

Policy Manual

Issues Policy

Issues Policy 15 (IS-15): Unpaid Work

Adopted by: Board of Directors

Adopted on: September 09, 2014

Summary:

Changing labour market realities since the early 2000s have seen the rapid expansion of the use of unpaid work for young people, students, and recent graduates. The Canadian Intern Association estimates that over 300,000 people were working nationally in unpaid internships in 2013, although reliable data has not been collected on a federal or provincial level. In particular, the use of unpaid internships has proliferated both among employers and as a program requirement for university programs. In British Columbia, the use of unpaid work is regulated, however these regulations or prohibitions are infrequently enforced. Often, those working as unpaid interns are not protected by workers' rights legislation or regulations and have no recourse for discrimination, harassment, or unsafe work conditions experienced on the job.

As the use of unpaid internships has increased, there has been a corresponding decrease in the number of full-time, entry-level positions within the labour market. Many of those who pursue unpaid internships are required to do so in order to meet program requirements and are unable to find paid internships. However, many others take these positions because they are unable to find paid work in their field and are trying to remain within the appropriate industry.

The rising costs of post-secondary education compound the pressures that students and recent graduates face, as more and more people rely on debt to pay for school. Those who end up in unpaid internships and other low-paid, precarious work often must find additional work in order to either repay their student loans or save up for the following year's tuition fees as well as pay for on-going living expenses. This need to work several jobs—including the one that is unpaid—can compromise workers' safety as well as their physical and mental health. If internships were all compensated fairly, there would be less pressure to pursue second or third jobs.

Policy:

- I. The Union supports:
 - a. Developing a national strategy to address youth unemployment, underemployment, and unpaid work;
 - b. The collection of data related to unpaid work by public statistical agencies such as Statistics Canada;
 - c. Federal and provincial funding for programs directed at increasing student employment and on-the-job learning opportunities such as the Canada Summer Jobs Grant;
 - d. The expansion and proactive enforcement of federal and provincial employment standards including:
 - i. Expanding the rights afforded to paid employees under the British Columbia Employment Standards Act to unpaid employees;

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- e. Full compensation for all people who work in the public and private sectors;
 - f. The development and maintenance of robust volunteer programs that support meaningful social engagement without replacing paid positions;
 - g. The expansion of well-resourced and thoughtful co-op and applied learning opportunities for students as extensions of their studies;
 - h. The thorough oversight of work placements provided by institutions for academic credit or required by academic programs of that institution;
- II. The Union opposes:
- a. The use of unpaid internships;
 - b. The use of precarious, contract, or unpaid workers to replace full-time entry-level positions;
 - c. The reliance on unpaid and temporary work in the public and private sectors;
 - d. Mandatory academic co-ops and internships without necessary student support services;
 - e. The practice of charging students tuition or fees for unpaid work, including internships;
 - f. The exclusion of unpaid workers, including interns, from the rights and protections afforded to paid employees.