create links between work-based learning and academic course curriculum (may link to learning logs).
8. Consider learning logs or diaries as a key means of reflection for interns. This should incorporate feedback from peers, teams, managers etc.

Step 7

Programme Evaluation and Intern Appraisal

“We send...all of our interns and our intern managers a survey at the end of the internship...We ask a number of questions, but the number one is really around that experience...We anticipated a hit to our intern experience score [owing to the virtual programme]...and not at all. We’re still at, like, 98% for 2020 and that’s been amazing.”

Programme Evaluation

Programme evaluation can be conducted at multiple levels, which should be determined by the programme objectives.

Level 1: Satisfaction With the Programme

While almost all programmes were evaluated in some manner, the approaches were often limited to Level 1 evaluation i.e. satisfaction with the programme. This is important for organisations where a key objective was to give interns “a good experience” and to build the employer brand. This feedback was generally collected through surveys or informal feedback from interns and managers.

Levels 2 and 3: Learning and Learning Transfer and Application

This is an important level of evaluation where a key objective was to develop interns’ competence and work-readiness. However, in reality many organisations measured outcomes at this level in a more ad-hoc way. For example, through feedback provided by immediate managers and project leaders and from panels observing internship project presentations.

Level 4: Return on Investment ROI

Evaluation of ROI was generally limited. For most organisations, the objective was to use the internship programme to create a talent pipeline. Many organisations used conversion rates of interns to graduate hires as a key metric to measure ROI, with target conversion rates as high as 50-70%. Some organisations also tracked diversity and inclusion metrics in terms of the conversion rates for different demographic groups.



Idea in Practice: Tracking Development

One telecoms company had a very structured approach to measuring intern progress and satisfaction. The intern programme manager meets each intern on a monthly basis. There is also a monthly pulse survey to understand how the programme was delivering on objectives, how interns were feeling and where returns were most evident. An additional mid-point check-in focused on development and social learning with an emphasis on self-reflection. At the end of the programme, a further check-in focused on interns playing back their experience on the job, their development, and any self-directed learning they have taken.



“[the intern] doesn’t have formal goals...However, as a manager, we created a document to list out his goals...and the way I see it is this will be a really useful tool when he comes to pull together his CV so he can articulate really clearly what his goal was, how he met it and key outcomes, etc. We’re just trying to set him up as best we can for life after his college course.”

Intern Performance

Similar to programme evaluation, the approaches to appraising interns generally focused around gathering feedback from their line manager. This varied from informal check-ins, which was the more common approach, to a few organisations that had a more formal process.

The intern specific projects and related presentations also provided opportunities for HR, L&D, and panels of judges to evaluate interns.

Interns were generally not set and managed against precise performance or indeed learning and development objectives. One organisation did however set performance expectations

for the intern which were the “same as other employees but toned down a little.” Interns were evaluated against key performance indicators around collaboration, development, growth in skillset, impact of their work and making connections. The more formal performance management of interns was considered useful to decisions about recruiting the intern for future positions.

The decision to set more formal goals depends on the objectives of the internship programme. If the objectives include intern performance and satisfaction with their jobs, then academic evidence consistently finds that setting specific, challenging goals improves performance substantially.¹⁰ Combining this with feedback improves performance further still.

Action Checklist: Programme Evaluation and Intern Appraisal

Programme Evaluation

1. Match the key objectives of the programme and key metrics to the evaluation method.¹¹
 - a) Intern experience: Measured by surveys of interns’ perceptions of programme. Supplemented by input from other stakeholders.
 - b) Graduate pipeline: Measured by translation of interns to graduate hires.
 - i) Track diversity metrics.
 - ii) Track quality and quantity of applicants.
 - c) Learning and skills development:
 - i) Pre and post scores on training.
 - ii) Manager feedback and ratings on intern projects or work tasks.
 - iii) Intern self-evaluation.
 - iv) Measure pre and post programme self-efficacy which is a reliable indicator of development in the absence of more specific programme measures of learning.¹²

2. Evaluate which elements of programme design, content and delivery were most effective in terms of programme satisfaction, learning and results.
3. Track longer term career outcomes of interns who are hired on internship programmes relative to other hires.

Intern Performance

1. Set specific goals for the intern matched to the internship programme objectives and organisation values.
 - a) Work, projects, learning, collaboration, networks, growth.
 - b) Use SMART goals.
2. Regular check-ins focused on progress, challenges, success.
3. Provide feedback on work, progress, processes, and objectives.
4. Complete an end-of-programme appraisal against goals.

