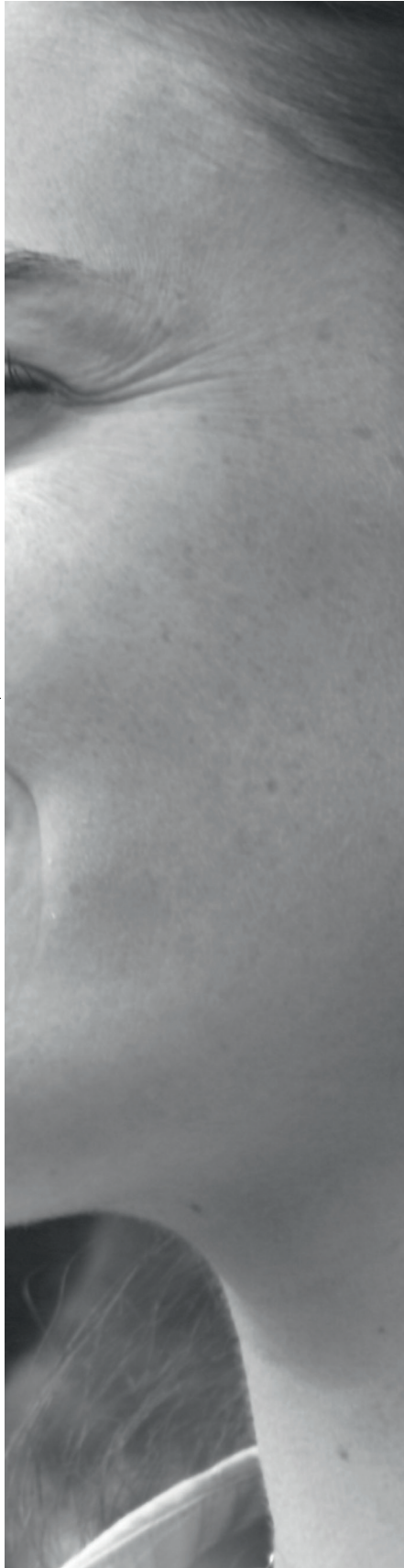


Turn on to interns

Offering internships could provide schools with new and exciting talent at minimum cost. **MATTHEW JANE** finds out how to make the most of these opportunities





In the hunt to recruit the most talented and able people, schools are often guilty of overlooking a lucrative pool of resources that is easily available, willing and highly skilled. Interns have the potential to provide schools with much needed skills, new ideas and a hard-working ethos that could prove an invaluable resource. In a time when budgets are stretched and people are working at full capacity, it has never been more necessary for schools to look at new avenues to help ensure they continue to offer the best opportunities for pupils.

It can be difficult to embed new ideas into a school that is made up of staff who are well-versed in their roles and highly indoctrinated into their method of working. By involving interns, schools could see new ways to shake up the educational offering or working processes. Andrew Scherer, marketing manager at Inspiring Interns, says hiring interns can provide schools with a number of benefits. "Interns are highly motivated, enthusiastic members of staff who can offer new perspectives on working practices and a number of fresh ideas. They are keen to prove themselves, eager to learn and comfortable with new technologies," he says. This could bring two-fold benefits to a school in that an intern who is ICT savvy could offer learning opportunities to existing staff.

An internship programme could also provide schools with an opportunity to gain a march in the recruitment environment. "Hiring an intern gives schools a fantastic chance to see new talent working within their organisation," says Scherer. "In effect the internship can become an extended hiring process, ensuring the candidate and school are a good fit should the host business wish to take on the student permanently on graduation."

NO COSTLY OUTLAY

Another key advantage of offering internships is that they have the potential to provide much needed skills without the need to commit to costly salaries and remuneration packages. While the area of payment for interns is still a slightly grey area, by and large it can prove less of a financial burden than having to sign up to lengthy contracts. Scherer suggests the main sticking point is whether the intern falls under the jurisdiction for national minimum wage (NMW). "If the student is undertaking a placement as part of their studies then they are exempt from NMW," he explains.

"If the internship is not part of a university course then NMW may be applicable. This largely depends on the nature of the placement – if it is predominantly didactic then payment may not be necessary. If the intern is expected to undertake tasks equivalent to that of a normal worker then NMW will be due," continues Scherer. He adds that, unfortunately, this is still a fairly contentious issue and one that he believes still needs further clarification from the government.

While many schools may not feel entirely comfortable with the idea of somebody working for no salary, it is important to consider the benefits provided to the intern through the opportunities the school offers. Where interns may miss out on short-term remuneration, they will gain valuable real-life experience that will help them expand their CV and offer them long-term benefits. There are always other ways schools can show their gratitude and support the intern, such as helping with travel costs or offering free school meals.

MAXIMUM BENEFITS

In order for the internship to offer optimum benefit for both the school and the intern it is important that the placement is well structured and that the individual is given plenty of guidance and assistance wherever needed. "Best practice is always to give the intern clear guidelines on what they will be doing and what is expected of them, as well as a designated mentor to help them when necessary," explains Scherer. "It is importance to remember that for many students, this will be their first real taste of operating within a workplace."

It is worth considering the processes you have in place for welcoming a salaried member of staff, such as providing a welcome pack explaining the school systems and unique policies, and extending these protocols to interns. "In terms of health and safety, all interns should receive the same induction and training that normal employees receive," adds Scherer. "Bearing all this in mind will not only ensure the student gets the most out of a placement, but also that they offer a lot more to the host organisation."

ENGAGING THE MARKET

When considering the internship market, schools are ideally placed to take advantage of existing relationships. If your school has close ties with a local higher or further education provider then consider asking them to discuss the opportunities with their students. Getting involved with events such as career fairs and open days could be another good way to tap into the market.

"Schools need to highlight what skills students will learn and develop through interning at their organisation," says Scherer. "An internship is a chance for students to improve their professional expertise in a way they cannot do in a classroom, so the host school needs to underline what the intern will gain from the placement and give an outline of how this will happen."

A further incentive for potential interns could be the possibility of gaining permanent employment after the placement. "The potential to earn their first job is a huge bonus for the student, particularly in the current employment market," adds Scherer.

By ensuring the placement is structured and well considered, the scope for all the individuals involved to reap some real benefits from an internship are huge, and it could provide schools with a valuable pot of ongoing skills well into the future. ■

FINDING INTERNS

- ▶ Speak to your local higher or further education provider to find out if any of their students are looking for a work placement
- ▶ Attend career fairs or university open days in your area, as many students will be looking for jobs there
- ▶ Speak to a recruitment consultant if you're already in contact with one, as they can often place interns as well as full-time employees
- ▶ Speak to parents and staff to find out if they have any older children interested in a future career in education.