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# **Energy-Agro-food Synergies in Africa: New Educational Models for Universities**

## **Working Paper on Internship Best Practices and current experiences in the East African Partner Universities**

**The Université D'Auvergne and the Sokoine University of Agriculture**

*This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.*



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## 1. Introduction



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Internships are very rewarding both for students and for the organizations which welcome them. They give students the opportunity of implementing their newly acquired knowledge and developing new personal and professional skills, which are essential in their educational programme. For firms or NGOs, students performing an internship can be entrusted with projects that the usual staff does not have time to develop; they can bring new ideas, and be very helpful in a work team. Also, internships fosters communication between educational institutions and the labour market, they establish a precious link: the labour market has a better knowledge of the different skills that graduates from an institution can have, and the higher education institutions can better measure the current needs of the labour market.

For these reasons, universities implied in the present Edulink project have decided to set up an internship program linked to the modules that will be developed in the frame of the agrofood/ energy nexus.

The objectives are as follows:

- Students complete their academic education with a work experience
- Students implement their new skills through an experience in the field
- Students are faced to concrete issues
- Students acquire a valuable professional experience to post on their resume
- Students measure the profile and the necessary skills to progress in the domain.
- Students develop personal and professional assets
- Students contribute to the host organization capacities improvement
- Solid links are created between the education institution and the host organizations.

## **2. Internships at Université d'Auvergne**

Fostering its students to perform internships for many years, Université d'Auvergne has developed links with numerous local, national and international organizations, and a great number of internships are carried out every year by its students.

Internships in French educational programmes take a large place: each student who studies 5 years in order to get a master's degree will have to perform at least 3 internships, whether in firms, NGOs, associations...The first one at bachelor's level is rather short (five weeks) and consists in a first contact with the firm, or with a domain. It can help the student determining his professional project; it consists mainly in job shadowing. The second internship at master level lasts minimum 2 months during which students start implementing their new skills; this placement is followed by a 3 to 6 months other placement the following year.

Several steps have to be followed:

### *2.1 Inform students on internships*



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At the beginning of the academic year, students are informed that they will have to perform an internship, look for a placement themselves.

### *2.2 Accompany the students and provide them with tools for the search of placements*

Students are trained to write letters of motivation, CVs, they also have opportunities to be trained for recruitment interviews.

They are given access to the alumni network: they can either get in touch with the alumni if they wish to find a placement in the organization where they currently works, or find out about all the different firms where they have carried out missions.

The school of economics organizes every year a “professional fair” where local, national and international institutions are invited to present themselves, describe the positions that may be of interest to graduates in development economics, and conduct interviews in view of offering placements.

A list of previous placements for alumni, dating back to ten years is also provided to students.

As early as the bachelor’s level, a teaching unit is devoted to their “obtaining employment project”

Students receive instructions for report writing, they also have the possibility of downloading the reports that obtained the best marks. They are explained and taught how to defend their report.

### *2.3 Provide students with a supervisor, member of the faculty*

Each student is provided with a tutor within the school. S/he is generally the master’s supervisor, or a professor whose research interests are linked to the internship’s subject. The tutor’s role is to give support in the search of a placement, to validate the student’s placement choice, to help students out of the issues they may encounter during the internship period or in the report writing.

Students will defend their final report in front of their tutor (and other, academic and non-academic members)

### *2.4 Inform the students of the administrative procedure/ documents required.*

According to the University rules and to French law, a “training contract” has to be signed by all three parties involved: the students, the host company and the university. The training contract has to include a certificate of attendance at the university, proof of health coverage, proof of personal liability, and proof of personal accident insurance.



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Once they have found a placement, students must provide their tutor with a “certification request”, where they describe the firm and the terms of reference. The form is validated by the supervisor who checks whether the tasks match the topic of the master’s programme.

### *2.5 Create a contact with all host organizations*

Supervisors contact the students’ tutors within the firms, in order to:

- define objectives ( purpose, intern assignments, results)
- evaluate the intern ( theoretical knowledge, dynamism, oral and writing skills, value added)
- receive a final global evaluation of the intern (exceptional, very good, good, bad)

These contacts about the internship create an excellent medium to exchange information university research/ firms’ needs.

### **3. Best practices at Université d’Auvergne**

To manage students, supervisors, tutors, documents...UdA has created two software programs, called UdApro and UdA stages (UdA internships)

The basic idea of UdApro is that all users have their own access on UdApro: one for students, one for professors (supervisors), one for stakeholders (tutors), and one for alumni.

- Students have access to information on job/internships opportunities arranged by domains and levels. They are also invited to deposit their CV
- Alumni update their profiles and students or academics or stakeholders can contact them
- Academics can disseminate information on the different degrees they are involved in, describe their students’ skills, add information and news on topics linked to their teaching and research interests.
- Stakeholders can drop off internships/ jobs offers and look for the profiles that best match their requirements. They also have access to information dropped by academics.

UdAstages consists in a dashboard used by administrative staff, supervisors and students: it helps managing the internships administration.

#### Suggestions for Edulink Agrofood Energy:

We suggest that the internship platform for the project be an aggregation of both UdA tools, UdApro and UdAstages.

All the East African universities involved in the project could describe their own internship organization and procedures, and the platform could be a flexible tool used by all.



