

“Bogus” internships make students pay



By Oscar Bentley, Editor (2018)
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Image: Kendra Rabbitts

The University Careers department has been criticised for advertising internships where students taking part have undergone negative and substandard experiences. The complaints, which come from students who took up ‘opportunities’ at a camp in Greece and with a travel writing company in Berlin, claim that they were sold misadvertised courses, which they realised upon arrival had a “horrifying” lack of basic resources, and in the case of the camp in Greece, were instructed to lie to immigration authorities about their purpose at the camp due to not having been informed to obtain a work visa.

Second year English student Kendra Rabbitts took up a placement at the camp after receiving an email from the University in February advertising for summer camp English teachers. Despite being informed in communications that the camp would be a “relaxed environment” and that she would be provided with lesson plans and any recourses she may need, when Rabbitts arrived, she found that teachers were expected to create resources from scratch, and that a severe lack of stationary meant that the overcrowded classes forced teachers to tear their limited supply of paper in half so to ensure every student had paper.

Rabbitts also contends that the camp was dangerous, with exposed nails, classrooms too small to cope with classes, and part of a bench becoming unscrewed from the wall, resulting in two girls scraping a significant amount of skin, hitting their heads and having to be sent to the doctor. Rabbitts further pointed to the inadequacy of the camp’s health care provision, saying that it was rarely affective and forced people to visit external medical facilities, and a lack of medication leaving one teacher unable to complete a course of antibiotics.

A recent English graduate, who wishes to remain anonymous, was also shocked to learn that the ‘internship’, as it was described on the careers website, which they had been sold for £1500, in reality

reflected nothing of the sort. Students found that the travel guide they were designing was to be of no future commercial use to the company, and German language lessons had to be taken over by an unqualified teacher when the original teacher’s contract expired mid-course. When a fellow intern asked their boss for a breakdown of the costs of the scheme, they refused to oblige.

They told Nouse: “[I] took a placement I found through York Careers, which was very clearly signposted as an internship. When I showed up to work, my supposed bosses referred to the month-long stint as a ‘course’, and it was far from an internship – and was immensely sub-par even for an educational placement. Our offices didn’t even have wi-fi. I still had an amazing time, but that was because I got to live abroad for a month, and wasn’t really anything to do with the actual ‘internship’ I was on. I don’t think York should have advertised it as being an internship – that’s bogus.”

A University spokesperson commented: “We are sorry to hear that students are reporting negative experiences during summer placements. We offer advice and support to students on finding good quality internships and placements on our website and provide one-to-one support through daily Careers drop-ins.

“Careers and Placements advertise hundreds of internship and placement opportunities. Opportunities advertised by us go through a validation process to ensure quality as far as possible. Many students report having found their internship experience hugely enjoyable and beneficial to their personal development and career planning. We would encourage students to come and talk to us to have the best chance of finding good quality experiences.”

Careers claimed that the travel writing company was neither on the University database nor through Careers Gateway, while the camp in Greece is now on a national list of institutions students have raised concerns about.



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