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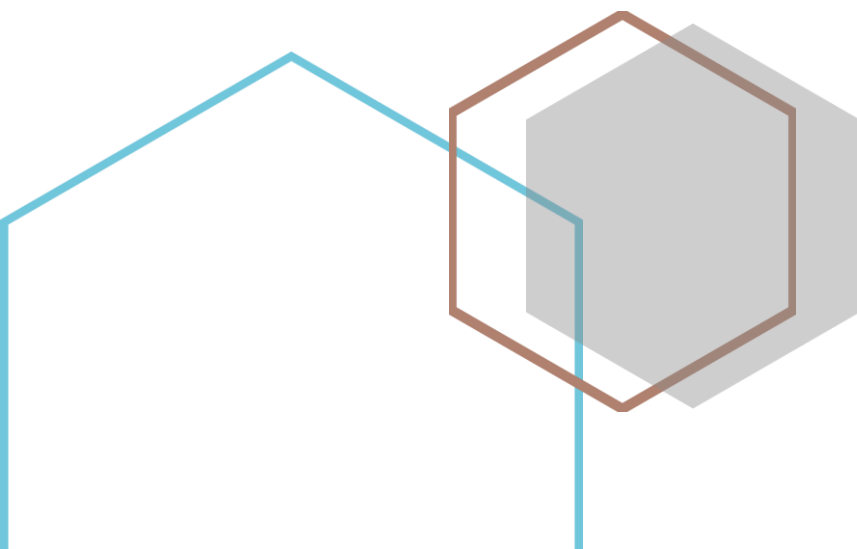
# PROPOSAL FOR REVIEW OF INTERNSHIP AND PLACEMENT SCHEME FRAMEWORK

UNIVERSITY OF RUHUNA, SRI LANKA

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Integrating Talent Development into Innovation Ecosystems in Higher Education

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**DESCRIPTION OF  
CURRENT POLICY**

The internship placement process at University of Ruhuna is operated by individual Faculties according to the requirements of the degree programmes. There are ten Faculties at University of Ruhuna, which are located in five geographically dispersed locations, with considerable distance between them. This has made it difficult to manage internships centrally.

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**PLANNING AND  
MANAGEMENT OF THE  
PROCESS**

Each Faculty has appointed an internship coordinator or placement officer to coordinate the placements, while a set of team members representing each department or degree programme assist the overall Faculty Coordinator to smoothly operate the process.

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**PREPARATION OF  
THE STUDENTS FOR  
INTERSHIPS**

Individual Faculties conduct an awareness programme before sending students to different organizations for internships. It consists of series of activities that prepare students for what awaits them. These sessions are conducted together with the Career Guidance Unit of the university. Although the objectives of the internship programmes are slightly different in the different Faculties, students get good opportunity to apply and practice the concepts studied in the classroom in the real working environment. This is an opportunity for students to develop both of their soft skills and technical/professional skills, to improve their performance in assigned duties and to strengthen their career.

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**PROCEDURES IN  
PLACE TO MONITOR  
THE QUALITY OF  
INTERSHIPS /  
PLACEMENTS**

The quality of the internship training is thoroughly monitored by academic staff. There are different modes of evaluation to assess quality and effectiveness in respective Faculties. For example, in the Faculty of Management and Finance, an academic supervisor is appointed for each intern and the entire process of the internship training is evaluated three times, at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the training. Accordingly, throughout the process, the appropriateness of the organization, the contribution of the intern to the organization and the extent of skills development are evaluated. Moreover, students are required to maintain a log book with the records of the work. These records are also inspected. The feedback obtained from the site supervisor, who is the immediate supervisor appointed by the host organization to supervise each intern, is also considered in the evaluation of the internship training and performance of the intern. Other Faculties follow more or less similar type of evaluation procedure.

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**COLLECTING  
FEEDBACK FROM  
STUDENTS AND  
EMPLOYERS  
REGARDING THE  
QUALITY AND  
EFFECTIVENESS OF  
INTERSHIPS**

Feedback is collected from both parties - the intern and the employer. The records in the logbook provide a good feedback about the nature of the training and the performance of the student. Moreover, the academic supervisor interviews the intern and evaluates his/her performance, as mentioned earlier. Finally, a viva voce examination is held in front of a panel of examiners where the student delivers a presentation and the examiners could question the intern about the experience and the quality of the training. Feedback is also obtained from the immediate supervisor



PROCEDURES IN PLACE FOR MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT OF THE SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES THAT THE STUDENT HAS DEVELOPED DURING THE INTERNSHIP / PLACEMENT

appointed by the organization that represents the employer. Further to that, industry forums are held with the participation of industry experts including Chairpersons, Managing Directors, HR Directors, Human Resource Managers, General Managers, Marketing Managers, Brand Managers and Senior Executives, etc. in order to collect feedback from top management.

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There are a number of methods used to evaluate the skills and competencies that the student has developed. The main ones are:

- evaluation criteria set by the Faculty and practiced by the academic supervisors
- evaluation criteria set by the university for the immediate site supervisors (in the host organizations) assigned to inspect the interns.

Evaluation forms have been designed to cover skills and competences components. The academic supervisor evaluates the student in terms of skills development three times during the training. The site supervisor, or in some cases the representative of the employer, evaluates the intern's skills development and provides feedback indicating the host organization's level of satisfaction.

POSSIBILITY FOR ENGAGING IN INTERNSHIPS / PLACEMENTS IN THE NON-PROFIT AND PUBLIC SECTOR

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Internships and placements are available in both the public and non-profit sectors. Some interns are interested in getting placements in public sector organisations as this sector provides many employment opportunities. Quite a few students get opportunities in non-profit organizations, too.

