

## Exposure doesn't pay



By [Rohan Banerjee](#), Deputy Comment Editor (2012)

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How competitive the journalism industry is may fall short of breaking news, but it is not about how difficult it might be to get paid for your work, but rather, how easy it is to not be.

The Huffington Post (UK) now claims to have over 5000 registered freelance bloggers, of which over a third are aspiring student journalists, and all of which are unpaid. The publication markets itself as a "platform for anyone who wishes to use it", while the similarly claimant Comment is Free section on The Guardian assures any wide-eyed optimists that "several of our bloggers have gone on to write commissioned articles for which they have been paid."

But while it might be nice to name-drop and mention you've been published, I'm starting to wonder if this exposure should be viewed as any more than exploitation. In writing for these publications, you're doing them a service. And for what? A neat nonexistent income and an extra line on your CV.

The same goes for internships. Now, before you all start writing in to smugly inform me that your internship at The Times was paid and that you didn't have to make a single cup of tea - yes I am aware that some of them do pay. However, the great majority of internships are unpaid and touted as an "educational cost that you'll be able to pay back later". And the ones that do pay are usually afforded only to those privy to an inside contact.

What's worse is that newspapers don't even need to promote these placements. We're ransacking every nook and cranny of the internet to uncover the editor's favourite TV show or even food, just for that ultimate reference in a covering letter.

Journalists aren't getting jobs without experience and interns aren't worth paying when we're so desperately prepared to do it for free.

So should we be calling for new legislation to force employers to pay out? Well actually, no, because what many people don't realise is that it already exists.

The National Minimum Wage Act is quite clear that anyone who is performing work or offering services personally to an employer is entitled to the NMW. Whilst "work" is not strictly defined, it does condition that if "you do a placement that does not involve any work being performed, such as watching, listening and questioning, you are not entitled to the NMW." By implication therefore, anything that involves completing set tasks for the benefit of an organisation counts as work and must legally be paid.

Certainly, it is disheartening when your efforts are not rewarded. Despite initially reveling in my "position" at The Huffington Post, the stark reality that I would not be paid, regardless of any quality writing I might produce, soon killed off the novelty of exposure.

But to radically change the current culture of misuse in journalism, it will take more than a few strong-headed would-be writers. The gusto should really come from the government, who ought to take a stronger position on the issue and crack down on those naughty papers and periodicals unscrupulously dodging employment laws.

Remember, exposure won't pay our student loans.



## One comment

H

22 Jan '13 at 12:30 pm

Can't help to think that comment is FREE (obv with emphasis on the latter) would be a better title.

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