Going further with student engagement

Wikimedia-focused paid internships and student work placements

Dr Sara Thomas

Background & introduction

Wikimedia UK is a charity and an approved national chapter of the global Wikimedia movement. We work with the Wikimedia Projects and enable people and organisations in the UK to contribute to a shared understanding of the world through the democratic creation, distribution and consumption of knowledge.

We have an established model of in-depth collaboration with content holding organisations, called the 'Wikimedian in Residence', which is delivered by creating a new staff post, usually over a year long, or bringing in a consultant. Organisations without a Resident in place may still find the WIR approach useful for thinking about student placements.

Over the last few years, Wikimedia UK and partners have been increasingly involved with or have helped with the hosting of internships or student work placements focused on delivering Wikimedia-related projects. We wanted to bring together some examples of this kind of work, explore how these kinds of placements sit within the ethos of the Wikimedia community, and share what we have learned from these experiences, offering what we have in terms of best practice.

This case study booklet is aimed at organisations in education or cultural sectors who already work with interns or student placements and want to explore whether Wikimedia-focused internships is a model of collaboration which could be beneficial to them.

⟶ *Fig. 1*

⟶ *Fig. 2*

⟶ *Fig. 4*

⟶ *Fig. 3*

Paid internships & student placements

Unpaid internships are increasingly recognised (certainly in the UK context from which we speak) to exacerbate a societal opportunity divide, thus, there has been a shift in many sectors towards paid internships, including in educational settings. Both the University of Edinburgh and the Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities, for example, only offer paid internship roles, as does the British Library.

It should be useful then to make a distinction between paid internships, and student projects or work placements which are arranged as part of a course of study or research.

It should be useful then to make a distinction between paid internships, and student projects or work placements which are arranged as part of a course of study or research. These both should be distinguished from volunteer work carried out with a charitable organisation, where tasks, expectations and conditions would be set in line with good volunteer management practices.

Although organisations may occasionally encounter instances where students seek out their own unpaid positions, we would generally recommend that funding be sought in order to pay them, and at a minimum, reasonable expenses should be allowable, in line with good volunteering practice. We recognise that the Wikimedia projects are dependent upon the donation of volunteer labour, and that Wikimedia can play a vital role in educational settings, but we also recognise that the culture of unpaid internships, especially where it is linked to employability skills and post-graduation employment opportunities, contribute to a less equitable society.

Whilst there can be a lot of crossover between both internships and student placements, in general we would expect an internship to last for a longer period of time than a placement, and for a placement to be a requirement of a course of study. The former would be a paid position, and the latter normally unpaid, or at least covered by existing student funding. It is these models of engagement in which we're interested, and will discuss here.
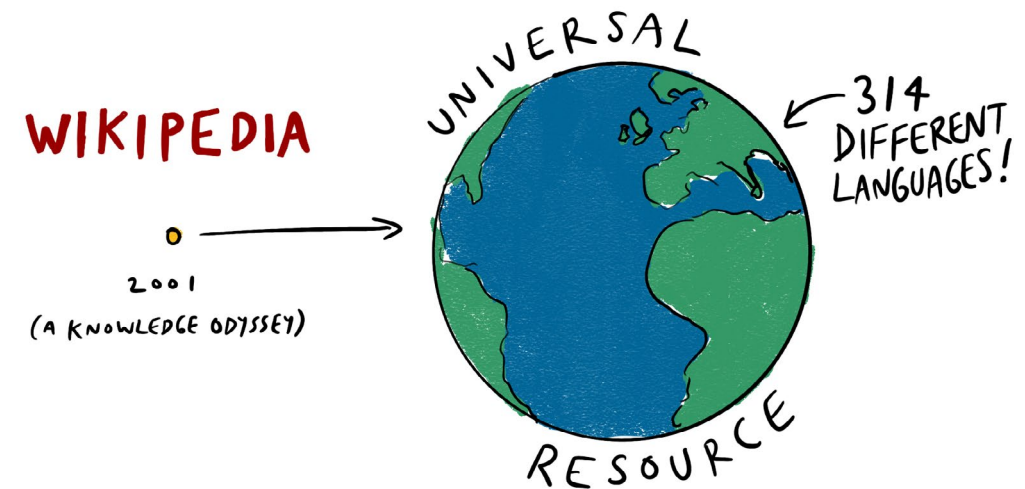
→ *Fig. 5*

