

International Interns - A valuable resource




KØBENHAVNS
UNIVERSITET

 Consortium
for Global Talent

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June 2012

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Introduction

This report bases its findings and recommendations on information gathered by the Consortium for Global Talent and University of Copenhagen on two study trips taken in January and February 2012 in the USA, consecutively. The knowledge gathered from the USA is not to be considered a copy-paste solution, as Denmark also possesses other valuable experiences on preparing students for company positions. It is, however, important to recognize that not all international students are able to have relevant part-time student jobs alongside their studies, as is the norm in Denmark, and so attracting these students through internships must be considered as a valuable possibility.

It is our belief that the experience universities and companies in the USA have in cooperating, when it comes to laying a foundation for future highly skilled professionals, may be of inspiration to Denmark and Danish companies. In particular in regards to how and why offering internships to international students is of importance to the company, as well as the country. It is therefore our wish that this report will clarify the potential opportunities that lie within internships for companies and international students in Denmark alike.

In 2010, 18,131 international citizens¹ attended full-time studies at higher educational facilities in Denmark. They, along with the students who every year visit Denmark on exchange programs, are preparing themselves for exciting jobs in the future, and should be viewed as potential resources by any company that expects to do global business in the future. With roots in foreign countries, these students can prove a valuable asset to companies, as they, because they have chosen to add international flavour to their education, have shown a willingness to bring their talent abroad, and combine their theoretical studies with global knowledge.

At the same time forecasts show that Denmark is at the risk of lacking highly skilled professionals in the near future. To avoid this scenario, it is necessary for Denmark to focus on attracting and retaining the international skilled talent. Currently, the foreign students make up only 5.4% of the student body, placing Denmark at 10th place in OECD's ranking, when it comes to receiving international students. Furthermore, it is shown that Denmark only attracts about 0.5% of the total amount of international students², who are interested in studying in a foreign country - 1/3 of which have the desire to stay once they have completed their studies³.

However, latest studies show an increasing tendency that Denmark in fact is considered, when students decide where to study abroad, and the number of students who finish a full degree in Denmark has more

¹ Danmarks Statistik, <http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/Nyt/2011/NR391.pdf>

² Daniel Guhr - <http://www.iu.dk/nyheder/artikler/potentialer-og-faldgruber-i-emerging-markets>

³ FBE 2009 - <http://dea.nu/sites/default/files/Baggrundsrapport%20-%20Analyse%20af%20internationale%20studerende%20i%20Danmark%20-%20besk%C3%A6ftigelsessituation.pdf>

than tripled within the last 10 years⁴. It is important that Denmark continues to increase this tendency, as international students, to a great extent, may be part of the solution, when it comes to the lack of highly skilled professionals which Denmark will encounter in the future.

Therefore, offering students the right incentives, may further increase their wish to study and stay in Denmark, hereby increasing not only the amount of talent, but also improving the Danish economy. In 2010, statistics showed that an additional 10% of international students staying in Denmark results in an increase in GDP of approximately DKK 1 billion⁵.

In many cases, internships may be part of this incentive. Internships help shape students for coming jobs, they provide businesses with motivated resources, and students and companies are able, together, to shape the competencies necessary for future business markets.

⁴ Styrelsen for international uddannelse - http://www.iu.dk/statistik/MOBILITETSSTATISTIK%20FOR%20DE%20VIDEREGAENDE%20UDDANNELSER%202009_10.pdf

⁵ <http://www.iu.dk/filer/markedsfoering/tema-arrangementer-1/Housing070411ThinkTankTalents.pdf>

What is an internship

An internship is part of a student's education and early career path. An internship integrates the student's academic knowledge with practical experience in a business, organisation or government setting. The student participates in a project at a work place for the purpose of applying knowledge and competencies learned during the university education to a practical project in a company or an organisation thereby adding to the student's experiences and competencies⁶. For the workplace the internship is an opportunity to connect with young talent at a very early point in their careers benefiting immediately from their competencies as well as having the opportunity to recruit young talent for more long term employment.

In both form and content internships can vary. Many internships are for academic credit making the internship a formal part of the student's university degree program. When an internship is for academic credit there must be a strong learning component to the internship. Internships must be learning based in order for universities to reward academic credit. Students can make agreements with the educational institution on how credit may be awarded.

