

INTERN EXPERIENCE REPORT

Insights from PRCA Africa Interns

Public Relations & Communications Association

PRCA
Africa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings from the PRCA Africa Intern Experience Survey, which gathered insights from current and past interns within the PR industry. The survey aimed to assess the overall quality and effectiveness of internship programmes, focusing on key areas such as practical experience, professional development, and satisfaction levels.

The majority of interns (92%) felt that their internships provided valuable practical experience, particularly in media relations, client communication, and event management. Support from supervisors was also highly rated, with 92% of respondents feeling adequately guided throughout their internship. Additionally, 82% of interns would recommend their programme to others, reflecting a generally positive view of the experience.

However, there were areas for improvement. Some interns noted the need for clearer communication of learning objectives, more structured onboarding processes, and broader exposure to different clients and departments. The desire for better integration into the wider team and enhanced networking opportunities was also highlighted as important for future programmes.

This feedback aligns with internship practices in South Africa, where most survey respondents were based. Interns are often sourced from the Informatics and Design Faculty, which includes the Public Relations & Communications department offering a three-year National Diploma. In their second year, students complete a three-month unpaid in-service placement, and in their third year, they aim to secure a 12-month internship, working in an agency from Monday to Thursday, with lectures on Fridays. Recruitment for these internships typically begins in October or November, with placements starting in January.

For context, in 2023, at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in Cape Town, the PR department had 80 students, of which only 20 secured agency placements. The remaining 60 students, unable to find internships, had to complete research projects instead. This highlights the competitive nature of internship opportunities and the importance of structured, accessible programmes that can bridge the gap between academic learning and professional experience.

Overall, the report indicates that internships are a crucial stepping stone for aspiring PR professionals, providing them with essential skills and experience. With a few enhancements, these programmes could offer an even more comprehensive and fulfilling experience for interns, helping to address challenges like those seen in South Africa's PR education landscape.

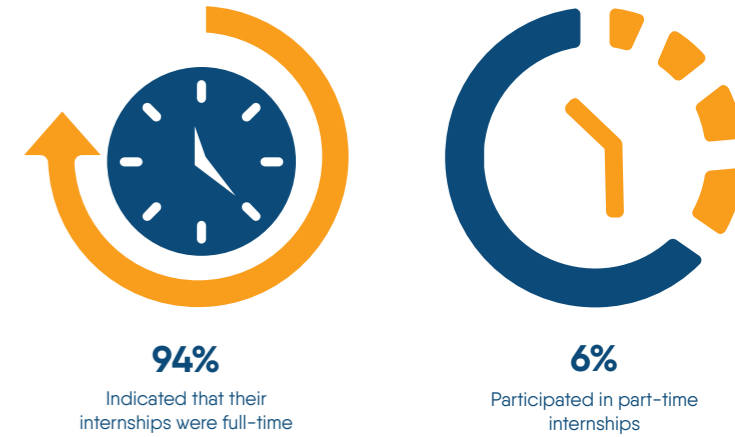
01 Type of Internship Participated In

All respondents (100%) reported that they participated in public relations internships. This reflects the primary focus of internship opportunities within the PRCA Africa network, aligning with the core services of most member agencies.



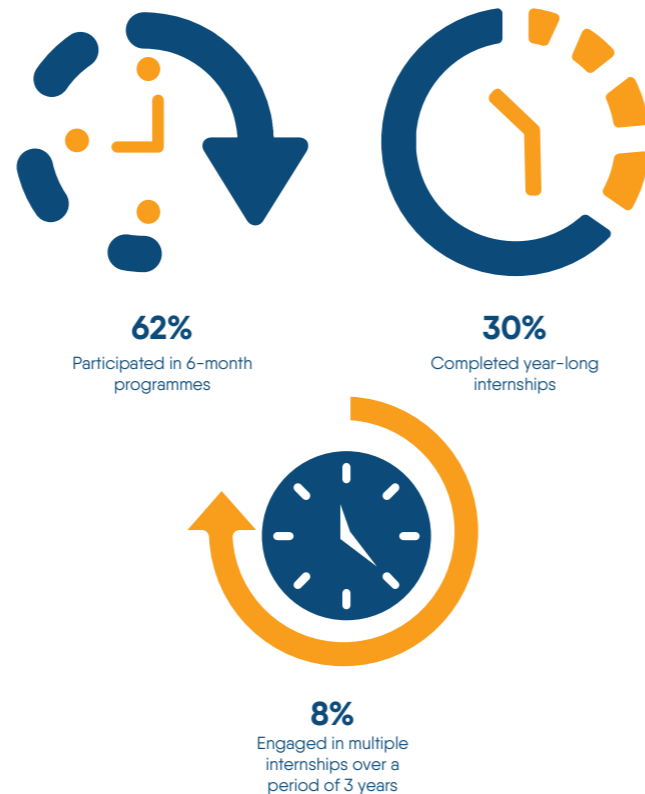
03 Internship Commitment: Full-Time vs Part-Time

