

Professional Internships in Higher Education

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Professional internships represent, for many students, their first encounter with the real working environment of a given industry. In practically-oriented study programmes they constitute a mandatory component, while in selected fields covered by educational standards (referred to below, for simplicity, as standardised fields) they form part of an extended system of preparation for a regulated profession. At the same time, their organisation raises many questions: who is responsible for finding an internship placement? Can professional employment substitute for internships? What rules apply in standardised fields?

Chapter I: Legal Basis, Purpose, and Learning Outcomes

The rules governing professional internships in higher education are laid down in the Act of 20 July 2018 on Higher Education and Science (PSWiN). Internships may constitute an element of the study programme, and their purpose is to enable the student to achieve defined learning outcomes in the areas of knowledge, skills, and social competences.

Pursuant to Article 67(1) PSWiN, studies are conducted in a specified field, at a specified level and profile, on the basis of a study programme that must indicate, among other things: what learning outcomes the student is to achieve, how the process of achieving those outcomes is structured, and how many ECTS credits are assigned to individual courses. Internships are one of the forms of instruction included in that programme. Their purpose is therefore not merely to “complete” a set number of hours, but to achieve and confirm specific learning outcomes that cannot be fully realised within university-based classes alone.

The learning outcomes designated for internships are detailed in syllabi, and the rules governing their completion are set out in internship regulations. The specific learning outcomes typically include:

- skills typical of the nature of the work (e.g. drafting administrative correspondence, operating specific IT systems, participating in design processes, performing basic diagnostic tasks);
- an understanding of how organisations function (structure, document flow, basic procedures);
- social competences such as teamwork, communication with clients, and adherence to professional ethics and internal regulations.

From the student’s perspective, it is important to make conscious use of these descriptions. It is worth comparing the outcomes listed in the documents with the actual scope of tasks performed during the internship, and to respond when the discrepancies are too great - for example by contacting the internship supervisor or the university coordinator. Internships are designed not only to “test oneself” in the role of a future employee, but above all to enable the student to obtain and formally confirm the learning outcomes defined in the study programme.

From the student’s perspective, internships also serve an informational and verifying function. They allow students to confront their ideas about a profession with actual working conditions, assess the utility of the knowledge acquired thus far, and identify areas requiring further development. Well-designed internships teach things that are difficult to describe unambiguously in a syllabus - such as coping with unpredictable situations, operating within a specific organisational culture, or inter-departmental collaboration in a complex organisational structure.

From a formal standpoint, internships are not a “break from learning” but an integral part of the educational process. Completion of the internships provided for in the study programme is one of the requirements for passing the academic year and one of the conditions for admission to the final examination (alongside completion of all other modules and fulfilment of other programme requirements).

The profile adopted for a field of study influences how the curriculum is constructed: the balance between theory and practice, the place of workshop-based classes, and whether professional internships are required by regulation or left to the university’s discretion. From the student’s perspective, this directly affects planning of the course of study and realistic expectations regarding internships.

Chapter II: General Academic Profile vs. Practical Profile

The profile adopted for a field of study determines how the emphasis is distributed between theoretical and practical instruction, and whether professional internships are a regulatory requirement or left to the university’s discretion. In the Polish higher education system, studies may be conducted on a general academic profile or a practical profile.

The most important differences between the two profiles can be summarised in the following table:

Element	General Academic Profile	Practical Profile
Link to research	Strong - programme based on preparation for academic activity	Moderate - emphasis on preparation for the labour market
Dominant type of instruction	Classes enabling preparation for academic work	Classes enabling the achievement of practical skills
ECTS distribution	More than 50% of ECTS credits from classes related to academic research	More than 50% of ECTS credits from classes developing practical skills
Professional internships	May be provided, but not mandatory	Mandatory, with a defined minimum total duration
Primary educational goal	In-depth knowledge, preparation for research/analytical work	Preparation for the labour market
Typical post-graduation paths	Research, expert work, further study	Direct employment in a specific profession or industry after graduation

Against this backdrop it is easier to determine which profile better matches individual plans. A student interested in academic, analytical or further educational paths (e.g. doctoral studies) will generally gravitate towards the general academic profile, which places greater emphasis on developing theoretical knowledge and research competences. A student focused on rapid entry into the labour market in a specific profession - such as public administration, management, IT or logistics - will more often choose the practical profile, in which practical classes and mandatory professional internships form a substantial part of the programme.

When making this decision, it is worth asking a few straightforward questions. They help to assess whether a given profile will match individual plans and learning styles:

- whether what matters more is deepening theoretical knowledge, participating in research, and the possible academic path (e.g. doctoral studies), or rather acquiring concrete skills that are immediately applicable on the labour market;
- whether one feels more comfortable in classes based on reading, analysis and discussion, or in those involving practical tasks, problem-solving, and project work;
- whether one is prepared to independently seek additional experience (internships, employment, volunteering) if the programme emphasises theory, or whether one prefers a significant portion of that component to be built into the programme itself through mandatory internships and workshop-based classes.