Internships may or may not be paid. It is important for any company or organization offering internships to consider whether an internship should be paid or unpaid. An intern may be working along side a paid student employee, and a clear distinction between the different types of engagement at a work place is advisable. If the internship is unpaid there should be a strong learning component for the student in order to justify ethically and legitimately that it is unpaid. In some fields it is common to offer some compensation to students in otherwise unpaid internships.

Based on the experience from American universities the unpaid *and* academically unaccredited internships are potentially problematic. Not having a clear distinction between on one hand the unpaid internships and on the other hand student employment or paid internships may lead to disagreements and conflict. By defining the internship as a learning experience for the student, thereby distinguishing it from student employment in content and encouraging students to seek academic credit, whenever possible, can be a useful way of creating a clear distinction between being an intern and a student employee.

It is important for all parties involved that there is a written agreement or contract describing the internship in as much detail as possible prior to the beginning of an internship. The company and the student may have different perceptions of what an internship entails. The contract, also sometimes referred to as learning agreement, should include the basic terms such as how many hours of work is expected from the student, the duration of the internship, and whether there is any compensation or remuneration involved. It should further include the expected learning outcome for the student, expectations to the work carried out by the student, and how and when the work will be supervised. Finally, is it advisable to include how and when the

⁶ UCLA Career Center, University of California Los Angeles

internship is to be evaluated and by whom. Some written component may be necessary to document the outcome of the internship, for example through a project paper.

It is an advantage to have key staff members involved at an early stage of defining the content and framework of an internship. The process can be a co-operation between the company / organisation and the student thereby preparing both parties for the internship relation. For some international students an internship may be their first real work place experience and spending some time managing expectations may be time well spent.

Who are the international students

International students are in Denmark for different periods of time.

Exchange students are students who are in a degree program at a home university abroad and are visiting a Danish university as part of their education. They are in Denmark for one or two semesters. The majority of these students are bachelor degree students at their home universities.

International degree students are students who are studying at a Danish university for a full degree. They are often master level students and they are here for a period of 2 years.

Both groups of students will have a residence permit through the university they are affiliated with if they are from countries outside of the EU. Companies who take in interns from these groups of students will therefore not be involved in providing a visa or residence permit as long as the internship period does not extend the period covered in the residence permit.

Some of the international students will have knowledge of Danish but the majority will not be proficient in Danish. The expected working language for international interns is accordingly English. International students often master other language skills besides English which could be an asset to the companies.

What's in it for the companies

In the USA, companies take a proactive role, when it comes to recruitment at all levels. The companies position themselves to attract talent at the different universities and offering internships is part of the companies' strategy for making themselves attractive to the most talented students.

Internships are seen as an opportunity for companies to meet potential employees at an early stage. For both the students and the companies internships are an opportunity to test whether the match is right before

possibly entering into a more long term employment relationship⁷. The companies benefit from internships in that they can meet a number of talented young students and benefit from their ideas and creativity in the work done during the internship. If the internship does not result in other types of employment there are still significant benefits to the company or organisation. An intern can bring new ideas, skills, creativity, innovation, engagement and knowledge to a project that may provide new alternatives to problem areas⁸.

In the USA, many internships end in employment within a short period of time after the internship has ended. According to Stanford University Career Development Center many American companies, which offer internships, have more than 50 % of interns work for the companies at some point after the internship has ended, making the student not only a current, but also a future resource⁹. It is therefore in the interest of the companies to view internships as an excellent opportunity for early recruitment of the most talented students. The international student cohort is an extension of the potential for companies to recruit the talent needed at an early point. The internship may accordingly be seen as a mutual trial-period for both parts.

Additionally, it is estimated that approximately 70 % of all jobs are obtained through networks. If the immediate contact does not work, the network behind the person, whether it is an employee at a company or a student at a university, will open for new opportunities. Companies should therefore not see taking on a student as an isolated event, but see the student as a potential ambassador that may facilitate contact to other eligible candidates for internships as well as for jobs.

Recruiting for interns is generally less time consuming than recruiting for regular staff. Advertisement costs are lower, and the costs associated with hiring a person who turns out to be a poor match for the company is reduced. Taking in interns furthermore reduces the costs of permanent recruitment. If an intern is taken on for further employment in company there is also the benefit of taking in a person who already knows the company from the inside¹⁰.

