

For a fee, students can fake their internships

As junior students in Chinese colleges take on summer internships, some unscrupulous businesses can't wait to make deals – like selling them fake internship certificates online.

For many students, internships are part of their course work and are directly connected with school credits. In 2015, the Ministry of Education issued a notice requiring that internships should account for at least 30 percent of all credit hours. Schools typically ask students to take up internships for a few months to prepare for future careers.

But if the students don't go along, there is an easy way out. For just 200 yuan (\$30) or less, you can get whatever internship certificate you like online. The business is obviously illegal, but it exists nevertheless.

On e-commerce website Taobao, one can find many items by searching "internship certificate". Most are labeled "internship reports" and "designing internship certificates for college students". Some even tout "tailor-made" internship certificates "providing all necessary stamps of any company of your choice".

Xinhua reporters spoke to "Yibaifen", an agent whose details were on Taobao, and tried to buy an internship certificate. The agent later said via WeChat that a certificate would cost about 50 yuan.

"You can choose any type of company in any city," the agent said. The agent then sent the stamp of a well-known Beijing-based IT company and claimed it was real because he "has connections".

"I can give you a discount if you buy two," the agent said.

On Taobao, one agent has sold more than 100 fake certificates in the past month, according to a Tianjin newspaper.

To make the fake certificates appear authentic, some agents even promise to take follow-up calls from schools.

On Tencent's instant messaging service QQ, an agent said that he is "on call 24/7".

"I put my own phone number on the certificates, so if your teachers call about your internship, I can handle them," the agent said.

Another agent claimed to have an authentic stamp of a Beijing advertising company. He declined to say whether or not he is an employee of the company, but he did say he "cooperates" with the company, and pays some "commission" to it for each stamp he puts on certificates.

But the general manager of the company denied any knowledge of the scam, saying the company has strict procedures about using its stamp, and that the agent's stamp must be fake.

Under China's Criminal Law, fabricating the stamps of government organs and companies could be a crime. Despite potential punishment, however, the business thrives, partly because of demand from college students.

Xiao Mo, an undergraduate at a college in Xuzhou, Jiangsu province, bought a fake internship certificate online. She said her college has "strict demands" with respect to its internship requirement, but she does not have time because she needs to prepare for graduate school.

"I really don't have time for an internship," she said. "Besides, my teachers probably won't check the authenticity of the certificate, so it should be no problem."

But a student surnamed Zhang from a Beijing college disagrees. Zhang, who has been working as an intern at a company the entire summer, said buying fake certificates is unacceptable.

"Internships are more about strengthening your ability than obtaining a piece of paper," he said. "Buying fake certificates is unfair to the students who work hard."

The phenomenon has fired up an angry discussion online.

"Internships are meant to prepare students for their future jobs, but buying fake certificates only damages their credibility," read one comment.

"It is necessary to get tougher on the businesses, and colleges need to reevaluate their assessment methods for students," said another.

Li Jiaying, deputy head of the University of International Relations, said buying fake internship certificates is immoral.

"Colleges need to be credible," Li said. "Anyone caught purchasing fake certificates should be regarded as cheating and be punished accordingly."

Qu Wenyong of Heilongjiang University said providing fake internship certificates could be a violation of the law, and that the government should deal with the agents.

"E-commerce websites are also to blame for providing platforms for illegal businesses," he said.