The answers to these questions need not immediately determine the choice of profile, but they help to better understand what to expect from studies in a given variant. If someone is closer to academic or analytical work, the general academic profile usually makes better use of such interests, whereas students focused primarily on preparation for a specific profession and on gaining experience during their studies will more naturally gravitate towards the practical profile, in which the extensive practical component and professional internships are an integral part of the programme.

Chapter III: Organisation, Course, and Formalities Associated with Internships

From the student's perspective, internships are not a single event but a process spread over time involving three parties: the university, the host organisation, and the student themselves. The quality of cooperation between them largely determines whether internships will be merely a formal obligation or a genuine learning experience in the working environment.

The university designs internships as an element of the study programme: it may increase their scope, specify their timing within the course of study, and determine what learning outcomes are to be achieved through them. At this level, decisions are made about how many hours of internship must be completed, at what stage of study, and what competences - knowledge, skills, and attitudes - are to be developed. The university also adopts internship regulations and prepares templates for the key documents: a placement letter, an agreement with the host organisation, an internship logbook, and an internship record card. In practice, this means the student should not independently "invent" a way of documenting the internship but should use the solutions described in the university's regulations and guidelines. The internship coordinator or supervisor within the department also plays an important role: they approve internship placements, answer questions, and ultimately sign off on the internship on the basis of the collected documentation.

The host organisation - a public office, school, company, non-governmental organisation or other institution - is not merely a "place to clock in hours" but a partner in the educational process. Its responsibilities include above all designating an internship supervisor who introduces the student to the specifics of the institution, assigns tasks, and monitors their completion. The supervisor is best placed to see whether the tasks assigned genuinely allow the student to develop the competences provided for in the study programme, or whether they amount merely to simple auxiliary work. The host organisation is also responsible for ensuring appropriate working conditions: health and safety training, information about the rules applicable within the institution, confidentiality requirements, and data protection. Well-designed cooperation makes the student a full participant in the life of the organisation - as far as possible engaged in tasks typical of the relevant profession.



The student is not a passive recipient in this arrangement but a co-creator of their own internship experience. Their responsibilities include familiarising themselves with the internship regulations, the course syllabus, and the rules applicable in the given location, then conscientiously performing the assigned tasks. This responsibility covers both observance of the work regulations and health and safety rules, and attention to documentation: systematically updating the internship logbook, obtaining the supervisor's signatures, and retaining certificates and other documents required by the university. An important element of this role is also responding to problematic situations - for example when the scope of tasks clearly deviates from what was set out in the syllabus, or when the way the intern is treated raises serious concerns. In such situations the student is entitled to contact the internship coordinator, the department authorities, the student union, or the student ombudsman, rather than accepting internships that do not fulfil their educational purpose.

The course of internships can - regardless of specific arrangements at individual universities - be described as a sequence of several stages. The first is a preparation stage in which the student checks the requirements for the internship (including the number of hours, permissible placements, completion deadlines) and selects a placement. This may be a placement proposed by the university or one found independently, subject to approval by the coordinator.

At some universities there is a possibility of completing professional internships abroad, for example under the Erasmus+ programme or other mobility schemes. The usual condition is that the planned tasks must be consistent with the learning outcomes specified for internships in a given field. Such a placement allows the student to observe how the industry operates in another country, to work in a different organisational environment, and to develop language and intercultural competences.

The choice of internship placement has, however, not only a substantive dimension but also a financial and logistical one. In many cases it entails the need for regular commuting to an institution located some distance from the university - such as a hospital, clinic, or other partner facility - without organised transport or reimbursement of travel costs. Applicable regulations do not impose a general obligation on universities to fund student travel to internships, which in practice means that these costs are largely borne by the student. From the perspective of the constitutional principle of equal access to education, as expressed in Article 70 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, high and recurring commuting costs for mandatory classes may in practice limit the ability of students in more difficult financial circumstances to participate fully in their education.

The next stage is the commencement of the internship, usually accompanied by completing the formalities: the university issues a placement letter and signs an agreement or contract with the host organisation specifying, among other things, the duration of the internship, the number of hours, and the general scope of tasks. Only on this basis are the internships treated as being carried out within the study programme.

The longest stage is implementation, during which the student performs the assigned tasks, gradually becomes familiar with how the institution operates, and confronts the knowledge acquired in classes with practice. During this time the student keeps an internship logbook - a document in which they describe the tasks performed, the number of hours worked, and sometimes reflections on the skills being acquired. The logbook serves a dual purpose: for the student it is a tool for organising their experience, while for the university it is the basis for assessing whether the internship allowed the intended learning outcomes to be achieved. The final stage is the sign-off on the internship, which consists of submitting the complete documentation to the appropriate university unit (e.g. the internship office, the dean's office, or the departmental coordinator): the internship logbook, a certificate or completion card signed by the institutional supervisor, and any additional documents provided for in the regulations.



