

## **Not enjoying your work experience? Head for Shanghai!**

**Breaking into the British media has never been easy. Now, budding journalists are heading off around the world for valuable work experience. Jade Bremner reports**

**" My journalism internship in Shanghai is certainly nothing like the rubbish jobs** I was given back home when I was interning with our local paper," says Emma Lloyd, 19, a student at London University, interning at the Shanghai Star. "I am actually working as a real journalist. Someone else makes the tea and does the photocopying."

Lloyd says that she feels "valued" and has quickly been trusted to write articles herself. "Today, I've done a short piece about a local artist. I'm also doing some internet research about a group of Canadian businessmen visiting Shanghai. What they call 'work experience' at home is basically hanging around the office looking over the shoulders of real journalists. From the first day here I was given the responsibility of writing material for the upcoming issue. You do have to work hard, and it can definitely be scary when you submit your first articles to our unsmiling editor. But if you rise to the occasion, this internship is a huge confidence builder..."

You can't just walk into an internship like Lloyd's; the Shanghai Star doesn't advertise for interns. So Emma arranged her internship through Projects Abroad. This UK-based organisation arranges volunteering and internships for 3,500 students a year. They have some 250 internship posts for would-be journalists in Argentina, Bolivia, China, Costa Rica, Ethiopia, India, Ghana, Mexico, Moldova, Mongolia, Romania, Senegal and Sri Lanka. They charge £1,500 to £3,500, depending on destination, for between one and six months, including arranging the internship, visas and work permits, accommodation and meals, insurance and emergency back-up. Among the most interesting internships are those in print journalism in Shanghai and those in television broadcasting in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Interns do real journalism and end up with a portfolio and a better chance of getting into a career in journalism when they get home.

There is a large and growing Western community in Shanghai. Millions of Chinese, especially young people, want to speak English, to a degree that Han Zheng, the mayor of Shanghai, has complained about "empire-building using a language." But the trend is unstoppable and there are plenty of English-language publications. Projects Abroad interns work on the Shanghai Star, with a readership of over a million, and on successful entertainment magazines such as That's Shanghai and Talk, both with readerships of more than a quarter of a million.

Helen He, the editor of the successful culture magazine Metrozine, says that the relationship works for both parties. "Projects Abroad interns have a fresh view of China. Each one is different. So having them as freelancers works for

us. We ask them to write about film, music, food and drink - and we try to send them out just with an interpreter to get a feeling for our city. We just had a boy who had graduated from Birmingham University and all he ever did was edit a boring student magazine, but we showed him how to find stories in the Shanghai streets. Wonderful results - his ideas, our ideas, his imagination, our imagination. I love it."

The "boy from Birmingham", Colin Shek, 21, tried to get an internship in London at IPC Media before he went to Shanghai. "...but there was a waiting list of a year - and everyone told me I should just forget about a career in journalism. In fact, even after a year, the internship wasn't guaranteed because they gave preference to NCTJ- or BJTC- qualified candidates." Shanghai was Colin's chance. He decided to stay on after his time with Metrozine and found a paid job with Talk, an events magazine. In a year or two, although he admits that anything can happen, he'll be in a better position to get the kind of job that he wants back home.

In Mongolia, Projects Abroad interns work at the national television station, TV5 and Mongolia National TV. Both these broadcast nationwide to a potential audience of 3 million. Broadcasting interns work on editing, producing and presenting. They regularly present a popular weekly 30-minute English-language news review on TV5 which claims an audience of more than 300,000 - although, since there are certainly not 300,000 English-speakers in Mongolia, presumably most of the audience doesn't understand it.

"Our interns have worked all over Mongolia," says Oko Togtuuny, Projects Abroad's Mongolian director. "They cover horse races and wrestling - and even visits by President Bush and Beyonce. Interns have to be keen and interested in television - they have to ask lots of questions and they have to push themselves quite a bit. They've got to be really keen to learn and then we can help them - we get them translators and we work with them everyday to help them get on in the TV world. Our TV stations are state-of-the-art."

This is not student journalism and Togtuuny says that some of the interns have even found themselves in the unlikely position of being local celebrities. "It's great when interns get high when they're recognised in the street."

It might be a funny route to a career in journalism. From Birmingham to London via Shanghai or Ulaanbaatar. But if you fancy a career in what Bismarck dismissed as "a refuge for those who have failed in other walks of life", it's definitely worth a try.

For information on Projects Abroad see [www.projects-abroad.co.uk](http://www.projects-abroad.co.uk) or call 01903 708300