

A Framework for Quality Internships:

Promoting Early Work Experience for Young People



Kevin Hempel

Sava Pantelic

Key Messages

- ▶ The lack of work experience among young jobseekers is one of the key obstacles to hiring by firms across the globe.
- ▶ Internships/traineeships are one type of work-based learning that provide an opportunity for prospective workers to acquire skills and experience in the workplace. The different kinds of internships include: (i) open-market internships; (ii) internships as part of school curricula; and (iii) internships as part of Active Labour Market Programmes.
- ▶ Internships can be highly beneficial to both the interns and the host organisations. However, many internships face quality issues, thus reducing the benefits or even leading to negative impacts on the youth and/or the employers.
- ▶ To ensure high-quality internships, stakeholders should respect and work towards quality standards at different levels:
 - (1) At the level of the employer (e.g. in terms of working conditions, tasks, supervision);
 - (2) At the level of the intermediary organisation (e.g. related to employer selection, feedback system); and
 - (3) At the policy level (e.g. regulatory framework, funding).
- ▶ With most studies on internships coming from high-income countries, policymakers and practitioners should build the evidence-base on the impact of internship programmes in low- and middle-income countries.

Corresponding author:

Kevin Hempel
khempel@prospera-consulting.com
@KevHempel

Photo credit (title page):

World Bank Photo Collection

1 Rationale

Young people face higher unemployment, underemployment, and precarious employment than adults ([ILO, 2020](#)). Globally, young people (18-24 years) are three times as likely as adults (25 years and older) to be unemployed. Many young people are also “idle” – neither working nor studying.¹ Even when young people find work, they are more likely to work in vulnerable and precarious employment, such as informal, part-time, or temporary jobs. Overall, young women are typically at particular disadvantage, with lower labour force participation rates, higher unemployment, and more vulnerable employment than their male counterparts.

This underutilization of young people’s potential is costly for the youth and society. Evidence from across the globe suggests that an unsuccessful school-to-work transition for young people can lead to long-lasting “scarring” effects, negatively affecting future job prospects, lifetime earnings, as well as their physical and mental health ([McQuaid, 2015](#); [Nichols, Mitchell and Lindner, 2013](#)). Moreover, high levels of youth inactivity or unemployment reduce tax revenues and productivity ([Goldin, 2015, p. 2](#)).

The lack of relevant skills and work experience among prospective workers represent a key obstacle to firms. 45% of employers globally report talent shortages ([Manpower Group, 2018](#)), with the lack of work experience identified as one of the main obstacles to hiring by employers across different regions, from the Caribbean to Europe and Central Asia ([Parra-Torrado, 2014, p. 12](#); [Koettl-Brodmann, 2015, p. 17](#)). Indeed, many employers are hesitant to hire a jobseeker without relevant work experience, as the perceived risks may be too high (e.g. high uncertainty about their ability and productivity). As a result, youth and other vulnerable groups (e.g. the long-term unemployed) may find themselves in an “experience trap”, whereby the lack of (recent) work experience prevents them from finding a job and gaining experience in the first place ([Rosas, 2016, p. 36](#)). In turn, the experience of unemployment further increases the risk of future unemployment, e.g. due to reduced productivity, deteriorating skills and employers’ prejudice ([Görlich, Stepanok and Al-Hussami, 2013, p. 5](#)).

Work-based learning (WBL), including internships, can bridge this gap, and facilitate transitions to employment. Work-based learning refers to “all forms of learning that takes place in a real work environment” ([IAG-TVET, 2017, p.2](#)). Some forms of work-based learning, such as apprenticeships and internships, can help students and jobseekers accumulate meaningful work experience and thus contribute to breaking the experience trap. While longer-term apprenticeships are often the focus of work-based learning, internships have also become a very popular instrument to gain exposure to the world of work, especially in OECD countries. For instance, around 80% of university students in the United States and Germany do at least one internship before graduation ([Rosas and Corbanese, 2017](#)). They are also becoming more common in some low- and middle-income countries, with Brazil, China and Romania adopting regulations on internships ([Stewart et al., 2018, p. 18](#)). Indeed, internships/traineeships represent an appealing instrument for a variety of reasons:

- **Short and simple:** Internships are relatively short-term instruments and easy to implement. They are inherently market-based (i.e. offered by different types of organisations based on their needs) and thus do not require substantial (or any) external intervention.
- **Mutual benefits:** Internships can benefit prospective workers such as students and jobseekers (e.g. through increased employability) as well as employers (e.g. in terms of talent acquisition, support for ongoing work). They are also beneficial to intermediaries such as education institutions (e.g. increased attractiveness of the education offered).

¹ Not in employment, education or training (NEET).

- Contribution to several policy objectives: Internships can be adapted to various needs and can play a role in several policy areas, such as practice-oriented higher education, active labour market programmes (especially in the context of job training programmes) and workforce development in the private sector.