Ethical internships and paid editing

With this in mind, one of the things we need to consider are the ways in which ethical internship practice might interface with paid editing rules on the Wikimedia Projects. When we began working with paid interns, we were concerned in the first instance to look at projects that did not involve substantial content creation on English Wikipedia. Whilst we felt that it would be unlikely that a student intern's work, properly signposted, would breach paid editing guidelines, we were conscious that this was not an area in which we had much experience, and a negative reaction to such work had the potential to make for both a poor experience and a poor outcome for both the intern and the host organisation, not to mention for the Wikimedia Projects.

In all kinds of placement, internship or volunteering, we would advise the host organisation to take careful note of local Wikimedia Project guidelines, particularly around such items as conflict of interest, and paid editing.

Early conversations at Wikimedia UK therefore focussed on looking at other projects, or work which involved other Wiki-adjacent activity such as training, event management, or advocacy. Our partners have also been conscious of this. The University of Edinburgh, for example, have hosted interns who have worked on event management, documentation, research, and data handling, all of which have proven highly beneficial to both the intern and the University.

In all kinds of placement, internship or volunteering, we would advise the host organisation to take careful note of local Wikimedia Project guidelines, particularly around such items as conflict of interest, and paid editing.

Crucially, we are concerned to ensure that the experience should be a positive one for the student and the organisation, and lead to tangible outcomes or outputs. One key takeaway here has been that getting away from thinking about en.wiki content creation has led to imaginative and highly worthwhile student projects.

→ *Fig. 7*

→ *Fig. 6*

Funding

Funding for such programmes can come from a variety of sources. Occasionally a student may approach an organisation as self-funded / unpaid, but as discussed this is not ideal, and at a minimum, expenses should be paid in line with good volunteer management practice. (If you do not already, we would suggest referring here to advice offered by your local Council for Voluntary Organisations.) Some educational institutions or related organisations may run internal internship programmes, or have access to internal funding sources which could support such placements, particularly if it might sit within or help achieve an organisation's strategic aims, such as commitments to gender equality or widening access. In other instances, funding might be sought from a third party funding body, although turnaround time on funding applications must be taken into consideration.

Wikimedia UK have engaged with a range of different student project models. Having reviewed the examples, we present three case studies below which illustrate some of the main approaches.

Types of project

$\longrightarrow$ *Fig. 8*

⟶ *Fig. 9*

↑

Case study 1

Wikimedia UK and Archaeology Scotland initially both submitted proposals to the Scottish Graduate School of Arts & Humanities' paid internship programme, which we later combined into a single proposal. Initially, we planned to focus on taking photos relating to Archaeology in Scotland, perhaps relating to women in Archaeology, in response to a known lack of this type of content on the Wikimedia Projects, and in line with our Gender Gap work.

Dr Doug Rocks-Macqueen from Archaeology Scotland was also working at that time as the Wikimedian in Residence at the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and therefore had relevant on-wiki experience. SGSAH funded the position, and also offered training to host organisations as well as recruitment support. The position was advertised through SGSAH's website, and send us the details of applicants. We also participated in a recruitment fair.

Unfortunately, the pandemic hit soon after the project began, and we had to quickly pivot to remote delivery, as the planned photography would not be able to take place. Our intern Roberta Leotta approached us having come across the Mapping Memorials to Women in Scotland project on Glasgow Women's Library's website. Having initially planned to work mainly on Wikimedia Commons, Wikimedia UK provided training in Wikidata, Google Sheets and Quickstatements. By the end of the project Roberta had mapped the Edinburgh section of the project onto Wikidata, providing a visualisation of the (unphotographed) memorials to women in Edinburgh. We met with her on a regular basis on video chat, and also corresponded by email.

As a result of the project, we had a new Wikidata identifier, and a re-usable workflow for Wikidata training and bulk item upload. This workflow was later used at a hackathon event with another Wikimedia UK partner, allowing the Aberdeen portion of the data to be uploaded, and a custom map (through WikiShootMe) being created, which allows us to invite community participation in photographing those items for which we do not have an openly-licensed image.

