

# Internship Survey Report - April 2025

## Introduction

An extremely competitive job market has emerged in the last few years - fueled by economic uncertainty and disparities, technological advancements, globalisation (aided by the rise of remote working, leading to competition on an international level), skill gaps and demographic shifts (age categorisation, migration, socio-economic status). While the number of vacancies for any role increases each year, it cannot keep up with the number of students/graduates emerging from universities. There are now more applicants fighting for the same position. Last year's Institute of Student Employers Recruitment Survey revealed that in the 2024 recruitment round, the average employer received 140 applications per graduate job - a 59% increase on the previous year and the highest recorded in more than 30 years (Prospects, 2024). With costs rising and highly competitive markets, businesses and organisations are focusing on efficiency - a cost-cutting approach that hires only the "best qualified candidate" - a definition that varies massively from one employer to the next. It is now a necessity for students to build a good portfolio of experiences to make themselves more appealing to employers - which leads to these questions:

- What role does the student seek?
- What experiences best back them up for said role?
- How easy is it to gain that experience?

## Headlines from the survey

Our analysis of the survey data has led to us formulating a set of recommendations for universities, employers and students. In summary:

- Universities should promote the availability of careers resources for students more effectively, and provide more targeted support (including workshops and events) for second and third year students.
- Employers should make key improvements to the process of applying for internships, including the transparency of the applications process and clearer jobs listings.
- Students should begin preparing in their first year, in order to make focused, targeted applications for internships in their sectors of chosen interest.

We expand on these points in the final section of this report.

## Internships - the key to unlocking job opportunities?

In order to explore the part that internships play as part of students' plans to demonstrate their employability and work-readiness to future employers, a group of nine students from Queen Mary University of London carried out an online survey and interviews with students and university careers staff as part of a micro-internship with ifutures during March and early April 2025. (Details of the QMUL micro-internship scheme are given in the appendix to this report.) The microinterns were assisted in their work by a full-time intern from Brunel University, as part of her studies there.

University careers staff see Internships as highly important, as shown by the following two quotes from interviews we conducted:

“ Internships are crucial for students due to the increasing competitiveness of the job market, with more graduates entering each year. Simply completing a degree isn't enough now, as employers expect additional experience like internships and involvement in extracurricular activities. Internships help students stand out by making them more "work-ready" and giving them practical experience that often outweighs qualifications alone. ”  
(Summer Internship Coordinator, Brunel University)

“ Internships provide work experience which is really valuable on a student's CV, which employers can look at and which greatly improves the student's employability. We know from all of the data we have that internships increase students' future employability, whether that's applying for further internships or whether it's applying for graduate level positions. ”  
(Internships Team Leader, Queen Mary University of London)

## The research

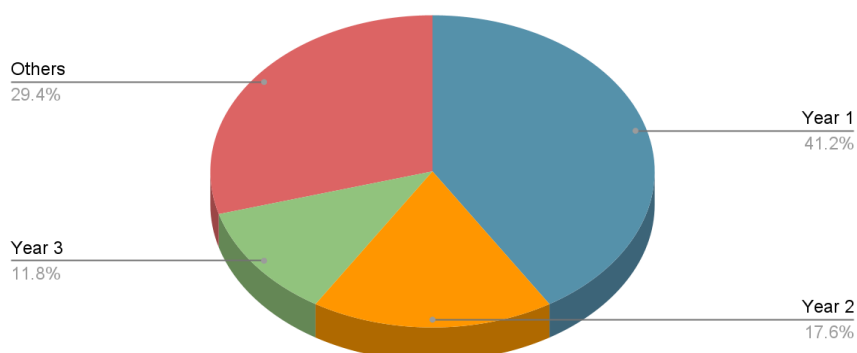
Working as a team, we devised and constructed an online survey using a Google Form containing a range of multiple response and free-form response items. The first part of the form consisted of items regarding the demographics of the respondent (university, course, year of study) and then continued by asking them to describe their experience of finding, applying for and undertaking internships.

A further section asked about the importance of social impact (defined in the survey as an organisation's *positive or negative effects its actions have on individuals, communities and broader society, encompassing areas like environmental sustainability, social justice and ethical business practices*) when applying for internships.