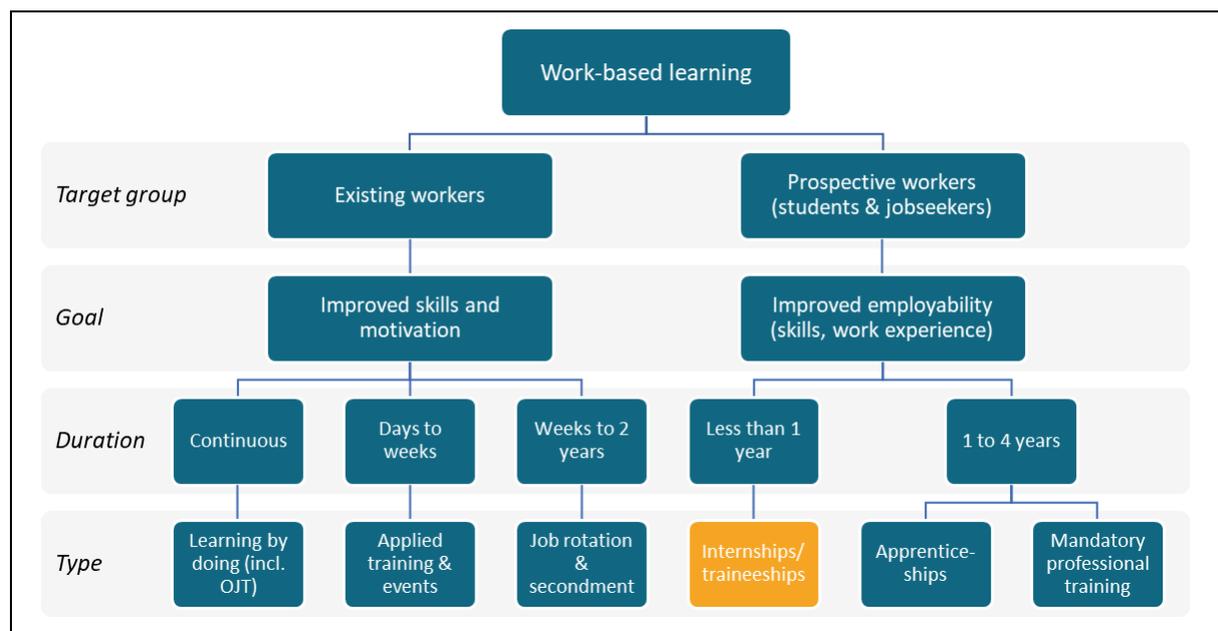
2 Work-based learning and internships: Key definitions

Work-based learning refers to “all forms of learning that takes place in a real work environment.” [IAG-TVET \(2017, p.2\)](#)

Work-based learning represents an opportunity for existing or prospective workers to acquire skills in the workplace. The defining feature of work-based learning is that it happens in the workplace, typically doing real work. WBL comes in different shapes and forms depending on the target group, goal and duration (*Figure 1*). For example, existing workers can acquire new skills and boost their workplace motivation through practical on-the-job training, job rotations and secondments. Prospective workers, on the other hand, can improve their employability and gain experience through apprenticeships, mandatory professional training and internships (*Box 1*).

In practice, WBL typically takes place in combination with other types of learning (e.g. classroom-based, online). For instance, existing workers may also access training courses, conferences or executive education as part of their professional development, while students and jobseekers typically attend studies or formal training courses to build knowledge and skills. There can also be grey areas of what is considered “in a real work environment”; for instance, mentoring or highly practical training courses organised around solving concrete work-related challenges with colleagues could be considered “work-based”, even though they may not always involve “doing actual work”.

Figure 1: Main types of work-based learning



Source: Own analysis, based on [Ecorys, IES and IRS \(2013, pp. 6-8\)](#); [Saraf \(2017, p. 7\)](#).

Box 1: Main types of WBL for prospective workers

Internships/traineeships represent optional or compulsory training programme during studies (typically in upper-secondary or tertiary) or upon their completion with the aim of gathering documented practical experience and improving employability. They last less than one year (typically 3-6 months) and sometimes include financial compensation.

Apprenticeships are formal or informal professional education and training programmes with aim of attaining a professional qualification. They can last 3-4 years and often include financial compensation.

Mandatory professional training refers to a specifically regulated type of traineeships as a prerequisite for entering certain professions, e.g. law, medicine, teaching, architecture, accounting, etc. They often last 1-2 years and include financial compensation.

Additional forms of work-based learning can include simulated work environments, short-term job shadowing/externships, and service learning.

Sources: [Hadjivassiliou et al. \(2012, pp. 29-37\)](#); [Ecorys, IES and IRS \(2013, pp. 6-8\)](#); [Buzzeo and Cifci \(2017\)](#); [Hall-Nevala, Ulicna and Duchemin \(2013, p. 13\)](#)

There are different types of internships. The nature of internship can vary according to target group, objective, regulation, institutional linkages, etc. Typically, one can differentiate between three broad types of internships ([Hadjivassiliou et al., 2012, pp. 29-37](#); [Stewart et al., 2018](#)):

- **Open market internships:** Open market internships refer to voluntary internships conducted before, during or after formal studies in order gain initial insights into the world of work (prospective and current students) or provide a pathway to work (graduates). The terms and conditions of open market internships are negotiated directly between the young person and the host organisation.
- **Internships linked to formal education:** These internships form (an optional or mandatory) part of the academic curriculum in upper-secondary or higher (vocational or general) education. These types of internships are intended to complement studies within the education institution in order to learn practical skills in the workplace. They are typically highly regulated and involve an agreement between the student, host organisation, and education institution. Students often receive learning credits for engaging in these internships.
- **Internships linked to active labour market programmes (ALMPs):** These can be self-standing internship programmes or internships that are part of a broader job training intervention (combined with classroom-based training and potentially other support services) seeking to enhance practical experience of unemployed jobseekers. While traditionally targeted at low-skilled jobseekers, they have come to also cover university graduates. They are typically administered by Public Employment Agencies or other public and non-public providers of ALMPs (e.g. Ministry of Youth, NGOs, etc.) and regulated by law.