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#### 4. Evidences from the East African Universities

A survey was conducted by the Sokoine University of Agriculture on the management of the students' internship in the four African Partner Universities: University of Nairobi, University of Mekelle, Addis Ababa Institute of Technology, Sokoine University of Agriculture.

A questionnaire circulated among the concerned groups raising the following questions:

##### INTERNSHIP TOOLS CHECKLIST

PLEASE FILL IN THIS FORM AS EACH QUESTION DIRECT

1. What is the name of the University?
2. Do you conduct Internship program for your Students?
3. How is it done? (planning and management of the internship at your University)
4. How do you get new offers from the employers who want internee (how is the university linked to outside partners)?
5. What are the problems facing the Internship at your location?
6. What are the proposed solution and inclusion in the strengthening the internship program?
7. Any comment with regard to internship experience from your University?
8. Do you have a webpage/platform that is specific for Internship? ( if yes how is it managed)
9. Are the student linked to the prospective employer through the internship? Or If Yes/ No how?
10. Do you think the internship program is sustainable? If yes why ? And if no why?

With regards to the internship experience at the Sokoine University of Agriculture here are the main outcomes:

SUA has two types of internship programs:

Field practical attachments for undergraduate students (5-8 weeks while in 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> year)

Internship program for postgraduate students (6 months)

##### Planning undergraduate

Field practical attachments for undergraduate students:

- University wide in terms of timing
- Coordinated at faculty level in terms of budget
- Departmental level in terms of
- Soliciting of placement opportunities
- Supervision of students at the respective placement
- Core evaluation of the students

Solicitation and maintenance of internship posts for undergraduates:

##### **Students own initiatives**



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- The department encourages students to look for posts of their own choice (beginning of 4 & 6 semester)
- The department assists students to look for the post by giving them an introduction letter
- Blind application
- Students' social networks

### **Department initiatives**

- undergraduate coordination office maintains database of internship posts
- organize staff physical visits to identify internship placements
- Individual Staff members' social networks

### **Firms/companies/NGOs' offers**

- Especially for those carrying out agribusiness related activities
- Aim to retain the students once graduated (finalists)
- Department verifies the offer prior to sending students

### **Internship through special students' exchange programs**

Japan (JICA: 2000 – 2012): currently affected by change of sponsorship policy

### Evaluation – Undergraduate

Hosting firm supervisor

Daily supervision of the student

Student has to fill in a logbook on daily basis in which the hosting supervisor will sign

Hosting supervisor fill in a grading sheet at the end of field practical

Department academic staff supervisor

Conduct physical supervision visits (once)

Core evaluation using student's log book

SP is core course but none GPA contributor (i.e. zero credit)

### Planning postgraduate

- Internship program is for MBA students only
- University wide in terms of timing
- Coordinated at Department level in terms of budget
- Core evaluation of the students
- Length of time is to allow students to produce their research papers

Solicitation and maintenance of internship posts for postgraduate students

### **Students own initiatives**

- The department encourages/assists students to look for the post by



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- Holding meetings on arrival and discuss about internship requirements and students responsibilities thereof
- Providing introduction letters
- Blind application
- Students' social networks

**Departmental initiatives (not mandatory)**

- Department maintains database (so far weak)
- Department encourages students to write appreciation letters to respective hosting firms on completion
- Individual Staff members' social networks

**Firms/companies/NGO offers**

- Especially for those carrying out agribusiness related activities

Evaluation-Postgraduate

**Hosting firm supervisor**

Daily supervision of the student

**Department staff supervisor**

Each student is assigned a supervisor.

The student identifies research problems from the hosting firm and submits a concept note to the supervisor within one month from the date of commencing internship.

The student agrees with the supervisor the research topic & procedure before working on his/her research paper.

The student has to submit final research paper for examination 3 months after the end of the internship period.

A core evaluation of the research paper is done by two examiners (the supervisor and any other academic staff in the department).

The research paper is integrated in the students final GPA results.

Comparative experience in internship across the East African Consortium members

Name of University	Addis	Mekelle	Nairobi
Do you conduct Internship?	Yes	Yes	Yes



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Organize level	department	- ILLTT - Department	- Department
Methods used to solicit placement	Different set up depending on discipline and department	- Student own initiative - Department initiative - University Industry Community Linkage Office	- Academic staff write letters - Firms/companies writes to request for internees
Supervision and evaluation	Done at department level and varies across department	ILLTT assign a supervisor for each student	- Visits supervision (interview both student and hosting supervisor) - Department academic staff supervisor - Company/firm supervisor

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Internship challenges across EA consortium members

- Difficult access to internship posts by students
  - Ethical transgression on the part of students
  - Statutory barriers
  - Limited understanding on importance of internship
  - All Universities have same calendar that means they seek attachment posts at the same time
- High costs of internship
  - Students do sponsor themselves



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- Scattered internship posts makes it difficult to conduct supervision of students
- No structured platform for University to meet with external Stakeholders

#### Proposed solutions by EA consortium members

- Structured program
  - Office responsible
  - Time period
  - Procedure to solicit internship posts
  - Procedure to ensure commitment for both, the student and hosting firm (contract signing)
  - Supervision and Evaluation structure
- Establish internship platform
  - Advisory body
  - Internet platform using social networks
  - Internet website
- Establish a formal databank for internship
- Employer forum to be offered once a year