



Professional Pathways – Making the Most of Your Internship

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Before your First Day

To prepare for your Professional Pathways internship, we recommend the following:

Get in Touch

Contact your new line manager as soon as possible to confirm your working pattern, how to report for work and request any joining instructions, such as:

- Is there anything you should read before you start the internship?
- Is there any documentation you need to provide or confidentiality agreements they want you to sign?



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It's important you make your line manager aware of any other commitments you might have and therefore when you cannot work but also are as flexible as possible to fit with your employer's requirements. You want to negotiate positively to come to an agreement that works best for both of you. You may wish to agree to meet before starting your internship (e.g. over a call) to discuss your start date, working hours and any tech you might require for the role. Your line manager may also want to talk through the objectives they have for the 35-hour internship. Prepare any possible questions you want to ask or clarify in advance. If you're meeting virtually, ensure you have confirmed and shared the platform meeting details as well as checked your technology all works ok (e.g. mic and camera).

Be mindful of your line manager's capacity to reply immediately or find a time to meet. If you have any concerns that you have not received a reply (please leave a good amount of time for them to respond), then do reach out to us at professionalpathways@exeter.ac.uk and we can check in at our end that everything is ok.

Job Description and Commercial Awareness

Check your job description so that you are clear on what you will be doing. Research the company and sector again to make sure you are up to date.

Student Secondment Internship Agreement

You will be issued an Internship Agreement (your contract of employment), detailing the terms and conditions of your internship, as well as your job title, line manager and university contact. It is important that you check your contract when you receive it to ensure that your personal details are correct and that you understand the contractual obligations between yourself, the university and your host employer before signing. Those working for the University will receive an Internal Internship agreement between yourself, your line manager and the Professional Pathways team.

Disclosing a disability or Sharing Personal Information with your Employer

Many people worry about disclosing personal information to potential employers for fear of how this will be perceived. It is your choice whether you should tell your line manager about a disability or other protected characteristics such as age, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. For more information on disclosures, advice on common equality and diversity issues and sources of support, please see the '[supporting equality and diversity](#)' webpages. Alternatively, please discuss with the Pathways team and we are happy to support you.

10 top tips for your internship (particularly useful if working remotely)

We have compiled "10 top tips" which you might find useful when preparing for your Professional Pathways internship, particularly if you have any elements of remote working:

1. Create a Workspace

A dedicated workspace helps you to approach working from home in an organised and efficient manner. If your home does not have a separate home office, use a well-lit and least used space in your home that can provide you with enough room for your equipment and resources, ideally away from your rest areas. When we sit down for so long during the day, you might like to consider creating a space to stand and work for part of the day, as long as it also follows [working safely with display screen equipment guidance](#). [Reasonable adjustments](#) can be made for an employee who has a disability.

You may be sharing your home with your family or flatmates so a protected workspace may not be easy. Some ideas you could use include using headphones; have a sign on your room door or laptop 'please do not disturb until ...'; build in regular breaks, perhaps to play with the children in the household; or agree with others to not use domestic appliances during a certain time.

2. Access to platforms and software packages



You will need to discuss what platforms and/or software packages you need access to, in order to work remotely with your employer. The host employer needs to provide you with access to the right systems, e.g. shared inboxes and cloud file storage such as [MS One Drive](#) or [Trello](#). You will also need to ensure you can access the right communication platforms such as [Zoom](#); [MS Teams](#); [Cisco Webex Meetings](#); [Meeting Owl](#); [Google Hangouts Meet](#) and [GoToWebinar](#).

Be prepared for technology not working. Does your broadband have sufficient bandwidth and where you sit has good enough Wi-Fi strength? If you lose connection have a [WhatsApp Team group](#) set up so you can still communicate and at least let your team know what is happening.