On this basis the coordinator decides whether to sign off on the internship, often with an assigned grade, which appears in the record and affects the course of study.

The documents associated with internships can be regarded as a formal record of the entire process. In most universities they include at a minimum: a placement letter issued by the university (confirming the student's status and the nature of the internship); an agreement or contract between the university and the host organisation; an internship logbook; and a certificate or completion card signed by the supervisor and indicating the duration and period of the internship. Many regulations also include additional elements such as reports and feedback surveys, which help to organise the student's experience and provide the university with feedback on the quality of cooperation with host organisations. The most commonly encountered documents include:

- a placement letter, issued by the university and provided to the host organisation;
- an agreement or contract between the university and the institution (sometimes also a tripartite agreement - between the university, the institution, and the student) specifying the period, duration, and general scope of tasks;
- an internship logbook, in which the student records tasks performed and hours worked, and which the supervisor certifies;
- a certificate or internship completion card, bearing the supervisor's signature and indicating the hours completed and an assessment of the internship;
- where required by some universities, an internship report and evaluation questionnaire as a supplement to the documentation.

From the student's perspective, these documents are more than a formal requirement. They organise the course of the internship, prompt reflection on the tasks performed, and allow them to be compared with the learning outcomes specified in the study programme. For the university they are the basis for signing off on the internship and a source of information about whether cooperation with a given organisation genuinely supports the educational process or requires changes in future years.

Chapter IV: How to Choose an Internship Placement?

Choosing an internship placement is one of the key moments in planning one's course of study, because in practice it determines what picture of the profession the student will take away from the university. It is also a good opportunity to see at first hand what work in a particular setting actually looks like.

The primary source of information about potential internship placements is the university itself: placement databases maintained by departmental supervisors or careers offices, and announcements addressed specifically to students of a given faculty. However, other channels are equally important and can be used in parallel. In practice it is worth drawing on several sources:

- internal university databases and lists of institutions with which placement agreements have been signed;
- independent searches by sending CVs and messages to selected institutions or companies;
- personal contacts - recommendations from acquaintances, graduates, or lecturers who cooperate with a given organisation;
- publicly available internship and traineeship portals, and careers fairs organised by the university or in the region.



The mere fact of finding an offer does not yet mean the placement will be good from the perspective of the study programme. When making a choice it is worth checking several elements that determine whether the internship will have genuine educational value:

- the match between the institution's profile and the student's field and specialisation;
- the match between the planned scope of tasks and the learning outcomes assigned to the internship - a good habit is to bring the syllabus or the description of outcomes to the interview and to discuss them with the potential supervisor;
- the possibility of designating an internship supervisor on the institution's side who will genuinely oversee the work and sign the documentation;
- logistical considerations: location, commuting, working hours, the possibility of combining the internship with university classes, potential remote or hybrid working;
- financial conditions - including information on whether the internship is paid or unpaid and whether it entails any additional costs for the student.

A well-chosen internship placement allows the student not only to complete the minimum number of hours required by the programme, but above all to test in practice how they perform in a specific professional role, team, and organisational culture. This transforms internships from a one-off obligation into a stage in the conscious building of one's own career path, already during the course of study.

Chapter V: Recognition of Professional Employment as an Internship

Pursuant to Article 67(7) of the Act on Higher Education and Science, a university may - at the student's request - recognise activities performed in the context of employment, a traineeship, or volunteering as counting towards the professional internship, provided they enabled the student to achieve the learning outcomes specified in the study programme for internships. The detailed rules (deadlines, required documents, decision-making procedure) are set out in the study regulations and internship regulations of individual universities, so the first step should be to check what arrangements have been adopted in the relevant field.

In practice, universities focus primarily on three elements:

- the connection between the duties performed and the student's field and specialisation;
- the possibility of linking specific tasks to the learning outcomes assigned to the internship;
- an appropriate working time, usually no shorter than the minimum internship duration specified in the study programme, or at least comparable to it.

If the work consists mainly of simple auxiliary tasks unrelated to the field of study, the university may conclude that it does not fulfil the purpose of an internship, even if it formally falls within the broadly understood "industry".

The procedure for applying for recognition of professional employment as an internship is generally multi-stage and follows a similar pattern at many universities:

- the student submits an application to the dean, the internship coordinator, or another designated person, specifying the period of work to be recognised;
- the application is accompanied by a certificate of employment or other form of activity (position, period, working hours);
- a description of duties is provided, together with - often - a supervisor's opinion on the competences acquired;



- a brief report or reflective statement is prepared in which the student demonstrates how the tasks performed related to the learning outcomes specified for the internship;
- the university decides on full recognition of the work, partial recognition for a certain number of hours, or refusal, with the caveat that each case is assessed individually.

Against the background of these general rules, the typical limitations become clear: work entirely unrelated to the field of study, too short a period of employment, or a lack of documents enabling an assessment of the actual learning outcomes are the most common reasons for refusing to recognise employment as an internship. It is therefore advisable, if the intention from the outset is that a particular job should eventually be recognised as an internship, to ensure - at the stage of taking up employment - an appropriate scope of duties, a complete set of documents, and prior consultation with the internship coordinator.