HTTPS://WIKIMEDIA.ORG.UK/2020/04/FIRST-STEPS-IN-WIKIMEDIA-WORLD/

HTTPS://WIKIMEDIA.ORG.UK//2020/08/REFLECTIONS-INTERNSHIP/

HOST ORGANISATION
University of Edinburgh

PROGRAMME
Internal, including external funding, paid internship

WIKIMEDIA PROJECTS
Wikidata, Wikimedia Commons, Wikipedia

OTHER TOOLS
OpenRefine, Pattypan, Quickstatements

OUTPUT
Research, Documentation, Content, Workflows

DURATION OF PLACEMENT
12 weeks over summer

⟶ *Fig. 10*

The University of Edinburgh has engaged a number of student interns through their established internal paid internship programme, most notably the Witchfinder General, a placement which worked with the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, a database of accused witches in Scotland which was put together by University researchers. Ewan McAndrew, the University's Wikimedian in Residence, had begun working with this dataset for student training in Wikidata, and had pointed out that the geolocation data would be a valuable addition to Wikidata, and would allow for interesting and valuable visualisation.

Intern Emma Carroll worked with a number of partners (including the National Archives of Scotland and National Library of Scotland) to geolocate a number of historic places, and upload this information to Wikidata.

The University further supported the project by the creation of a new website (https://witches.is.ed.ac.uk/) which allowed for engaging visualisation of this data. The website caught the imagination of many, and resulted in both national and international press attention, as well as bringing attention to the original piece of research.

Since that internship, the University has hosted a number of other internships through their internal scheme, working on Women in Red editathons, EDI and Wikimedia, Library & University collections engagement with Wikimedia, creating and documenting workflows for image and data upload to Commons and Wikidata (working on the Tower Block Archive and Historic Leith Archives), creating videos, and creating a new section of the website to host many of the Wiki resources relevant to students and teaching staff. The University's Wikimedian in Residence is also now participating in the Edinburgh Award Programme, offering a Wikipedia editing module. The Edinburgh Award is a scheme whereby student involvement in activities such as volunteering and community work can be officially recognised by the University.

Wikimedia UK has an established and long running partnership with the University, and has supported and promoted the work of the interns as a part of that collaboration.

HOST ORGANISATION
British Library

PROGRAMME
Student work placements
arranged through University
College London

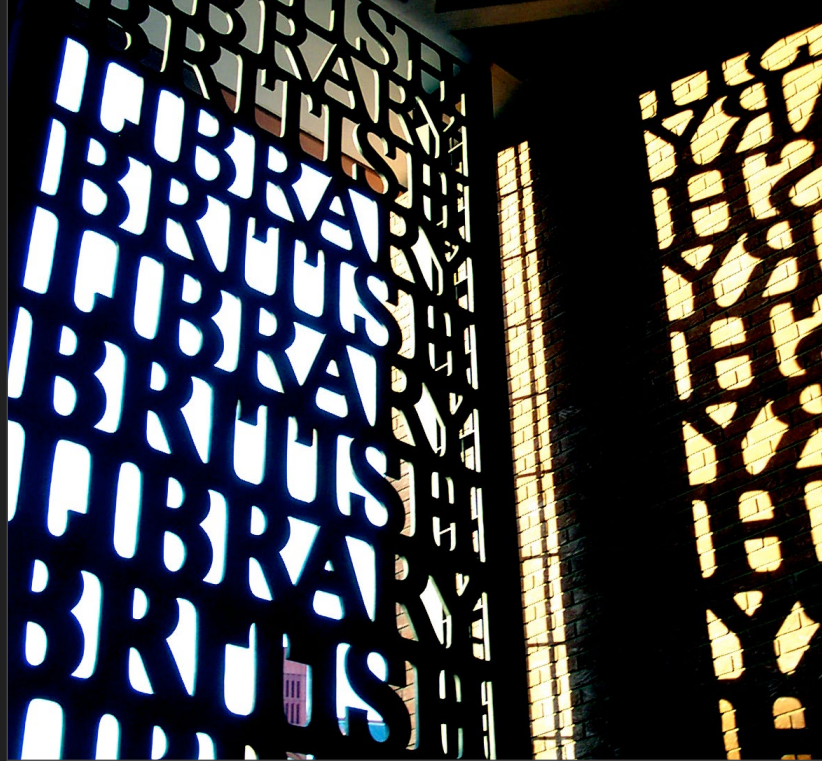**WIKIMEDIA PROJECTS**
Wikidata, Wikisource,
Wikipedia