When asked about the nature of their internship commitment, the majority of respondents (94%) indicated that their internships were full-time, while a smaller percentage (6%) participated in part-time internships. This data suggests that most internships in the PR industry require full-time involvement, offering interns an immersive experience within the agency environment.



02 Duration of Internship Programmes

The majority of interns (62%) participated in 6-month programmes, with 30% completing year-long internships. A smaller percentage (8%) reported engaging in multiple internships over a period of 3 years.



04 Internship Remuneration

All respondents (100%) indicated that they were remunerated during their internship period. The fact that all interns were paid highlights a positive trend towards recognising the value interns contribute to agencies. Offering remuneration not only helps to attract high-quality candidates but also promotes fairness and inclusion, ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent talented individuals from participating in internships.

This approach reflects the increasing awareness within the industry that internships should be a mutually beneficial arrangement, where interns receive compensation for their contributions while gaining valuable professional experience.



05 Alignment of Programme Description with Responsibilities

When asked about the alignment between the programme description and their actual day-to-day responsibilities, the majority of respondents reported a strong correlation. Most interns indicated that the roles and responsibilities communicated at the outset of the programme were well-aligned with their tasks during the internship. Here are some key insights:

- **Strong Alignment:** A significant number of respondents mentioned that the programme description aligned very well with their daily responsibilities. Interns felt that they were given tasks that mirrored those of a full-time professional, such as managing PR basics, attending client meetings, and being hands-on with projects.
- **Learning Opportunities:** Some respondents appreciated being allowed to be hands-on and learn on the job, gaining exposure to the realities of working in PR, which included both administrative tasks and more involved client work. This practical experience was seen as essential to understanding the fundamentals of the PR industry.
- **Negative Experiences:** One respondent mentioned that there was barely any structure to the programme and that they were limited to menial tasks like managing media lists and performing administrative duties, highlighting a disparity in experiences across agencies.



Strong Alignment



Learning Opportunities



Negative Experiences

06 Opportunities for Gaining Practical

Respondents were asked whether their internship provided opportunities to gain practical experience in the PR field. The vast majority of interns (92%) felt that their internship offered them valuable practical experience, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world PR tasks. This hands-on exposure is critical in helping interns build the skills necessary for a successful career in the industry.

The small percentage (8%) who did not feel they gained sufficient practical experience may reflect instances where the internship focused more on administrative or routine tasks, highlighting the importance of ensuring that all interns have meaningful learning opportunities throughout their programme.



92%

Felt that their internship offered them valuable practical experience, allowing them to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world PR tasks

07 . Practical Experiences Gained

Respondents who indicated that they gained practical experience during their internship elaborated on a range of skills and responsibilities they developed. The key areas of practical experience include:

- **Media Relations:** Many interns reported gaining experience in building and maintaining relationships with the media, including journalists and producers. Tasks such as media networking, attending media events, creating media lists, and distributing press releases were frequently mentioned as essential skills developed during the internship.
- **Client Management:** Interns had the opportunity to engage in client-facing activities, such as conducting client meetings, preparing reports, and presenting monthly activities. Some respondents noted they learned how to drive status meetings independently and develop strategic PR plans for clients.
- **Event and Campaign Management:** Practical experience in planning and managing media events was a common highlight. Interns were involved in events from start to finish, including logistical support and liaising with media and influencers. They also gained experience in managing PR and social media campaigns, providing them with insight into the broader communications landscape.
- **Writing and Reporting:** Interns developed skills in copywriting, including drafting press releases, writing blog posts, and preparing client reports. They also gained experience in coverage tracking and reporting on campaign outcomes, which are crucial skills in measuring the effectiveness of PR efforts.