Chapter VI: Standardised Fields

In the Polish higher education system there is a group of fields for which the study programme - including practical training - is determined not only by the university but also by national educational standards. Pursuant to Article 68 of the Act on Higher Education and Science this applies in particular to fields that prepare students for regulated professions, such as:

- medicine and dentistry;
- pharmacy, nursing, midwifery, physiotherapy, emergency medical services, veterinary medicine;
- architecture;
- programmes preparing students to practice as teachers.

In these fields the educational standards describe the course of internships in very precise terms. They specify the minimum number of hours of practical classes and professional internships, the typical placement settings (e.g. hospital wards, educational establishments, design offices), the types of tasks to be assigned, and the learning outcomes that must be achieved before a graduate can apply for the right to practise the profession. In comparison with “non-standardised” fields, this means less flexibility for the university in shaping internships - their duration cannot be freely shortened or substituted with other activities, and any modifications must fall within the framework set by the standard.

In the field of architecture, the study programme is shaped taking into account the requirements arising from the regulation on studies and, in the case of universities implementing the educational standard for the architecture profession, also the requirements set out in separate regulations. In accordance with the regulation on studies, architecture may be offered as integrated master’s studies, though this is not the only permissible form. The educational standard for the architecture profession then specifies minimum requirements for practical training - including the types of internships and their minimum duration. The learning outcomes specified for each internship are formulated in the study programme of a given university with reference to those requirements. In practice this means that students must be given the opportunity to participate in design work and in spatial development processes, so that the learning outcomes defined in the study programme can be achieved. Completing internships in accordance with the requirements of the standard is one of the conditions for completing the programme and obtaining a diploma that entitles the graduate to apply for membership of the architects’ professional body.

In the case of programmes preparing students for the teaching profession, the educational standard covers both requirements relating to programme content and pedagogical internships. It provides for a specified minimum duration of internships in schools and other educational



establishments and indicates that these should include observation of classes, co-teaching and gradual assumption of responsibility for independent teaching, as well as participation in other tasks of a teacher, such as contacts with parents and pastoral work. Completing these internships is one of the conditions for obtaining teaching qualifications.

For students in standardised fields, internships therefore mean less flexibility but greater predictability. Study programmes and internship regulations refer directly to standards and - in the case of regulated professions - to the relevant acts and regulations specifying the conditions of access to the profession. At the same time, this provides greater certainty that the internships completed will be recognised when applying for the right to practise the profession, professional licences, or admission to state examinations concluding the educational pathway.

Chapter VII: Professional Internships in Medical Fields

Professional internships in medical fields occupy a special place in study programmes because they are directly linked to patient safety and the quality of care provided. Although formally still a student learning a profession, the student operates in an environment where the consequences of error are real. This applies not only to the medical dimension but also to patients' rights, including the right to privacy and to confidentiality of health-related information. For this reason, practical training in healthcare cannot be treated as a formal obligation reduced to completing a required number of hours. Its purpose is to enable the achievement of specific learning outcomes and to verify whether academic knowledge translates into safe action in clinical conditions.

In practice, several features can be identified that distinguish practical training in the medical professions from many other areas of study. First, the internship takes place in conditions of heightened risk and therefore requires supervision and clear limits on student autonomy. Second, the internship is not solely about technical tasks, but also about communicating with patients, working in a therapeutic team, maintaining documentation, and functioning within the organisation providing services. Third, the internship is a place for developing professional attitudes, understood as responsibility, discretion, respect for patients' rights, and awareness of one's own limitations and the need to seek consultation in difficult situations.

In common usage, "medical fields" refers to a broad group of programmes related to health, care, diagnostics, and therapy. From the perspective of organising internships, however, it is worth distinguishing between fields related to health in a broad sense and standardised fields. In the first group, the scope and form of internships result primarily from the study programme designed by the university and from local arrangements, such as cooperation with specific facilities or the practical training traditions of a given institution. In the second group are fields for which national educational standards have been established. In such cases the basic parameters of internships are laid down in regulations, and the university has limited discretion in shortening them, substituting them with other activities, or freely rescheduling them.

The significance of standardised fields lies in the fact that the internship within them is a programme element defined externally to the university. The standards set minimum requirements for training, often explicitly specifying the minimum number of hours, the number of ECTS credits, and the study profile. This arrangement is a guarantee mechanism, as it aims to ensure that graduates of a given profession acquire comparable practical preparation regardless of where they study. At the same time, the mere existence of standards does not determine the quality of internships. The fact that an internship is required does not yet mean it is carried out in a manner leading to the achievement of the learning outcomes specified in the study programme. From an educational standpoint, what is crucial is whether the student has the opportunity to perform tasks appropriate to their stage of learning, whether they receive



feedback, and whether the course of the internship allows genuine verification of learning outcomes.