OTHER TOOLS
Quickstatements,
Citation Hunt

OUTPUT
Article content, data upload

DURATION OF PLACEMENT
2 weeks–6 weeks

↑

Case study 3

⟶ *Fig. 11*

The British Library collaborates with University College London, where the Library hosts students, who undertake practical work placements as part of their studies. In 2021, two students came on board to work with the Library's Endangered Archives Programme, and another to work directly with the library's Wikimedian in Residence, Dr Lucy Hinnie, on the India Office Records project.

The two EAP students – Hope Lowther, and Jack Hudson – from UCL's Archives & Records Management MA course joined the library for two weeks, learning how to edit Wikipedia and about Wikipedia's role in enabling the sharing of collections material. They were also able to take part in some Wikidata based activities, and an editathon that was being organised by the Wikimedian in Residence. The other student, Dominic Kane, from UCL's Digital Humanities MA, was involved in adding information from the India Office Records collection to Wikisource and Wikidata. The student was able to meet with curators and other library staff, and was trained in Wikidata, including the use of Quickstatements for bulk upload of data. The student was also able to create a Wikidata Project Page for further work on the India Office Records.

These placements helped to build the culture of Wikimedia engagement within the Library, contributed significantly to pieces of ongoing work, and extended the reach of Library collections.

HTTPS://BLOGS.BL.UK/DIGITAL-SCHOLARSHIP/2021/06/ADDING-DATA-TO-WIKIDATA-IS-EFFICIENT-WITH-QUICKSTATEMENTS.HTML

HTTPS://BLOGS.BL.UK/DIGITAL-SCHOLARSHIP/2021/06/TRIANGULATING-BERMUDA-DETROIT-AND-WILLIAM-WALLACE.HTML

Benefits for student and host organisation

Students

Skills development

Digital skills enhancement is a key takeaway here. But whilst we normally think of engagement with the projects in terms of digital, data and information literacy, these kinds of placements offer the opportunity to think about different skill sets – web design, event management, project management. This comes in addition to learning about time management, being self motivated, and working with others.

Confidence building

"[I am now]…more willing to push myself out of my comfort zone in terms of working and I am much more comfortable undertaking new tasks and responsibilities."

Hannah Rothmann, University of Edinburgh

Learning about open knowledge

When asked about the long-term benefits of an internship to themselves, one student answered

"An awareness of the ways we can improve access to knowledge and education…A greater understanding and appreciation of Wikimedia's platforms and all the work that goes on behind the screen."

Hannah Rothmann, University of Edinburgh

→ *Fig. 13*

→ *Fig. 12*

Experience outside their subject area

One useful piece of recurrent feedback we've received was the benefit to the student of gaining experience in, or learning about, a sector somewhat removed from their subject area. This can be useful both in terms of broadening their experience, and evidencing personal and professional development.
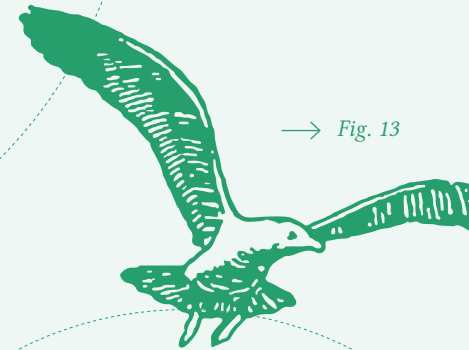
(Net)working with a team

"…what I consider the major lesson I took from this experience was understanding how to create a collaborative, supportive working team which is able to face, with creativity and flexibility, any type of situation…[including]… unpredictable ones such as [a] pandemic."

