

TALENT DEVELOPMENT AS A JOURNEY, NOT A TRANSACTION

M&G Investments, a longstanding supporter of the ASISA Academy's graduate programmes, is rethinking how it approaches early career development. Drawing on a strong track record, HR Manager Mujahid Isaacs explains, the company is evolving its internships from narrowly defined pathways to specific roles into broader, more flexible platforms designed to launch lasting careers in the financial services industry.

Since hosting its first ASISA Academy intern in 2014, M&G Investments has developed a flexible, human-centred approach to graduate development. The approach, designed around responding to the needs of young professionals, is also applied to its own initiatives, such as a dedicated graduate analyst programme within the investment team, which hosts four analysts at a time across South Africa and Namibia.

Isaacs explains that the company's model places value on individual growth and career exploration alongside training and development for specific roles. It challenges traditional ideas about what it means to "develop talent" and expands on them.

"Look at these students doing a Bachelor of Business Administration degrees, did they actually want to do that, or was it the best opportunity available to them at the time? From my personal experience, at that age, you don't necessarily know what it is you want to do."



M&G Investments HR Manager Mujahid Isaacs, far left, with some of his colleagues who joined M&G Investments through the ASISA Academy's graduate programmes. From second left, Retail Client Service Consultant Aphiwe Mxabanisi, Retail Client Service Administrator Lebohang Kanogoiwa, Institutional Client Service Associate Sisipho Jokazi, Project Assistant Sisipho Mgugunyeka, Reconciliation Specialist Tamzin May and Process Analyst Tony Gozongo.

Isaacs explains that M&G Investments is open to the final placement of graduate trainees and interns. "They might sign up for a graduate programme for an investment role but, once they are in the business, they recognise that operations or marketing is a better fit."

Like most investment firms, M&G Investments shortlists according to who has the best academic results and how they conduct themselves in the interviews, "but we also try to assess where they want to be and where they want to forge a career," says Isaacs.

Once they are at M&G Investments, the interns are given room to explore different functions across the business: investments, operations, marketing, client servicing, before being nudged toward longer-term roles that better suit their skills and interests.

"We are really intentional about where we place them and how we help them to forge careers going forward. We believe that individuals thrive when they are doing something that they are passionate about – this is a win-win for us."

While M&G Investments strives to give interns broad exposure across the business, placements are also shaped by the current focus and available capacity within each division.

"There must be both the capability and capacity for leaders in that area to train, onboard and properly support them," explains Isaacs. "You need to actively engage these students. You can't just bring them into the system and leave them. That approach doesn't benefit anyone."

The philosophy is straightforward: when graduates are given the chance to find the right fit, they tend to perform better and stay longer. "It's our responsibility," Isaacs adds, "to give them a compelling reason to stay and grow with us."

Putting this approach into practice requires intention and effort. M&G Investment's model includes structured mentorship, frequent check-ins and ongoing communication between HR, line managers and the graduates to ensure support is consistent and meaningful.

This kind of holistic support is especially important given the socio-economic pressures many graduates face, particularly those from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. For many, the primary goal in choosing a degree or internship is to secure stable, permanent employment as soon as possible. The need to support their families often influences their career choices in ways employers should be mindful of, adds Isaacs.

"You can't just drop someone in and hope they swim," he says. "We need to stay connected, not only to how they are performing at work, but also to how they are adjusting to the world of work itself."

Isaacs, who has been at M&G Investments (previously at Prudential) for a total of 13 years, says: "Our first intern joined us in 2014, so we have built a solid track record of what works and what doesn't."

Ensuring a positive experience for each intern is key, regardless of where they are placed. "We do our best to accommodate them, because when graduates find roles where they can truly add value, everyone wins, even if they eventually move on to another organisation," Isaacs adds. Isaacs emphasises that this mindset needs to be shared across all hiring managers. "It's important they understand that it's not just about giving a student two or three months of work experience," he says. "The goal is to create a meaningful experience; one they will look back on positively."

Beyond protecting the company's reputation, it's also about supporting personal growth. "It's good for your brand, and it's good for the individual," he adds.

Isaacs is realistic about the challenges of retaining talent. The investment management industry is small, and specialists with a year or two of experience are in high demand. Competitors often try to lure rising stars with higher salaries or faster career progression.

"But we don't see it as a loss if they stay in the industry," Isaacs says. "That's still a win. It means we have contributed to building the ecosystem and, ultimately, the industry. It all starts with a pipeline, and that is where programmes like these matter so much."