3. Agreeing Clear Expectations

Remote working can be a significant change to those used to working in the workplace, with easy face-to-face access to their team. It is important to build a new type of trusted working relationship and to avoid misunderstandings, it could be useful to agree:

- When you are available to work and when you will be working
- How you will stay in touch and who will organise this
- When work will be set and reviewed
- How your performance will be measured and managed
- Where your work will be stored and who has access to it
- When you will be taking breaks and how you will communicate this with others. Maybe you could enter your working hours in your signature; enter your working hours on a shared team calendar
- Who you should contact if you have any problems or circumstances have changed

4. Getting Motivated and Being Productive

Life has many demands and things you want to do and achieve. Doing a good job and carving out a successful career is one of those. To stay productive at work you need balance with your work and home life. These 3 steps can help you stay on track:

a) **Strategise** - What do you want to achieve and why? What is the driver or motivation behind this? Set a goal and make a plan listing your objectives, then break it down into a list of manageable tasks.

b) **Focus** - Quantify how long each task takes and book it into your schedule. To prioritise, we must work on the tasks that have the nearest deadline and are deemed to have the highest importance. To establish what is your highest importance activity, consider:

- What are your own responsibilities and duties?
- What are your contributions to team duties?
- What is the impact of the work?
- Who requested the work to be undertaken? How important are they to the business and your career e.g. senior position; new customer; loyal customer.
- When was it requested?
- Who is the work being produced for?
- Who is leading on the work?
- Who do you need to collaborate with and what is their availability?
- How long does the work take to complete?
- How can the work be undertaken? Do you know how to undertake the work, or does it require additional learning? Have you got access to the right information and systems?



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Most people create a long 'To Do List', but once you have decided your priorities you can create a 'Must Do Today List'. If you receive a lot of new emails that distract you from your list, perhaps you could consider checking your emails twice a day to see if you need to re-prioritise your day. Try and keep the structure of your day simple.

- c) **Commit** - Have you completed everything on the 'Must Do Today List'? If not, reflect upon why this hasn't worked? Is your strategy still correct? Did you prioritise correctly? Did you allocate enough time to each task you booked in? Perhaps you are procrastinating and working on the easy hits rather than the priorities? If so, maybe you should '[eat the frog](#)' or deal with the most challenging task of your day first?

Do you need to build in energisers during the day? A quick stretch, breath of fresh air and a healthy snack can help you press the reset button.

A good way to stay motivated is to also spend a moment at the end of the day to look at everything you have achieved that day and see how completing some urgent tasks have helped you get that one step closer to achieving your goals.

Working from home is not all about challenges. Reflect upon the positives it brings, for example, you have a flexible job; you can make a cooked lunch; and being more sustainable by avoiding the daily commute. Appreciating the good things in life will help you feel more motivated.

5. Communication Adjustments

Developing and maintaining good working relationships with your manager and colleagues requires a change in communication when working remotely. As mentioned above being accountable about when you are working is important.

Being mindful that your colleagues will have competing demands on their time when working at home, so check when they are available to communicate; it's good to respect the boundaries people set.

People may be under pressure, so helping others, including by being kind and generous with your words will be appreciated. Perhaps you could instigate a virtual 'water cooler' chat to connect with colleagues in a non-work way.

6. Virtual Meetings

- Get ready in advance with your technology and agenda items.
- Consider colleagues in other time zones, where applicable, when you set meetings.
- Remember to switch on your camera; blur your background (or choose a suitable location) and consider your non-verbal communication. You will also need to think about how you are dressed and whether it is appropriate for this meeting.
- Invite others in to give their thoughts and ideas. Be specific and ask people by name, otherwise everyone could start talking at once.
- Speak slowly and clearly and pause before responding to others as sometimes there is a time lapse between transmissions.
- Perhaps appoint a meeting facilitator to monitor chat comments during the meeting?
- Avoid distractions like checking email or having side conversations with people in the group.
- It is useful for your records to keep a summary of key points and actions after a virtual individual or team meeting.

7. Regular Breaks

For your health and wellbeing, it is important to take regular breaks; this includes physically moving and taking a break from looking at your screen. Stepping away from your desk at lunchtime will help



you feel re-energised for the afternoon ahead. You could even set up reminders to take a break; using apps such as Alexa Flash Meeting can be helpful for this.

8. Personal Support

The University and the Professional Pathways team can offer initial support so do reach out to us if required: professionalpathways@exeter.ac.uk. You may also feel comfortable enough to speak with your line manager if you have any concerns during the internship itself. For more specialist support you may be eligible to access the university's [Student Wellbeing services](#) or the [University's Staff Wellbeing services](#).

9. Flexible Working

If you wish to change your agreed working pattern, please seek permission from your line manager at your host organisation.