At this point it is useful to refer to specific examples, because they show how the standards organise the relationship between theory and practice. In the medical field, the educational standard provides for integrated master's studies lasting 12 semesters, on a general academic profile, with a minimum of 5,700 hours of instruction (including professional internships) and at least 360 ECTS credits. At the same time, the standard specifies a minimum of 600 hours of professional internships, to which 20 ECTS credits are assigned. In practice this means that professional internships constitute a distinct, mandatory programme component whose completion should lead to the achievement of specific learning outcomes, not merely a formal confirmation of attendance at the facility.

In the case of dentistry, the standard provides for a 10-semester programme, also on a general academic profile, comprising at least 5,000 hours of instruction and at least 300 ECTS credits. A minimum of 480 hours of professional internships is also stipulated, to which 16 ECTS credits are assigned. These parameters alone show that in these fields the internship is one of the primary programme components serving the achievement of learning outcomes. This also has organisational implications, as it limits the possibility of freely shortening internships or substituting them with other forms of activity that do not involve engagement with real clinical tasks.

In nursing, a different organisational emphasis is visible. The standard for first-cycle studies provides for at least 4,720 hours and 180 ECTS credits, and simultaneously specifies a practical study profile. In practice this means that a substantial proportion of ECTS credits must be assigned to classes developing practical skills, and the standard sets a threshold of "more than 50%" of ECTS credits in this regard. The nursing standard also explicitly specifies the duration of professional internships: at first-cycle level professional internships encompass 1,200 hours and 46 ECTS credits. For second-cycle studies, professional internships of 200 hours are provided for, to which 10 ECTS credits are assigned. From the perspective of the study programme, this shows that internships in nursing constitute one of the main elements of the educational process leading to the achievement of learning outcomes, and their role is not limited to a supplementary function relative to theoretical classes.

The nursing standard also includes detailed organisational requirements concerning the conditions of practical training, including group sizes during practical classes and professional internships. From the standpoint of educational quality this is not a secondary matter, as group sizes affect the possibility of performing tasks and the level of supervision over the student.

In recent years, standards have been increasingly systematising the relationship between instruction in clinical conditions and instruction in simulated conditions. Simulation does not replace contact with patients, but allows skills to be practised in controlled conditions before the student is allowed to perform tasks in a clinical environment. Amendments to the standards clarify that a specified portion of classes may take place in simulated conditions in a range of 5% to 15% of the hours (depending on the type of instruction). From the perspective of organising internships, this creates a need to ensure not only access to a clinical base, but also appropriate teaching conditions on the university's side (skills laboratories, simulation centres, simulated patients) and a mode of instruction that gives the student the opportunity to perform and repeat tasks with feedback.

The standards also show that practical training in the medical professions is not of a reproductive character. In medical education, for example, the ability to use medical databases, to interpret information needed to solve clinical problems, and to assess the quality of scientific evidence is emphasised. Communicative and teamwork elements are also being reinforced. In



practice this means that the student is to acquire competences enabling safe action in real conditions, not merely technical proficiency. Assessment tools for competences are associated with this approach. In medical education, the OSCE examination has been introduced as a means of verifying the skills achieved in the course of the entire educational process.

The example of dentistry clearly illustrates the logic of the gradual progression of practical training. Practical training typically proceeds from pre-clinical instruction, in which the student develops manual techniques, ergonomics, asepsis and antisepsis principles, and performs tasks in controlled conditions, to clinical teaching with a patient under supervision. In dentistry it is clear that manual dexterity is necessary but not sufficient. Every task requires an understanding of indications and contraindications, risk assessment, work with documentation, and responsible communication with the patient. Recent updates to the standards also incorporate elements of modernising practice, including the introduction of digital dentistry solutions in the area of planning and conducting treatment.

Internship placements correspond to the future working environment. Depending on the field, these include hospitals, wards and clinics, primary healthcare, diagnostic laboratories, emergency medical services, and pharmacies. In addition to the placement itself, the supervision model and the gradual increase in autonomy are crucial. Students should not act “on their own initiative”. Tasks should be performed under the direction of authorised persons, and the scope of assigned tasks must correspond to the stage of training. In this area the organisation of instruction, including group sizes, is particularly significant, as it affects the genuine possibility of practising skills and the level of safety.

The second pillar of internship organisation is the documentation of progress. The internship logbook, competence record, or other tools should not be purely formal in character. Their purpose is to show what tasks the student carried out, what skills were mastered, and where gaps requiring further training exist. Documentation is also of evidential significance, and in some professions is an element in confirming fulfilment of the requirements laid down for subsequent stages of the professional pathway.

A good example is pharmacy, where the professional internship in a pharmacy is described in detail in the regulations. Its framework programme, method of documentation, and duration are specified. From the student’s perspective, this means that the internship has not only an educational dimension but also a formal one, linked to entry into the profession. The regulations state that the internship lasts 6 months and encompasses 960 teaching hours, is carried out in a community or hospital pharmacy, and constitutes a mandatory element of the pharmacy study programme. In practice, confirmation of the course of the internship and the tasks performed is significant not only for the sign-off but also for demonstrating the acquisition of professional competences.

