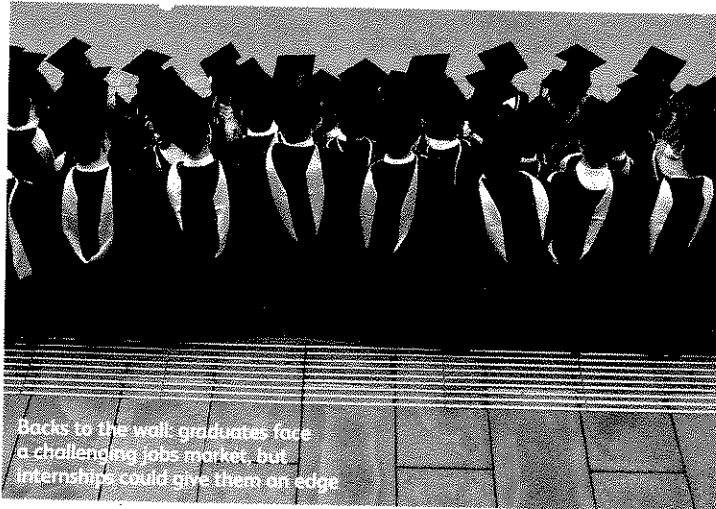


Class of 2009 turns to internships



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Richard Irwin, senior recruitment manager at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), said that Milburn's plans "could make it harder for small firms to introduce internships - and that could be damaging".

The PwC internship scheme, as for many large recruiters, is a hiring tool: "We have a 95 per cent conversion rate to full-time employment from summer interns," said Irwin. While acknowledging some "bad apple" firms may misuse interns as cheap labour, Irwin said he hasn't come across this directly. "We advertise all vacancies, people are selected via a competitive process and placements are reasonably well paid," he said.

Internship pay is a divisive issue. The Milburn report recommends "remuneration levels fairly recognise the value an intern brings to the organisation". Carl Gilleard, CEO of the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), believes that unpaid internships are not ideal, but that undertaking them "can show commitment". It's hardly an issue among his members - the latest AGR survey found median internship pay to be a reasonable £300 a week,

with only 1.4 per cent paying less than £100. Yet forcing employers to pay the minimum wage would be overkill, he said, and could risk making the situation worse because fewer places would be offered.

The value of internships is two-fold. The employability skills

often seen as missing in young job applicants can only be developed through meaningful work experience. Lynsey Brooks, employment policy adviser at the Federation of Small Businesses, said: "If you've looked at lots of graduate CVs, you might understand what, for example, being head of a university film society involves. But to small businesses it may not sound like much. Whereas if you've worked, it's a skill they can understand."

John McGurk, CIPD adviser, learning and talent development, said the issue is clear cut: "Employers who complain about students' skills have a responsibility to offer students opportunities to learn them. Internships are one of the key ways to do this."

◆ See the next issue of *PM* for an in-depth look at the current state of graduate recruitment.

Employers urged to dip their toe in Talent Pool

The government's newly launched Graduate Talent Pool is "an opportunity for SMEs to gain access to really good talent", according to John McGurk, CIPD adviser, learning and talent development. The online portal is intended to be a one-stop shop to match graduates with internships, and firms with the skills they require. It also outlines the support available for employers.

Carl Gilleard, CEO of the Association of Graduate Recruiters, welcomed the call for large firms to help smaller organisations set and structure quality internships. "We might get organisations who haven't traditionally tapped into

the graduate market, to try it through internships and see the value they get," said Gilleard.

One employer that is discovering the value of interns is Stephanie Oerton, head of talent and development at National Express. Owing to a massive increase in applications for the company's graduate scheme, Oerton is also looking at internships. With one intern currently in the firm's marketing division, Oerton sees it fast becoming "our preferred way of letting us look at who's available and vice versa".

◆ <http://graduatetalentpool.direct.gov.uk>

The latest figures, showing 722,000 unemployed 18-24-year-olds (see "Lost Youth?" page 16), do not make pretty reading if you're a university student or graduate jobseeker.

Wilma Martinelli, president of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, told *PM* that, while she believes it's too early to predict the fate of the class of 2009, she would be "very happy" with a graduate unemployment rate of 15 per cent by next year. But with new figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency showing unemployment among university leavers rose from 5.8 per cent to 8.4 per cent between 2007 and 2008 (compared with 7.8 per cent for the entire working population), the reality is likely to be much higher.

The solution upon which the government is hanging its hopes is internships. Both an increase in internships offered to students as part of "sandwich" degrees or vacation placements, and also in internships offered to unemployed graduates through the Graduate Talent Pool website (see panel, right).

But, with bizarre timing, Alan Milburn, former cabinet member and chair of a panel on fair access to the professions, last month released a report attacking internships for going to "the few who have connections, not the many who have talent". The report also called for a quality standard which all internship providers should meet to ensure fairness and quality.