



ESPA

The Next Generation
of International Talent

IVC Evidensia is a leading European veterinary care provider, with operations spanning 20 countries. It is growing constantly as new practices join the group, creating a continual need for fresh hires.



IVC EVIDENSIA

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6-month internships via ESPA UK help IVC Evidensia identify, nurture and train enthusiastic young recruits.

The company's interns have come from predominantly marketing and graphic design backgrounds.



Paul Hardwick is the group's Head of Digital, overseeing a team of nearly 30 staff who support the international network's digital needs. He has worked with ESPA UK since 2018, to bring in smart digital and marketing interns to support digital projects and services. During that time, IVC Evidensia has brought in seven ESPA interns, of which two were recruited for full time positions afterwards.

It began to use ESPA at a time when it was looking to mobilise a team of people to support some large new digital projects. Paul said: *"Rather than going to the recruitment market ESPA internships seemed like a good option. Although we are in a strong position to attract applicants, we felt this was a good way to 'grow our own' young staff. We had a number of short-term projects requiring bursts of work of 6-12 months, where it didn't make sense to employ a full-time team that wouldn't be needed longer term."*

He has been happy with the results to date: *"We have had many ESPA interns over the years, including some real superstars – two of whom we recruited into the team afterwards."*

Central technical and creative hub for international network

The company's interns have come from predominantly marketing and graphic design backgrounds. Creative graduates have found valuable opportunities in Paul's team. He explained *"We are a central function, and we provide digital services, support, content and images for clinics across the network. We can offer opportunities across all we do – including content creation, graphic design, social media management, google Advertising, SEO, copywriting, content editing, testing, UX and UI design."*

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The team supports its clinics with everything they need, including managing hundreds of websites centrally to ensure they are robust, secure, and well-maintained. It means migrating new websites and updating content in many languages. *“Students from outside the UK bring native language skills, and this works really well. We have had interns from the Netherlands, France, Spain, Italy, and Germany to help us create content and manage ongoing changes in local languages. They are also able to improve their English – although I must say their English skills, both verbal and written, are amazingly good.”*

Investing in interns helps identify long term potential

IVC Evidensia is a business built around people, and this extends beyond the vets working in its clinics into all its operations. Paul is committed to ensuring that the company invests effort in ensuring that the interns benefit, as well as the company.

He stated: *“Internships make sense for us as a business. Recruiting in this way helps us create consistency and quality of outputs, because we can coach and nurture any individual who is interested in a particular field like design, content, or copywriting. We can potentially gain a good new team member after the internship, who knows us, whom we know and trust.”*

He knows interns gain a lot from the experience. *“ESPA helps to bring us sharp young post-graduates or students just finishing their undergraduate degree, who need a 6-month placement as part of their studies. But it benefits students also because it is a good opportunity to get a taste of work, or even establish their career.”*

He related the example of Carme, one of the first ESPA interns: *“Carme joined us as a content editor but was interested in graphic design and a great illustrator. We gave her some tools, let her learn, and employed her as a graphic designer after her internship ended. Then she showed a keen interest in user experience design – so we coached her for about 6-12 months. We gained a really brilliant home-grown UX designer. She worked with us for quite a while before going to work for a big education firm.”*

He added *“It is incredibly rewarding to see an intern thrive, give them their first opportunity, and nurture their talent – and just as rewarding to see them move on to their next role.”*

Carme wasn't the only intern success. Another intern, Italo, joined IVC Evidensia with an interest in coding and software engineering. Paul recalled that *“Italo was put to work testing our systems. It gave him the opportunity to learn about the whole process and cycle of software delivery. After a few months, he was doing a similar job to a junior testing analyst we might have paid a considerable amount for. We recruited him as a Quality Assurance (QA) analyst, gaining a team member who was not just high quality, but used to our way of working.”*

Strong selection processes make any issues manageable

The two companies have established a good relationship and an excellent track record of selecting intern candidates that hit the ground running.

While ESPA has become good at identifying people that match the desired specifications, Paul feels that the company also retains some of the responsibility. *“ESPA do a very good job of finding and screening candidates. However, we still interview people just as if they were normal job candidates. We share the task of finding good people and it is usually very effective.”*

The process feels quite low-maintenance from that point on, he commented *“Generally we can be very hands off – ESPA supports the ongoing process and the accommodation, and we just cover the costs and leave the rest of the arrangements to them. I've never heard a single grumble from an intern, who always seem to enjoy living in a new city and working with such an interesting company. They are well looked after by ESPA.”*



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While there are some cost benefits to bringing in interns versus traditional recruitment this is not the main benefit in Paul's view. *"Cost is certainly a factor. If we were to recruit contractors for short bursts of work, they could be expensive. But the main thing that we look for in interns is enthusiasm, and that they are sharp and willing to learn in this first experience of work. We also benefit as they don't bring bad work habits with them!"*

Despite taking care in selection, Paul related one instance of an intern that didn't work out. He said *"There is always a risk that someone just wants to float through the process to tick a box for their course. It's why we interview so carefully – it can never be about simply bringing bodies in. We ended one internship early – although after endless feedback, nurturing, and coaching. It simply didn't work. ESPA did a brilliant job in resolving the situation."*

The secret of internship success

Asked why the company has such success with its interns, Paul reflected *"We take the skills and the interests people come with. We always have a particular business need, but we'll also encourage them to explore the areas they are keen on. Being part of a team gives them exposure to things they are not aware of and many opportunities to learn. After 6 months, if they are doing well and can carry on or come back, we would love to take them on."*

Paul also believes that success also depends on how interns are treated when they join. He explained: *"We onboard them like any other new starter. They get all the respect that anyone joining a company should get. We do a full induction and get to spend time with lots of people in the team – who are all quite young, very engaged, and enjoy their jobs."*

Interns are given clear objectives, but in a way that doesn't limit their experience, he said. *"Each is given a key objective to work on most of the time, but they also spend time in every area in the first few weeks. We have a formal catch-up one month in and talk about whether there is anything they are particularly interested in or don't like. If they show a specific interest, and are good at it, we encourage them to move into a role in that area."*

His advice to other firms is to *"treat every intern like an employee and expose them widely to the business. Don't keep them in a box to do one job, do admin or fill in spreadsheets for 6 months. Have an open mind about what they could do longer term. Our biggest successes with ESPA interns have been in allowing them to add their own flair, giving them some autonomy and a lot of trust."*

"The way to benefit from internships is to encourage that interest and passion and give constant feedback, so you get the best out of people."

Paul can see an ongoing role for interns as the company grows. IVC Evidensia is setting out to be the world's leading veterinary group and is adding new geographies all the time. Recent expansion areas include Eastern Europe and North America.

"We're proud of what we've done with done with ESPA and are happy to say so. There's been a pause in internships recently, as we are undergoing a big transformation, but I hope to get going again soon. The relationship with ESPA is very good, and I'd like to keep it going" he concluded.



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