Table 1: Comparison of different types of internships and their features

	Open-market internships	Internships linked to formal education	Internships as part of ALMPs
Target group	(Prospective) students and recent graduates	Students	Unemployed jobseekers
Main objective	<u>Students:</u> Professional orientation, enhance future employability <u>Graduates:</u> Transition to work	Professional orientation, enhance future employability	Facilitate transition to work
Typical duration	2-6 months	<u>Secondary:</u> Several weeks <u>Tertiary:</u> 3-9 months	3-6 months
Level of regulation	Varies by country (can be low)	High	High
Facilitation & monitoring	None	Education institution	Public Employment Agencies, Ministries, NGOs, etc.

Source: Own analysis, based on [Hadjivassiliou et al. \(2012, pp. 29-37\)](#); [Stewart et al. \(2018\)](#)

3 Benefits of internships

“Participation in internships is a major factor in employers’ recruitment decisions.”
[Comyn and Brewer \(2018, p.19\)](#)

Internships can be a win-win experience for interns (primarily young people) and employers, providing benefits for both sides. Young people benefit from getting to know the world of work, building up skills, gaining practical experience, and growing their networks. Conversely, companies can leverage internships for identifying future employees, bringing in qualified people to support ongoing work, developing employees’ leadership skills, as well as generating cost savings in terms of recruitment and training (see table 2). Education institutions can benefit, too. For instance, internships provide an additional pathway for learning (complementing classroom-based learning), may increase the attractiveness of the academic programme, enhance school visibility and rankings, and enhance the loyalty of alumni ([Maertz, Stoeberl and Marks, 2014, p. 127](#)).

Table 2: Benefits of internships

Youth	Employers
Professional orientation Internships provide insights into the world of work (e.g. explore specific industries, companies, job functions), thus helping identify work-related preferences and career options	Talent acquisition & retention Internships can help screen and identify potential future employees who know the company, require less training, and are more likely to stay with the firm
Skills acquisition Internships can help solidify and develop a young person’s technical and soft skills, as well as apply knowledge acquired in school	Support for ongoing work Interns can support company employees by actively contributing to existing tasks and projects, while also bringing “fresh ideas”
Work experience Internships can offer practical on-the-job experience to first-time jobseekers or career switchers, and help signal one’s ability to potential employers	Current employees’ leadership skills Internships can help existing workers develop their leadership skills by supervising and/or mentoring interns

<p>Professional networks By increasing exposure to people already working, internships help grow professional networks that can be beneficial in the future</p>	<p>Company visibility and reputation Internships can help increase a company’s visibility and reputation in the local community and beyond</p>
<p>Increased employability Internships can improve a person’s job prospects, facilitate education-to-work transition and lead to higher starting salaries</p>	<p>Cost savings and higher productivity Internships can be a useful tool to save costs in terms of recruitment and subsequent training, and can lead to higher productivity as a result of investing in interns’ skills</p>

Source: Own analysis, based on [Hall-Nevala, Ulicna and Duchemin \(2013, p. 13\)](#); [Maertz, Stoeberl and Marks \(2014, p. 127\)](#); [Making Cents International \(2017, p. 39\)](#); [Richmond Community College \(n.d.\)](#).

Existing empirical evidence confirms the potential benefits of internships on young people and firms.

In a review of relevant literature, [O’Higgins and Pinedo \(2018\)](#) find that internships can be associated with better post-internship labour market outcomes for the intern; however, internship characteristics play a key role. For instance, unpaid internships and internships after graduation (as opposed to direct entry into employment) have had less favourable results (see also [Comyn and Brewer \(2018\)](#) for similar findings). Box 2 provides examples of studies on the impact of internships on youth and employers.

Box 2: Impact of internships on youth employability and host organisations

Impact on youth

[Robert and Saar \(2012\)](#) conduct a comparative research analysing the effect of work experience on post-graduation occupational outcomes of tertiary education graduates in six Central and Eastern European countries. The study finds that study-related work experience reduces the duration of job search and improves employment prospects, while non-study-related work (e.g. odd jobs) affected entry into the labour market and job quality in an unfavourable manner.

[Baert et al. \(2019\)](#) use fictitious but realistic job applications to test the effect of a voluntary internship experience during higher education on the likelihood of being invited to a first interview in Belgium. The authors find that applicants with internship experience have, on average, a 12.6% higher probability of being invited to a job interview.

[McKenzie, Assaf and Cusolito \(2016\)](#) use a randomized control trial to evaluate a youth internship programme in Yemen. They demonstrate that receiving an internship resulted in an almost doubling of work experience and a 73 % increase in income during the internship period. Moreover, participants with internship experience had better employment outcomes after the end of the internship compared to those without such experience, despite the worsening political and economic instability in Yemen.

Impact on employers

[Mgaya and Mbekomize \(2014\)](#) conduct a survey of 150 host organisations to identify the benefits to employers from participating in the internship programme organised by the Faculty of Business at the University of Botswana. According to the survey, host organisations can bring in new ideas, benefit from cost savings, enhance their image, and fulfil their corporate social responsibility.

[Bailey, Hughes and Barr \(2000\)](#) run surveys of two samples of employers to understand their motivation for participating or not participating in five school-to-work programmes in the United States, as well as explore the quality of internships offered. The study suggests that more than half of participating employers were primarily motivated by philanthropy (e.g. contributing to the community or a desire to improve the public education system). On the other hand, three quarters of the nonparticipating employers would require more profit-oriented arguments (e.g. access to a pool of qualified workers) to join the internship programmes.