Respondents were also asked whether they would be willing to take part in a short interview with one of the interns following the survey.

We promoted the survey using email, WhatsApp and personal contacts. A total of 75 responses were received from students of 14 universities across England, plus 1 from Portugal. Four of these responses were from recent graduates. The breakdown of respondents across university, subject and year of study are shown in Appendices 1, 2 and 3. Of the 75 respondents, 17 had completed an internship. The chart below shows the year in which respondents reported having undertaken their internship. (The term "students" will be used to refer to respondents from now on.)

**Year in which students undertook internships (N = 17)**



More students from year 1 secured an internship than students in any other year. Conversely, students in years 2 and 3 found it more difficult to secure an internship, with both groups together representing only 29.4% of students reporting that they had secured an internship.

Slightly less than one-third of the students responding (consisting of fourth-years, postgraduates, and recent graduates) had secured an internship, a success rate comparable to students in their second and third years together. The interpretations that follow, concerning the relative success rates of students in different years, are speculative, and are certainly worth further exploration.

The success of year 1 students in having the greatest overall success in securing an internship was unexpected. It may be due to there being a relatively lower level of competition at this stage. In contrast to students within their penultimate year, first-year students are more likely to apply to *spring weeks* rather than internships; hence, the students in the survey had a higher chance of securing one. (A spring week internship is a week-long taster or insight experience designed to introduce students to an employer. It occurs in the spring during the Easter holidays and it is usually available to first and second-year (on a four-year course) students. In the past, spring weeks were for students who had an interest in investment banking. However, they also exist in other areas of finance and other sectors (Warwick Business School, (undated)).

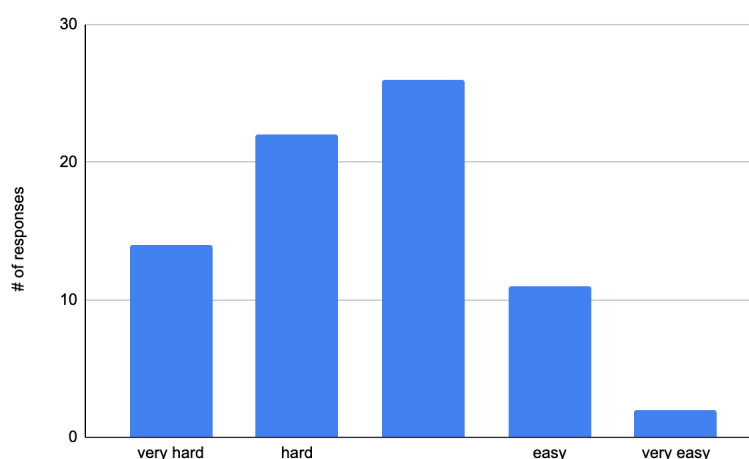
In comparison, students in years 2 and 3 reported securing fewer internships compared to the other years. This may be attributed to the increased competitiveness associated with penultimate-year internships as internships conducted in the penultimate year can turn into graduate opportunities, hence the higher demand for internships in years 2 and 3, making it more challenging for applicants to succeed.

Older students may also find it easier to secure an internship than Year 2 and 3 students because they may have a greater familiarity with the application process and more experience, which may enhance their chances of securing an internship.