08 Opportunities to Develop Professional Communication Skills

Respondents were asked whether their internship provided opportunities to develop and refine their professional communication skills. A large majority of interns (92%) indicated that their internship helped them enhance their professional communication skills. These skills are crucial in PR, where effective communication with clients, media, and internal teams is key to success.

The development of communication skills is likely tied to tasks such as client meetings, media outreach, report writing, and public speaking during events. The small percentage (8%) who did not feel they had the opportunity to improve their communication skills may have been limited in their responsibilities or primarily engaged in administrative tasks.



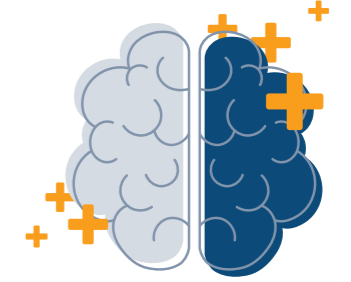
09 Development of Professional Communication Skills

Respondents elaborated on how their internship helped them develop and refine their communication skills. The most commonly cited experiences include:

- **Daily Interaction with Clients and Media:** Many interns reported that being regularly involved in client communications and media relations helped them significantly improve their communication skills. Speaking to clients and journalists, participating in meetings, and engaging in day-to-day interactions provided interns with real-world experience in professional communication.
- **Emotional Intelligence Training:** Some agencies offered formal training, such as Emotional Intelligence workshops, which helped interns understand and manage emotions, leading to more effective communication. This training was valuable in improving interpersonal communication, particularly in a professional setting.
- **Learning by Observation and Proactivity:** A few interns noted that while there wasn't always a formal programme in place, they gained communication skills by observing their managers and proactively seeking opportunities to improve. Being involved in high-level tasks like media pitching, content creation, and campaign discussions allowed them to learn by doing.
- **Workshops and Mentorship:** Some interns benefitted from media pitching workshops and guidance from senior team members, which further honed their skills in both written and verbal communication. Regular participation in tasks that required direct communication with external stakeholders was essential in building confidence and competence.



Daily Interaction with Clients and Media



Emotional Intelligence Training



Learning by Observation & Proactivity

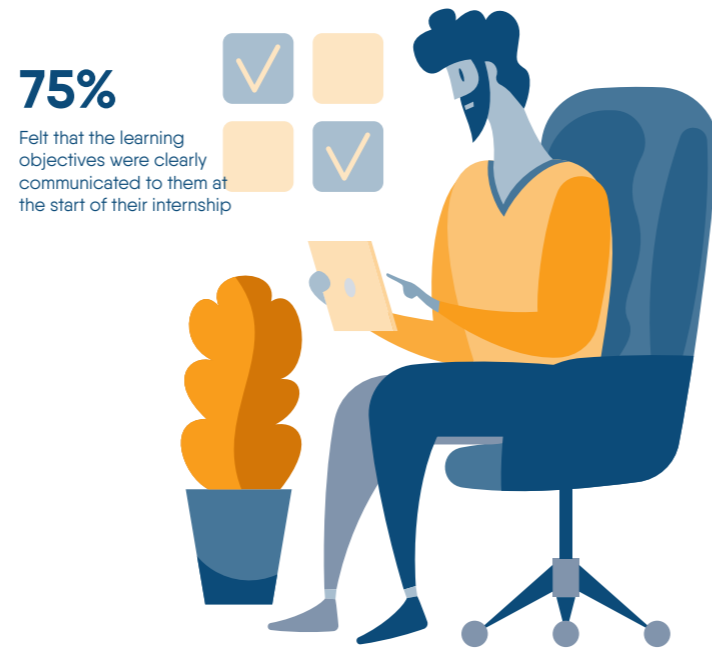


Workshops & Mentorship

10 Clarity of Learning Objectives

Respondents were asked if the learning objectives of their internship programme were clearly communicated. The majority of respondents (75%) felt that the learning objectives were clearly communicated to them at the start of their internship. This suggests that most agencies take the time to set clear expectations and outline the skills and knowledge interns are expected to gain during their programme. However, 25% of respondents felt that the objectives were not clearly communicated, which could lead to confusion regarding roles and responsibilities, or a lack of direction in terms of skill development.

