

## [Banning adverts for unpaid internships will only hurt young people](#) [1]

Written by [Daniel Pryor](#) [2] | Tuesday 3 September 2013



During the closing weeks of 2012, Labour MP Hazel Blears claimed to have attracted cross-party support for [a private bill that would have effectively made advertising for unpaid internship positions illegal](#) [3].

Thankfully for those that are eager for valuable work experience regardless of short-term financial rewards, her calls to effectively exclude tens of thousands of would-be interns from pursuing their preferred vocation fell upon deaf ears. The bill has since faded into obscurity.

Monday saw Nick Clegg criticise the movement to protect interns from themselves, with his spokesman citing potential 'unintended consequences' - such as the creation of a 'black market' for unpaid internships - as grounds for opposing the ban. Speaking to [Graduate Fog](#) [4], the Deputy Prime Minister's spokesman explained:

'We want to bring an end to the 'who you know not what you know' culture. But there are possible unintended consequences of legislating on this issue - it could actually be entirely counterproductive and force these valuable opportunities back on to a kind of 'black market' where the vacancies are filled by people with the best connections.'

I don't think that Hazel Blears and co. harbour a desire to deny all but the well-connected a chance to hone skills that will help them to secure preferential employment. Nonetheless, in the words of Milton Friedman, 'one of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intentions rather than their results'. The result of prohibiting advertising for unpaid internships would be the substitution of meritocracy for nepotism.

The rhetoric surrounding unpaid internships has, for the most part, been overwhelmingly negative in tone: skewing the debate towards the emotive rather than the factual. Whilst more reasonable detractors cite cases of interns being treated poorly by employers (and [there are a number of such cases](#) [5]), oft-repeated comparisons to 'slavery' are hyperbole at best, and callously trivialise the plight of [millions of actual slaves living in the world today](#) [6].

An individual choosing to be paid in experience rather than money should be allowed to do so, free from a coercive state severing access to the former option through banning certain job advertisements. The appropriate response of those who rue interns lack of access to paid employment should be deregulating the labour market, rather than denying young people the opportunity to improve their future job prospects by acquiring indispensable knowledge and skills.

Extrapolating general 'anti-internship' sentiments from a few extreme cases masks [the true story](#) [7]: one of a practice that provides saleable skills, easier access into highly competitive professions, networking opportunities, and a plethora of other benefits. At present, I am lucky enough to be completing an unpaid placement at the ASI; hopefully, the constructive nature of such a placement is evidenced by the very existence of this blog post. I don't claim that every intern will be as lucky as me in his or her remit, but I do know that I am definitely not alone in gaining substantial benefits from an unpaid internship.

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