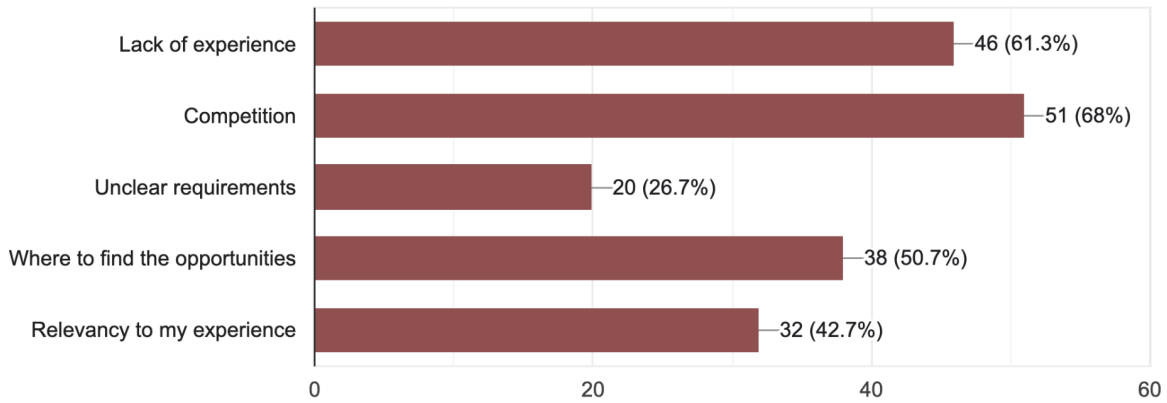
## Finding and applying for internships

We asked students about their experiences of searching and applying for internships. Respondents who had completed an internship were also asked some further questions.

All respondents were asked to rate the difficulty of finding an internship. Only 17% of students described the process as "easy" or "very easy", as the chart below shows.

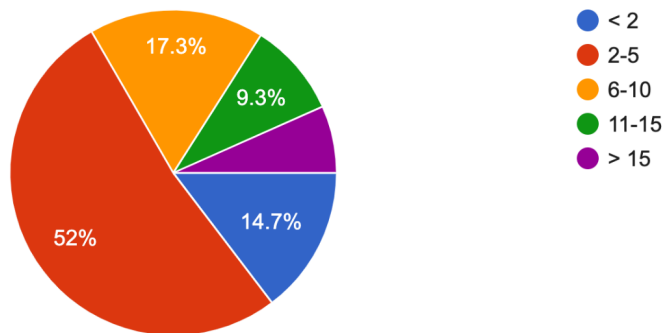


Students were then asked about the biggest challenges they had found in applying for internships (responses to more than one factor were allowed):

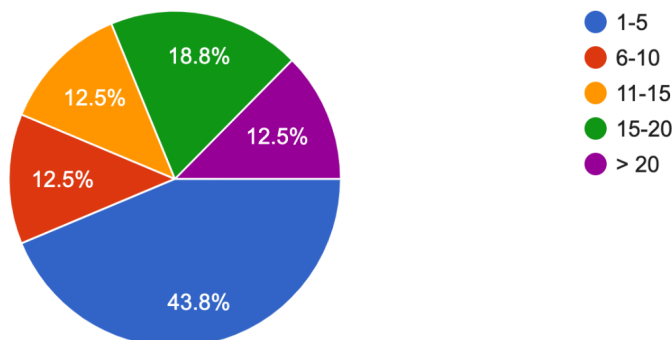


When asked how the process of searching for internships could be improved, 64% of students say that clearer postings for internships are needed, and 56% say that more resources for finding internships should be available to students. Over half (55%) of students say that they need better opportunities to network with potential providers of internships. This is important, since students say that they view an internship as a way of getting a foot in the door with employers, with two-thirds of them looking for an internship that can turn into a full-time job when they graduate.

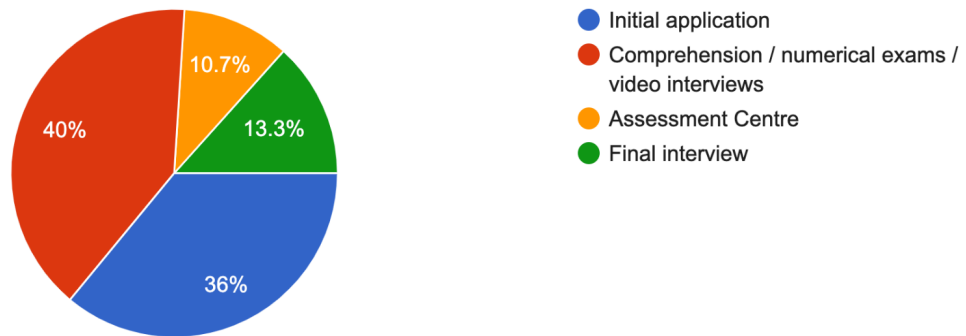
Students say that they spend a significant number of hours each week searching and applying for internships:



The number of internships that students apply for varies.



