

SOLVING STAFFING GAPS AND SHAPING FUTURES

Developing people is what drives Norman Petersen, HR Business Partner at Allan Gray. But he is clear that the firm's relationship with the ASISA Academy's [IMACS@TSIBA Internship](#) is, first and foremost, about addressing a recruitment challenge.

Allan Gray's relationship with the [IMACS@TSIBA](#) Internship began in 2013. At the time, Petersen was managing one of Allan Gray's Retail Operations teams and was "always looking for talent". When he heard about the internship, he thought it would be a great way to give potential employees work experience and to identify potential hires for Allan Gray.

"It was 50-50," he says, "they got the opportunity to gain work experience and to graduate, and I got to find potential candidates to hire."

The IMACS@TSIBA Internship connects companies with high-potential undergraduate students completing a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) Finance degree through TSIBA Business School. Students participate in the ASISA Academy's investment management administration programme, which offers a powerful combination of theoretical knowledge and work-readiness training.

Companies interview BBA Finance students at TSIBA, select candidates to sponsor for the academic component over 12 months, and host them for a 16-week internship during their final year of study.

Petersen says working with people is what gets him to the office every day, but he emphasises that the benefits of the internship go both ways. The programme helps Allan Gray and other businesses to assess potential employees while giving students the workplace experience they need to graduate.

"Sometimes when these stories are told, the focus is placed entirely on the development side, and what gets forgotten is how valuable these young people are to businesses," he says. "The internship over that 4-month period is a great time for us to assess whether they will fit into our business, and whether Allan Gray is the right environment for them to realise their potential."

"There is a lot of potential for the students and for Allan Gray," says Petersen. "We hire throughout the year, and this is a great channel to assess how candidates would fit into the business – and for them to do the same," he adds.

"I get requests almost daily from students asking to do job shadowing or similar but, as a financial institution, we are limited in what we can offer. The internship with the ASISA Academy and TSIBA is a gateway to introduce promising young people to the working environment. They do real work during those four months so, by the time the internship is done, they know exactly whether this is the right environment for them."

The relationship between Allan Gray and the ASISA Academy's IMACS@TSIBA Internship has been extremely successful. Petersen says almost all interns have been offered permanent roles.

It's now nearly 10 years since Allan Gray welcomed its first IMACS@TSIBA intern, and most are still with the business. In fact, according to Petersen, many former interns have worked their way into key roles at the company.

"We've got senior specialists in the investment admin team, team leaders, someone working in private clients ... They all started in junior roles but have progressed over time into much more senior positions."



Norman Petersen (right) pictured with ASISA Academy alumni employed by Allan Gray.

From the start, Petersen saw enormous potential in the TSIBA students. Many come from disadvantaged backgrounds and, he says, and they are “very ambitious and exceptionally resilient”.

“Over the years, I’ve noticed that candidates from TSIBA are unique. They have so much potential.”

Petersen adds that the work the ASISA Academy does to prepare interns also plays a major role in the success of the partnership.

“The ASISA Academy does a great job prepping them for the real-world work environment. What you learn at university and what you experience in the workplace can be quite different. That is also true of Allan Gray and other asset managers – culture and expectations can vary widely.”

The ongoing support from the ASISA Academy during the internship is also key, he says. “When the interns are with us, there’s someone from the ASISA Academy who guides them, someone they can ask questions and who supports them throughout.”

As driven by people as he is, Petersen wasn’t always in human resources. He started off his career as a consultant at a bank doing mortgage bonds, then moved into personal banking. Over time, he realised that he didn’t enjoy the front-office work and that he preferred to engage with people and teams.

When he joined Allan Gray in August 2005, he focused on improving efficiencies within the business through people. Now, 20 years later, “people are definitely what drive me to come to the office every day. I love to see people grow and develop”.

But it’s clear he still keeps business needs and efficiency front of mind. What he values most about the IMACS@TSIBA Internship is how it combines people development with business outcomes.