

# Internships – Are they worth it? Does it really make me more employable?

## **CPF Board** 00:07

Hey and welcome to Let's Talk CPF, a podcast where we bring conversations on CPF to your ears, brought to you by the CPF Board. This podcast will answer common questions, offer tips, and feature interviews with industry experts on CPF and financial planning. Thanks for listening and let's get straight into today's episode.

## **Sarah** 00:34

Going for internships during holidays have become such a norm among students. Amidst stiff competition, students like me are hoping internships can help us stand out from our peers. But, are internships really necessary and will it really help to boost my employability? I'm Sarah and I'm currently an intern at CPF Board. As someone who's currently on my second internship, these questions do come to mind sometimes. So instead of going in circles, we have invited Ms Catherine Neo on the show. Catherine is leading the internship team in Singapore Polytechnic. She works with the industry, partners and students to curate the internship program. I'm going to start off with a somewhat contentious question. I've heard of others saying that internship is not worth it, given its relatively lower salary compared to working part-time. Catherine, what are your thoughts on this?

## **Catherine** 01:25

Hi Sarah, thanks for having me here today. Across Singapore Polytechnic, SP for short, all the internship companies meet the sectorial base allowance, except for interns working in healthcare industry and NGOs. Our SP interns generally receive an allowance higher than the baseline allowance, which have also increased over the years. You mentioned that you are currently an intern right? What are your thoughts on this?

## **Sarah** 01:51

I do feel that the learning opportunities and experiences that I get here as an intern offsets the lower allowance received. In fact, I personally chose to go for internships over positions like temps or part-time, because I felt that the experiences I will get here are more similar to a full-timer's. Other than that, I would also be given more learning opportunities as compared to part-timers or temps. Furthermore, I'll be able to ask for different types of work for more exposure.

## **Catherine** 02:20

That's correct. Experiences that you will get as intern and temp will vary because of the title. Furthermore, interns are generally given more room for mistakes as compared to temps. So starting out as an intern will definitely help you learn better in the long run. Given that many companies out there are offering internships for students, perhaps you could share what you usually look out for as a student when applying for internships.

**Sarah 02:46**

Actually I was from SP and back when I was choosing my internship from the school portal, I really scrutinised the job descriptions and shortlisted companies based on these factors, breadth of experience, whether there is opportunity for me to explore and learn, as it is quite common for marketing interns to be assigned to focus solely on social content creation. While I can and value doing social media content work, I didn't want to only focus on one single thing, since I believe that internship is the time for us to explore and learn. I wanted to meet new people, and a place that allowed me to grow my network professionally.

**Catherine 03:23**

Yes, it is good to list down your career and learning goals when selecting which internship postings to apply for.

**Sarah 03:31**

In searching for my second internship, I decided that I wanted to explore a different role in communications. And that's when I stumbled across my current role as an intern at CPF Board's communications team. I have since tried podcast production, social media production, media monitoring, and media pitching. And this really helped me to understand not just the media side of communications, but also the wider comms environment better. But when searching for my second internship, I did it without the help of SP and that's when I realised that it was rather hard for me to get even one interview. Considering that it wasn't easy for me, how can students with no prior experience stand out from others to get their very first internship opportunity?

**Catherine 04:15**

Students with no internship experience can always stand out from others through doing things like tailoring your resume to fit the job description, preparing for interviews by practising with a trusted friend or a career guidance officer. How you present yourself during interviews is important as well. This includes your body gestures, body language when communicating with the interviewer, your tone of voice and how prepared you are when answering their questions. Another factor in securing an internship is network. Interview opportunities can be found through word of mouth, open career job portals and also even exclusive ones only offered to partner educational institutions like ours. For example, SP we have our own career portal, and there are many internship opportunities available for students in our internship program. In fact, the program for all courses are minimally oversubscribed by 2% to 300%, such that there could even be 100 jobs available for just 10 students. And this really gives our students, including those with no experience, a lot of opportunities to search for the right internship placement. In SP, our students are also given the opportunities to develop soft skills, such as communications, teamwork, accountability, and cultural inclusivity. And these are essential skill sets that can give you an edge over other candidates. If you're able to tailor your resume well, prepare for interviews and highlight your soft skills, you should be able to find an internship.

**Sarah 05:55**

Wow Catherine, that's insightful. So just out of curiosity, because I actually did a little survey with about 30 plus responses from students aged 17 to 25 years old. And I found out that among those responses,

20% have not gone for any internships. So do you think it's necessary for them to go for one, and in fact will going for an internship really help prepare them for the workforce?

**Catherine** 06:19

Nowadays, we do note that students in universities are going for more than one internship to boost their resume. So I do believe that having at least one internship experience is important. Actually, internship is the closest work experience that our students can have. So having an experience do help students to better understand how companies work and what is expected of them. Like meeting KPIs, seeking guidance from supervisors. And as an intern, people will give you more leeway and expect you to make some mistakes. And these are the things that students with no internship experience will not know, which puts them at a disadvantage when they work full-time. It is also a great opportunity for students to apply what they learn in the classroom to the real world. So students should be open-minded and curious and take the initiative to enhance their learning experience during an internship to make the most out of it. Of course, it is normal for students to feel uncertain and a little bit apprehensive when going for internship as it can sound quite daunting.

