

Shining a light on the shady world of work experience

The initial findings of an NUJ survey have identified widespread misuse of work experience placements by media companies. The survey, which covered people who completed a journalism course within the last five years, has shown that companies across all the main sectors of our industry are exploiting newly qualified journalists through bogus work experience placements.

The NUJ is supportive of properly resourced work experience as part of a journalist's training. However, our results show that many people are doing proper full-time jobs for little or no money – sometimes for months on end.

In many cases the NUJ believes that companies are acting illegally by failing to abide by minimum wage rules.

Some of the survey's headline findings include:

- more than 50 per cent of respondents completed work experience placements after achieving their qualification, with the majority receiving little if any payment for their work
- one-in-five who did post-qualification work experience undertook a placement for three months or more, with some working for more than six months unpaid
- of those people who had material published or broadcast, 78 per cent received no payment for their work
- one-in-four people claimed to have completed a placement at an organisation that wouldn't be able to function normally without people on work experience
- more than half of respondents felt that they didn't get enough support or guidance during their placements

The NUJ also received hundreds of comments in relation to the survey, with people telling their stories about what worked and what didn't during their placements. We'll be using these comments to help guide the focus of our campaign.

It is unacceptable for newly qualified and student journalists to be exploited by media businesses. For advice on how work experience should be done, the NUJ has produced guidelines which can be downloaded at:

<http://www.nuj.org.uk/innerPagenuj.html?docid=488>

The NUJ is campaigning to put a stop to this exploitation. If you have information that could help our campaign, or if you want to stay informed about our work in this area, email campaigns@nuj.org.uk

Detailed results

It is clear that unpaid work experience by recently qualified journalists is widespread. More than half of all respondents completed work experience after achieving their qualification.

Did you undertake any work experience placements after you achieved your qualification?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	51.3%
No	48.7%

44 per cent of respondents who undertook work experience after qualifying completed placements of more than a month, with more than one-in-five completing placements of three months or more.

How long was the longest period of work experience that you undertook after qualifying as a journalist (please give the total period, even if the placement was only part-time)?

Answer Options	Response Percent
1-2 weeks	34.8%
3-4 weeks	20.8%
1-2 months	22.0%
3-6 months	15.5%
More than 6 months	6.8%

Between a half and two-thirds of people on post-qualification work experience didn't even receive expenses.

Did you receive payment of expenses during your work experience?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	42.1%
No	57.9%

More than half of respondents felt they didn't get enough support and guidance during their placements. Around one-in-five felt organisations primarily offered work experience to get extra work done, without giving much consideration to what assistance people needed during their placements.

Which of these statements best describes your own work experience placements?

Answer Options	Response Percent
I was given clear support and guidance on most of my placements	43.7%
I had only limited support and guidance on most of my placements	37.4%
Most of my placements were used by organisations to get more work done, with hardly any support and guidance	18.9%

One-in-four claim to have completed a placement at an organisation that wouldn't be able to function normally without people on work experience.

Some organisations see work experience as a way of covering off editorial functions without employing full-time staff. Did you complete a placement with any organisations which you feel relied too heavily on the efforts of people on work experience, to the extent that normal editorial activity would be endangered without them?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	26.4%
No	73.6%

Of those people who had work published or broadcast, 78 per cent were never paid for their work.

Did you get any work published/broadcast during your work experience placements?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	89.8%
No	10.2%

If yes, did you receive payment for this?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Always	5.9%
Sometimes	16.3%
Never	77.8%

In almost 60 per cent of cases where someone was led to believe that work experience could lead to paid work, no job offer was forthcoming.

Did any organisation suggest that completion of a work experience placement could lead to a paid position?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	42.7%
No	57.3%

If yes, were you taken on by the organisation once you completed the placement?

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	42.7%
No	57.3%

Almost half of respondents who did post-qualification work experience completed one placement after achieving their qualification, with most others doing one or two more. Just over 13 per cent completed placements at four or more organisations.

At how many different organisations did you undertake work experience placements after qualifying as a journalist?

Answer Options	Response Percent
1 org	48.9%
2-3 orgs	37.9%
4-5 orgs	9.8%
6-10 orgs	2.7%
More than 10	0.8%

The above results are taken from 644 respondents to the survey, which was completed between 31 March-14 April 2008. It was possible for respondents to skip questions that were not relevant or which they felt unable to answer, so every respondent did not necessarily answer every question.

If you want to find out more about our campaign to end this exploitation, email campaigns@nuj.org