

Paid Internship Program

Information for prospective host agencies

A key challenge for the child and family services sector has been to ensure the supply of an adequate, appropriately skilled and trained workforce to meet the challenge of complex service delivery. For regional and rural areas there is the additional need to attract and retain 'local' talent. This is particularly important at a time of rapid reform when workers might need to be upskilled to respond appropriately to new demands. A report produced by the Future Social Service Institute (FSSI) 2018¹ indicates that over the next five years health and social services jobs in Victoria are set to grow by 60,000. This will place further pressure on an already stretched system to attract, develop and retain a highly qualified and skilled workforce for the community services sector.

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) was funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to implement several workforce initiatives from the Child and Family Services Industry Plan 2018–21. A key initiative of the plan was exploring opportunities to attract new workers to the sector by developing a paid internship program.

The Paid Internship Program aims to provide a much-needed alternative model of social work field education (FE), enabling students to graduate workforce-ready when they enter the child and family services sector. Organisations benefit by having access to the services of a capable intern who fits their selection criteria, and a potential pipeline of a known professional if a vacancy arises subsequently.

The following document provides responses to some frequently asked questions.

Q: How is the internship structured?

The paid internship program essentially comprises two components: part-time employment (paid) and Field Education placement (unpaid). In order to comply with AASW [Guidance on Field Education Programs](#), students can complete their placement within the same agency where they are employed, but the two positions must be within separate program areas and report to separate line managers. The agency's usual onboarding and employment policies apply, and the usual structure and requirements of the FE are the same as any other FE placement.

Q: How long is the internship?

Immersing the intern within an agency for longer than required by their FE unit provides greater opportunity to network and gain knowledge within the sector, and increased confidence at applying classroom learning to direct practice with service users. Internships that run for the better part of a year help to alleviate financial stress for students in their final year of their course. To receive the full benefits of the program, internships should run for 9-11 months¹. The exact length of any internship agreement is flexible and is to be negotiated between agency and intern prior to the intern starting.

Q: How are interns recruited?

The Centre will support host agencies with administrative tasks involved with recruiting applicants. The Centre has supporting documentation including position description template, written application form and suggested interview questions. The Centre will distribute the position description to Victorian universities and can support the agency to screen and interview candidates.

¹ Any remaining internships in 2021 should aim to run for at least 6 months

Students entering their final year of a social work qualification will apply via their university FE coordinator, who facilitates this process by collaborating in assessing applications and ensuring candidates' compliance with ASWEAS requirements.

Applications are assessed by a panel including the host agency, the university and Centre staff. The host agency has the final say in whether a candidate is successful in their application, and will then carry out their usual Human Resources practices of inducting a new team member.

Q. Who provides supervision?

During FE placement days, the expectation is that a student receives professional supervision from a suitably qualified social worker within the host agency. However, if this is not possible, the university may be able to provide external supervision for the period of the field placement.

Throughout the period of the internship the intern is not required to have specific Social Work supervision but they should be supervised as per the policy within the host organisation.

Q. How is intern performance managed?

Whilst underperformance within a FE placement would always be a point of discussion between a host agency and the University, the same does not exist for a paid employee, as the employment sits outside of the responsibility of the University. However, it is proposed that the employment and FE placement are a 'packaged' opportunity with explicit statement in the employment contract that any information of concern/performance management will be shared between the employer, host agency and University as required. As an employee of the organisation, the intern is subject to the same conditions and codes of conduct as any employee. Usual workplace employment conditions apply, including probationary periods, performance reviews etc.

Any illness or absence during FE requires additional days to be added and the host agency will need to have the student fulfil the total 70 days, extending the placement potentially beyond the length of the original contract. This need not impact on the employment conditions of the Internship, however, any future offer of ongoing employment with an agency must allow the student to complete their placement days.

Q. How is the intern remunerated?

Host agencies provide funding for the intern's remuneration. The award rate should reflect the professional nature of the appointment, which is attractive to applicants, but also recognises that they are not yet fully qualified. Given that the interns have not yet completed their Social Work qualification, we suggest that the appropriate pay structure for a 3-year degree applicant would be appropriate. This means that at a minimum, interns should be paid at a rate equivalent to SCHADS Level 2 Paypoint 1 which is equal to \$28.41 an hour. Please contact Centre staff for some examples of indicative costs associated with an internship.

Q: Can we hire the intern at the end of the program?

The paid internship offered by the organisation is for a time-limited contract with no guarantee to students of ongoing employment. As part of the workforce strategy we would hope to be able to offer ongoing employment however it is ultimately at the discretion of the organisation whether there is an ongoing option. We cannot 'bond' an intern beyond that time if they choose to leave, hence attempts to minimise this as part of the initial selection process looking for students interested in working in the local area long term.

Any future contracts between the host agency and intern are to be negotiated directly and do not involve ongoing input or support from the university or the Centre.

For further information about how you can participate in the paid internship program, please email Karalyn.davies@cfecfw.asn.au