

THE POWER OF INTERNSHIP

...AN EXCELLENT WAY TO EXCELLENCE



INTRODUCTION

A conservation-restoration internship is a finite but substantial period of specialized work-based training, in which the intern works individually to achieve agreed learning goals with a tutor who is an experienced professional in the area of this learning.

Internships as **learning opportunities** are widely used in the conservation profession. Before the emergence of formal conservation programmes, working alongside more experienced colleagues was indeed the only way to acquire skills and knowledge to practice conservation of cultural heritage.

In recent decades, both national and international bodies have addressed many issues related to the **development of conservator-restorers**. It has now become clearer that practitioners need specific opportunities to learn professional skills. These are the skills needed to use academic knowledge and practical skills learnt in a formal education programme in the 'real world of conservation'. They are also the skills needed by those already practicing in the field to update their work or to broaden their expertise. It is now accepted that these professional skills can only be obtained effectively during planned work-based learning, that is, through internships. Internships today are undertaken either as part of a degree programme, or as a stepping stone from a programme to a job, or as part of a conservator's continuing professional development. Formal academic education and internships cannot be considered as alternatives; they are complementary and essential parts of the **learning and development of a professional conservator**.

In the best cases, an internship can be a **life-transforming experience**, marking the **professional identity and approach** of the intern for years to come; in the worst of cases, an internship can result in a frustrating and expensive period of time spent drifting or feeling exploited. Such experiences also leave hosting colleagues with a dispiriting sense of a waste of time and effort for everybody.

While potential interns are usually eager to undertake an internship, institutions can be hesitant to take interns, believing that the benefits will not justify the investment of resources required. Conservation staff can also be reluctant to get involved, afraid of an additional unrewarding and irritating workload, or feeling they lack the necessary teaching skills. This leaflet aims to show how **ALL those concerned with an internship can benefit**, and how these **benefits can be best realised**. **If this results in more successful internships**, the whole profession and practice of conservation will benefit.



THE INSTITUTION

“Institution” is a general term used here for the organisation or employer that either sends or hosts an “intern”. Institutions can range from large museums to research labs or private workshops. An educational programme may be a ‘sending’ institution. An institution may both send and host the same intern across departments within its organisation.

Setting up an internship programme offers both the sending and host institution an opportunity to ...

- ▶ Assess its strengths and weaknesses: what can we offer? What areas would we like to see strengthened?
- ▶ Diversify the professionalism in the institution
- ▶ Highlight professional development as an institutional priority
- ▶ Network: create and strengthen links between institutions, including funding agencies and professional bodies, and conservators working in them
- ▶ Target resources
- ▶ Hone the institutional identity and raise its profile
- ▶ Motivate and increase the capability of staff by recognizing their potential as tutors or encouraging them to undertake internships

A successful internship happens where the institution:

- ▶ has staff development at its heart
- ▶ understands that internships help this development, and creates a coherent programme for both hosting and sending interns
- ▶ understands that internships need commitment, forward planning, resources, and evaluation and that interns are not just ‘free pairs of hands’
- ▶ provides interns with appropriate opportunities, space, materials, welcome, integration, personal/social care
- ▶ supports staff to become tutors with encouragement, training, time, and other necessary resources.

THE INTERN



The central character of the internship is, of course, the intern. Internships can be for anyone – you do not have to be a student or a graduate professional, nor do you have to be young! The key qualification is a keen interest in learning something new by working alongside others in a new environment.

An internship offers an opportunity to...

- ▶ Assess your professional strengths and weaknesses, your education/training so far, and how you want to develop professionally
- ▶ Increase and refresh your professional skills in the areas that you have identified as being important to you, and where formal training is either inappropriate or is not available
- ▶ Concentrate on an identified area more efficiently than your normal schedule allows for
- ▶ Strengthen and diversify your practical skills while working as a member of the professional community
- ▶ Uncover the connections between theoretical knowledge and the real world
- ▶ Develop your professional skills in alternative learning situations and contexts
- ▶ Enhance your investigative spirit, teamwork abilities, creativity and decision-making
- ▶ Discover your own capacities and find satisfaction in sharing your experiences with colleagues
- ▶ Make contacts with institutions and professionals that will form an important long-term network

A successful internship happens where the Intern:

- ▶ First analyses what it is they want from an internship
- ▶ Finds out if the institution and tutor can offer this, and what financial and other resources they will need
- ▶ Gives the institution an honest description of their abilities, limitations, and learning goals
- ▶ Ensures they have truly adequate funding to allow them to commit fully to the internship
- ▶ Respects the institution's culture and what it is offering
- ▶ Has a participatory, creative, adaptable, proactive and open attitude towards the work, is willing to accept constructive criticism, and seek out opportunities
- ▶ Acknowledges and reports back to the institutions (original / hosting / sponsoring / funding) that enabled the internship
- ▶ Disseminates newly acquired knowledge and understanding to colleagues on return
- ▶ Advocates appropriately how this could benefit practice in the sending institution

An Internship is

... a dynamic process which needs careful planning, openness, and the willing collaboration of all the actors: the sending/hosting institutions, the intern, and the tutor.