GAPS, WEAK POINTS AND INEFFICIENCIES OF THE INTERNSHIP POLICIES AT THE UNIVERSITY

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### Creating more opportunities for internships

University of Ruhuna has identified the importance of expanding the network of organizations that can provide opportunities for student internships. There are certain Faculties that fail in the task of finding adequate opportunities for all students. They do not guarantee that all students will get equal opportunities and access to good internship hosting organizations. Therefore, expansion of the internship network is an issue that needs to be given more attention. Private sector companies consider internships as a 'win-win' situation as they get access to trained human resources, dynamic and highly competent students. Therefore, with the right approach and efforts, it is possible to establish a larger network of potential internship providing organizations. There are unused opportunities also in the well-established non-governmental organizations.

### Planning

A well-planned strategy is necessary for an effective internship programme. Planning is important at different stages - finding suitable organizations, developing a good database, selecting and matching the needs of the organizations and students, making students ready for the training by way of strengthening their skills and competencies, etc.

### **Preparation of students**

During our consultations with external stakeholders in the frame of the INNOTAL project, the question of getting students adequately prepared for internships was raised and discussed. For internships to be a ‘win-win’ process, private sector organizations insist on the University continuing to provide well-qualified, dynamic, and competent students. The main issue is for the Faculties to provide knowledge and skills relevant to the needs of the private sector, and the public and non-governmental organizations.

### **Monitoring of quality**

Monitoring the quality of practical training is compulsory as to make sure that the objectives of the training are achieved. Monitoring has to be strengthened in two dimensions:

- Making sure that the student has obtained a satisfactory training and experience and has managed to develop the required skills during the training
- Determining if the student was able to provide a satisfactory contribution to the organization relevant to its goals and objectives

At present in most Faculties no such broad evaluation is being conducted at the end of the trainings.

### **Monitoring of developed skills and competencies**

Applying a 360-degree evaluation process will be very beneficial to all the stakeholders involved in the internship training process. Currently, the academic supervisor and site supervisor evaluate the skills and competencies acquired by students during the training. This process should be strengthened by eliminating the weaknesses. The site visits by a panel of supervisors have been identified as an effective tool that allows the progress of students to be assessed in the workplace itself. Obtaining feedback from co-workers and can be easily collected and will also strengthen the evaluation.

### **Diversification of internship opportunities**

Usually, internship training is provided for students once in their academic programme. It is typically scheduled in the final year of studies. However, this arrangement is not effective. If students get engaged in internships at least a few (two/three) times, this would be a good exposure and will strengthen the development of valuable skills and competencies. This issue has been raised by the external stakeholders that we consulted during the consultations carried out in the frame of the INNOTAL project. A few practical trainings, even if they are with a smaller duration (e.g. two/three months) would be more effective than a single final-year three- or six-month internship.

Moreover, the network of potential host organizations should be expanded to provide internship opportunities in international companies or agencies in foreign countries. This would be a significant opportunity to develop a range of valuable competences of students, such as multicultural

communication, working in international context and multicultural teams, understanding global issues, etc.

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### **Improving the process of establishing contacts with business, public sector and the non-profit sector in view of creating opportunities for students to get engaged in placements and internships**

University of Ruhuna should work on the following future directions for improvement:

- Enlarging the existing network of internship-providing organization with external organizations in the business, public, and the non-profit sectors
- Improving the institutional understanding of public sector and non-profit sector organizations as two key resources which can be utilized for skills developments.
- Maintaining a database of private-sector companies that provides adequate information about their organizations and work
- Maintaining continuous dialogue with public and private sector organizations.

### **Improving the process of planning internships/placements: Implementation of Training Needs Assessment (TNA)**

To achieve a better planned strategy for an effective internship programme, University of Ruhuna needs:

- To develop a filtering mechanism to identify the organizations that are most suitable for providing effective practical training for students
- To develop a systematic selection process where the needs of the available host companies/organizations can be effectively matched with particular students. In some cases, organizations set criteria for the students that they want to recruit as interns (for instance, English literacy, IT knowledge etc.). This practice should be recommended to all host organizations
- Plan internships as an integral element of a broader institutional commitment towards the continuous improvement of the skills and competencies of students.

### **Improving the process of preparation of students for internships/placement**

To improve the process of preparation of students for internships/placements, University of Ruhuna should:

- Provide additional training to make student fluent in English language and IT skills, as these are relevant in all workplaces
- Carry out awareness raising campaign on the benefits of the internship programme and its relevance to academic qualifications

- Engage students in discussions in order to improve their attitudes towards the internship programme.

### **Strengthening the monitoring process in order to ensure the quality of internships/placements**

In order to strengthen monitoring of the quality of the internships, University of Ruhuna should:

- Enable monitoring continuously throughout the training
- Develop and maintain an effective mechanism to evaluate whether the student has obtained a satisfactory training and experience and developed the required skills in the training
- Instruct supervisors to assess whether the student was able to provide a satisfactory contribution to the organization in light of the organization's goals and objectives. This can be achieved by collecting feedback from the site supervisor and from co-workers.

### **Improving the procedures for monitoring and assessment of the skills and competencies that the students acquire during internships/placements**

The University of Ruhuna could improve the procedures for monitoring and assessment of the skills and competencies that the students acquire during internships/placements by:

- Applying a 360-degree evaluation process to assess the impact of the training
- Improve the process of feedback collection from the site supervisor
- Carry out site visits by a panel of supervisors
- Collect feedback from co-workers in the host organization.

### **Expanding the possibilities of internships/placements in the non-profit and public sectors**

The opportunities for internship for University of Ruhuna students in the public sector and the non-profit sector are currently underutilized. Specially, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences is enlarging the network of internship providing partners in these two sectors.