The process of applying for and successfully gaining an internship has a number of challenges. We asked students which part of the applications process they found most difficult:



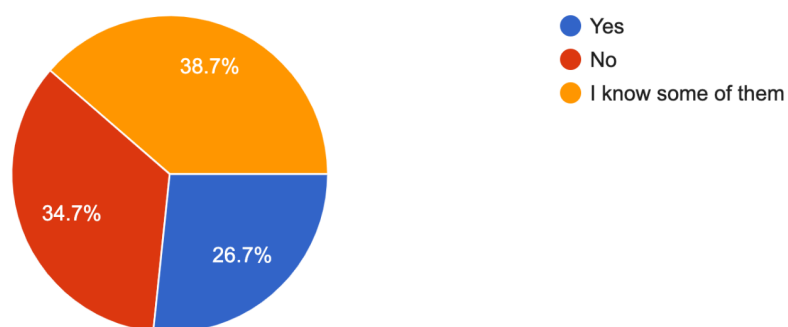
At the initial stage of the application process it seems likely that some students do not meet the basic eligibility requirements for a specific internship but apply anyway - students have a strong perception that “more applications are better”, but as we show below, a smaller number of high-focused and targeted applications is likely to be a better strategy.

Students say that comprehension/numerical exams and video interviews are stressful, especially where there is limited preparation time and/or where the content of tests is unclear ahead of time. For many students video interviews feel impersonal, and the idea of their responses being recorded causes some anxiety.

At the assessment centre and final interview stages candidates have become much more invested in the process after getting through the earlier stages. At this point the process is much clearer and personal, and the expectations are more clearly defined.

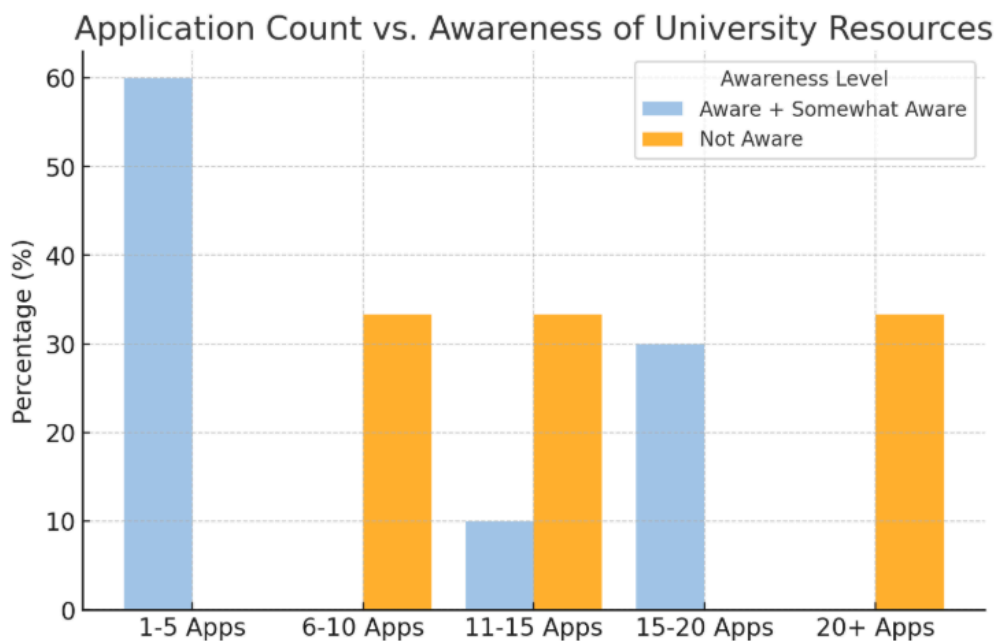
We believe that most students who apply for internships are not well-prepared for the early stages of the process. This coincides with employers using the early stages of the internship application process to filter out weaker candidates and those who are not a good fit. At the latter stages the remaining candidates are likely to be stronger and/or a better fit for the role. And at this point it is likely that soft skills and how an individual aligns with the team are very important.

We asked students how aware they are of the resources available (for example *CareerSet*) at their university for finding internships.



The table below suggests that the success rate of achieving an internship offer is largely unrelated to a student’s awareness of resources available from their university to support finding and applying for an internship. However, further analysis shows that the complete picture is more nuanced when we factor in the number of applications made.