Roberta Leotta, SGSAH

Tangible outputs

"As an ultimate outcome, my project contributed to an increase in open access knowledge about the history of women who in some cases, are little known."

Roberta Leotta, SGSAH

"There is now a wealth of data from the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft uploaded onto Wikidata and the database itself has been further enriched by being geo-located."

Emma Carroll, University of Edinburgh

"Ending my first week, I attended a meeting of the British Library's Digital Scholarship team. It was really interesting to hear about all the different digital initiatives going on, both within the BL and in partnership with other organisations."

Dominic Kane, British Library

Students
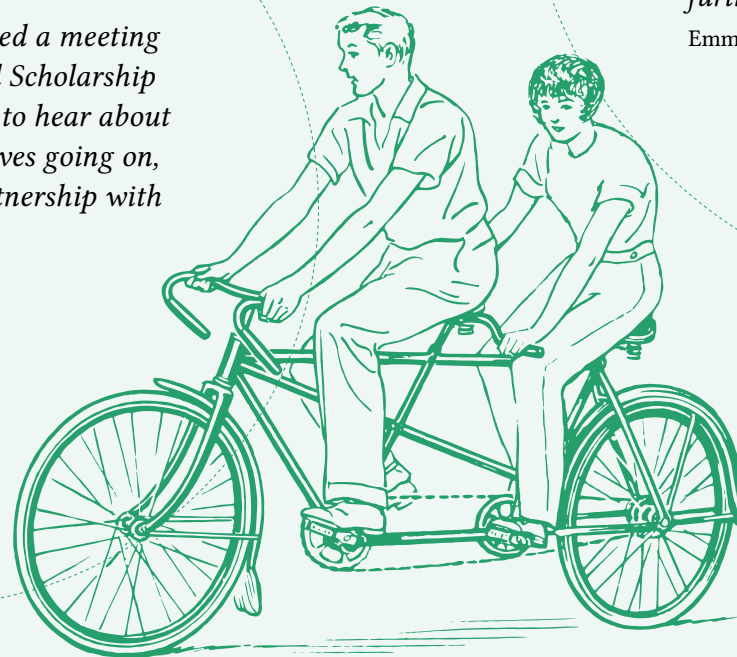
$\longrightarrow$ *Fig. 14*
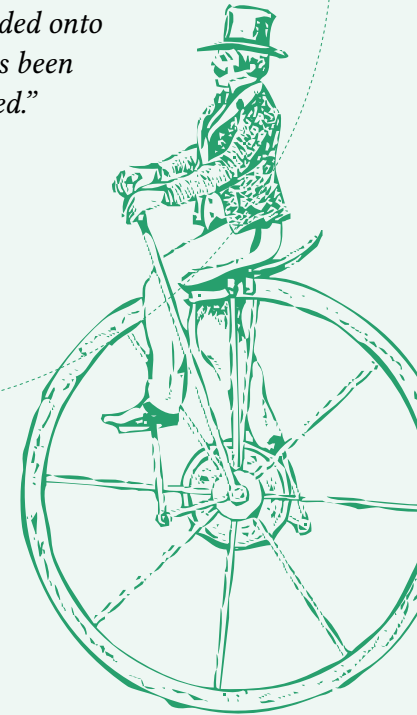
$\longrightarrow$ *Fig. 15*

Host Organisation

Growing the community

An intern or student work placement can offer a way to grow or develop Wiki-engagement within an organisation, including leveraging future growth in this area. This is particularly the case where the key contact at an organisation is either the sole, or one of only a few, staff members who are tasked with Wikimedia engagement. Where a Wikimedian in Residence is in place, it can give them an opportunity to act or develop as a mentor and supervisor. Where an organisation doesn't have a Wikimedian in Residence, placements can act as a lower-stakes way of deepening engagement with the Wikimedia Projects.

Deliver on strategic objectives

Where Universities or other organisations have strategic objectives that are a good fit with the work of Wikimedia, these types of placements can offer good opportunities to deliver on those goals – such as gender equality, digital skills development or widening participation.

"The University [has] strategic commitments to open knowledge…navigating the world of information, providing [students] with opportunities to learn digital skills that are important to graduate employability…so that we have an inclusive environment where everyone can thrive and achieve. [These internships] are about Walking the Walk…It's a win… and it's good value for money."