By having interns, the students will help keep companies abreast of new developments, theories, concepts and methods within certain fields of work or business areas, just as it will provide the companies with opportunities to influence and help shape competencies best suitable for the future, hereby ensuring both employee and job security. It will also provide companies with the opportunity to participate in creating top talent within their respective field of competencies¹¹, which in turn will enhance the students' chances of being absorbed by the labour market upon completion of studies.

⁷ Berkeley International Office, University of California Berkeley; UCLA Career Center, University of California Los Angeles

⁸ The Stanford Internship Program: A Prospectus for Employers

⁹ Assistant Director Chris Pohalsky, Career Development Center, Stanford University

¹⁰ Career Development Center, Stanford University

¹¹ Berkeley International Office, University of California Berkeley

At the same time, having interns permits better utilization of full-time personnel. The student intern can provide professional or para-professional staff support in relation to short or long-term projects, where it would not be advantageous to divert other qualified employees from their specialized areas¹².

The international aspect should also be considered as a benefit. Having international employees, be they permanent or interns may provide companies with added international or local understanding and knowledge. Such knowledge may eventually facilitate the company's possibilities of a smooth entering into new international markets, negotiation within foreign cultures etc. In general, companies can expect that interns are very engaged, take a great deal of pride in their work and overall often perform beyond the employer's level of expectation.

It is important to stress that it is not only the companies, but also society who benefits from the talented students, who have been mentored and shaped into business people. Furthermore, the students are not lost to other potentially interesting countries after their graduation, but rather encouraged to stay in Denmark due to the experience gained through an internship with a company.

What makes an internship successful

The students' motivations for seeking out internships depend to some extent on how the internships are structured. If an internship is for academic credit then there is an immediate benefit to the student for completing the internship. If an internship is not for credit, then the student's motivations lie in the prospects of getting practical experience within their field, getting to know a work place, learning about the culture of a country, exploring possible career paths, creating an international network and résumé building.

The successful internship from a student's point of view is one, where the intern is involved in tasks or a project of relevance to the company. Participating in a project of real value for the company and getting hands on experience is a key to the student's sense of success and being part of something worthwhile. The internship should be a different type of experience than an operational work experience.¹³ The skills learned may be general or specific in nature, but to distinguish the internship from a training experience the skills learned should be transferable and valuable in other settings than the specific internship location.

In addition, internships often play a great role in the shaping of students in a business aspect. Thus, former interns that have enjoyed working with a company will naturally act as goodwill ambassadors. This automatically provides the company with an alumni network that may serve as a link between the company and the university. Should the intern end up with a career at the company, they will further be able to provide the company with information about academic structures of the university, and possibly contribute to or at

¹² Career Development Center, Stanford University

¹³ NACE: A Position Statement on U.S. Internships (www.naceweb.org/about/membership/internship)

recruitment fairs, where their affiliation with the university will help students get insight into the company and vice versa.

What does it require of the companies to have interns

An internship serves to enhance a student's educational experience and career development and it should challenge the student's capabilities.

In order for the internship to become a successful experience and to avoid misunderstandings and disappointments it is recommended to set up a written learning agreement or contract between the intern and the company prior to the beginning of the internship and then implement a structure and supervision of the internship to meet these objectives.

A key element of a successful internship is to identify a staff member who is ready to assume responsibility for the internship and who is willing to supervise the student throughout the internship. This should preferably be a person who is directly involved with the content of the internship, and who can provide professional supervision of the intern's work as well as regular constructive feedback to the intern.

A clear description of the intern's duties and responsibilities is required, and should be based on the organization's philosophy, practices and code of conduct, ensuring that the intern is well informed of and incorporated into the company business. A set of well-defined expectations should also be provided by the company¹⁴. Providing the students with the skills to thrive in an organization early on creates a pool of strong, dependable potential candidates for continued employment.

Practical issues such as where the student should work, internet access, introduction to the work place etc. is important to consider before the start up of the internship. To the greatest extent possible, the intern should participate in activities of the work place alongside the regular employees. A high level of inclusion into the workplace makes the internship more successful for all parties.