The student comes into contact with health information subject to special protection. In conjunction with the patient’s right to confidentiality of information and the obligation of professional secrecy, this means that the internship also develops competences relating to confidentiality, discretion, and the proper handling of documentation. It is precisely during the internship that the student learns that confidentiality applies not only to the relationship with the patient but also to the way in which documentation is handled and conduct in the clinical environment.

The most valuable medical internships develop a set of competences that are difficult to cultivate in purely academic conditions. These encompass technical and procedural skills, clinical reasoning and diagnostic elements, communication with patients and families, teamwork in a therapeutic setting, ethical attitudes, and the ability to draw on current knowledge. The internship should lead the student not merely to perform tasks but to

understand their purpose, to be able to assess risk, to know the limits of their own competences, and to be able to draw on team support.

From the perspective of educational quality, feedback is particularly important. Mere presence in a facility does not guarantee the development of skills if the student is not assigned tasks, is unable to repeat procedures, and does not participate in case discussions. The organisational arrangements that strengthen the role of supervisors, limit group sizes, and introduce competence-assessment tools are therefore significant. In practice, this represents a shift in emphasis from a model of “completing an internship” to a model of “implementing an internship”, understood as a process of learning and competence verification.

The discussion about internships in medical fields also has a systemic dimension, as it is linked to the model of entry into the profession. The post-graduate internship for doctors and dentists functions as an element of professional preparation, regulated by law and described by the Ministry of Health. Proposals for changes to the internship model periodically emerge in public debate. Regardless of the direction of any potential reform, the implication for educational quality is similar: the greater the proportion of preparation for safe practice that is to be carried out during the course of study, the greater the importance of the genuine content of student internships and consistent competence verification, rather than merely formal certification of attendance.

The conclusions for the organisation of internships can be expressed in several questions that are helpful for both universities and students. Does the student know what learning outcomes are to be achieved and what tasks are associated with them? Is there genuine supervision and the possibility of feedback? Does the student have the opportunity to repeat tasks in a way that builds competence, both in simulation and in clinical conditions? Does the documentation of the internship reflect real tasks and allow gaps to be identified? Does the internship consistently teach confidentiality and respect for patients' rights from the very first contact with documentation and conversation? If the answer to these questions is negative, the problem is not an individual student problem but a problem of educational quality. If the answer is positive, the internship becomes one of the most formative elements of the degree programme. In medical fields theory and practice are not in competition. Practice is the application of knowledge, and knowledge is an instrument of safety and quality.

Chapter VIII: Professional Internships in Uniformed Services Fields

Professional internships in fields related to state security, armed formations, and the broadly understood maintenance of public order are something far more than a few weeks pencilled into the academic calendar. They are a pivotal moment and the first genuine encounter with a very specific, often insular working environment that may seem incomprehensible to an outsider. Internships in uniformed services fields mean entering an area where every mistake - even one arising from inattention when filling in documentation - carries real legal consequences. Here there is no room for “it seems to me” - every action, from checking identification to securing a scene, must be firmly grounded in a specific legal basis. For this reason, internships in uniformed services fields are not an ordinary “sign-off” but a key stage of adaptation to life in service, where discipline and rigid procedures always take precedence over individual improvisation.

The key to understanding the specific character of these internships is the recognition that the Polish higher education system in this area operates in two clearly distinct models. There are civilian fields conducted by traditional universities, and there are uniformed-service universities, colloquially known as ministerial universities. The latter include, among others, the Police Academy in Szczytno, the Main School of Fire Service, the Academy of Justice, the



Border Guard University, and military universities such as the General Tadeusz Kościuszko Military Academy of Land Forces, the Military University of Technology, the Air Force Academy, and the Polish Naval Academy. At civilian universities, students complete internships in order to test whether work in a given institution suits them. Students at officer schools have already made that choice. Such internships are not an exercise in “observing” others’ work but a formalised system of vocational training that is inseparable from the officer programme and the daily tasks typical of the chosen service.

What for a civilian student is a free choice of internship placement is, for uniformed-service students, an order or a posting to a specific territorial unit. The role of these postings in preparing students for work in hierarchical structures is enormous. The uniformed services are based on a clear chain of command, which to many outside observers may seem rigid or even overwhelming. The internship teaches the most important lesson, however: understanding the “chain of command”. The uniformed-service student learns to accept the fact that in this system, the superior’s order and the applicable regulations take precedence over personal assessment of the situation. It is precisely in the unit, on the so-called “front line”, that students discover that teamwork in the Police, Border Guard, or military is not an empty slogan from a recruitment brochure but an absolute necessity arising from the need to ensure one’s own safety and that of fellow patrol members. Every aspect of their conduct - from punctuality, through a neat appearance, to the manner of addressing superior officers - is assessed on an equal footing with substantive knowledge.