Ewan McAndrew, Resident, University of Edinburgh

Host Organisation

Fresh eyes

Students can bring a fresh perspective, or new skills into an organisation in a measured and meaningful way. Their motivation has also been observed to be high.

"...students were engaged, fresh to Wiki, and left converted which was a real boost."
Dr Lucy Hinnie, Resident, British Library

New opportunities

A number of organisations with whom we spoke reflected upon the additional opportunities for work that were afforded by taking on a student placement or intern. In particular, projects which they would have found challenging to progress without the placement, or which would otherwise lie outwith the capacity of a staff member.

→ *Fig. 18*

"...the articles that were created has helped share knowledge of notable people and organisations that have archival collections within EAP. These Wikimedia articles will be useful resources."
Dr Graham Jevon, Cataloguer, Endangered Archives Programme, British Library

"If you give them a task that they are motivated and engaged with, and give them a certain autonomy, you don't need to "manage" them that much, because they're already [sold] on the idea that this is important work that they're doing."
Ewan McAndrew, Resident, University of Edinburgh

"The internship took...a really rich dataset...and opened it up to a new audience across the world. Every corner of the world has had a look at that website now – 168 countries."
Ewan McAndrew, Resident, University of Edinburgh

What makes a good project

...host organisations should be careful to be realistic about what can be achieved within a particular timeframe.

For a partner who is already engaged with the Wikimedia Projects, an intern or student placement can be an opportunity to engage with a section of the Projects in which they are at the early stages of exploring, and can offer new depth to their engagement. Or, it can be an opportunity to carry out work such as research or documentation which can benefit from a fresh eye. Whilst approaching an internship project as a way solely to get additional resource should be approached with a degree of caution, we have seen numerous examples of where a student was able to take on a "nice to have" project which the organisation would like to complete, but which might not be prioritised under normal circumstances. The Witches project at the University of Edinburgh, for example, sought to gain more value from a piece of work already undertaken.

Taking account of the time-bound nature of these placements is key to good project design. Because a student is with the host organisation for a relatively short period of time (3–6 months, generally), and it is likely that their learning curve within the Wikimedia Projects may be relatively steep, host organisations should be careful to be realistic about what can be achieved within a particular timeframe.

Pointedly, we would not recommend designing a project which:

— is based around an ongoing or open-ended piece of work which would be negatively affected by the student's inevitable departure,

— creates expectations of sustainability beyond the life of the project which the organisation is unable to support,

— is more properly the role of staff, or;

— in which the student does not have the opportunity for meaningful impact.

In our experience, placements are very rarely likely to be suitable for an organisation which has not yet engaged with Wikimedia, as some familiarity with the Projects is necessary both for good project design, and for the host organisation to be able to offer proper support and supervision. In our conversations with hosts, the time estimated for staff support varied between 1–4 hours a week, plus any additional training.

Host organisations also recommended setting clear expectations at the outset, including around contact time. Where placements are remote, virtual check-ins were valued by both host organisations and students. Workflows and organisational tools (such as shared working documents and to-do lists) were also valued, as was allowing students the flexibility to find a topic that interests them, and have ownership over setting milestones. Many interns and student placements produce blogs as part of their work; to act as a record of achievement, as well as documentation of the project.

Host organisations also discussed the value of connection with the wider Wikimedia community, including Wikimedia UK, and individuals working with Wikimedia either in other organisations or as volunteers.

We've noted that a good project is made better by a host organisation which is flexible enough to allow a student to bring something of their own to the project, whether that be outlook, skills, or experience. One host described the process as "Alchemy" – finding the right person for the right project, and letting them run with it.