	Internship	No internship	%
Aware	16	4	20%
Somewhat aware	23	6	20.7%
Not aware	21	6	22.2%



Students who are at least partially aware of university resources made fewer applications before getting an internship compared to those who say they are not aware of these resources. It also appears that the percentage of people who say that they are aware or somewhat aware of university resources and who successfully gained an internship is significantly higher than that of those who say they are unaware of university resources.

Students who are aware of university resources made fewer applications than those who were not aware. University resources supporting internships encourage students to tailor their applications towards the employer they are applying to. So rather than sending a 100 of the same CV and/or cover letter towards 100 different intern roles that are advertised (a strategy that students often use when looking for part-time work), resources suggest that students look further into a employer to which they wish to apply in order to learn a bit about the organisation, their values and their goals. This enables student to apply this to their career goals and skill-set so recruiters can see that the applicant is genuinely interested in the role and is a strong fit for it.

Students making between 1 and 5 applications (43.8%) were all aware of resources to support their applications. They are likely to have focused on a small number of highly relevant internships, tailoring their applications to each one to ensure they are a strong fit for the role. Possessing strong qualifications and relevant skills is also a key factor to students being able to secure an internship after a only few applications.

By contrast, students making 6-10 applications stated that they were unaware of resources to support them. These students were in the second year as undergraduates or were postgraduate students when they made these applications - we have no further data to understand why these students were not aware of resources to support them.

From 11-20 applications (25%), students are likely have applied to internships that are more competitive, which will require applying to more roles to increase their chance of securing an internship. Students are also able to refine their application over time to improve their chances may also account for more applications being made, suggesting that students in this group may be less well-prepared than those students who made fewer applications.

Students who made more than 20 applications (12.5%) are likely to have started out by making weaker applications, needing to submit multiple applications in order to learn from rejections in order to improve subsequent applications. Students also targeting very competitive sectors with many competing candidates trying to secure a role also require many applications to improve the likelihood of receiving an offer.

The data shows the importance of application quality, as tailored applications are the ones that stand out to employers and are more likely to reach a positive outcome. It is seems likely that students making tailored applications receive guidance from university resources, or from personal connections. Additionally, the spread of the data supports the idea that securing an internship is highly competitive, especially when applying to industries that receive very high number of applicants. In this scenario, multiple applications are required to increase the chances of securing an internship.

## Internship challenges and lessons learned

Those students who had completed an internship were asked to share any challenges they had faced or lessons they had learned during their internship. (This was a free response question.)

“ *The main challenge was knowing what internship would help me in the line of work I would do after university. I felt the roles could be very specific and as someone who is still unsure of my career path, I would have liked an internship that allowed me to do some rotations in different roles/departments.* ”

“ *Adjusting to the working environment, I felt like at university there was a clear distinction between lecturer and student but during my internship the distinction was not as clear. We were just people working together, and the people there just happened to be working more years. So I found it difficult adjusting from the perspective of a student of relaxing a bit around everyone since they were the same people I would go out with after work for various activities.* ”

“ ... with each internship the core challenge was adaptability and ensuring that you are on top of everything. Work can be truly overwhelming in the first two weeks. By the time you are in your 4th or 5th week there are some signs that you are somewhat settled. ”

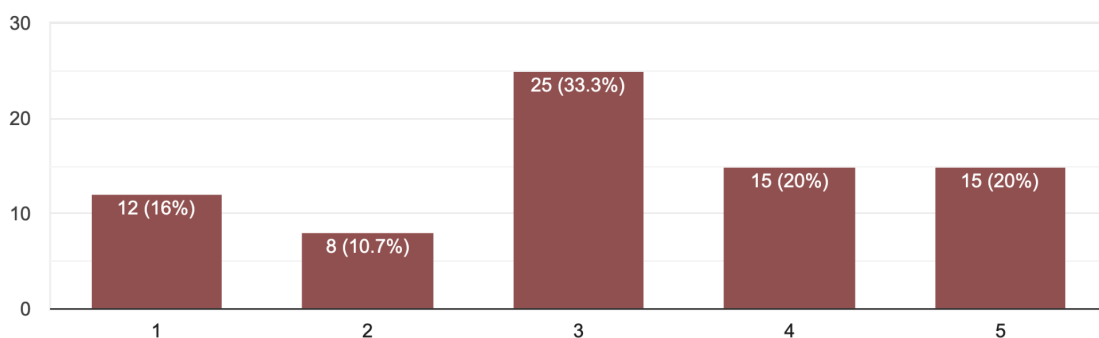
There are two major points that emerge from these comments. First, the part that internships play in helping students to learn more about their career direction. Secondly, the important role of internships in enabling students to understand more about the professional workplace and working relationships.