4 Challenges & limitations

“[Businesses] often view interns as free labor. They look at interns as a way to finish tasks that a regular employee wouldn’t do.” Cited in [Joyce et al. \(2018, p.40\)](#)

Despite the potential benefits of internships, there are often too few internship opportunities available. While internships are commonplace in many OECD countries, they are not as common in many low- and middle-income countries, possibly as a result of existing informal employment arrangements in these countries ([Stewart et al., 2018, p. 18](#)). This has to do with countries’ economic structure (e.g. more micro- and small enterprises, higher informality), but also practical reasons that may prevent businesses from providing on-the-job training opportunities. These include uncertainty about the potential benefits to the firm, lack of knowledge on how to structure internship programmes, the free-rider problem (where other firms are able to access well-trained employees, even if they did not organise internships themselves), as well as the lack of resources to organise internships ([Saraf, 2017, p. 6](#)). The extent to which each of these factors represents a binding constraint on internship availability may depend on the specifics of the firm and the local market – e.g. the lack of resources may create a more significant constraint for micro- and small enterprises (ibid).

Even if the availability of internships is high, there can be widespread quality issues. Not all internships are created equal. Indeed, internships in countries across the globe often lack adequate learning content or working conditions ([Stewart et al., 2018, p. 21](#); [Pavlović-Križanić, Đurović, Velev, 2015, p. 40](#)). For example, interns are sometimes hired for menial work nobody else in the organization wants to do. Similarly, the lack of a clearly assigned supervisor or mentor can reduce the potential for knowledge transfer. Due to the common lack of regulation, voluntary internships in the open market can be more prone to quality issues compared with work-based learning explicitly linked to study programmes or offered as part of active labour market policies ([Stewart et al., 2018, p. 21](#)).² Moreover, employers sometimes use internships as a way to obtain temporary cheap labour and replace regular staff ([Ecorys, IES and IRS, 2013, p. 6](#); [Stewart et al., 2018, p. 24](#)).

When poorly designed and implemented, internships can even have negative effects. Not surprisingly, when major quality issues exist, internships cannot achieve the expected results (or may even have negative impacts on the intern and/or the firm). For instance, open-market internships after graduation from university have been found to have detrimental effects on employment prospects, career satisfaction and earnings in several countries ([O’Higgins and Pinedo, 2018](#)). Therefore, potential benefits to individuals, enterprises and the broader economy depend on the internship characteristics. The quality of the employer-intern relationship (including relevance of tasks, working conditions, quality of supervision, compensation, etc.), the role of intermediaries (e.g. university career centres), as well as the broader institutional and regulatory environment influence whether internships are beneficial or harmful.

² That said, there is a high variation of quality within different internship categories. Therefore, many open-market internships can also be of high quality while many structured internship programs linked to education programs or ALMPs can also be weak.

5 Guidelines for quality internships

To ensure that both youth and employers reap the full benefits, all stakeholders should strive to organise and deliver high-quality internships. We build on the existing literature and propose a framework for quality internships and internship programmes to guide employers, intermediaries and policymakers. The recommendations are organised across three levels according to the responsible stakeholder involved:

- (1) **Micro-level (employers):** Focus on the internship itself and the individual intern-employer relationship (*relevant for all types of internships*);
- (2) **Meso-level (intermediaries):** Focus on intermediary organisations facilitating internships, such as education institutions, public employment agencies, NGOs, business associations, municipalities, etc. (*particularly relevant for internships as part of study programmes or active labour market policies*);
- (3) **Macro-level (policy environment):** Focus on the enabling policy environment and potential reforms affecting the availability and quality of internships.

Recognising that employers and intermediary organisations have different levels of experience with providing or facilitating internships and may face varying degrees of resource constraints (e.g. depending on the size of the firm), there can be no “one size fits all”. We therefore distinguish between relatively pragmatic “minimum standards” that should be respected by all actors involved, as well as more mature arrangements that can further enhance the internship experience based on the needs and resources available.

5.1 Micro-level: Employers

Quality criteria at the employer level focus on the relationship between the host organisation (employer) and the intern. Quality criteria at this level relate to the tangible aspects of the internship that employers can decide and adjust themselves (*“internal factors of success”*). Table 3 summarizes key criteria and recommendations for each step in the internship process, from preparation and planning to final evaluation.

Table 3: Quality internship criteria at the micro-level

Quality criteria	Minimum standard	More mature arrangement
<i>Features</i>		
Preparation, outreach and selection		
Needs assessment	Determine general interest of senior management in having an intern	Consult with different units / senior staff about their needs for interns
Terms of reference	Provide a basic description of the organisation and the intern’s tasks	Provide a clear and detailed description of the intern’s key tasks and position requirements (e.g. skills, academic background)
Workplace and equipment	Determine the workspace and equipment needs and if the intern will share these with other staff/interns	Prepare dedicated equipment and workspace for the intern
Supervision	Clarify availability of a direct supervisor for the intern	Look for volunteers to act as mentor and/or buddy

