Background

As part of its mandate to empower the nation's youth, the National Youth Commission of Sierra Leone (NAYCOM) is committed to promote decent employment opportunities for Sierra Leonean youth. After scrutiny of existing employment opportunities for young graduates, it emerged that the lack of working experience is a major obstacle for job-seeking graduates. Similarly in most developing countries, young people exiting school are often caught in a vicious circle where the lack of experience prevents them from obtaining a job, and the lack of work time prevents them from obtaining the experience, the Catch 22 phenomenon.

In order to address these shortcomings, NAYCOM, with the technical and financial assistance of UNDP, are implementing the second year of the graduate internship programme (GIP), which benefits graduates and students of tertiary education institutions wishing to acquire a formative and productive work experience.

Objective

The objective of the extended internship programme is threefold: (1) increase the number of young people benefitting from productive internship opportunities nationwide and (2) increase the overall quality of the internship experience, so as to actually contribute to the employability of the intern and to the maximization of both the social and private return of the initiative (3) ensure equal opportunities to access merit based internship positions.

Technical specifications and implementation

The GIP is an internship scheme first piloted in 2012 with the aim of deserving tertiary education institutions graduates. The internship experience is meant to be beneficial to both employers and interns. The latter will have the chance to develop professional skills and an understanding of a profession, while the former will be able to identify and recruit motivated and capable individuals.

Implementation of the GIP involves three parties: prospective interns, prospective employers and NAYCOM/UNDP. Each will have a different role to fulfill in order to make the programme successful.
Prospective interns

Tertiary level students who have graduated or completed their academic studies within the past 3 years are eligible to apply for the internship program. They are required to register with UNDP/NAYCOM in order to qualify. For their registration to be validated and their candidature to become active, they must provide, together with personal information and contact details, an updated CV compiled according to a universal template provided by UNDP/NAYCOM, originals or certified copy of the university inscription and of the diploma(s) held and a notice of the final graduation mark. The candidates who apply for the GIP will have to comply with the criteria defined by UNDP/NAYCOM and publicly advertised.

They must also indicate their preferred:

- Career or area of interest (e.g. Administration, Architecture Building, Planning and Surveying, Auditing, Banking, Marketing and PR, Animal and Plant Resources, Arts, Design and Crafts, Charity/Voluntary Opportunities, Construction and Property Management, Counseling and Social Services, Development organizations (NGO), Development Organizations (IO and Donors), Education (Teaching and Lecturing), Engineering, Finance, General Management, Geology and land management, Health care, Hospitality and Events Management, Human Resources and Employment, IT, Economics, Statistics and Management Services Information Services, Insurance, Pensions and Actuarial work, Law Enforcement and Public Protection, Legal Services, Sports, Tourism (Hotels and Restaurants), Logistics and Transport, Manufacturing and Processing, Marketing and Advertising, Mining, Natural Resources and the Environment, Private sector, Public Sector, Publishing, Media and Performing Arts, Sales, Retail and Buying, Scientific Services and analyses)
- Location (which one of the Sierra Leone Districts)
- Willingness to change the location
- Starting date.
- Duration (4 months).

If selected for an internship, the prospective intern will have to undergo a one-day training session on life and soft skills. Information technology skills will be highly valued and promoted in the training sessions. The Interns will also have to deliver, before the last day of the internship an assessment report of the experience, following the template provided by UNDP/NAYCOM. Failure to deliver such report will entail loss of the final monthly allowance. The perspective monthly allowance for interns is of SL 375,000 (USD 85 to 90).
UNDP/ NAYCOM

UNDP/NAYCOM will mediate between interns and employers, warranting fulfillment of their respective obligations. In particular they:

1) Policy advocate by the Ministry of Youth Affairs, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education. Promoting ‘National Internship Policy’ is essential to the nature of the programme, as to integrate the GIP within the legal framework of Sierra Leone’s education system.

2) Ensure that prospective interns’ data are electronically registered either through remote internet connection either through manual data entry points accessible to all interested candidates.

3) By proactively looking for available employers, UNDP/NAYCOM ensures that the highest number of internships responding to the requirements listed below is made available to suitable candidates (where needed, UNDP and NAYCOM assistance could be sought after to establish meaningful contacts with potential employers).

4) UNDP/NAYCOM will foster the potential partnering with the placement institutions in order to establish a supportive dynamic between the Universities, NAYCOM and the private sector. The medium long term perspective is to create a Graduate Internship Platform. The GIP will look forward becoming a fixed yearly programme encouraging employment among the young graduates, and facilitating the private’s sector development through the availability of motivated young workers.

5) UNDP/NAYCOM ensures that the internships proposed:
   a. Last an average of four months (full time). Duration should be clearly specified in the offer (as well as possibility of renewal).
   b. Represent an actual and genuine vacancy which the employer is interested to fill and not a way to take advantage of “free” labour.
   c. Are organized so that the intern will be able to enjoy a fully-fledged working and training experience, while supervised and enjoying a legally valid employment contract.
   d. Warrant to the intern fundamental legal protection and labour rights.

6) UNDP/NAYCOM carefully scrutinizes, selects and monitors employers (see section below) on the basis of:
   a. Quality of the job offered to the young people.
   b. Working conditions and possibility of warranting, ceteris paribus, a permanent job at the end of the internship.
   c. Capacity to accommodate the intern within the company's structure.
   d. Training contents of the internship experience.
   e. Flexibility to accommodate different profiles (gender balanced) and most disadvantaged youth with relevant academic curriculum (in order to avoid only the most connected youth to benefit from the opportunity).
N.B. The agreement with the employers shall be based on the exchange of mutually advantageous services. UNDP/NAYCOM will ensure that the most qualified applicants will be proposed.

