

The unpaid intern-ship: sailing or sinking?

Last month the Government launched a Call for Evidence on unpaid internships and other similar roles, such as voluntary roles, unpaid work trials and work shadowing, to identify whether Government action is needed to ensure compliance with National Minimum Wage law.

What is the Call for Evidence about?

Currently, there is no legal definition of the term “intern” or of similar types of roles such as “trial work period”, “volunteer” or “work shadowing”. Historically, many employers have not paid individuals for carrying out internships and similar roles. However, where someone performing such a role meets the legal definition of “worker”, they are entitled to be paid at least the National Minimum Wage and benefit from certain other basic employment rights.

The Government is concerned that some employers are not complying with the law and misclassifying interns and possibly others in order to avoid making payment. The Government has said it wishes to crack down on non-compliance with the National Minimum Wage legislation.

In October 2024, the Government published [Next Steps to Make Work Pay](#), which set out plans to take forward workplace law reform commitments not covered by the Employment Rights Bill. This included a promise to issue a Call for Evidence on unpaid

internships.

On 17 July 2025, the Government published the promised Call for Evidence, which seeks to understand the circumstances in which interns are not paid (or paid below the National Minimum Wage) and the reasons for this. Evidence is also sought on how similar roles operate in practice (namely, work trials, voluntary work, volunteers and work shadowing) in order to understand whether further work is required to ensure compliance with the law.

The Call for Evidence sets out various questions for employers including asking for the reasons for not paying an intern and whether unpaid internships (or those paid below the National Minimum Wage) should simply be banned altogether.

What does this mean for employers?

Currently, this is just a Call for Evidence, so employers will not be affected for some time. However, it is implied that after the evidence has been reviewed there will be some reform on internships. Businesses who offer such roles should, therefore, keep track of further developments in this area.

The Call for Evidence closes on 9 October 2025, with the Government's response expected early in 2026.

[Call for Evidence on Unpaid Internships](#)

With thanks to our work experience student, Shaan Kailey, for

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BDBF is a leading employment law firm based at Bank in the City of London. If you would like to discuss any issues relating to the content of this article, please contact Amanda Steadman (AmandaSteadman@bdbf.co.uk) or your usual BDBF contact.