

Government to regulate student internship programmes

GULU

By Nicholas Wassajja

The Government has started a process to regulate workplace-based learning that includes internships and apprenticeships in a bid to address the skills gap that continues to affect the labour force in the country and ultimately reduce unemployment.

According to a draft regulatory impact assessment that seeks to inform the workplace-based learning policy, "models that are based on intensive periods of training in the workplace, such as internship and apprenticeship, often offer young people the possibility to stay with the employer on completion of these programmes or reduce the time it takes to find the first job."

The regulatory impact assessment report indicates that, in a competitive labour market like today's, the experience gained through workplace-based learning opens doors to positive early employment.

To enhance the benefits that learners accrue from workplace-based learning models, the gender labour and social development ministry through the Green Jobs Programme, has embarked on countrywide consultations on how best the Government can regulate internship and apprenticeship to the learners' benefit.

The consultations started over the weekend in Gulu district with an interface between ministry officials, district labour officers and district education officers for an input to the regulatory impact assessment that will inform the compilation of a workplace-based learning policy in the country.

The assistant commissioner for employment services, Milton Turyasiima, said the gender ministry is working with the education ministry to roll out certification for students that have undergone

internship and apprenticeship.

This comes at the time the Government is proposing a National Youth Service Bill to establish a National Youth Service Scheme that will make paramilitary training compulsory for youths below 30 years.

The service scheme would teach sexual reproductive health, anti-corruption and patriotism. Certificates will be awarded on completion.

If passed, the proposed Bill would replace an earlier National Graduate Service Bill, 2016 that wants higher institution graduates to do voluntary service for one year in disparate sectors as a gateway to formal employment.

If the workplace-based learning policy is effectively implemented, the national annual labour productivity is expected to increase from the current sh5m per worker to sh7m per worker by 2023.

The regulatory impact assessment report also assumes that the proportion of the population with specialisation in any field is expected to increase from 6% in 2017 to 10% by 2023.

Despite Uganda's economy experiencing strong GDP growth, averaging 7% annually over the past decade, it has not created jobs for the youth. For instance, a study done by the African Development Bank in 2015 said youth unemployment stands at 83%, the highest in Africa.

Enoch Mutambi, the skills employment and employability specialist under the Green Jobs Programme, said formal apprenticeships collapsed in the 1990s with the only available apprenticeships being informal and explained that the workplace-based learning will address this gap.

The Uganda National Apprenticeship Framework was approved by Cabinet in 2018, with the gender ministry charged with its implementation.