Clear communication of learning objectives is essential for ensuring that interns understand what they are working towards and can measure their progress effectively throughout the internship.



11 Support from Supervisors

Respondents were asked if they felt adequately supported by their supervisors during their internship. An overwhelming majority of respondents (92%) felt that they received adequate support from their supervisors, suggesting that most agencies provide strong mentorship and guidance during the internship period. Supervisor support is critical for helping interns navigate their responsibilities, address challenges, and gain confidence in their skills. The eight percent who felt they were not adequately supported may have faced challenges such as limited access to mentorship or unclear expectations from their supervisors, which could hinder their overall experience.

Strong supervisory support is essential for ensuring that interns feel engaged, capable, and prepared for professional growth.



12 Areas for Improvement in Supervisor Support

For the small percentage of respondents (8%) who did not feel adequately supported, they provided insights on how the level of support could be improved:

- **Clearer KPIs and Communication:** One respondent suggested that clearer KPIs should be communicated from the start of the programme. Setting well-defined goals and expectations would provide interns with a better understanding of what they need to achieve and how their work contributes to the overall objectives of the agency.
- **Time Constraints and Proper Onboarding:** Another intern mentioned that their team was heavily involved in a brand campaign during their internship, limiting their capacity to provide proper onboarding and mentorship. As a result, the intern felt that they were “thrown into the deep end” and had to figure things out independently. While this provided valuable learning experiences, a more structured onboarding process and better time management from supervisors could have improved the experience, especially in the early stages of the internship.

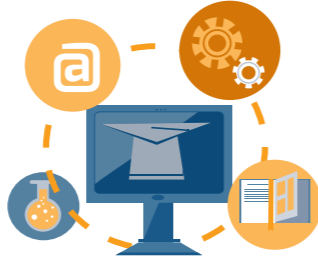
These responses indicate that a lack of clear goals and limited capacity from supervisors can negatively affect the internship experience. Ensuring that interns are given proper onboarding, clear KPIs, and regular feedback from the beginning would help improve their learning and engagement.



13 Valuable Aspects of the Internship Programme

Interns highlighted several aspects of their internship programmes that they found particularly valuable and recommended continuing:

- **Media Training and Relations:** Many respondents appreciated the opportunities to engage in media training, manage media relations, and draft media proposals. These experiences provided essential hands-on practice in one of the most important aspects of PR.
- **Full Immersion in Agency Activities:** Several interns valued being immersed in the full spectrum of agency activities, which allowed them to experience the realities of day-to-day PR management. This exposure helped them understand all facets of agency work, from client relations to strategic decision-making.
- **Mentorship and Access to Management:** Having access to the management team for mentorship was highlighted as particularly valuable. Interns appreciated the opportunity to learn directly from experienced professionals and gain insights into higher-level decision-making processes.
- **Ownership and Responsibility:** Respondents valued the opportunity to take ownership of tasks without being micro-managed. Being trusted to handle responsibilities such as creating media lists, pitching to media, and managing client expectations helped them grow in confidence and skill.
- **Professional Grooming and Structured Growth:** Mentorship and professional grooming were key for personal development, and having structured progress tracking with agreed timelines ensured that interns could monitor their own growth throughout the programme.



Media Training & Relations



Full Immersion in Agency Activities



Mentorship & Access to Management



Ownership & Responsibility



Professional Grooming & Structured Growth

14 Areas for Improvement in Internship Programmes

Respondents shared various suggestions for improving the internship programme to enhance the learning experience for future interns. Key areas for improvement include:

- **In-Person Learning:** Some respondents suggested that in-person internships would provide a better learning experience compared to remote or online settings, as it allows for greater engagement and interaction with team members.
- **More Structured Training:** Several interns emphasised the need for more dedicated training on basic PR tasks and consistent check-ins with mentors. Integrating interns across departments and ensuring they have one-on-one time with senior team members for skills transfer and guidance would enhance the learning process.
- **Transition Between Responsibilities:** The transition between different responsibilities during the internship could be smoother, with clearer communication about expectations and progression through the programme.
- **Dedicated Mentorship:** Respondents suggested that having a dedicated mentor or guidance consultant would provide better support. This would ensure that interns are not left feeling disconnected from the team or lacking direction in their tasks.
- **Improved Onboarding:** Proper onboarding sessions were mentioned as essential for helping interns understand their role from the start. This could include daily check-ins in the early stages to align on tasks and expectations, ensuring a smoother integration into the agency's workflow.
- **Respect and Inclusion:** One respondent highlighted the need for interns to feel more included, mentioning that being made to perform menial tasks like getting tea and coffee can diminish their sense of belonging to the team.



15 Opportunities for Networking with PR Professionals

Respondents were asked if their internship programme offered opportunities to network with other professionals in the PR industry. A slight majority of interns (55%) indicated that their programme provided networking opportunities with industry professionals. These networking opportunities are valuable for interns, helping them build relationships, gain insights from experienced professionals, and potentially secure future job opportunities. However, the 45% who did not have such opportunities highlights that not all internships are designed to facilitate professional networking, which could limit the broader exposure and career-building opportunities for those interns.

Networking is an important aspect of a successful internship, and agencies that do not yet prioritise it may want to consider integrating formal or informal networking events or opportunities for interns to connect with industry professionals.



16 Enhancing Networking Opportunities

Respondents offered suggestions on how networking opportunities could be further improved within internship programmes:

- **Making Networking a Core Focus:** Some respondents emphasised that networking should be a core element of every internship programme. Agencies should prioritise it as part of their strategy, ensuring interns are actively encouraged to make professional connections.
- **Collaboration and Communication:** Enhancing collaboration between interns and other professionals through constant communication within the agency and with external contacts would help build stronger networking experiences.
- **Organising Intern Networking Events:** Several interns suggested organising events where interns from different agencies or departments can come together to share ideas and opinions, which would create valuable peer-to-peer networking opportunities.
- **Involvement in Media and Industry Events:** Some respondents noted that involving interns in media events or industry-specific gatherings would allow them to meet professionals and make connections in the field. This could include attending media events, client events, or PRCA industry functions.
- **Formal Networking Events:** Suggestions such as PRCA-hosted events (Breakfasts, Dinners, Student Bootcamps) and agency-organised networking events would provide structured opportunities for interns to connect with industry leaders and peers.



17 Areas of Knowledge or Skills Lacking in the Programme

When asked if there were any specific skills or areas of knowledge that the programme lacked, the majority of respondents indicated that there were no major gaps. However, a few respondents suggested areas for improvement:

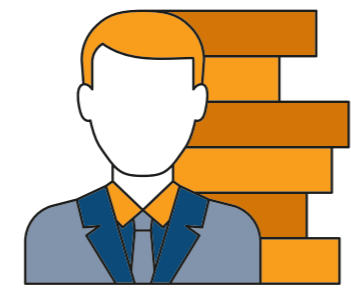
- **Cross-Industry Exposure:** One respondent expressed the desire for more opportunities to learn across different client industries, which would provide broader exposure and a more well-rounded understanding of the PR field.
- **Understanding the PR Landscape:** Another respondent mentioned that a deeper overall understanding of the PR landscape would have enhanced their learning experience, suggesting that more structured education on industry trends and best practices could be valuable.
- **Professional Conduct:** One intern highlighted the importance of learning how to act and present oneself as a professional, suggesting that greater emphasis on workplace professionalism and etiquette would have been beneficial.



Cross-Industry Exposure



Understanding the PR Landscape



Professional Conduct

18 Overall Satisfaction with Internship

The majority of respondents (73%) reported being very satisfied with their internship experience, indicating that the programmes were effective in providing valuable learning opportunities and professional development. A smaller portion (9%) were somewhat satisfied or neutral, suggesting that while they may have gained useful experience, there may have been areas that could have been improved. However, the 9% who were very dissatisfied highlight that a small percentage of interns may have faced challenges such as lack of support or limited learning opportunities during their programme.

Overall, the high satisfaction levels suggest that most agencies are succeeding in delivering meaningful and beneficial internship experiences, though there remains room for addressing gaps in satisfaction for a minority of interns.