Recruitment / what makes a good intern
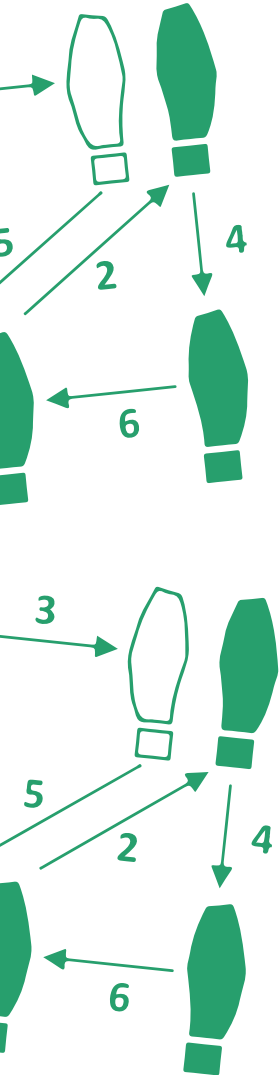
"Get someone good."

Ewan McAndrew, Resident, University of Edinburgh

Aside from having a clear brief and a good hook for the project, emphasis has been placed on the importance of recruitment, and finding the right person. Having a good interview panel and a good job description with a solid hook were seen as invaluable, both for garnering interest and to enable students to understand the role. In general, we find that you should look for the following:

— Research skills

— Writing skills

— Willingness to learn about Wiki if they don't already, in which case

— Fast learner

— Ability to work independently

→ *Fig. 19*

Past projects not already mentioned, and suggestions for future work include

— Conducting a piece of research, culminating in writing a report for internal or external distribution

— Assisting with metadata / structured data preparation and uploading of images to Wikimedia Commons

— Researching and preparing data for upload to Wikidata

— Visualising data

— Assisting with and organising events such as editathons, and working to support volunteers

— Creating web resources

— Working with GLAM collections to identify and fill particular content gaps on-wiki; for example taking pictures of collections items not already on Wikimedia Commons

Next steps

If you're interested in pursuing an internship or student placement, please drop us a line! We'd be happy to help discuss your idea. programmes@wikimedia.org.uk

Image Attributions

→ *Fig. 20*

1 *Photo from the University of Edinburgh's 'Women in Espionage' editathon series. Author: Mihaela Bodlovic. CC BY-SA 4.0.* Details

2 *Emma Carroll collaborating with Navino Evans on the Accused Witches Wikidata project. Author: Stinglehammer. CC BY-SA 4.0.* Details

3 *Photo from the University of Edinburgh's 'Women in Espionage' editathon series. Author: Mihaela Bodlovic. CC BY-SA 4.0.* Details

4 *Photo from the University of Edinburgh's 'Women in Espionage' editathon series. Author: Mihaela Bodlovic. CC BY-SA 4.0.* Details

5 *Wikipedia has come a long way since it's humble beginnings in 2001. Author: Bryan Mathers (Visual Thinkery). CC BY-SA 4.0.* Details

6 *Wikimedia UK staff and volunteers leaving Moor Street Station in Birmingham. Author: Jwslubbock. CC BY-SA 4.0.* Details

7 *Students' at the University of Edinburgh have made a physical visualisation of The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database. Author: Yarnoverhook. CC BY-SA 4.0.* Details

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9 *A collection of tools and ornaments from the late Bronze Age Adabrock hoard, Isle of Lewis. Author: National Museums Scotland. CC BY-SA 4.0.* Details

10 *Photograph of the ceiling of the Playfair Library, Old College, University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Author: Gary Campbell-Hall. CC BY 2.0.* Details

11 *The British Library entrance gate and its shadow. Author: C. G. P. Grey. CC BY 2.0.* Details

12 *Drawing made easy : a helpful book for young artists; the way to begin and finish your sketches, clearly shown step by step. Authors: Lutz, Edwin George. No known copyright restrictions.* Details

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15 *Monocycle américain. Author: Louis Baudry de Saunier. Public Domain.* Details

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18 *The theory and practice of jute spinning; being a complete description of the machines used in the preparation and spinning of jute yarns. Authors: Leggatt, William. No known copyright restrictions.* Details

19 *Man's foot positions for the basic box dance figure in rhumba. Author: Aaron OReilly. CC BY 3.0.* Details

20 *Drawing of an old airplane. Author: openclipart.org. CC0 1.0.* Details

21 *I enjoyed listening to @LornaMCampbell talking about Openness. I'm always surprised by how blind I am to those barriers, and have a lot to learn from the perspectives of other people. Author: Bryan Mathers (Visual Thinkery). CC BY-SA 4.0.* Details

OPEN

KNOWLEDGE

REMOVE BARRIERS TO KNOWLEDGE!

