

US teenagers pay five-figure fees to become unpaid interns

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Wealthy American students are paying more than \$10,000 to secure unpaid internships at British companies.

Thousands of students and graduates from the US and other nations are paying for help to obtain placements in fashion, advertising, media and law.

The five-figure fees include accommodation in the UK, weekend trips, insurance and visa assistance, but will fuel concerns that the children of affluent families use unpaid internships to gain career advantages.

Global Experiences, a US company, charges students between \$7,990 (£5,700) and \$10,990 (£7,800) for internships in London lasting between eight and 15 weeks.

Online reviews posted by alumni state that interns have been placed at an array of companies, including the engineers Medland Metropolis, the LGBT publisher Pink News, Osman, a fashion label, and Ovation Theatres, which runs the Upstairs at the Gatehouse venue in Highgate, north London.

Other young people have gained work experience at charities, advertising agencies and property companies.

None of the companies hosting the internships receive payment from Global Experiences and there is no allegation of wrongdoing. Yet the activity will increase concerns that unpaid

internships undermine social mobility as they are dominated by young people who are able to work for long periods without an income.

About 70,000 internships are offered each year in the UK, according to research by the Sutton Trust. The charity estimates that 10,000 graduates are in internships six months after leaving university.

In February the government announced a curb on companies that use prolonged unpaid internships to secure free labour. Employment law states that all workers must earn the minimum wage but genuine interns, who are not obliged to come to work every day, are exempt.

Global Experiences defended its programmes, which can allow students to earn credits towards their degree.

A spokeswoman said: "It is clear that North American students, providing additional support to London firms and taking away knowledge and building relationships as part of their degree, is of value both to the London economy and also to their own professional development.

"Without the support of firms such as Global Experiences these activities would be restricted to the few with personal connections and as such social mobility would decline.

"A large propor-

tion of our students are first generation university students and we work with our university partners to ensure we make the programme affordable to all." Global Experiences also said that its partner companies could pay their interns if they wished.

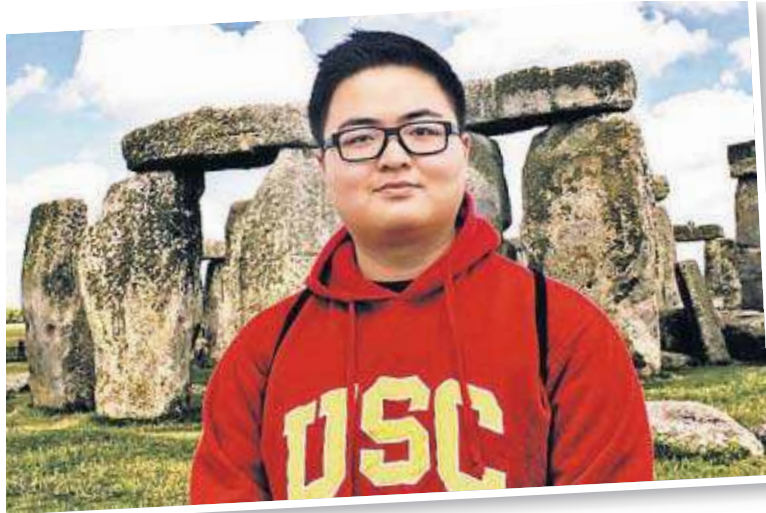
Tanya de Grunwald, founder of careers blog Graduate Fog and a campaigner for fair internships, said: "The

rise of pay-to-intern companies is a stark reminder that unpaid internships are a global epidemic.

"Young people everywhere are finding an expensive degree is no longer enough to secure a good job. They also need experience, preferably from a big-name employer in a city like London. Wealthy international families with big ambitions for their children's future will certainly pay for that. Unpaid internships exploit those who do them, and exclude those who can't afford them."

Testimonials posted by former Global Experiences interns suggest most of them enjoyed and benefited from their experiences in London.

The packages include weekend excursions to destinations including Stonehenge, Brighton and Canterbury. Interns are housed in student residences in the centre of the city and have access to emergency support.





Interns who used companies to secure places have posted images on social media reflecting their life in London and on outings to attractions around the UK