

# UK university buyers achieve constructive industry response on student internships



**Brands:** Dell, HP, Lenovo

**Products:** Servers

**Factory:** Wistron, Zhongshan

**Location:** China

**Time:** 2015-2018

**In 2015, the NGO Danwatch began an investigation into Taiwanese electronics manufacturer Wistron finding evidence of illegal use of student labour.**

In the multinational's server factory in China's south-eastern Guangdong province, Danwatch found students doing 'internship' work that did not fit their studies. This often included overtime and overnight shifts.

There was a clear reliance on these workers, where they represented up to 20% of people in a 20,000-strong workforce. This is a common practice in the electronics industry in China. There was also evidence of forced labour – they would not graduate if they did not complete the work.

Using this initial evidence, Electronics Watch gathered support from UK higher education sector buyers. These affiliates then helped spur action by the global brands Wistron supplied, including Dell, HP and Lenovo.

Dell led the way through its relationship with Wistron, enabling Electronics Watch to get onsite in 2017 to facilitate an Economic Rights Institute (ERI) survey with employees.

ERI guided a dialogue between management, employee representatives and 40 employees. This was designed to review Wistron's working conditions and workers' priorities for improvement.

Both Dell and Wistron showed a high level of openness and engagement, providing access to records, and were responsive to requests for evidence. All parties gained insight on compliance issues and methodology from this level of transparency.

Electronics Watch was later able to verify that Wistron:

- No longer allows student interns to work overtime or overnight.
- Ensures that internships fit within students' courses of study, including mentorship and skills development.
- Must get clients' permission for the use of student workers for specific projects.

However, flexible employment practices other than student internships continued to have adverse impact on workers. At the time of the research, most workers had been employed for a very short time. Short-term employment increases occupational health and safety risks, and creates dis-incentive for management and workers to invest in worker wellbeing. An unusually large proportion of the workforce stated that higher wages was their top priority. They said overtime was a necessity because of their low incomes.

Electronics Watch is continuing to monitor this factory and engage with industry to address problems and their root causes.

## Further reading (for affiliates only):

[Compliance Report:](#)

Wistron, Zhongshan, China (January 2018)