DAAD Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service

DAAD – Information for providers of virtual internships

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP

Virtual internships follow the current development in the academic and business world, where more and more takes place online and digitally. A virtual internship can also provide direct and authentic experience of working in and for universities, organisations and companies, independent of physical mobility and presence. They also offer opportunities to acquire technical, personal and social skills specifically in the digital environment.

1. BEFORE THE INTERNSHIP

Space and time for technical preparation
- Allow sufficient time for detailed preparation and familiarisation.

- Make sure that digital access to the necessary work tools and platforms is guaranteed. If necessary, contact your IT colleagues early on.

- Create the technical conditions for personal exchange, e.g. by video conference. If necessary, clarify the extent to which licences need to be obtained for the use of appropriate software.

- Support your interns in identifying and installing the necessary hardware and software and, where possible, help them find competent contact persons (IT hub, possibly assistants and staff at your institute). If necessary, offer training in the use of unfamiliar technical equipment.

Clarify expectations and work organisation
- Agree on a schedule in advance that includes regular personal exchange. In our view, it would be very important to hold regular video conferences. Communication exclusively via e-mail tends to be impersonal and could have a negative impact on the trainee's motivation.

- In some cases, it can also be helpful to draw up target agreements: In which projects should the intern contribute and to what extent? What are deadlines to keep in mind? Where can the intern find the relevant information and what work has already been done?

- Plan opportunities for virtual exchange with other team members and, if applicable, other interns in your organisation.

Take into account any differences between time zones.

- Plan for technical problems, for example regarding the internet connection, and have alternative solutions ready if possible. It may be helpful to exchange telephone numbers in advance, provided the trainee agrees to this.

- Make agreements in advance about the work assignment, cooperation and interaction. If these need to be adapted in the course of the internship, discuss the changes and record them in writing, as well as the interns' agreement to them.

2.

DURING THE INTERNSHIP

Record progress

- Regularly review work progress and provide support if necessary. Mutually agreeing on objectives can be helpful for this. If you notice that the intern has difficulties in implementing the objectives, you can address this in good time and offer support if necessary.

- Give feedback on progress and performance. Also create space for mutual feedback regarding the cooperation.

Encourage exchange

- Communicate with your interns regularly and personally according to the agreed schedule.

- Invest time in personal interaction, especially in the initial phase, in order to build up a relationship of mutual trust.

- Enable and encourage exchange with other team members to improve integration and understanding of their own project, but also of the team's work.

- Create space for informal exchange within the team or with other members of your organisation. It is also important to talk about topics outside the professional context and to inquire about the intern's personal environment.

- Provide opportunities for interns to talk about their country of origin and their culture as well as to get to know your organisation in a more informal setting.

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3.
AT THE END
OF THE INTERNSHIP

- Give detailed feedback on the work results, but also on social inter-action and integration. If possible, conduct a final interview.

- Discuss possibilities for professional development.

- Compare results and experiences with the mutual expectations set at the beginning.

- You should also accept feedback. For example, feedback from the intern on the technical implementation, the supervision situation, the work organisation or the social aspects of the internship can help optimise the cooperation with future interns.

- If there is no final report in which you can give feedback to the DAAD, you are welcome to contact us directly and make suggestions for improving our supervision services.

(If necessary, please also name a programme-specific contact person)