Toolkit Resources

Manager Checklist

Actions	Plan	Enablers	Barriers
Prior to Placement			
Identify indicative projects for intern to work on. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ensure viability in virtual context. – Ensure opportunities for learning. – Identify any skills requirements (to inform selection and L&D). – Ensure project owners support intern involvement. 			
If not involved in selection review the intern’s CV or application in advance. Identify areas of common interest or experience to aid relationship building.			
Consider connecting with the intern in advance of the programme to make introduction and set initial expectations.			
Develop awareness of intern perspective and experience. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – May be their first work experience. – You need to be more hands-on and available in a virtual context than the traditional face-to-face context. 			
Identify key connections to help the intern in building their network and getting to know the business.			
Onboarding			
Connect with intern during first days of programme to welcome them and help their transition.			
Identify initial daily tasks for the intern.			
Ensure interns have the resources they need to deliver on goals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work skills – may be developed through L&D or induction. – Technology or other resources. 			
Help them understand key aspects of organisational culture. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Call out key aspects of culture. – Help them understand how it influences how things get done. 			
Help them understand etiquette in the team. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Expectations around cameras on/off. – The importance of deadlines. – Encourage asking questions and seeking guidance. 			
Make introductions and create time to connect with team colleagues.			
Ask the intern about their motivations and ambition to help understand their ambition.			

During the Internship			
Clarify Task and Work Structure			
Clearly outline work objectives and goals. – Clear and task focused communications is key. – More direction required in the virtual than in the traditional internship format. – Consider setting SMART objectives and specific goals matched to the programme objectives.			
Ensure regular and timely feedback. – Solicit feedback from colleagues. – Encourage self-reflection. – Discuss progress and processes to reaching goals. – Highlight successes.			
Schedule regular check-ins. Monitor wellbeing.			
Keep contemporaneous notes on intern performance to minimise biases in final evaluation. This reduces recency biases and helps in reflecting on the intern's development over the course of the programme.			
Make Connections			
Create opportunities for more informal one-to-ones. – Have a coffee or arrange to go for a walk during calls to make discussion more informal. – Focus on more non-task issues. – Talk about common interests and experiences.			
Help interns build a network. – Ensure immediate team make connections. – Encourage them to connect. – Set goals for connections i.e. connect with three new people every week.			
Enable Learning			
Encourage informal learning behaviours such as: – Seeking others' knowledge. – Sharing their knowledge. – Learning from others.			
Help interns understand organisational culture and how it is reflected in their behaviours. – Bring culture to life through sharing your experience of the organisation. – Call attention to and acknowledge aspects of culture on display in particular work situations and explain why they matter. – Challenge the intern to describe how culture impacts on their decisions and actions.			
Encourage interns to identify projects they wish to engage with beyond core work. – Highlight volunteering or CSR projects. – Identify opportunities aligned with their interests.			
Use the opportunity to learn from the intern. – What is new in the courses they are taking in college? – What new apps or technologies are they using in college or personally?			
Encourage the intern to reflect on: – Their key learnings. – Their successes. – Key challenges.			
On Completion of Internship			
Provide intern feedback on entire placement, including input from colleagues. – Key achievements. – Key strengths. – Development areas.			
Complete programme evaluations, intern appraisal and hiring recommendations if relevant. Continue to improve and adapt the programme for future in-takes.			

Toolkit Resources

Mentor Checklist

Actions	Plan	Enablers	Barriers
Prior to Start			
Review the intern's CV or application in advance. Identify areas of common interest or experience to aid relationship building.			
Consider connecting with the intern in advance of the programme to make introduction.			
Reflect on your internship and/or graduate experience. Put yourself in intern's shoes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What surprised you. - What you learnt. - What you wish you knew. - Your tips for succeeding. 			
Identify key connections who would help the intern in building their network and getting to know the business.			
Onboarding			
Connect with intern during first days of programme.			
Discuss your role with intern. Clarify role as a buddy to help them navigate the organisation and the programme and be a sounding board – not a line manager.			
Ask the intern about their motivations and ambition.			
Share your experience of being an intern / newcomer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What surprised you. - What you learnt. - What you wish you knew. - Your tips for succeeding. 			
Help them understand key aspects of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culture – the way things are done around here. - Business etiquette – dos and don'ts in work setting. 			
Where you notice similarities between your intern's values, beliefs, and personality with yours – let the intern know.			