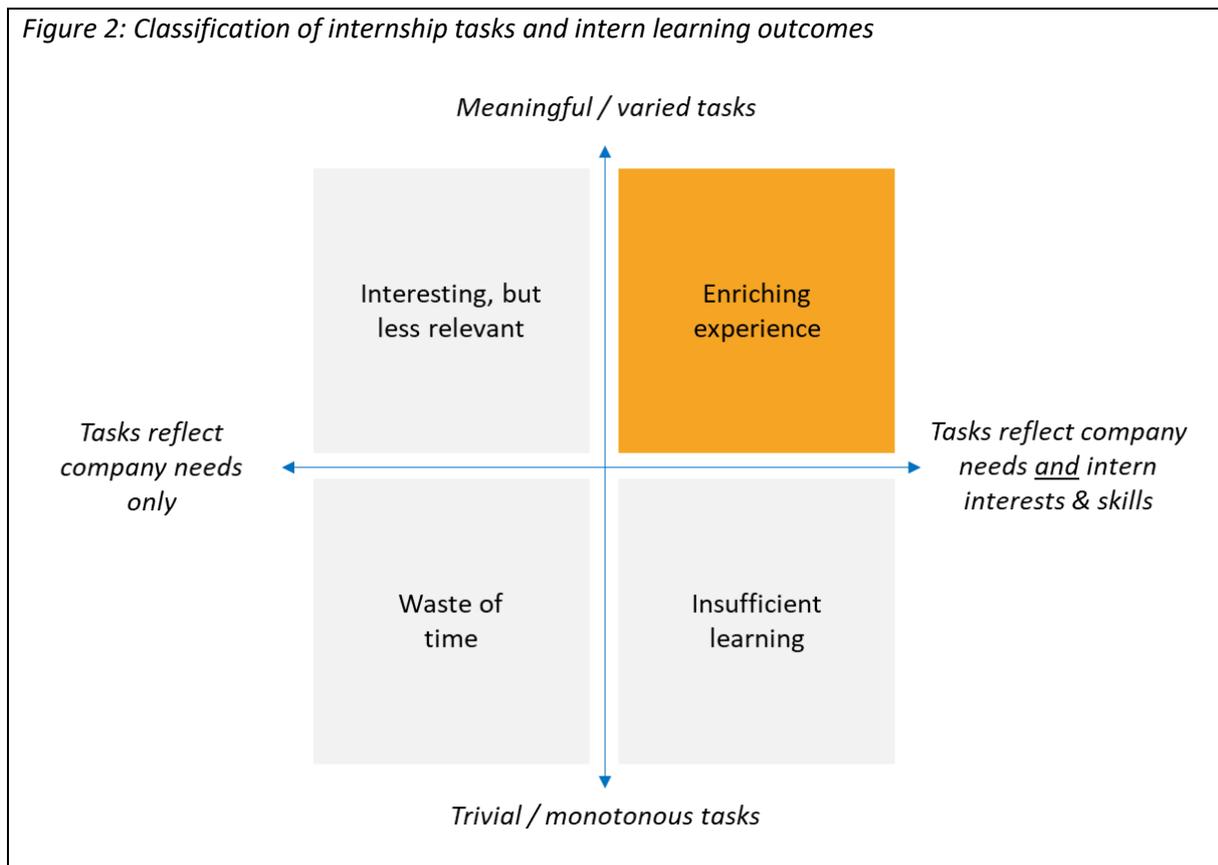
<i>Outreach</i>	Share the call for applications with a broad network	Develop targeted outreach strategies leveraging a variety of communication channels (social media; job portals; career fairs; universities, NGOs...)
<i>Selection process</i>	Select interns based on the quality of their application (CV, motivation letter)	Select interns through (multiple) interviews and/or assessment centres (incl. tests, group interviews, etc.)
<i>Inclusive employment</i>	Signal non-discrimination in the application process and encourage minority groups to apply	Tailor the internship to the needs of specific target groups (e.g. disadvantaged youth, youth with disabilities), with individual learning pathways
Contract and working conditions		
<i>Existence of an internship agreement</i>	Conclude a basic written agreement between the intern and the host organisation (and possibly the education institution) prior to starting the internship (specifying learning objectives, duration, potential compensation)	Conclude a detailed written agreement that specifies the rights and obligations of the intern and the host organisation (incl. learning objectives, tasks, confidentiality, intellectual property rights, etc.)
<i>Learning objectives</i>	Define at least 1-2 learning objectives in the agreement	Ensure that all learning objectives are specific and measurable
<i>Duration of the internship</i>	Determine minimum duration to achieve basic learning objectives (typically at least 1 month)	Determine ideal duration of the internship in line with company needs and intern availability (typically 3-6 months)
<i>Payment arrangements</i>	Cover interns' transportation, meals, and insurance costs	Provide financial compensation in line with the applicable minimum wage or the local living wage
<i>Benefits and working conditions</i>	Provide basic protection and health & safety standards as prescribed by law (e.g. working time, rest periods, health insurance, vacation)	Offer benefits and conditions similar to other (junior) team members; offer flexible working hours (esp. if the internship is done during school/studies)
Initial orientation		
<i>Introductory guidance</i>	Provide initial guidance at the start of the internship: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About the company and the department • Tour of the workplace (incl. basic health & safety procedures as needed) • Initial conversation with the direct supervisor and meeting with key team members 	Organise a formal onboarding programme (for example, several days of orientation, introductory classes, etc.)
<i>Clarity of tasks and objectives</i>	Determine mutual objectives to be fulfilled during the internship and explain key tasks	Co-develop a work plan with clear objectives (including learning and training objectives), milestones and performance indicators