10. When to Stop Working

Where there aren't the normal prompts to remind us, it is the end of the day, sometimes people will let the working day drift on. Don't forget the importance of work-life balance to remain a happy, motivated and productive intern!

On your First Day

Points of Contact

Identify your key points of contact before you start the internship. You should know who to report to on the first day, and who your main point of contact is. This is usually your line manager, but it is also a good idea to find out who to contact if your line manager is unavailable at any point during the remainder of your internship. Some companies will offer a "mentor."

On your first day, there are a few tricks that should ensure a smooth transition into the team:

- Learn the names of your colleagues as quickly as possible. Write them down if necessary.
- Take a lot of notes. The first day will likely be a whirlwind of meet and greets and information downloads. Being able to recall a lot of this information shows attention to detail and prevents the wearisome practice of asking for information or details on things over and over again.
- Accept offers of help. Rejecting support could be taken as a rebuff.
- And don't forget...be positive!

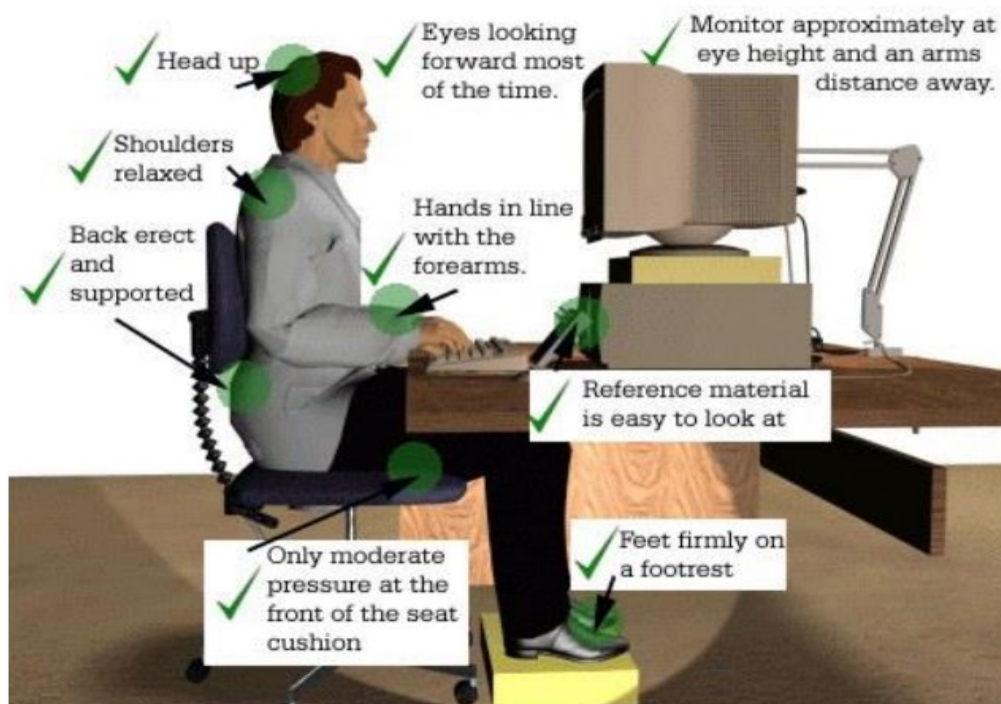
Induction

We would advise that you undertake an induction process with your new employer on your first day. If your company does not have an established induction, they may wish to work through the [Professional Pathways Internship Induction Checklist](#). This checklist also covers health and safety issues both in the workplace and working remotely.

Think about polite and sensible questions to ask as you are being introduced to your new colleagues e.g. how long have you worked for the company? What are your main responsibilities? Will you and I be working together?

Guidance for Setting up your Workstation

If you are working with Display Screen Equipment (DSE) you will need to make sure that your workstation is set up correctly to ensure that you reduce the risk of pain and ill-health associated with DSE use. The following image may help you correctly set up your station.



During your Internship

Hours of work

As part of the programme, the University is funding 35 hours of work for a University of Exeter student to undertake at a host organisation or within the University of Exeter. The 35 hours are to be completed between 22 June – 3 July 2026, following the employer-led training. The 35 hours don't include paid breaks, so for example if you work 9:00am to 5:00pm, with an hour for lunch, you will have worked 7 hours. We also ask that you ensure you don't work more than 6 hours without a 20-minute break (the break is unpaid).