**Sarah** 07:28

Yes, I agree. Internship is truly the best place for students to piece together what they learn in school and the reality of being in the workforce. It is also an opportunity to learn things that aren't taught in school, such as forming professional relations in the workforce. My first internship was back in September 2023. And I too, was afraid of meeting the people that I will be working with. I thought that things like age gap, and a lack of common interest between us could make it hard to bond. Most importantly, I was also worried that I did not have the ability and knowledge to carry out the job properly. But thankfully, I managed to adapt to the work environment successfully, through the support of my friends and my liaison officer from SP.

**Catherine** 08:12

That's awesome, Sarah! I do think that having a support system is always important for students to navigate their way through internships, especially if it's their first one. This could be your friend, your family, and also your career guidance counselor. It is important that the work assigned during internships are meaningful. This is something that students should look out for at the interview stage, ask about the tasks assigned day to day, and also the percentage estimates for each task in your work day. For example, if you're looking for a social media internship, this will entail strategy formulation, writing content, producing videos. Do ask how much percentage of your day or week will this take. My job as the Internship Lead at SP would include this, ensuring that the opportunities provide students with relevant work experience. There are many opportunities for students to learn from the industry. In SP, we have industry projects with real clients during the school semester, which I'm sure you have already gone through since you are graduating this year.

**Sarah** 09:21

Yes, of course, when I was schooling, I felt that the curriculum was extremely rigorous, and stressful for an 18 year old. However, when I started to intern, I realised that I could handle the stress and assignments given to me better. In that sense, I guess I could say that the biggest takeaway from school is having the skill of time management.

**Catherine** 09:41

Being able to complete tasks efficiently and on time is an extremely important skill, not just for work but for school as well. And it's great that you're able to hone this skill, with all this talk about your internship. I'm curious, was the job given to you what you expected?

**Sarah** 09:59

Well, it's a both yes and no type of answer here. For my first internship, I thought that since this internship was sourced by the school, I'll be there purely as a marketing student. In school, we were mostly taught to just strategise and plan for marketing campaigns. But at work, other than social media management, I had to do things like administrative work, handle the procurement and logistics when organising events. I also often had to synergise plans with other departments, as opposed to just between me and my groupmates in school. As an intern, small things like teamwork, willingness to learn, and a proactive attitude can really make or break your internship experience. Thus it's really important to practice it at all times. So Catherine, as the Internship Lead in SP, you probably received feedback from companies both good and bad. Do you have any tips for interns on how to do well in their placements?

**Catherine** 10:53

Of course, the best way for students to improve is to be mentally prepared to receive feedback. They should adopt the mindset of receiving constructive feedback to identify areas for improvement. Normally, each intern will be assigned to a liaison officer who is also a lecturer from the school. During the internship period, the liaison officer will make a minimum number of touchpoints with the students and company supervisors, to be updated on the progress of the student. Through these interactions, the liaison officer will discuss areas to improve. So Sarah, as someone who has completed a 6-month internship, have you then discovered anything about yourself professionally?

**Sarah** 11:36

Through the internships that I have been in, I found out what I liked in a job and what I didn't, I now have a better idea of what to look for when searching for my next internship. For example, initially, I thought that a job in events will be extremely suitable for me. But I slowly realised that events as a 9 to 6 job will be very energy draining, and not something I could do long term. Other than that, during my internships, I've had the opportunity to connect with industry professionals, gaining insights into various marketing roles. And this is helpful because I feel that in school, opportunities to interact with professionals are limited. So, internships provide a platform for learners like me to network with experienced individuals who can share their career advice and experience.

**Catherine** 12:22

It's nice to know that you got a chance to expand your network professionally. Was networking hard for you initially? Since you mentioned earlier that you were afraid that you couldn't bond with colleagues because of the age gap.

**Sarah** 12:35

Initially, I was really shy, so it was hard. But honestly, my best tip would be to just really be brave and start a conversation. My team really helped in making me feel comfortable enough to step out of my comfort zone. And I'm grateful to have had positive experiences at both my internships. Do you have any advice on looking for the right company or team to develop and learn effectively?

**Catherine 12:59**

It's always important to do some research on the companies beforehand. Simple research can be done by going on platforms like Google, Glassdoor and even LinkedIn when looking at suitable companies for their aspirations. It's also important to identify your own weaknesses and strengths, as well as areas of growth so that you can better assess what the company can offer, and whether it supports your learning and career aspirations. Hence, your future company could be from a completely different industry from your field of study, especially if they offer a job scope that is what you want, and there's potential for growth and worth considering. After doing the research, students should be able to better assess the company and choose a suitable internship for themselves.

**Sarah 13:47**

That's definitely very good advice when trying to find out whether a company can help you develop professionally. So Catherine, before we end, do you have any last bits of advice for our listeners?

**Catherine 13:59**

Yes, internships are a great way to hone one's skill and experience. But in addition to internships, there are always different ways to upskill yourself as well, such as other industry-based learning experiences, like the Final Year Project, which could be based on a real world problem, or industry-based projects with a live client to provide real world perspectives. Ultimately, students should make a conscious effort to identify the areas for growth and research on what is suitable for their learning and development, and continuously seek opportunities in order to improve their knowledge and skills.

**Sarah 14:38**

It's indeed crucial to be clear about your motives before pursuing any learning opportunities, such as internships. Thank you, Catherine, for joining us on today's episode. To all interns out there, remember to always approach your internships with an open mind, a willingness to learn and a proactive attitude. After all, internships are not just about gaining experience but also about discovering your strengths, passions and the kind of work environment that best suits you. Once again, I'm Sarah and you're listening to Let's Talk CPF.

**CPF Board 15:13**

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