Content and supervision		
<i>Nature of the tasks</i>	Involve the intern in meaningful and varied tasks; provide opportunities to apply knowledge and skills	Give the intern responsibility and autonomy in line with skills and experience (progressively challenging assignments), treating them as full team member
<i>Supervision</i>	Assign a dedicated supervisor for the intern who provides regular guidance	Assign an additional mentor and/or a “buddy”
<i>Exposure & special activities</i>	Involve the intern in regular team meetings/activities	Involve the intern in meetings with other teams and clients when appropriate; provide opportunity to meet senior staff; offer special training and networking opportunities
<i>Treatment</i>	Ensure respectful treatment of the intern	Promote a welcoming work environment (e.g. team building, social events, open channels of communication)
<i>Feedback mechanism</i>	Ensure there are opportunities to provide informal mutual feedback throughout the internship	Schedule formal and regular performance reviews (with supervisor and/or HR) to provide two-way feedback and address any challenges
Closure		
<i>Final evaluation meeting</i>	Arrange a meeting for the supervisor and the intern to provide mutual feedback	Arrange additional meetings with mentors, HR representatives
<i>Certificate / reference letter</i>	Provide a short letter/certificate acknowledging that the person completed the internship	Provide a detailed reference letter for the intern, highlighting tasks, accomplishments and strengths

Source: Author based on [Council of the European Union \(2014\)](#); [Ecorys, IES and IRS \(2013\)](#); [Hadjivassiliou et al. \(2012\)](#); [Hora, Wolfgram and Thompson \(2017\)](#); [International Youth Foundation \(2013\)](#); [Rosas and Corbanese \(2017\)](#); [Simpson University \(2015\)](#).

Among the criteria above, the nature of the tasks is typically one of the most important factors for the interns since it will directly determine their learning experience. In defining the tasks, companies face several trade-offs, including how strongly to focus on company needs vs. individual interests and skills of the intern and how to design meaningful and varied tasks that can be realistically accomplished in the limited period of time (see Figure 2). Meaningful and diverse tasks are typically contingent on a sufficient duration of the internship (e.g. 3-6 months). Companies should ideally have transparent communication with the (prospective) intern to find the mutually most beneficial arrangement.

Figure 2: Classification of internship tasks and intern learning outcomes



Box 3: Internship programme at ProCredit Bank

ProCredit Bank organises internships for students of various universities, majors and academic years (including first-year students). The selection process consists of several stages, including a phone interview, numerical and logical reasoning tests, a group discussion, and an individual interview. Interns have the opportunity to work on the bank’s current projects, gaining real-world experience in the banking sector. Moreover, the internship schedule can be flexible. Interns are not required to work full-time, which allows students to balance their university and internship commitments.

Source: [ProCredit Bank](#)

5.2 Meso-level: Intermediaries

Quality criteria for internships at this level target intermediary organisations, including university career centres, public employment agencies and non-governmental organisations. Intermediaries often play a critical role facilitating the matching between young people and employers. Therefore, the design and implementation of internship programmes is essential to maximise the benefits for each side. Table 4 summarizes key criteria and recommendations along the key dimensions of the design and implementation of internship programmes.

Table 4: Quality internship criteria at the meso-level

Quality criteria	Minimum standard	More mature arrangement
<i>Features</i>		
Programme design		
Partnerships with key stakeholders	Establish partnerships with employers and align internships with own strategic needs (programme content; duration) ³	Encourage active involvement of other stakeholders (social partners, NGOs, government agencies) during preparation stage as appropriate
Internship guidelines	Provide recommendations for internships (duration, compensation, working conditions, learning objectives, transparency about tasks)	Establish minimum prerequisites and standards to be respected by employers and interns (e.g. formal internship agreement; focus on learning objectives; duration; compensation)
Outreach and selection		
Employer outreach and selection	Maintain an updated database of relevant employers	Proactively grow network of employers; use specific criteria for deciding which employers to partner with
Dissemination of internship openings	Post internship offers on online platforms and physical info boards or via newsletters	Actively promote internship programmes, e.g. by organising employer presentations and career fairs
Matching of prospective interns and employers	No active role in matching	Consolidate all internship applications and/or conduct preselection on behalf of employers
Monitoring & evaluation		
Feedback system	Provide a contact person in case of necessity	Maintain active and regular contact with the intern and the employer throughout the internship
Post-internship evaluation	Ask interns/employers to complete a short evaluation form (overall satisfaction, strengths, areas of improvement)	Request interns and employers to complete a more detailed internship report to judge the quality of internships (e.g. to gain credits) and follow-up on the findings

Source: Author based on [Ecorys, IES and IRS \(2013\)](#); [Joyce et al. \(2018\)](#); [MyCareer \(2014\)](#); [Polk State College \(2015\)](#); [Simpson University \(2015\)](#).

Box 4: LOYAC Internship Programme in Jordan

The non-profit organisation LOYAC runs an annual internship programme in Jordan for young people aged 16 to 30. As of 2017, more than 700 young people have completed an internship, lasting typically 6-8 weeks. In cooperation with the British Council, LOYAC focuses on supporting both the interns and the employers. For example, LOYAC and the British Council work with employers to understand their needs and encourage them to develop an internship plan with clear learning objectives based on the programme's guidelines. In addition, LOYAC organises soft skill development workshops for interns prior to each internship cycle, thus ensuring that young people are prepared to make the most of their work experience.

Sources: [British Council \(2017\)](#)

³ E.g. Universities: alignment of the internship programme with curriculum/academic studies; Public Employment Service: alignment with strategic sectors/ labour market needs

5.3 Macro-level: Policy environment

Quality criteria at the policy level are aimed at national and regional institutions, including ministries, government agencies, independent commissions and quality assurance bodies. An appropriate policy environment can enable and incentivise stakeholders to offer more and better-quality internships. Table 5 summarizes key criteria and recommendations in terms of the general regulatory framework for internships, as well as several specific support measures.