## Social impact

Young people in the Gen Z demographic (generally defined as being those born between 1996 and 2010) are widely perceived as being socially aware and engaged and having strong ethical values. More than any other generation, Gen Z collectively demands purpose and accountability, the creation of more opportunities for people of diverse and underrepresented backgrounds, and rigorous sustainable and green practices (McKinsey, 2024).

We asked students how much the social impact of a company or organisation (defined as “the positive or negative effects its actions have on individuals, communities and broader society, encompassing areas like environmental sustainability, social justice and ethical business practices”) matters to them when applying for an internship.

Importance of social impact (1 = not much, 5 = a lot):



Slightly more students in the survey said that the social impact of an organisation they would consider applying to was important (40%) than not important (26.7%), with the greatest proportion (one-third) expressing no opinion either way. There is some evidence from the comments made by students that, at this stage of their career journey, there is a trade-off between a desire to obtain an internship (in order to become more employable) and a preference to work in an organisation which has positive (or at the least, non-negative) social impact.

Students gave some examples of positive social impact that they had encountered in their internships.

“ In the application process, I have seen several diversity initiatives including guaranteed interviews for disabled people. ”

“ I ended up in a company that works very closely with sick children and hospitals within London. They had lots of volunteering opportunities which was important to me. ”

“ My internship gave all of the interns, including the apprentices who were joining, a bonus of £200 before we started our internship to buy some clothes as they were conscious of the fact that they were strict on dress code but understood as we were students not all of us, especially the people straight out of sixth form, would have a professional wardrobe prepared. ”

“ During my internship search and experience, I saw businesses making a positive social impact through sustainability initiatives, community support programs, and diversity-focused hiring. One company promoted eco-friendly practices, a nonprofit provided education for underprivileged students, and a tech firm prioritized diversity and inclusion. ”

“ Many offer paid volunteering opportunities within the organisation, I have to say I favoured companies with this however it wasn't a main priority. ”

While social impact is not a top priority for many students, they do care about things like sustainability, inclusivity and ethical practices. Employers that clearly show how they are making a positive difference are likely to stand out more to students, especially those who express a strong desire to work with organisations that align with their values.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the data collected through our survey, it was observed that a significant number of students experience difficulty when securing internships. As students enter university, the gap between education and career is not well bridged. This may be attributed to a limited experience applying for internships as well as a general lack of awareness regarding the resources and support systems available to help them. However, it is essential to note that these vary according to the year of the students.

The data reveal a clear gap in internship success rates across different academic years, highlighting the need for better support and guidance, particularly for students in their second and third years. While first-year students benefit from less competitive opportunities such as spring weeks, older students benefit from their experience to secure roles more easily. Addressing the gap and providing targeted resources can help bridge the transition from education to employment, ensuring all students have equal opportunities to gain valuable work experience during their studies.

Our research highlights a clear gap between education and career readiness, especially for students in competitive application years.

The results of our survey suggest that while students are motivated to gain internship experience, they face many barriers, such as high competition, limited experience, a lack of awareness of available resources and insufficient numbers of internship opportunities.

There is a strong demand for internships that could lead to full-time jobs, so students would benefit from clearer job listings, more accessible resources, and more networking opportunities.

On the basis of what we have found, we have the following recommendations to make for universities and employers:

- Universities should take action to increase awareness of available career resources since students who use these resources secure internships more efficiently
- Universities should offer better support through application workshops, industry events, and early experience programs.
- Universities should provide more targeted support for second and third years , who face higher competition for a limited number of opportunities.
- Employers should improve transparency in early stages of the application process to help students to avoid dropping out due to unclear steps or overly complex comprehension tests.
- Employers should provide clearer job listings and networking opportunities, making it easier for students to find suitable roles.
- Employers should make their job listings easier to understand, offer more flexible entry routes and have greater transparency about their expectations of students in the internship applications process.

