

Academy doubles work placements for pre-university students

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The Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa is running a pre-university internship programme that is placing its Diploma Programme students in a six-week long internship to gain work experience and transferable skills, making them more employable.

In September 2015, the World Bank reported that the Kenyan education system was failing to produce graduates with the knowledge and skills crucial for Vision 2030. The report titled 'Kenya's Education Achievement and Challenges' found technical and vocational training systems had few linkages and little or no relevance to the labour market.

With Kenyan employers raising increasing concerns about the relevance of education to workplace skills, Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa has created extensive internships for its school students and has now doubled the number of students going through the programme, with work placements in Kenya, across East Africa, and in Canada.

Another report by the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) in 2014 found that more than half of Kenyan graduates were unfit for the job market, with one of the reasons cited being lack of practical experience. Human resource expert Suzanne Mwai, of recruitment agency Flexi Personnel, said the lack of practical knowledge among graduates is one of the major reasons why Kenyan employers are reluctant to hire fresh graduates since they have to be re-trained, a factor that puts financial strain on employers.

"There exists an employer-graduate mismatch because impressive papers are not what get graduates a job. Employers are looking for practical experience, which internships provide. They want someone who can start a job with little or no training instead of spending weeks on training, which sometimes has to be paid for," said Mwai.

This gap has seen the Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa invest in extensive workplace experiences, with students starting internships at the end of June or early July until mid-August, with institutions that include the Global Centre for Pluralism in Canada, Aga Khan Health Services in Kenya, Aga Khan Foundation In Uganda and Aga Khan University in Arusha depending on students' preferences and geographic location.

"We encourage our students to do early internships because it allows them to get the opportunity to explore their passions and gain clarity on their intended career paths," said Zohra Lakhani, Student Leadership Programmes Manager at the Academy.

The students apply for internships through the Academy, in a process that includes the submission of an application and resume, and interviews, in the same process as is required when applying for a job. This helps the Academy match students to ideal internships.

The placements also help students make career decisions, reducing the chances of students taking a major at university and then changing it later in life. In an incentive to get Kenyan employers to allow fresh graduates to intern for them, the government in 2015 allowed firms that take in at least ten fresh graduates

as interns to pay lower corporate tax.

While reading the budget last year, Treasury Secretary Henry Rotich said the move would help build a resource of skilled man-power, which would help boost the employment rate into the private sector and lower the high rate of unemployment among the youth.

A 2015 report prepared by High Fliers Research Limited in the UK about the graduate market showed that 31 per cent of recruiters only take in graduates who have already worked in organizations through an internship, industrial attachment or work vacation.

The Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa, which implements the International Baccalaureate (IB) system of education monitors students during the internship to ensure that they are learning from their experiences through actual training in a professional environment.