

Western Cape Government Graduate Internship

The Western Cape Government Graduate Internship is designed in such a way that allows bursary recipients to work back the period of the bursary provided by the Government Department. Should an applicant apply for and successfully be awarded a one-year bursary from the Western Cape Provincial Treasury, it is a requirement for the applicant to work at the Western Cape Provincial Treasury for one year, failure of which would result in the applicant paying back the full sum of the bursary plus interest. If the Western Cape Provincial Treasury awards the bursary, this Department could take the awardee in its own employ or allocate the awardee to a different Government Department, but the Treasury would still be responsible for the payment of the salary.

The Graduate Internship programme, which is one of the internship programmes offered by the Western Cape Government, initially starts with the signing of a contract soon after the bursary is awarded. Applicants get notified about the successful application and is then required to attend a compulsory briefing session explaining the contract that needs to be signed which essentially finalises the bursary amount and commits the applicant to be employed by Government after the completion of the bursary period. Nearing the completion of the applicant's studies, the applicant can either ask for a deferment, which will be given if the reasons for the deferment are sound, or ask to start the internship period. The applicant will then be included with the next intake of Graduate Interns.

At the start of the internship programme at the Western Cape Provincial Treasury, interns attend a session in which they are required to submit personal documentation as well as sign a one-year contract setting out the period of employment, hours of work, leave days and salary amongst others. An HR official goes through the documents with interns and provide clarity on confusing concepts, after which they attend a primary induction session broadly explaining policies and procedures. Interns get introduced to the Minister of Finance as well as the Head of Department at this primary session. After completing introductions interns get assigned to various Government Departments and within the Treasury they get assigned to various Directorates based on their qualification. They also get assigned to a specific mentor who collects the interns at the end of the session and physically takes them to their Directorates and introduces them to colleagues.

The first couple of weeks as an intern in the Budget office of the Western Cape Provincial Treasury is spent reading through a significant amount of documents familiarising yourself with various concepts and principles. Before doing any valuable work, mentors ensure that you have sufficient background knowledge. You are assured that you can ask questions and any one of your colleagues will assist. In the first few weeks you also attend a second induction session specific to the Government Department in which you were placed in which various individuals out of each Chief Directorate and Directorate talks about what their key functions are, after which you are allowed to change your Directorate if you feel you are better placed somewhere else.

After the first few weeks of intense reading, the mentor discusses exactly what is expected of you of which the first task is writing a report and then presenting it to the team. They are there to guide you every step of the way. You are given tasks of which the first few are small to test your capabilities and then it gets harder with less direction to test creativity and innovation.

A year in the Budget office starting at the very start of the new financial year and ending at the end of the financial year allows you to experience a complete budget cycle from start to finish. "As an intern, I was integrated into the various processes, which was primarily processes involving my mentor, but I was also given the opportunity to assist and provide input into other aspects as well". Responsibilities

ranged from administrative related tasks such as minute taking, printing and setting up meetings to more Junior Economist tasks such as managing an economic intelligence portfolio by providing economic research to senior and executive management to inform and guide the integrated planning and budgeting cycle, providing economic analysis by compiling reports that provides an objective review and analysis of past and forecasted economic variables, and providing Budget analysis by assessing provincial departments' budgets and plans in order to promote effective and optimal financial resource allocation. "These tasks allowed me to strengthen my analytical skills which ranged from learning new Excel formulas to analysing Excel data spreadsheets released by Statistics South Africa. It also allowed me to develop my writing skills from having my reports sent back with allot of comments for improvement initially to having it being used as is in publications".

The work contributed towards the writing and editing of the 2017 Western Cape Provincial Economic Review and Outlook, 2017 Medium Term Budget Policy Statement, 2018 Medium Term Expenditure Framework and the 2018 Overview of Provincial Revenue and Expenditure. Apart from being involved in the actual business of the Directorate, attending various meetings with high-ranking officials present and making meaningful contributions which are acknowledged, the intern also gained various soft skills such as communication skills, accountability, confidence, learning to work in a team, amongst others. "My confidence was strengthened from the very start when I presented my research findings to the rest of the team, they praised me for what I had done right and commented on where improvements can be made". Interns are also encouraged and assisted in attending various training programmes to further increase their skills level.

"The biggest advantage of completing a Graduate Internship at the Western Cape Provincial Treasury is coming out of it stronger intellectually and personally. This gave me newly found confidence to enter the labour market as someone looking for a career rather than an internship. It also allowed me to have an idea of what the world of work is about after only knowing student life. Meeting targets were no longer determined by myself but rather by external powerful parties that needed things done in a specific way at a specific time, of which non-delivery was not an option. The increased stakes were both exciting and terrifying. Time management and prioritising was a skill I learnt and later excelled at".

The only aspect that could be viewed as a disadvantage of the programme is the fact that a one-year bursary opens the door for a one-year internship opportunity. Should the intern want to stay on in the employ of the Department it is very difficult to get a post (many vacancies require three years of experience) and as such the Department loses a potential employee. So, for the intern valuable work experience, lessons and skills are gained but for the Department it is an investment that benefits another institution.

It is recommended that opportunities be made available for interns that show potential to be a valuable asset to the public sector to extend their internship period even if it exceeds the period of the bursary provided. Interns should not be told to apply for a post on the Government Website of which most posts require more than one year of experience thereby making their chances of getting the job slim. They therefore leave the public sector and look for employment elsewhere.