Professionalism and Professional Relationships

Professionalism is working with a desire to give your best at all times and in every situation and acting in a fair and diligent manner. You must pay meticulous attention to courtesy and honesty with friends, colleagues and customers. It's important to maintain consistently high levels of professionalism and pay close attention to the quality of service and your work.

It is normal to expect an adjustment time when starting in a new working environment, there are plenty of unwritten rules and previous history between colleagues that you haven't covered. Be careful about getting involved in gossip.

It is fine to be friends with people at the organisation but be mindful that they are your colleagues too. Ensure you relate to them in a professional manner whilst at work, especially when you are with other colleagues.

The information that people choose to share about their private life varies from person to person. Gauge your audience. Not everybody wishes to know about your weekend but on the whole, this seems to be an accepted exchange for five minutes first thing on a Monday morning. Going into detail about the personal relationship problems you may be experiencing is generally considered inappropriate. Always consider the personal nature and the amount of time spent on these conversations, remember you are there to work!



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Begin by starting to get attuned to the hierarchies and find out who is responsible for what function. You will find different levels of formality and informality and personality differences will also be a factor; try to observe and make educated guesses when dealing with different people.

During your internship itself, please ensure you maintain regular communication with your line manager and any other colleagues you may have been asked to update on progress. Make sure you have agreed with your line manager the best way to do this, e.g., a quick email at the end of the day summarising where you've got to, a catchup in person (if you're in the office), a quick call or even just a Teams message.

Remember you are representing the university when on your internship and helping us to maintain a positive relationship with the organisation for future involvement in the scheme.

Professional Do's and Don'ts:

- **DON'T do your personal admin at work.** Make personal phone calls, check texts, emails or personal social media outside of work hours; this could be done at lunchtime.
- **DO be punctual and reliable.** Arrive/log-in in good time to start work and if you are going to be late, call or message your line manager or another senior member of staff to let them know. Don't finish early or take extended lunch breaks, unless authorised. Also, don't always be the one asking to finish early as this is unfair on your colleagues – it is important to be flexible.
- **DO make sure you know your company's procedures.** If you are ill, make sure you follow the company's sickness reporting procedures. Ensure you know who to report to in case of illness so that you are prepared.
- **DO work hard and be proactive.** All employers want high productivity, so work quickly, accurately and aim to achieve as much as you can. If you feel under-utilised don't stay quiet, ask for more work and even better, suggest areas where you might be able to make a contribution and add value to the company. It is important to make the most of your time with the organisation you have been matched to. Ensure you speak with your line manager early on to try and focus the internship around your personal career goals, where possible. Don't be afraid to say what you want to get out of the experience and your key interests. Some organisations will have a set project that they need you to work on, while others will be happy to shape the internship around your area of interests but in either situation, it is worth having a conversation with your line manager to mention any particular area you'd be keen to gain experience in.
- **DO teamwork.** It is important to make sure you do all of your work but remember there is no "I" in team. Teamwork can produce results that we cannot achieve alone. Consider the bigger picture.
- **DO ask relevant questions and DON'T be afraid to ask.** It is important to learn from your colleagues but be mindful that your questions are directed to the right people, at the right time. Try to avoid asking the same questions twice, if possible. Take notes if you think you are likely to forget someone's explanation. If you don't understand something, don't be afraid to ask for clarification. This is the best way to learn and also ensure you're on the right track.
- **DO be assertive.** Do not be afraid to assert your opinion, as long as it is informed. Remember employers seek out undergraduates and graduates for your brains but make sure that in trying to be helpful you are not telling them what they already know. Put forward your suggestions; you are a fresh pair of eyes, and your ideas can be extremely valuable.

In summary, **professionalism** is:

- Respectful written communication (including correct grammar & spelling).
- Appropriate image - respecting professional cultural norms e.g., dress code.



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- Taking responsibility.
- Take the lead in contacting your matched line manager, reply in a timely manner.
- Be positive and enthusiastic: contribute ideas and provide constructive feedback if asked.
- Be honest about your career needs and wishes.
- Think 'Integrity'- fulfil your commitments.

