

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Report shows 'non-traditional' students find it harder to find work placements in creative industries

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg has this week criticised unpaid placements as giving well-connected youngsters an unfair advantage.

Speaking in the context of the government's plans for a social mobility strategy, Mr Clegg said career opportunities should not depend on "who your father's friends are".

Research from London Metropolitan University's Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE), provides evidence that these barriers do indeed exist. The research by IPSE found that unpaid work placements and informal recruitment methods mean that entry into employment in the arts and cultural sectors is harder for students who are not from white, middle class backgrounds.

The research illustrates how disabled students, black and minority ethnic students, those with caring responsibilities and students from disadvantaged backgrounds face significant barriers to gaining work placements. Some students feel that they 'don't fit' in the sector as a result of their work placement experience.

The research report, titled 'Work placements in the arts and cultural sector: diversity, equality and access', was published by the higher education equality body, Equality Challenge Unit.

Kate Byford, senior policy adviser at Equality Challenge Unit, said: "The importance of work placements can't be underestimated for students looking to get ahead. In the current economic downturn, it is anticipated that even more students will depend on work placements as a way to get a foot in the door. However, finding placements can be difficult if you don't have contacts in the industry."

Dr Kim Allen, part of the research team at IPSE, said: "Whilst laudable, the government's proposed actions to increase the number of paid internships could in fact create even deeper inequalities when students have to go the extra mile to get placements in such a competitive labour market.

"Our research found that unpaid placements are given greater value than paid placements among both students and employers by seemingly signifying students' commitment and motivation. More privileged students were significantly benefiting from this, while employers can simply go on exploiting students, safe in the knowledge that students will work unpaid just to have a company's name on their CV."

-Ends-

## Notes to editors:

### Comments from project participants:

Middle class student: "If you really go for it and do unpaid work experience, you've got some really interesting things on your CV. That means they think you've got some kind of drive and are worth taking on."

From a placement tutor: "We also say to the students that, you know, they shouldn't be putting themselves into lots of debt to do a placement. Some of them want to go and work for big luxury fashion names for example, and they were happy to pay whatever its costs just to be there and get it on their CVs."

Working class student: "I only did the one placement. Other people did additional stuff but a lot of them like the London scene, and they were having a lot of funding from their parents: they had their flat paid for them, all their degree paid for them. They didn't work the whole time they were at uni because they could do it in their spare time literally, but for me it was a struggle. My uni work did suffer because I was working part-time in a bar as well, until really quite late. I couldn't afford to go and do six weeks unpaid at all."

**The Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE) at London Metropolitan University** is a groundbreaking research institute with a unique focus on education and social justice.

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<http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research-units/ipse/>

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