During the Internship			
<p>Check in regularly – try to make discussions less formal. Have a coffee or arrange to go for a walk during calls to make discussion more informal.</p>			
<p>Help interns build a network.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Encourage them to connect. – Make connections for them. 			
<p>Provide support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – On non-work issues that may arise. – Involve them in social activities. – Encourage the intern. <p>Work tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Adopt a coaching approach. – Help them think through challenges. – Encourage them to ask questions and seek support. – Provide suggestions for support. <p>Wider transition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Watch for challenges in adjusting to work culture. – Ask about connections with other networks. – Ask about connections with work team. – Encourage engagement with social activities. 			
<p>Help interns understand organisational culture and how it is reflected in their behaviours.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bring culture to life through sharing your experience of the organisation. – Call attention to and acknowledge aspects of culture on display in particular work situations and explain why they matter. – Challenge the intern to describe how culture impacts on decisions and actions. 			
<p>Use the opportunity to learn from the intern.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is new in the courses they are taking in college? – What new apps or technologies are they using in college or personally? 			
<p>Provide feedback to the intern on anything you observe with regard to their work, processes, or engagement.</p>			
<p>Encourage the intern to reflect on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Their key learnings. – Their successes. – Key challenges. 			

Toolkit Resources

Intern Checklist

Action Item	Your Plan	What Worked and Why	How Could You Improve
Plan and Prepare			
Learn about the organisation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – History. – Key products/services. – Key people. – Engage with materials provided by organisation in advance. 			
Set up home workspace. Think about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Where – try to find a quiet place. – Camera location and background – use filters or background. – Ergonomics – many programmes provide support. 			
Think about what you bring to the role: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Your knowledge from degree. – New software or techniques that you have learned about. 			
Actively Engage in Onboarding			
Attend all induction sessions. Complete all assigned tasks.			
Understand the expectations of you. Your line manager is key. Ask about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Your role. – Your daily tasks. – Your projects. – Your objectives and goals. – Meeting plans. – Preferred communication approaches and plans. – People you could benefit from meeting with. 			
Connect with your mentor. Ask about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Their role. – Any questions you have about workplace etiquette and culture. – People who you should connect with. – How and when you will connect. 			

Deliver on Expectations			
Ensure you understand key deliverables and timelines. If unsure, ask for clarification.			
Be an active participant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce yourself when you meet new colleagues. - Ask for clarification if you don't understand – remember you are new and therefore do not know the jargon. - Show initiative and enthusiasm. - Seek opportunities to participate in discussions. - Seek opportunities to share your knowledge – remember your education is up to date and others may benefit from it. 			
Once you have become comfortable and are consistently meeting goals and deadlines consider opportunities to contribute more broadly. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Let your manager know if you feel you can take on more challenging work. - Offer to assist colleagues to help them deliver. - Are there volunteering opportunities that are meaningful to you? 			
Build your Network			
To succeed in your job: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build relationships with your. - Work team and colleagues. 			
To expand learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Look for opportunities to build relationships in other departments or units. - Attend learning events such as lunch and learns. - Ask your mentor or manager for connections. 			
To help you fit in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build relationships with other interns. - Actively engage with social events. - Identify affinity groups in the organisation and reach out to those running them. 			
Continue Learning			
Let your manager know if you need more support, more resources and if you find tasks excessively difficult. Let them guide you towards a solution.			
Learn about yourself: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflect on experience regularly through the programme. - Keep a learning diary/log. - Ask for feedback – manager and mentor. 			
Take part in training opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure you partake in all scheduled training. - Look for opportunities for extra relevant training e.g. LinkedIn Learning or other platforms. - If there is the opportunity to gain certifications such as digital badges do so. 			
Solicit feedback from manager, mentors, and colleagues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On your work. - Your projects. - Your engagement. - Anything you can do to develop further. 			