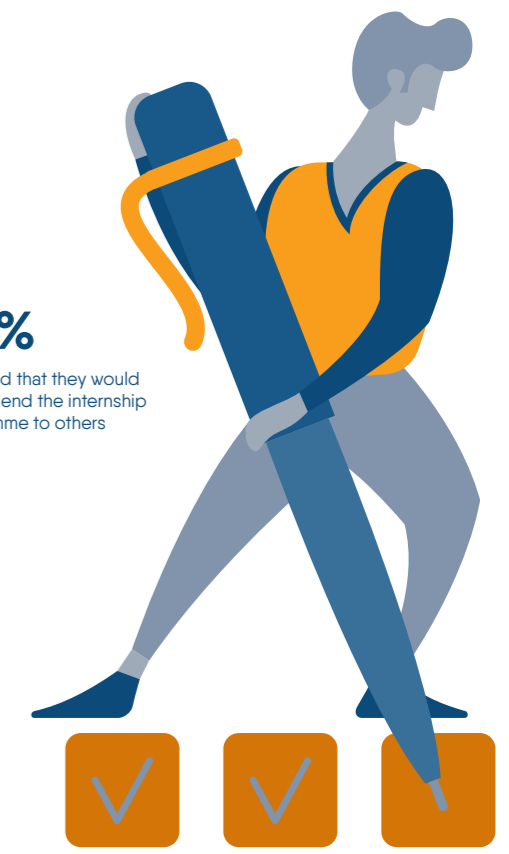
19 Willingness to Recommend the Internship Programme

Respondents were asked if they would recommend the internship programme to others interested in pursuing a career in PR. The majority of respondents (82%) indicated that they would recommend the internship programme to others, reflecting a generally positive view of the experience and its value for aspiring PR professionals. This high percentage suggests that most interns found the programme beneficial in terms of gaining practical skills, networking opportunities, and professional growth. However, the 18% who would not recommend the programme may have encountered challenges or unmet expectations that impacted their overall perception of its value.

This willingness to recommend the programme demonstrates its effectiveness in preparing interns for a career in PR, while also signalling the importance of addressing areas where some interns may have had less positive experiences.

82%

Indicated that they would recommend the internship programme to others



20 Additional Feedback on Internship Programme Experience

Respondents offered valuable additional feedback regarding their internship experiences, highlighting some key insights:

- **Proactive Learning:** One respondent emphasised that learning is the intern's responsibility, encouraging future interns to actively seek out senior colleagues for mentorship and knowledge sharing. This underscores the importance of being proactive in the internship environment and taking charge of one's own development.
- **Inclusivity and Team Integration:** Another respondent stressed the importance of interns feeling like they are truly part of the wider team. They suggested that agencies should ensure interns are introduced to all team members, not just their immediate team, to avoid feeling isolated. Ice-breaker sessions at the start of the internship were recommended to foster inclusivity and make interns feel more welcome.
- **Exposure to Different Teams and Clients:** One respondent expressed a desire for more opportunities to work across various teams and experience different client types. By being exposed to a range of clients, such as consumer versus finance, interns would gain a broader understanding of PR strategies and the unique challenges associated with each industry sector.



PRCA Africa Membership and Industry Promotion Network

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CONCLUSION

The PRCA Africa Intern Experience Survey highlights the valuable role internships play in preparing future PR professionals. The majority of interns reported positive experiences, with many gaining practical skills in media relations, client management, and campaign execution. The support provided by supervisors, alongside opportunities for hands-on learning, played a crucial role in their satisfaction.

However, the feedback also indicates areas for improvement. Interns expressed a desire for clearer communication of programme objectives, more structured onboarding, and greater exposure to different clients and departments. Additionally, ensuring that interns feel fully integrated into the wider team and offering more networking opportunities would enhance the overall learning experience.

In conclusion, while the internships generally provided a strong foundation for those entering the PR industry, addressing these key areas would further enrich the experience for future interns, ensuring that they are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of the PR world and contribute meaningfully to the industry.



For more information please visit:
<https://www.prca.org.uk/node/2715>

Jo Brophy MPRCA

International Engagement Manager, PRCA

jo.brophy@prca.global



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