For students, there are two clear pieces of advice:

- A strategy based on tailored applications, rather than volume-based applications, increases success rates.
- Early preparation (in year 1), including spring week programs, can help students gain a competitive advantage in securing internships.

The role of the ifutures university careers community:

- The ifutures university careers community can bridge the gap by providing direct access to internship listings, employer connections and tailored application advice.
- The ifutures university careers community offers guidance on leveraging university resources, ensuring students maximise available support.
- The ifutures university careers community helps connect students with industry professionals, offering insights into improving applications and preparing for interviews
- By addressing these key pain points identified in our research, the The ifutures university careers community helps to support students securing internships more efficiently and confidently.

## Research and report team

### QMUL

Ankita	2nd year	Biomedical Engineering
Anu	2nd year	Materials Science and Engineering
Chaudhary	2nd year	Mathematics and Statistics
Fasika	3rd Year	Chemical Engineering
Ibraheem	2nd Year	Biomedical Sciences
Iqra	3rd Year	Mathematics and Statistics
Irfana	3rd Year	Mathematics
Isabelle	2nd year	Actuarial Science
Klarisa	3rd year	Mathematics

### Brunel

Namita	2nd year	Psychology
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## References

McKinsey (2024), *What is Gen Z?*

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-gen-z>

Prospects (2024), *What's the state of graduate recruitment in 2024?*

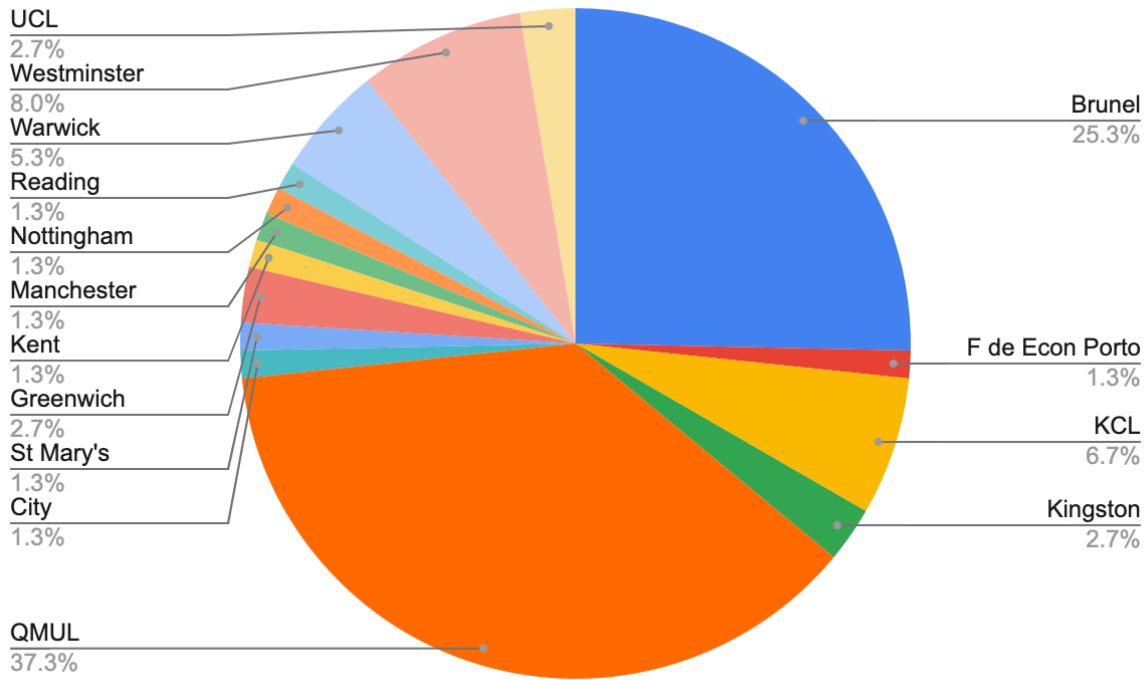
<https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/whats-the-state-of-graduate-recruitment-in-2024>