Challenge 1

Enabling Relationships and Building Networks – Research Insights

What	Define	Why	How
Structural	Connections to people: weak or strong	Recognise the importance of different types of relationships for different programme objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – To master job and role tasks: Build strong ties to a smaller network of contacts with relevant information. – To facilitate intern learning and development: Build networks that cross organisational boundaries. – To help newcomers fit into the organisation: They need strong friendships. – To build intern commitment to the organisation: They need strong friendships (8 plus friends) with people in different units and levels of the hierarchy, this is linked to higher levels of organisational commitment.¹³
Relational	Relationship quality: trust, norms, identification	<p>Virtual contexts reduce nonverbal cues about expected behaviour and so these behaviours need to be made more explicit than in face-to-face interactions¹⁴ by:</p> <p>Trust – specifically competence and benevolence – is key to building relationships.¹⁵</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Make norms around etiquette, cooperation, and conflict management more explicit. – Prepare guidelines about norms for communication such as frequency and preferred technology. – Train virtual workers about communication norms. – Socialisation strategies at induction should provide opportunities for: positive and supportive interaction, team building tasks, and opportunities for interns to showcase their competence and benevolence. – Behaviours that help build trust in early virtual encounters are enthusiasm, communication about personal activities, active participation, timely responses, in-depth feedback, open communication, delivering agreed results, cooperative behaviour and individual initiative.¹⁶
Relational	Mentor-Intern	<p>Mentees with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – greater instrumental and psychosocial support and relationship quality are more satisfied, have greater affiliation and a lower intention to turnover. – more instrumental and psychosocial support report greater socialisation and learning.¹⁷ 	<p>Match mentors with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – deep level similarity to mentees in terms of attributes, values, beliefs and personality as this predicts psychosocial and instrumental mentoring support and relationship quality. – Experiential similarity in terms of educational background and functional area as predicts instrumental support and relationship quality.

Challenge 2

Improve Virtual Project Team Working for Tacit Knowledge Sharing – Research Insights^{3, 16, 18}

What	Define	Why	How
Enhance Team Trust	Cognition-based trust – a members' evaluation of the reliability, integrity and competence of other members. Affect-based-trust – a members' emotional feelings/evaluation of the reliability and integrity other members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Intra-team trust is more important in virtual teams than face-to-face teams. – Virtual teams with high intra-team trust out-perform virtual teams where trust is low. 	See Challenge 1
Social Cohesion	A shared liking or attraction to the group, friendship, closeness among group members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – More important in virtual teams than face-to-face teams. – Computer-mediated communication makes social cohesion and relationship building more difficult due to lack of social cues. This effect is larger when team members never met face-to-face and have no common past. 	See Challenge 1
Team Virtuality	Asynchronicity of communication and geographic dispersion. Other factors that can be considered in measuring virtuality are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Proportion of work time team members spend apart. – Proportion of team members who work virtually. – Degree of separation of team members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Virtuality negatively impacts information sharing. – The limits of computer mediated communication result in team members limiting their communication to problem-focused information rather than process focused and social communication. – Problem-focused information is important for performance. – Process-focused and social communication is more important for performance of virtual teams. 	Team managers should place more emphasis and time into encouraging process and social communication.
Co-Ordination	Tracking progress and tasks, accounting for outcomes, moulding the team, managing collective resources, setting communication rules (frequency, response time, feedback, explicitness), deadlines, goals.	These co-ordination activities improve virtual team performance.	Team managers should implement these co-ordination activities.
Debriefing	Reflecting on team goals, collaboration, decision-making processes and internal communication.	Guided reflexivity and debriefing sessions can substantially improve virtual team performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sessions must be guided and feedback given. – Go through a series of questions reflecting on a recent experience, actions taken and lessons learned.

Challenge 2

Improve Virtual Project Team Working for Tacit Knowledge Sharing – Research Insights⁸ (cont.)

What	Why	How
Develop networks composed of high levels of reciprocity and interaction	Supports learning processes.	Actively engaging in network development and being a supportive, contributing member.
Be careful of overly consensual networks.	Failure to challenge shared views and common assumptions leads to groupthink and lack of novel knowledge.	Have someone act as devil's advocate.
Different network relationships serve different purposes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Weak ties for problem-solving. – Strong ties for problem reformulation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Connect interns to others in different units for problem solving. – Interns should work with their local team for problem reformulation or to get work done.
Naturally emerging, informal social networks where learning is not separate from work activities may facilitate greater knowledge transfer than formal, strategic groups or learning networks.	Learning in the flow of work is important but more difficult in remote work contexts.	Try not to formalise everything about virtual internship programmes but rather enable the conditions for informal knowledge sharing to occur.
Be aware of the impact of blame cultures.	Negatively impacts communication and reflection processes.	Develop a climate where incidences of blame are called-out and dissuaded.
Enable a learning culture.	Improves learning processes and tacit knowledge flow.	Encourage questioning of established assumptions, challenge and critique the work of others and share knowledge and resources.
Job characteristics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Positively enable informal learning behaviours. – Engagement in informal learning behaviours positively impacts general work attitudes, knowledge/ skill acquisition and performance. 	Consider opportunities to provide autonomy, resources, people support, formal and informal organisational support.

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