Upon arrival in Denmark, many internationals find settling here challenging. The issues may be of tangible sorts, such as social security registration, housing locating and opening bank accounts. Or they may include less tangible issues such as developing a network and new friends to share your thoughts and international experience with. Helping the student in all of these areas are regularly not required, when hiring interns. However, offering help in any way that may further ease their settling may nourish their motivation for staying longer, or coming back once they have graduated.

¹⁴ The Stanford Internship Program: A Prospectus for Employers

It is important to keep in mind that engaging in an internship does not impose any obligations on the part of the company beyond the internship period. An internship does not imply automatic employment after the end of the internship, although many companies use internships as a way of getting to know potential future employees.

How are the educational institutions involved

International students face a particular challenge, when searching for internships in a new country. Within a short period of time they have to search out internship opportunities in Denmark and orient themselves in the possibilities available to them. To facilitate contact between companies and students interested in internships a shared platform is necessary. To meet this need most higher education institutions maintain online databases, where companies can advertise positions for interns, and students can search for internships posted by companies. The job and internship databases can thus serve as entry point for the companies to the universities and as a venue for students and companies to connect, make the match, and agree on an internship. This type of infrastructure is an important tool for the international students to acquaint themselves with the opportunities available.

The venues for cooperation between education institutions and the private sector are numerous and continuously expanding. There are shared platforms for exchange of knowledge and expression of interests through company advisory panels at the universities, shared research and innovation initiatives, and internships for full degree Danish speaking students, job fairs, as well as initiatives by alumni associations.

There is currently a potential for further interaction in the area of internships for international students to the benefit of all parties involved. The international students depend upon the existence and quality of job databases as the infrastructure through which they can connect with companies as well as career counselling provided by the educational institutions. Career counselling is important especially for this group of students, as they need to develop their knowledge of the Danish private sector related to their area of study, and to Danish work life in general. This is an area that can benefit from further attention at the educational institutions.

Next steps

Interns need supervision and guidance. The opportunity for providing them with it should be seen as an investment for the company. There is much to be gained for both companies and students participating in internships, and it is common at the overseas universities contacted, that there is a natural interest for going abroad from students all through their study periods. In the life of Danish students, having a student job or some sort of job experience is a must, as companies rarely hire graduates, who have no work life experience. Internships undoubtedly provide international students with this experience, and introduce them to a country and a company they may wish to stay with for a longer time period. The precondition for this, however, is that internships exist.

In conclusion, the following “Next steps” are to be considered with the aim to further develop a tradition and culture for having international interns in Denmark.

- On a larger scale, we need to consider if the overall conditions are right for attracting international students as interns and potential employees of Danish companies. Issues involving immigration should not be a hindrance. It should be possible for companies to offer employment to talented interns without encountering problems in regard to visa issues. It is a lost investment to lose students after an internship and a missed opportunity for economic growth if practical and bureaucratic matters hinder employment.
- Further co-operation between educational facilities and companies is imperative. Outreach specialists at career centres at the educational institutions can ensure that both the company and student needs are met in the internships. Outreach activities can also for example include company visits for professors as the academic supervisors for the interns. Career centres at the educational institutions can serve as mediators between the educational facility as supplier of knowledge and future resources, and the companies’ market demand.
- It is an absolute necessity that companies consider the benefits of having international interns, and they make an effort to offer internships. Companies must not only agree on the possibilities of internships, but “walk the talk” for example by setting a minimum of how many interns they are willing and able to take per year.
- Focus on university alumni must be strengthened. Company employees are bound to have insight in university programs after having studied at a given university themselves. They may be helpful in pin-pointing which students will be right for which departments, and also serve as an excellent contact person for universities at the company.

Accreditation

We would like to extend special thanks to the following offices at universities and individuals who have made this report possible by sharing valuable knowledge and experiences with us, as well as to those who have assisted in compiling the report.

Berkeley International Office, University of California Berkeley

Director Ivor Emmanuel

Career Center, University of California Berkeley

Assistant Director Nancy McFarland

Career Development Center, Stanford University

Assistant Director Chris Pohalski

Career Development Team, New York University – Leonard N. Stern School of Business

Director of Relationship Management Maureen Carpenter

Center for Career Education, Columbia University

Outreach Specialist Vernon Gibbs II

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University of California Study Center, University of Copenhagen

Senior Program Coordinator Jane Lydiksen