Warwick Business School (undated), *Spring week internships: the complete guide*,

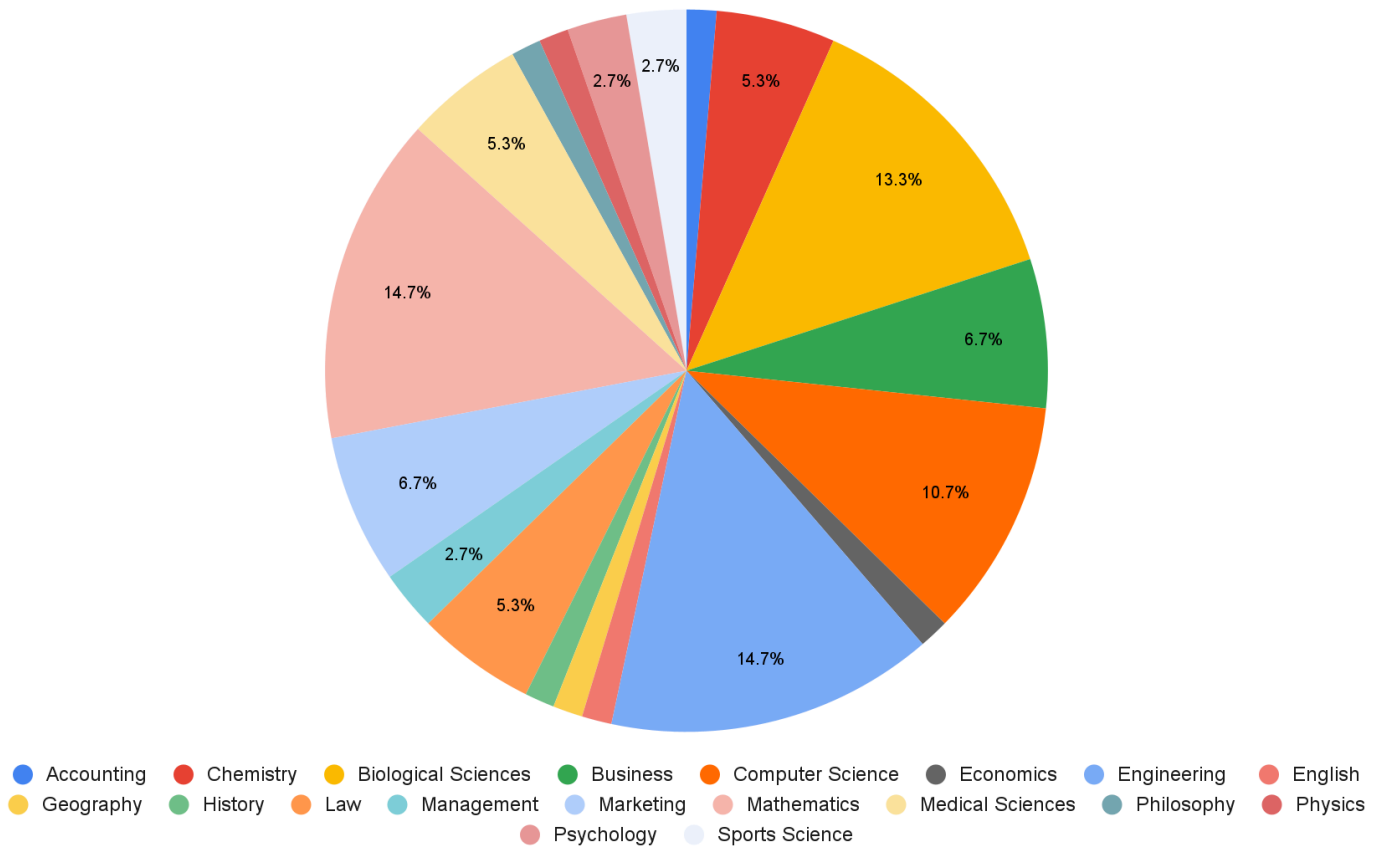
<https://www.wbs.ac.uk/blogs/student/undergraduate/spring-week-internships-the-complete-guide>

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 - responses by university (N = 75)



## Appendix 2 - subjects studied



Appendix 3 - year of study (N = 75)