7) UNDP/NAYCOM arranges for the selection of candidates to be jointly carried out with the employers, avoiding patronization and favoritism. In particular UNDP/NAYCOM will:
   a. Preselect a roster of potentially suitable candidates to fill each of the proposed vacancies, by verifying credentials, qualifications and academic records.
   b. Once the roster of at least 5 peers is selected\(^1\), the choice of the two final candidates is made through a draft lottery, subject to verification of candidates’ records and of the drafting process by NAYCOM and UNDP.
   c. The two final candidates are proposed to the employer for the final choice with an accompanying presentation file.

8) UNDP/NAYCOM will monitor the quality of the internship. In particular:
   a. Internships will be the object of a careful mid-term and final scrutiny through a questionnaire provided to both the employers and the interns by the NAYCOM staff.
   b. Interns will be withdrawn from placements considered inappropriate and not conforming to laid-down standards for employers. An alternative solution will be provided to the intern while sanctions and warnings to not complying employers will be considered.
   c. The feedback from interns and employers will be utilized to define shortcomings in existing training contents and ad hoc remedial courses will be envisaged on the basis of the internship report.

9) NAYCOM and UNDP will proceed to organize random checks and monitoring of the internships to prevent fraudulent behavior and to ensure quality standards are respected.

10) UNDP/NAYCOM will liaise with the placement institution to arrange a ‘host home initiative’ for the interns who are displaced from their home residence. This initiative aims at facilitating the settlement if the intern in the location where the placement institution is placed.

\(^1\) Such roster could be reduced to 3 candidates in case of evidence of lack of qualified candidates.
Prospective employers

The GIP is open to public, private and third sectors employers, including International Organizations. However, selected employers are required to fulfill a certain number of requirements. In particular:

Before the beginning of the internship

1. Present to UNDP/NAYCOM a clear work plan for the entire duration of the internship, including:
   a) A title for the intern position (i.e., Sales Intern, Account Executive Intern, Marketing Intern, etc.), specifying the profile sought and a summary description of the work that the intern will be responsible for, including the team(s) and project(s) with which the intern will work and the skills and experience the intern can expect to gain or expand.
   b) A training plan specifying nature and amount of training which will be provided to the intern. Employers should engage in providing to the intern a specific amount of training, notably in the form of general orientation to the employer’s business and specific orientation on the subject or product he is assigned to work for. N.B. Such training needs to be measurable and verifiable.
   c) Tasks. The employer should specify what kind of tasks the intern is assigned to so that, by the end of the internship, the intern should be able to report about the contribution s/he provided. Such reporting must be based on concrete, measurable and achievable goals. Strong preference will be assigned to proposals that minimize the clerical duties and aim at empowering the intern with tasks which could bring value to the organization.
   d) The names of two workers (or positions) who will provide supervision and mentorship to the intern. One should be the direct reporting manager and the other individual should be a mentor (for best results make sure the mentor has the same area of subject matter expertise). The direct reporting manager will also be considered as the lead contact person for UNDP/NAYCOM, being responsible of the communication and mediation.

During the internship

1. Induction. Interns should receive a proper induction at the beginning of the internship covering: description of the organization and structure, objectives and values, introductions to relevant staff and team members, tour of the facilities.

2 NB in case of entities with less than 20 workers, only one name is required.
practical issues including how to claim expenses, and health and safety procedures.

2. **Treatment.** Interns should be treated with exactly the same degree of professionalism and duty of care as regular employees, including access to disciplinary and grievance procedures. The intern should be given as much responsibility and diversity in their work as possible. In particular, interns are to be: (i) made to feel part of the organization, (ii) given work that develops their skills, (iii) made to be cognizant of issues relating to insurance, health and safety, and the provisions of the working time policy within the firm, (iv) entitled to equal holiday time as other employees of the same grade when applicable.

3. **Supervision.** Aside from defining clear plans and goals, the employers should engage to provide timely feedback to the intern on a weekly or biweekly basis, taking the time to discuss about the intern’s performance and the future steps.

4. Fill out a mid-term evaluation report with support of the NAYCOM staff assessing the state of advancement of the intern in achieving the tasks, and reaching the training objectives. Via the mid-term evaluation, the employer could also propose alteration of the original work plan, providing adequate justification. N.B. failure from the employer to submit the mid-term evaluation report within two weeks from the agreed date will stop the internship or lead to exclusion of the employer from future NAYCOM-led internship programme.

5. Provide at its own expenses Public Liability Insurance and Employment Liability for the interns working for the placement institution when applicable.

6. The placement institution will be encouraged to offer a minimum living stipendium to support the interns’ cost of living for the duration of the internship. The financial disbursements will be carried at the end of each month, upon continuous attendance to the workplace. The monthly allowance recommended to be disbursed to the intern is SL 375.000 (USD 85 to 90).

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**After the internship**

1. **Final report and evaluation.** At the end of the internship, the employer should engage in providing to UNDP/NAYCOM and to the intern, a final report following a previously agreed template, assessing the contribution of the intern and the learning achievements, as well as the overall profile of the candidate. Failure to comply will cause exclusion of the employer from any other NAYCOM-led internship initiative.

The employer should also provide the intern with a certificate/reference letter detailing the work they have undertaken, the skills and experience acquired, and the content of the formal performance review conducted at the end of the internship. It would
also be appreciated the opportunity to provide the intern with an ‘exit interview’ allowing the intern to take stock of his/her experience.