Being a uniformed-service student on internship carries enormous ethical responsibility. One must be aware that every act of conduct, even outside working hours, reflects on the image of the entire service in the eyes of the public. Moreover, in contrast to civilian interns, they are subject to a continuous appraisal system. Every year, superior officers issue assessments that directly affect the students’ future careers. A good assessment represents an opportunity for promotion, additional passes, or better service conditions. A bad assessment may, on the other hand, mean the end of a uniformed career and the requirement to repay training costs. This means that every task is approached with maximum concentration, in the knowledge that one is being observed not only by a lecturer but above all by a future superior.

Another aspect that entirely differentiates uniformed-service students from students of civilian fields is the question of access to information and legal responsibility. On entering the unit, from the very first day they encounter sensitive data, details of ongoing proceedings, and other service secrets. There is no question of accidental access. At the very beginning of their professional journey they undergo briefings on the protection of classified information and data protection legislation. Most are required to undergo a complex vetting procedure in order to obtain a security clearance. Without this document they could not only not complete their internship but could not perform service at all.

The organisation of internships itself is a process in which three forces come into play: the university’s educational requirements, substantive supervision within the unit, and the current needs of the service. Depending on the service, these experiences look different. A student officer of the Police Academy or the Border Guard University completes internships in home units, often in the very place where they will subsequently serve after their commissioning. Importantly, after completing the required stages of basic training they may perform specified service tasks under the supervision of a designated supervisor, within the scope provided for by the internship programme. This means that during the internship they do not stand on the sidelines but actually carry out assigned tasks, conduct operations, check identification, and fill in procedural documentation. The internships are therefore a genuine test of what they learned within the walls of the university, and an examination of their stress tolerance and their ability to cope with unpredictable situations.



Students during internships in territorial units spend on average around 1,000 hours there. This is an enormous amount of time, which allows in-depth acquaintance with the specifics of service in various branches - from prevention, through investigative and detective units, to administrative and logistical tasks. This large number of hours proceeds from the assumption that an officer must know service “inside out”. One cannot command people without knowing what their daily work at a post or border crossing looks like. This intensity allows the development of so-called procedural memory, because certain tasks must be performed reflexively and flawlessly, in strict accordance with the law.

Signing off on the internships is a further stage of bureaucratic and substantive verification. Students must demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes provided for in the course programme and syllabus, that they are able to draw up a protocol, operate the service’s IT systems, or properly secure a scene. This systematic approach guarantees that the person leaving the walls of the university with officer’s stars on their epaulettes is genuinely prepared to assume responsibility for the people under their command and for the tasks to be carried out. It is also worth mentioning how internships affect students’ futures. Although as uniformed-service students they already have guaranteed employment, the course of their internships and the assessments they earn determine future service assignments. Internships also offer an opportunity to build authority among future subordinates. If, as officer cadets, they demonstrate that they are not afraid to take initiative, know the procedures, and show respect for more senior officers, their start in the role of commander or manager will be considerably easier.

In summary, internships in uniformed services fields are a process requiring great maturity and, paradoxically as it may sound, humility towards the institution. Their greatest value lies not in the spectacular actions sometimes seen in films but in understanding the mechanisms of state operation. It is a time during which students learn that being an officer is not merely the privilege of wearing a uniform but above all the obligation to serve the public interest in accordance with the oath sworn. If these several weeks in territorial units teach respect for hierarchy, precision in action, and responsibility for every word spoken and every document signed, it means the goal has been achieved. Students emerge from these internships not only as better students but above all as professionally formed officers, ready for the challenges that the security of the modern world places before us. This is the foundation on which they build their professional identity, mindful that in their work the margin for error is almost zero.

Chapter IX: Student Rights During Internships

A student completing an internship remains above all a student, not a full employee of the institution. They participate in a real working environment but perform tasks within the educational process and under the supervision of persons responsible for their training, not on their own independent professional responsibility. Internships are not a “grey zone”: they are governed by specific rules relating to safety, work organisation, the scope of tasks assigned, and how students are treated. In practice this translates into a series of specific rights, some concerning working conditions and some concerning the limits of the student’s responsibility and competence.

First, the student is entitled to safe and hygienic conditions for completing the internship, including health and safety training and information about the hazards present in a given location. They also have the right to know who their supervisor is on the institution’s side, what the internship programme is, and what tasks they will perform, before formally commencing. The employer or host organisation should present the rules applicable in the internship setting - relating to, among other things, working hours, procedures, confidentiality and data protection - in a clear and comprehensible manner.



The right to safe conditions also includes the provision of necessary personal protective equipment - such as gloves, masks, a coat, or protective footwear - wherever these are standard practice. In the case of practical classes organised by the university, it is the university that should ensure they are provided to students on the same terms as to its own teaching staff. In the case of professional internships carried out in external organisations, the obligation to provide personal protective equipment falls on the host institution as the organiser of work in that setting.

