

[Just do nothing](#) [1]

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Everyone is against red tape and vows to cut it back. Yet, year after year, there's more red tape, regulation and form-filling than ever before. The trouble is that each instance of red tape and its ilk is usually tiny in the greater scheme of things and is spun strand by strand by otherwise insignificant busybodies nagged by vested interests. Over the long run, though, these strands together hold down the greater Gulliver.

We wish the British government all the best in cutting through this tangled web - call us when the job's done. In the meantime, here's a piece of advice to make things easier. While you're hacking away, make sure the minions behind you aren't spinning more tape.

The Guardian [reported](#) [3] last week that HMRC is planning raids on fashion companies to ferret out interns 'at high risk' of abuse under national minimum wage laws. It seems HMRC has convened a 12-person 'dynamic response' unit to make unannounced inspections of businesses where interns are being used as workers rather than just shadowing staff.

We all know where this is headed. The threat of raids will mean companies stopping internships whether these companies are 'abusive' or not. What small company needs the hassle of proving innocence or defending alleged guilt?

Pretty soon, the cry will go out that there's no internships in the land and a national 'intern partnership' with business will be launched, complete with legislation, regulations, budgets, ministers and bureaucrats. It won't take long for someone to learn that access to internships isn't 'fair' so more regulations will dictate that daddy's friend can't take on his daughter for the summer. Then someone will notice that the quality of internships is a 'post code lottery' so there'll be equalising funds for the intern-challenged regions. And let's not forget the massed ranks of equality champions, seeking for new pastures.

HMRC commando raids to rescue intern hostages just don't seem like a top priority. Nobody has snatched the interns off the street, bound and gagged them - they're free to drift away and slump in front of daytime TV anytime they want. But they choose not to because they're having more fun, learning something useful about the real world and slowly building an interesting resumé. Meanwhile, the businesses get a cheap'n'cheerful way to assess potential employees at minimal cost. That's become more important as getting rid of bad workers grows harder due to more onerous 'rights' granted to new hires.

Youth unemployment is, indeed, a problem. The cost of red tape and regulation on small business is one cause as is an uneconomic minimum wage. Call off the HMRC hounds before they make matters worse.

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