Setting Objectives, Review and Evaluation

We encourage you, together with your line manager, to set objectives as soon as you can. Objectives are what you need to achieve overall by a certain date. Objectives are different to a list of tasks, as tasks are the actions you must undertake in order to achieve your objectives. Responsibilities specifically highlight your obligations within the role you have been employed to do. Ideally your internship organisation should review and evaluate your performance throughout your internship, providing feedback where necessary.

When agreeing objectives, make them **SMART**:

Specific: State exactly what you want to accomplish (who, what, where, when)

Measurable: How will you demonstrate and evaluate the extent to which the goal has been met.

Achievable: Objectives should be challenging; however, they need to be achievable.

Relevant: How does the goal tie into your key responsibilities? How is it aligned to your objectives?

Time Bound: Date of completion and interim deadlines, dates and frequency.

Encourage your line manager to identify with you some objectives that you would like to achieve during your internship, and by continually reviewing your progress, you can identify where you are excelling, and which areas need more attention.

We recommend that all interns meet with their line manager regularly during the 35-hour internship, particularly if the internship is remote working. These meetings are to monitor your performance, provide you with an opportunity to learn from a more senior member of staff and to a lesser extent, provide you with personal support. Use this opportunity to seek constructive feedback.

If there is a Problem on your Internship

If you feel things aren't working out as you had hoped with your internship; the University is here to offer you support. This could include discussing issues around your responsibilities or more serious issues such as struggling with your workload. Please get in touch with the Professional Pathways team in the first instance: professionalpathways@exeter.ac.uk

At the end of your Internship

Saying Thanks

Make sure you thank the people you have worked with.

References and Recommendations

Ask permission from your line manager to use them as a referee. Don't forget this is polite to ask as anyone writing a reference will be required to spend a significant amount of time doing this. It may also be worth asking them if they would be happy to give you a recommendation on LinkedIn (make sure you're connected with them and any other colleagues you've worked with, on LinkedIn too!)

Feedback

Ask your line manager and/or other relevant colleagues for feedback on your performance and work during the internship.

The Pathways Team will be in touch shortly after your internship to ask you to complete a short feedback form and will also encourage your line manager to complete their own feedback form.



PROFESSIONAL PATHWAYS

Exeter Award

Completion of Professional Pathways covers the following parts of the Exeter Award:

- 35 hours of work experience
- 1 personal development session
- 1 other employability activity
- The online application form

This means participants only need to do the following to complete the Exeter Award (which you may well have done most of when preparing for Pathways):

- CV/Cover letter session - these are run regularly during term time
- 1 personal development session - for example presentation skills, teamworking, communication and collaboration, networking essentials.

After this, you can book onto The Interview Experience which the team will schedule to run after completion of your Pathways internship in June/July.

More details about the Exeter Award can be found [here](#).

Updating your CV & Certificate

Once you have completed the programme, we would recommend that you review your CV, ensuring you include details of the training, group project and internship elements and the skills and experience you gained from each. You will also receive a certificate from the Pathways team as a record you have completed the programme.

Further Employment and Networking

Once you have completed your 35-hour internship, you have access to experienced professionals: your host employer and colleagues and now is your chance to network and seek their career guidance:

- See if anyone is willing to look at your CV for the sector you are interested in.
- Can you see any further opportunities for employment with this employer? If so, do you know how they advertise jobs?
- Job seeking – Ask for recommendations of where to look for work in the sector.

Remember that all Exeter students and graduates can access the [Career Zone's](#) resources, including booking meetings with a Careers Consultant.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a great tool for connecting with people working in the sector you're interested in, building your personal brand, hearing updates and even finding jobs!

If you haven't done so already, make sure to connect with us on LinkedIn!

[Steve Wallers](#)
[Carly Ainsworth](#)

Celebrating Success

Previous Pathways internships have been a great success, with both employers and interns benefiting a great deal from the experience. We would love for any success to be noted and celebrated. You may wish to post about your Pathways experience on LinkedIn. **Please be sure you have checked with your employer before sharing any information around your work on LinkedIn as there may be sensitive information they do not wish to be shared publicly.**

Don't forget to use #UoEPathways when posting and tag @university_of_exeter_career_zone.



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You will also be invited to nominate your employer for a [Student Employment Award](#), if you feel appropriate. This takes place in May each year and employers can also nominate their student(s) and it's a great chance to raise yours and their profile and celebrate what was achieved.

Thank you for taking part in the programme, we really hope you enjoyed the experience!