



As difficult economic times see more graduates struggling to secure paid employment, universities are trying to ease the transition between education and the workplace.

The University of the Arts London has launched the Creative Graduate Internship Programme, which will provide eight- to 12-week paid internships for recent graduates using funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The scheme, which will run for the first time between March and September this year, will offer small businesses with fewer than 50 employees £100 a week towards paying an intern's wages.

University of the Arts London internship co-ordinator Mavi Tikotkar says, 'We find a lot of graduates are underemployed and are not working in the industry they studied in. Internships help improve confidence in front of a potential employer, as well as building up commercial skills and contacts.'

The placements must be project-based to ensure that the graduate can make 'meaningful contributions', and graduates must be paid at least minimum wage, says Tikotkar.

Sanjay Sinha, creative director of Web design consultancy Classic Studios, which hopes to take part in the scheme, says, '[This] has come at a great time for us. We're expanding, but freelancers are costly and you don't generate the same sort of relationship.'

Although unpaid internships are a valid first step for some graduates, many are unable to work for free for more than a few weeks. Tikotkar says, 'Unfortunately, it's a culture that has long existed within the industry. We question how useful short placements are and hope the scheme will give graduates an opportunity to prove their talent.'

University College Falmouth business fellow for advertising and design Jono Wardle agrees. 'It's important to show that graduate-level skills are worth paying for,' he says.

At University College Falmouth staff run an incubation space where graduates can apply for a hot desk for a minimal cost. From there they can set up their own businesses with mutual support network and access to a telephone, the Internet and workshops.

Vicki Brotherhood, Falmouth's Design Centre Bureau service co-ordinator, says 'Many of the graduates that use the space at the design centre are designer-makers, who use the laser-cutting, screen-printing and rapid prototyping equipment. They'd never be able to afford their own equipment.'

Furniture designer Jethro Macey took advantage of access to the machinery during his two-year stretch in the Falmouth incubator. He says, 'I wouldn't have been able to do half of the work without having those resources on tap. It gave me the opportunity to experiment with what I wanted to do.'

Macey still has a strong relationship with the university through networking while at the incubator. He teaches the MA 3D design students and is currently using the laser cutter for some of his work for 100% Design in September.

Both Wardle and Matt Desmier, head of enterprise at the Arts University College at Bournemouth, agree that graduates must prove themselves to win space within their respective incubators.

Desmier runs the Enterprise Pavilion – a purpose-built graduate business incubator on the university site. New businesses based there have access to post-handling services and broadband, as well as business planning and skill development workshops. Since its foundation five years ago, the Enterprise Pavilion has assisted 75 start-up companies, with a 95 per cent survival rate compared to a 33 per cent national average, says Desmier.

Desmier attributes the success to the pavilion's selective criteria. He says, 'We have a

With a little help

As the University of the Arts London launches a graduate internship programme funded by the Hefce, **Laura Snoad** looks at what a range of colleges are doing to ease the route into employment for students



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Graduate development

Internships

The University of the Arts London will offer 100 students paid internships with small businesses. The scheme is funded by a £13.6m grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for England

Incubators

University College Falmouth and The Arts University College at Bournemouth provide office space and business services for talented graduates

Alumni network

The Royal College of Art runs regular alumni events to strengthen professional skills and provide networking opportunities

keen eye for undergraduate talent and cherry-pick the best business plans: 'Apart from being 'ridiculously cheap' – £45 a week for a desk – the space allows designers to set up businesses in a 'de-risked' environment, says Desmier. The pavilion's reputation and Desmier's active role in the South West Design Forum means that he is approached by clients looking for talented graduates.

Dan Hinton, the creative director of Web design consultancy Pixelfish, which works from the space, says, 'We're not isolated! in our bedrooms and can use the skills of other companies in the building.'

Duncan Cook, managing director of Three Sided Cube, also a Web design group, adds, 'We engage heavily with the talent coming out of the university to grow our business. In certain areas they know far more than us.'

We're not isolated in our bedrooms and can use the skills of other companies in the [Enterprise Pavilion] building

Dan Hinton, Pixelfish



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1 and 2 Students at work at the University of the Arts London

3 Enterprise Pavilion incubator unit, at the Arts University College at Bournemouth

4 Furniture designer Jethro Macey

5 Mavi Tikotkar, University of the Arts London internships co-ordinator



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Building up networks between graduates is something that the Royal College of Art believes is important in supporting graduates, says alumni co-ordinator Cia Durante. Graduates are invited to professional development events and talks from leading industry figures as part of the Fuse programme, as well as having access to the RCA library, internal intranet and practical training courses, such as modules covering Final Cut Pro and InDesign.

The RCA's new Battersea site will have incubators for 20-25 'bright RCA graduates in the hyphen period' when they are finding their feet, says ex-RCA rector Sir Christopher Frayling.

Durante stresses the importance of lifelong learning. She says, 'Many of the practical issues of moving your career forward and learning how to combine work and life don't arise until afterwards. It's important we're still here to provide support when we're needed.' ■