Table 5: Quality internship criteria at the macro-level

Quality criteria Feature	Details	Primary responsibility
General regulatory framework		
Internship definition	Provide a clear legal definition of what constitutes an internship, e.g. as part of the Labour Law or relevant decrees	Government, e.g. Ministry of Labour
Common quality framework	Provide recommendations and standards for a quality internship, such as compensation, social security, duration, primary focus on learning	Government or independent bodies (e.g. commission for education/training; associations of universities and employers; chamber of commerce)
Equal opportunities	Stipulate the need for equality and non-discrimination in the workplace/internships, e.g. as part of labour and/or equality laws	Relevant Ministries and specialized agencies focusing on disadvantaged groups (e.g. persons with disabilities, minorities)
Emphasis on quality assurance	Encourage external or joint evaluations of internship programmes, in particular for certain types of internships (e.g. as part of ALMPs; mandatory internships during education; mandatory professional training...)	Independent quality assurance bodies or joint partner committees (consisting of e.g. employers and intermediaries)
Specific support measures		
Emphasis on internships as part of education	Promote practical learning (including internships) as part of study programmes; specify minimum internship duration for certain study programmes; ensure university terms and exam schedules allow students to do voluntary internships	Ministry of Education, Universities, Accreditation bodies, School/university associations
Funding	Offer funding to employers who organise internships (e.g. targeted at SMEs, focused on disadvantaged youth) in the form of wage subsidies and other incentives (e.g. tax)	Relevant Ministries (e.g. Labour, Economy, Youth), Public Employment Agencies, and local authorities (city councils); potentially leveraging multi-lateral sources of funding
Special assistance for SMEs	Encourage SMEs to think about organising internships and provide support to increase the supply of internships (e.g. legal advice; HR capacity building; logistics)	Government or independent bodies (e.g. employer association; chamber of commerce)

Source: Author based on [Council of the European Union \(2014\)](#); [Ecorys, IES and IRS \(2013\)](#); [Hadjivassiliou et al. \(2012\)](#); [Stewart et al. \(2018\)](#); [US Department of Labor \(2018\)](#).

Box 5: Argentina's efforts to improve the quality of internships

In 2008, Argentina passed a law to regulate internships and ensure minimum quality standards. Crucially, the law requires host organisations to sign an agreement both with the student and an educational institution, thus effectively outlawing internships in the open market. The law specifically addresses working conditions, including pay, internship duration, working hours and the number of interns a host organisation can have at any given time. For example, interns should be paid a minimum wage or a wage in line with the relevant collective agreement for existing employees. In addition, provisions are in place to ensure that interns are not simply low-paid labour to replace an existing worker or fill a vacancy. It is worth noting, however, that the extent to which voluntary internships in Argentina continue to exist in practice is not known.

Source: [Stewart et al. \(2018, p. xiv, p. 35\)](#)

6 Conclusions & way forward

Internships represent a valuable and flexible instrument of work-based learning to improve the labour market integration of young people while benefiting employers through improved workforce development and increased productivity. They are relatively easy to implement and can be integrated in different settings and programmes, including education curricula, skills training as part of active labour market policies as well as private sector led workforce development.

Despite their promise, many countries do not yet realize the full benefits of internships due to limited availability and quality issues. There are often too few internship opportunities to meet the demand from young people. Moreover, internships without proper working conditions (e.g. unpaid, poor treatment of interns) or the necessary structure and guidance may not provide interns with a meaningful learning experience.

Depending on the local challenges and needs, there can be several entry points for enhancing the availability and quality of internships in collaboration with employers. These include:

- Working directly with employer associations and individual firms to highlight the benefits of offering internships and assisting companies in setting up quality internship structures in line with their needs and resources;
- Partnering with education institutions and main providers of ALMPs to set-up or refine internship programmes in line with the recommended quality standards;
- Supporting an enabling policy environment, such as a proper regulatory framework for internships as well as targeted support measures (e.g. incentives for offering certain types of internships).

Finally, policymakers and practitioners should work towards building evidence on the impact of internship programmes in low- and middle-income countries. With most of the current evidence on the impact of internships on employment prospects and firm outcomes stemming from OECD countries, relevant stakeholders in LMICs should invest in strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation systems as well as in counterfactual impact assessments to better understand the design and implementation arrangements that work best in the local context.

Bibliography

[Baert, S., Neyt, B., Siedler, T., Tobback, I., and Verhaest, D. \(2019\), Student Internships and Employment Opportunities after Graduation: A Field Experiment. Institute of Labor Economics \(IZA\).](#)

[Bailey, T., Hughes, K., and Barr, T. \(2000\), Achieving Scale and Quality in School-to-Work Internships: Findings from Two Employer Surveys.](#)

[British Council \(2017\), Internships in Jordan: Supporting the Provision of Quality Internships for Young People in Jordan.](#)

[Buzzeo, J., and Cifci, M. \(2017\), Work experience, job shadowing and workplace visits: What works?. The Careers & Enterprise Company.](#)

[Comyn, P., and Brewer, L. \(2018\), Does work-based learning facilitate transitions to decent work? International Labour Organization \(ILO\).](#)

[Council of the European Union \(2014\), Council Recommendation of 10 March 2014 on a Quality Framework for Traineeships \(2014/C 88/01\).](#)

