

DEBATE

Do we need tighter rules to prevent unpaid internships and improve social mobility?

In many sectors, young people early in their career are expected to “pay their dues” by working in a series of unpaid internships. The experiences and contacts gained really do help to develop a fledgling career.

But it costs over £1,100 per month to live in London while taking on an internship. Most young people cannot afford to work unpaid, meaning that unpaid internships end up preventing less advantaged young people – those whose parents can’t afford to support them – from getting a foot on the ladder.

The problem is that the legal grey area allows employers to offer unpaid internships with impunity for what would otherwise be deemed paid work. That is why the law should be changed

I dislike like the idea of internships being limited to children of the wealthy as much as anyone. But the reality is that internships often have limited value to employers, while feedback, one-on-one mentoring, and industry contacts are extremely useful to the intern. Many young people view work experience as an investment in their future, and make considerable sacrifices to pursue these positions.

New rules wouldn’t result in more paid internships, but fewer opportunities overall. Many employers will decide that the costs of offering work experience outweigh the benefits. In a job market already saturated with graduates, this would remove a crucial mechanism for young people at the start of their careers

YES



PETER LAMPL

so that all internships over four weeks are paid at least the minimum wage (£7 per hour), and preferably the living wage (£9 per hour).

Failing to address the problem of unpaid internships means that they will remain a major roadblock to social mobility, and bar less advantaged people from a whole range of careers.

◉ *Sir Peter Lampl is founder and chairman of the Sutton Trust.*

NO



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to distinguish themselves in their fields of interest. It would also push employers to select based on academic performance alone, disadvantaging those without top grades.

Not all internships are valuable, but nor are unpaid interns “modern slaves” or helpless victims of unscrupulous employers, as campaigners imply.

◉ *Madeline Grant is editorial manager at the Institute of Economic Affairs.*