



Quality Internships



Posted by: Brussels Interns NGO



The European Parliament has offered some support to young people as they fight for fair access to paid, quality internships. Many individual MEPs are enthusiastic defenders of youth employment rights. But progress is slow, and MEPs will need to make the issue a real priority for the rest of their mandate. We also deplore the fact that many MEPs still take unpaid interns in their offices.

Internships across Europe - progress is slow

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The current EP mandate began with hope and disappointment. The Council had recently signed a Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships, encouraging member states to improve the standard of internships. The Recommendation was non-binding, but as a statement of best practice it borrowed heavily from the ambitious [European Quality](#)

best practice it borrowed heavily from the ambitious [European Quality Charter on Internships and Apprenticeships](#). However, the Recommendation ignored calls to guarantee remuneration from the European Youth Forum and MEPs who signed the Love The Future campaign pledge on young workers: “we call for internships with ... reimbursement for internships within education and remuneration for those outside education”.

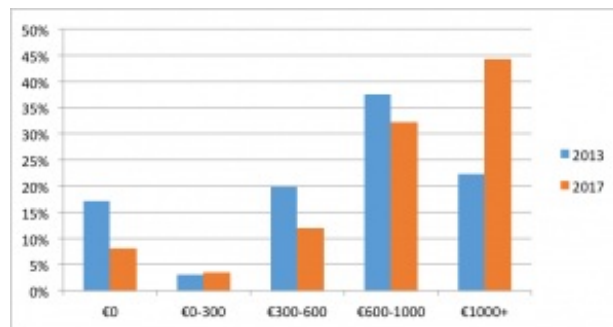
In any case, the Recommendation was largely overshadowed by the Youth Guarantee programme. Traineeships were included in the Guarantee’s promise of a “good quality” offer to any young person unemployed for four months, but there was confusion about what this meant. The Brussels Interns NGO worked with a coalition of MEPs to submit a [Parliamentary Question to Commissioner Thyssen](#), asking what criteria would apply to Youth Guarantee traineeships to assess if they were of “good quality”. The response [revealed incoherence](#) between the Recommendation and the Guarantee, with no clear assessment of remuneration or learning content. The Parliament later built on these criticisms in its October 2016 [assessment of EU Youth Strategy](#). A recent [parliamentary question](#) from a cross-party coalition of MEPs makes it clear that the Youth Guarantee must do better on quality control to avoid “traineeships that lead nowhere”.

The EP’s recommendations on the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), led by rapporteur Maria João Rodrigues (S&D), call explicitly for “proper learning and training content and decent working conditions for internships...remuneration should be commensurate with the work provided...and the need to enable interns, trainees and apprentices on the labour market outside educational curricula to make ends meet.” The EU currently has little competence to legislate on issues of remuneration, but the Parliament’s clear stand against unpaid internships is very welcome. MEPs should keep up the pressure!

Internships in EU institutions - time for real change

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DATA: Remuneration of interns in MEP offices and political groups - 2013 vs. 2017

(Source: European Parliament Youth Intergroup)

Change is hopefully on the way. The MEPs of the Youth Intergroup have worked with intern representatives inside and outside the Parliament to push for a change in the rules governing traineeships in MEP offices and Political Groups. They gathered 134 signatures on a manifesto for fair internships which demands good working conditions, decent remuneration and quality learning for all interns in the Parliament. The Youth Intergroup has also supported campaigns for paid internships in other EU Institutions and backed the [Global Intern Strike](#) in February 2017.

There is still enough time for the Parliament's Bureau to meet and agree this rule change before election season, and this should be a priority. The EEAS has already been warned by the EU Ombudsman that unpaid internships in its delegations are malpractice – it would be hugely embarrassing for the Parliament to face a similar rebuke. Moreover, allowing MEPs to continue taking unpaid interns excludes young people from these opportunities and undermines Parliament's moral authority when discussing matters of social justice. Young Europeans are enthusiastic Europeans, but they are highly sensitive to hypocrisy.

Standout MEPS



Terry Reintke

Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance

As one of the co-chairs of the European Parliament Youth Intergroup, Terry Reintke has been a constant supporter of the fight for fair access to paid, quality internships – both inside the Parliament and across Europe. She has regularly worked with grass-roots campaigns, sponsored Parliamentary Questions and raised the issue with fellow policymakers and in the media.