[Ecorys, IES, and IRS \(2013\), Apprenticeship and Traineeship Schemes in EU27: Key Success Factors. A Guidebook for Policy Planners and Practitioners. European Commission.](#)

[George Mason University Career Services \(2018\), Guidelines for Creating Internship Learning Objectives.](#)

[Goldin, N. \(2015\), Toward Solutions for Youth Employment: A 2015 Baseline Report. Solutions for Youth Employment \(S4YE\).](#)

[Görlich, D., Stepanok, I., and Al-Hussami, F. \(2013\), Youth Unemployment in Europe and the World: Causes, Consequences and Solutions. Kiel Institute for the World Economy \(IfW\).](#)

[Hadjivassiliou, K. P., Carta, E., Higgins, T., Rickard, C., Ter-Minassian, S., Pesce, F., Samek, M., Barbieri, D., Broglio, D., Naaf, S., Grollmann, P., Weigel, T., Wolfgarten, T., and Hensen, K. \(2012\), Study on a comprehensive overview on traineeship arrangements in Member States. Final Synthesis Report. European Commission.](#)

[Hall-Nevala, A. M., Ulicna, D., and Duchemin, C. \(2013\), Work-Based Learning: Benefits and Obstacles. A Literature Review for Policy Makers and Social Partners in ETF Partner Countries. European Training Foundation \(ETF\).](#)

[Hora, M. T., Wolfgram, M., and Thompson, S. \(2017\), What do we know about the impact of internships on student outcomes? Results from a Preliminary Review of scholarly and practitioner literatures. Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions \(CCWT\).](#)

[Interagency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training \(IAG-TVET\) \(2017\), Investing in Work-Based Learning.](#)

[International Labour Organization \(2020\), Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the future of jobs.](#)

[International Youth Foundation \(2013\), Promoting Youth Employment Through Internships: A Guide to Best Practices.](#)

[Joyce, P.; Staklis, S.; Thakkar, A.; and Vavricka, J. \(2018\). Making paid internships the standard: A global lens. RTI.](#)

[Koettl-Brodmann, J. \(2015\), Skills Gaps and the Path to Successful Skills Development: Emerging Findings from Skills Measurement Surveys in Armenia, Georgia, FYR Macedonia, and Ukraine. World Bank.](#)

[Maertz C. P., Stoeberl, P. A., and Marks, J. \(2014\), Building Successful Internships: Lessons from the Research for Interns, Schools, and Employers.](#)

[Making Cents International \(2017\), Demand-Driven Training for Youth Employment Toolkit.](#)

[Manpower Group \(2018\), 2018 Talent Shortage Survey: Solving the Talent Shortage - Build, Buy, Borrow and Bridge.](#)

[McKenzie, D., Assaf, N., and Cusolito, A. P. \(2016\), The demand for, and impact of, youth internships: evidence from a randomized experiment in Yemen.](#)

[McQuaid, R. W. \(2015\), Multiple Scarring Effects of Youth Unemployment. Skills Development Scotland.](#)

[Mgaya, K., and Mbekomize, C. \(2014\), Benefits to Host Organizations from Participating in Internship Programs in Botswana.](#)

[MyCareer \(2014\), Handbook on Career Guidance and Counselling \(Career Counselling Steps and Set Up of Career Counselling Services\). Enhancing Youth Employment Project \(EYE\).](#)

[Nichols, A., Mitchell, J., and Lindner, S. \(2013\), Consequences of Long-Term Unemployment. Urban Institute.](#)

[O'Higgins, N., and Pinedo, L. \(2018\), Interns and Outcomes: Just How Effective are Internships as a Bridge to Stable Employment?. International Labour Organization \(ILO\).](#)

[Pavlović-Križanić, T., Đurović, A., and Velez, B. \(2015\), Internships and Traineeships in Serbia: Challenges and Perspectives \[Stručne prakse i stručno osposobljavanje u Republici Srbiji - izazovi sprovođenja i moguće perspektive\]. Belgrade Open School.](#)

[Parra-Torrado, M. \(2014\), Youth Unemployment in the Caribbean. World Bank.](#)

[Polk State College \(2015\), Internship Handbook: Academic Year 2015-2016.](#)

[Robert, P., and Saar, E. \(2012\), Learning and Working: The Impact of the 'Double Status Position' on the Labour Market Entry Process of Graduates in CEE Countries.](#)

[Richmond Community College \(n.d.\), Employer Guide to Organizing a Successful Internship Program.](#)

[Rosas, G. \(2016\), In Search of Benchmarks for Quality Internships \(Chapter 2 in the 2016 United Nations World Youth Report: Youth Civic Engagement\). UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.](#)

[Rosas, G., and Corbanese, V. \(2017\), Developing Quality Traineeships for Young People. International Labour Organization.](#)

[Saraf, P. \(2017\), On-the-Job Training: Returns, Barriers to Provision, and Policy Implications. World Bank.](#)

[Simpson University Career Services \(2015\), Employer Internship Guidelines.](#)

[Stewart, A., Owens, R., Hewitt, A., and Nikoloudakis, I. \(2018\), The Regulation of Internships: A Comparative Study. International Labour Organization.](#)

[Sweet, R. \(2014\), Work-Based Learning: A Handbook for Policy Makers and Social Partners in ETF Partner Countries. European Training Foundation.](#)

[United States Department of Labor \(2018\), Fact Sheet #71: Internship Programs Under The Fair Labor Standards Act.](#)

prospera

effective employment promotion

www.prospera-consulting.com