
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Working for free



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Sam

Hello. This is 6 Minute English. I'm Sam.

Rob

And I'm Rob.

Sam

Before you got your first job, Rob, did you do any work experience?

Rob

I think I may have done a day or two at some companies, just shadowing, watching how they did things – but nothing much more than that.

Sam

Some companies offer students or recent graduates what they call **internships**. These are extended periods of work experience where someone can be working full-time without an actual contract and in many cases without even being paid.

Rob

Ah – yes. This is a bit of a problem, isn't it? Some companies are being accused of using students and graduates as cheap or free labour.

Sam

Yes, although the counter argument is that **internships** are valuable experience for people who need it before they can get a 'real' job. Well, we'll look at this topic a little more after this week's quiz question. On the topic of business and companies, which is the oldest stock exchange in the world? Is it:

A: Bombay

B: New York

C: Amsterdam

What do you think, Rob?

Rob

Tricky, because I was expecting London on that list. I'm going to take a guess then at Amsterdam.

Sam

OK. Well, I will reveal the answer later in the programme. James Turner is the chief executive of an education charity. Recently he took part in a discussion on the BBC radio programme *You and Yours*, on the topic of **internships**. What does he think is a big issue with unpaid **internships**?

James Turner, Chief Executive, The Sutton Trust

In many careers we're now seeing that it's almost as an expectation that a young person does an **internship** before they stand a chance of getting that first full-time job in that profession, and the issue with that from a sort of **social mobility** point of view is that a substantial proportion of those internships are unpaid and that effectively **rules out** those who can't afford to work for free.

Sam

So what is the problem with unpaid **internships**, Rob?

Rob

Well, if you can't afford to work for free, it makes it very difficult to do an **internship** – particularly in expensive cities like London. This excludes, or **rules out** a lot of people from the benefits of an **internship**.

Sam

This is bad for **social mobility**, which is the ability of people to move to higher, better paid levels in society. So the poorer you are the more difficult it can be to get a good job, even if you have the ability.

Rob

Could you afford to work for free here in London, Sam?

Sam

No, I can barely afford to live in London as it is, so the idea of doing an unpaid **internship** would not appeal to me at all. Turner goes on to talk about other issues that are also problematic in **internship** programmes.

James Turner, Chief Executive, The Sutton Trust

Too often **internships** are open to those with **established** connections in the professions and again that **rules out** those young people who don't have the **well-connected** families or friends who can **open** those **doors** for them.

Sam

So what are these other issues?

Rob

In many cases he says that internship opportunities are only available to those with **established connections** to the company or industry. This means they have some pre-existing link with the company, for example, through family or friends' families.

Sam

Yes, it's a lot easier if your family is **well-connected**, if it has a lot of contacts and links to a particular company or important people in that company.

Rob

These links make it easier to **open doors** to the opportunity. To **open doors** is an expression that means to get access to.

Sam

So it seems that to be able to do an unpaid internship you need to have a fair bit of money and to get an internship in the first place you may need to have a previous link to the company through a family connection, for example.

Rob

So the system would seem to be difficult for poorer families and make it more difficult for students without those resources or connections to get on the job ladder. Here's James Turner again.

James Turner, Chief Executive, The Sutton Trust

Too often **internships** are open to those with **established** connections in the professions and again that rules out those young people who don't have the **well-connected** families or friends who can **open** those **doors** for them.

Sam

Right, time now to answer this week's question. Which is the oldest stock exchange in the world? Is it:

A: Bombay

B: New York

C: Amsterdam

Rob, what did you say?

Rob

I went for Amsterdam.

Sam

Well done, that's correct. Congratulations to everyone who got that right and extra bonus points if you know the date. Rob?

Rob

Haven't a clue! 1750?

Sam

Actually it's a lot earlier, 1602.

Rob

Wow, that's much earlier than I thought.

Sam

Right, let's have a look again at today's vocabulary. We've been talking about **internships** which are periods of work at companies as a way for students or new graduates to get experience in a particular field.

Rob

If they are unpaid it can make **social mobility** very difficult. This is the movement from a lower social level to a higher one and it's difficult as poorer candidates can't afford to work for free.

Sam

Yes, the cost **rules** them **out**, it excludes them from the opportunity.

Rob

What helps is if you have **established** connections with a company. This refers to previous or pre-existing links with a company.

Sam

And also if your family is **well-connected**, if it has good connections, for example if your father plays golf with the CEO, it can **open doors**, or in other words, it can make it easier to get into the company.

Rob

So Sam, are you well-connected?

Sam

No, only to my smartphone!

Rob

Same here – but we still made it to BBC Learning English and you can find more from us online, on social media and on our app. But for now, that's all from 6 Minute English. See you again soon. Bye bye!

Sam

Bye everyone!

VOCABULARY

an internship

a temporary, often unpaid, job for a student or recent graduate at a company as a way of getting work experience in a particular industry

social mobility

the ability to move to a higher social status

to rule out

to exclude or prevent someone from doing something

established connections

previous or pre-existing links

well-connected

having strong links with important people at high levels within a company

to open doors

to make it easier to get into a career