Internship is not

... a job ... a 'free pair of hands' ... an academic course





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THE TUTOR



The tutor in an internship is the individual who teaches or mentors the intern. The tutor is a guide, not a textbook and is the heart of a successful internship.

Tutoring offers an opportunity to...

- ▶ See your work and experience in a new light
- ▶ Pick up new ideas and hear of others' experiences
- ▶ Carry out projects with motivated colleagues that would otherwise not be possible
- ▶ Develop your teamworking, communication and teaching skills
- ▶ Share your knowledge and experience with a colleague who is genuinely interested in the same things as you
- ▶ Gain valuable professional and human satisfaction
- ▶ Become an integral part of the professional development programme of your institution
- ▶ Build professional contacts beyond your own institution
- ▶ Gain increased peer and institution-wide recognition
- ▶ Reinforce your professional identity by adding the element of passing on knowledge which is intrinsic to professionalism

A successful internship happens where the Tutor

- ▶ Has ensured that their own current teaching and communication skills and knowledge are appropriate for successful tutoring
- ▶ Takes responsibility for introducing the intern to the institution, and ensuring that the intern learns of its way of life and outside opportunities
- ▶ Learns from the intern what they can already do, what they are hoping to achieve and, with the Intern, plans and agrees a work programme of how this goal may be met, and what is impossible
- ▶ Is willing to share information, experiences, work problems, and constructive criticism and has arranged for adequate time to do this
- ▶ Offers the intern frequent constructive feedback on their progress
- ▶ Respects the intern's culture, concerns, experience, and commitment
- ▶ Offers an evaluation of the Internship to the sending (and funding) organization, and at least some continuing contact to the intern on their return
- ▶ Provides own institution and colleagues with an evaluation and where improvements in the internship programme or conservation practice might be possible
- ▶ Ensures adequate time for reflection of own experience of an internship (before arrival of the next intern!)

What the Conservation Profession can do to help Internships :

Develop a common understanding of conservation practice so that communication between the actors is made easier. Potential interns need to be able to describe what they can do and what they want to achieve, and what they have achieved when they've completed their internship. Institutions need to be able to describe what they can offer and how they want conservation to improve. Tutors need to describe their own relevant professional skills and how they wish to develop, as well as describing the development of the intern. Educational institutions need to describe the relevance of their teaching to practice, and the abilities of their graduates.

This common understanding can be developed through commonly held standards of the practice of conservation. These agreed standards can only be developed by practitioners.

Be pro-active in finding financial resources for internships.

Internships are unique learning opportunities

The learning objectives can be related to specific or general skills, but they must always be clearly defined and expressed

The learning happens in a variety of ways simultaneously. The most important lessons are often related to professional practice and identity

Internship is a deeply personal experience with human interaction at its core

Internship can take place at any stage of professional development – as a part of initial studies, or after years of working in conservation

Internship is an experience which takes place in a variety of institutional contexts: a museum, a research institute, a private workshop or other

Internship must be clearly defined within the institutional policy of both the sending and receiving institution, however large or small

INDIVIDUAL GOING SOMEPLACE ELSE TO LEARN WITH OTHERS

Internship is like a journey

An Internship is not the same as leaving for good – it is a move for a defined period of time

It is important to have a clear idea of the reasons for going, and the objectives of the journey

Going on an Internship requires the mobilization of a series of resources, only some of which are financial

Internship happens always within a context that is different. This difference does not depend on geographical distance – even a move within the same institution implies entering into a different organizational culture

Internship is an experience structured around exchange between professionals. The tutor assigned to the interns is the key person in this process

This leaflet is the outcome of a meeting organized by Centro Nacional de Conservación y Restauración (CNCR) of Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos (DIBAM) of Chile, and ICCROM (The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property). The event was supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile and Minera La Escondida, through Corporación de Amigos de Museos y Bellas Artes.

Editors: Katriina Simila, Janey Cronyn, Maureen B. Fant