⟶ *Fig. 21*
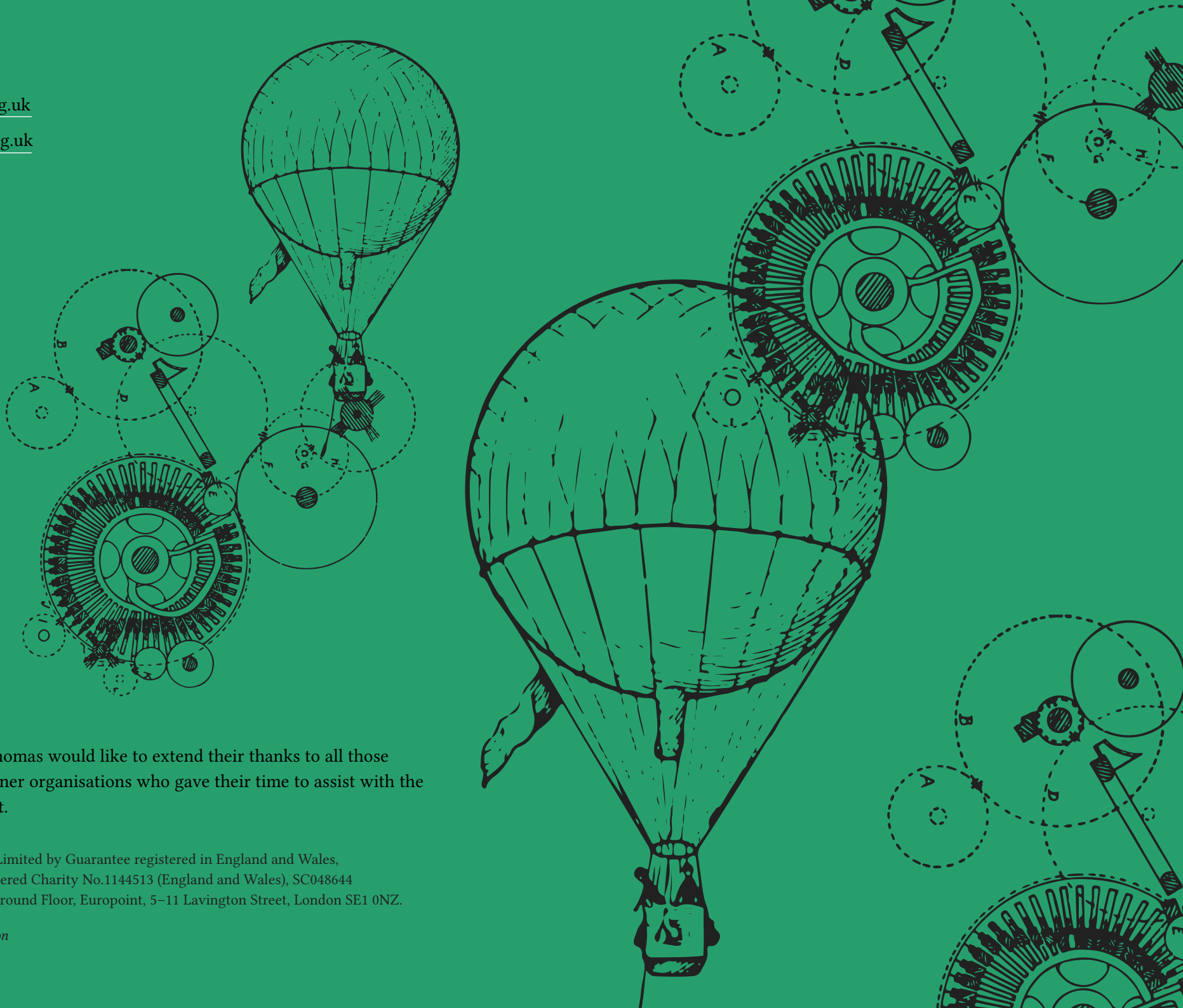
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