

## Virtual Work Experience Program

To increase access to work experience opportunities for students across Australia, including those who may face geographic or other barriers, CSIRO is working with the Australian Government Department of Education and Training on a 12-month project to develop and test a Virtual Work Experience Program.

The program will provide an opportunity for students to undertake collaborative, group STEM<sup>1</sup> projects, including projects linked to real-world CSIRO research and industry challenges. Experienced CSIRO staff or STEM industry professionals who are remote from the student will act as the work experience supervisor. Students may also be remote from each other.

### Why is CSIRO piloting this program?

Research shows that well-designed work experience programs play an important role in transitioning students from study to employment. Work experience programs can support students to make informed study and employment choices, assist in developing valuable work-based skills and enhance employment prospects.

Each year, however, organisations including CSIRO receive significantly more applications for work experience than there are places available. In addition to this, many students are unable to participate in their specific area of interest or undertake meaningful work experience due to accessibility issues, or the cost and distance of travel.

The Program will pilot ways to provide meaningful student work experience using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solutions, to:

- increase student choices of work experience by removing geographic constraints, or cost barriers and providing opportunities to complement existing school work experience offerings
- assist students to develop STEM skills as well as General Capabilities skills such as teamwork, communication, negotiation and resilience<sup>2</sup>
- increase organisations' capacity to offer work experience that leads to genuine student outcomes
- broaden the types of real-world work situations that students are exposed to, including introducing non-traditional working arrangements such as telecommuting which are predicted to be the way that more jobs will be, and staff will operate in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

<sup>2</sup> These are the types of skills sought to be developed under five of the Australian Curriculum's *General Capabilities*: Information and Communication Technology Capability, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding, and Intercultural Understanding.

### **Who will be involved?**

CSIRO will involve approximately 100 high school students to take part in six program pilots. Students from remote, rural, regional and metropolitan areas—and with diverse academic backgrounds and career aspirations—will be involved for the program pilots.

Students from a broad range of schools will be directly invited by CSIRO to participate in the pilots. Participation is voluntary and students can elect not to take part, if they wish.

### **What will students do?**

The program aims to develop an understanding of possible STEM careers and skills by providing an opportunity for students to undertake collaborative, group STEM projects linked to real world CSIRO research and industry challenges. Students will undertake meaningful work with outputs and outcomes that can be used as part of work portfolios, while being supervised by a Remote Work Experience Supervisor.

### **Where will students undertake the program?**

Students will participate in work experience projects using an ICT solution while in their schools, homes or a supported community venue, such as a library. Students will need to be supported by a teacher, parent or an approved adult in their physical location.

### **When will the program take place?**

The program pilots are planned to take place between March and July 2019.

### **Is there a cost to students?**

Participation in the pilots is free of charge to all students. There will also be no payments made to students to be part of this program. Students may receive a certificate or non-monetary prize at the conclusion of the program.

### **What will the program explore?**

This program will explore and report on:

- whether genuine work experience programs for high school students can be provided using non-traditional methods, such as ICT solutions
- how non-traditional work experience programs should be structured to achieve the best outcomes for students, including whether face-to-face elements are needed
- optimal timeframes and models to provide non-traditional work experience programs (full-time, part-time or a combination of both)
- a one to many supervisory arrangement between Remote Work Experience Supervisors and teams of students (who may be co-located with, or remote from, each other)
- the requirements of the ICT solution used to support the virtual work experience activities.

### **How will the program be evaluated?**

The program will be evaluated by the CSIRO Planning, Performance and Impact unit. The evaluation may include surveys, online observations and interviews, and analysis of recordings of online interactions. Students and Remote Work Experience Supervisors will need to agree to participate in the evaluation in order to participate in the pilots.

An Advisory Group of industry experts has also been established to provide input and guidance on the program, including scoping, content, practicality and relevance.

### How will students' personal data be protected?

All information provided by students will be treated confidentially. It is anticipated that some student personal data will be collected for the project, including names, school year, home address, age, gender, cultural background, identified special needs, school and/or personal email addresses, school name and address, and phone numbers. This personal information will only be used to contact the students and to facilitate the students' participation in the pilots and the evaluation of those pilots.

Personal data will be stored on secure CSIRO servers in Australia and in locked cabinets on secure premises (if in hard copy). Where third parties are provided with personal data to conduct the pilots (e.g. a third-party IT vendor), they will be required to provide a similarly safe environment.

The principal output of the pilot program will be a final report from CSIRO to the Australian Government Department of Education and Training. The final report will not identify any student by name and will not include any personal data. The high-level findings of the project may also be shared at education conferences and with education stakeholders but will not identify any student by name and will not include any personal data from students.

Any personal data collected will be retained until the acceptance by the Department of Education and Training of the final report, upon which time the personal information will be destroyed or securely archived in accordance with the Commonwealth Archives Act (1983).

CSIRO will treat all personal information collected as part of your application in accordance with CSIRO's general privacy statement ([www.csiro.au/privacy](http://www.csiro.au/privacy)). Please contact [vwep@csiro.au](mailto:vwep@csiro.au) if you:

- would like to access any of your personal information we have collected in the application process
- would like to withdraw your consent at any time to use the information as described above or
- believe that any information is inaccurate, incomplete or out of date.

### Can students opt out?

Participation in this program is completely voluntary and students may withdraw at any time by giving notice to one of the contacts below. Any data collected in the evaluation process about a withdrawn student will be destroyed and not be reported upon.

### Contact

If you would like more information regarding the Virtual Work Experience Program, please contact Dr Rodney Thiele, Education Advisor, CSIRO Education and Outreach, at [Rod.Thiele@csiro.au](mailto:Rod.Thiele@csiro.au) or 08 6436 8831.

If you would like more information regarding the evaluation of the program, please contact Dr Thomas Keenan, Senior Advisor, Office of the Chief of Staff and Strategy, CSIRO, at [Tom.Keenan@csiro.au](mailto:Tom.Keenan@csiro.au) or 07 3327 4019.

This project has been approved by CSIRO's Social Science Human Research Ethics Committee in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). Any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project can be raised with the Manager of Social Responsibility and Ethics on 07 3833 5693 or by email at [csshrec@csiro.au](mailto:csshrec@csiro.au).