Second, the student is entitled to basic guarantees relating to working hours. Even if the internship is not a standard employment relationship, it cannot involve an unlimited number of hours without rest. It is accepted that the weekly time spent working within the internship should not exceed the maximum limits applicable to employees, and the intern is entitled to daily and weekly rest and to a break during the day when the internship lasts a sufficient length of time. For many students, the question of the internship's unpaid character is also important - if the internship is conducted on the basis of a university agreement as a programme element, it may be unpaid, but this cannot justify a violation of minimum protective standards.

It is worth adding that the unpaid character of an internship means an absence of remuneration for the student, not a transfer of the costs of organising the internship onto the student's shoulders. The host organisation has no right to charge the student fees for the opportunity to complete the internship, to have the logbook signed, or to receive a certificate - such practices, though still encountered, are contrary to the very nature of the cooperation between the university and the host organisation, which is to be a partner in the educational process, not an entity "selling" access to internships.

Third, the student is entitled to respect for their dignity, protection of their personal rights, and equal treatment. This means a prohibition of discrimination on any ground, a prohibition of mobbing, harassment, and other forms of psychological or physical violence. If violations occur during the internship - such as humiliating comments, unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, harassment, or isolation - the student can and should treat these as violations of their rights, not as a "normal part of gaining experience".

An important aspect of the legal situation of a student on internship is also the limits of their competences and responsibility. The scope of tasks that may be assigned to a student should derive from the study programme and the learning outcomes specified for the internship, and in the case of regulated professions - also from the relevant educational standards and sector-specific regulations. A student should not be required to perform tasks that go beyond their training and anticipated competences, especially if these carry a risk to the health or safety of others. In the event of pressure to perform tasks reserved for fully qualified professionals, the student is entitled to refuse, citing the internship programme and safety rules, and thereafter to report the problem to the internship coordinator or the department authorities. Responsibility for the proper organisation of work, supervision of the intern, and assigning them appropriate tasks rests primarily with the host organisation and the designated internship supervisor.

An important element of the rights of a student completing an internship relates to documentation and sign-off. The student is entitled to maintain an internship logbook in accordance with the university's template, to obtain signatures and confirmations from the supervisor on an ongoing basis, and to expect their tasks to be faithfully reflected in certificates and assessments. A refusal to sign the logbook or to issue a certificate should have a substantive justification (e.g. tasks genuinely not completed), not arise from personal conflict or aversion to students. If the internship was actually completed in accordance with the agreed programme, the student may demand that this be reflected in the documentation, and in the event of problems may turn to the university for assistance.



In the event of difficulties or a violation of rights, the student is not left alone. The first step is usually an attempt to clarify the situation at the internship location - a calm conversation with the supervisor, invoking the internship programme and the university agreement. If this produces no results, the student may report the problem to the internship coordinator, the departmental supervisor, the internship office, or other persons designated in the regulations. Many universities also have a student ombudsman and a student union, which assist in conflict situations, participate in mediations with university authorities or the host institution, and provide support in pursuing rights in the event of more serious violations. In extreme cases - for example in the event of serious breaches of safety or dignity - it is possible to discontinue the internship at a given location and find an alternative form of completion, without placing responsibility for that decision solely on the student.

Conclusion

Professional internships are a moment at which the abstract provisions of the study programme meet the concrete reality of institutions, companies, and offices. The quality of this encounter largely determines whether the degree programme will prove genuine preparation for work or merely a sequence of pass marks and examinations. Well-designed internships allow students to test in practice their ideas about the profession, to verify their existing educational choices, and to plan their next steps more effectively - from the choice of specialisation through to their first job and potential further study.

From the perspective of the higher education system, internships are a space of shared responsibility. The university bears responsibility for ensuring that internships are designed to enable the achievement of the learning outcomes specified in the study programme, and that their actual course corresponds to the stated assumptions. The host organisation - for treating the student as someone learning a profession, not merely as additional hands for the work; the student themselves - for consciously choosing an internship placement, attending to documentation, and responding when internships deviate from their educational function. This is of particular importance in standardised fields and in situations where internships are signed off on the basis of professional employment - there, formal frameworks and documentation requirements become crucial for subsequent professional qualifications.

Internships can also be a site of tensions: between expectations and the realities of the labour market, between the need to learn and the immediate interests of the institution, between the provisions of regulations and everyday practice. For this reason, awareness of the rights one holds, the available support pathways, and the role of the student union and the student ombudsman - at both university and national level - is so important. The better a student knows these mechanisms, the more easily they can use the internship as a tool for development rather than merely an obligation to be discharged.

Ultimately, professional internships are not an end in themselves but a means: they are intended to help build a bridge between the course of study and the future professional pathway. Making conscious use of the opportunities they offer - from the choice of placement, through negotiating the scope of tasks, to using the experience gained in subsequent applications - transforms them into one of the most formative elements of a degree programme, rather than merely a compulsory stop on the road to a diploma.



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