
Internship Programme

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Over the past year, Otago Polytechnic's School of Information Technology has been working closely with the Dunedin ICT Cluster, a network of IT companies supported by the Dunedin City Council Business Development Unit. As a result of this collaboration, an internship model has been launched which provides opportunities for Otago Polytechnic IT students to gain valuable business experience in local IT companies. Local companies have committed time and funding to the scheme, which also has financial backing from the DCC.

Internships have been either summer projects or semester based work placements. The internships will meet the need for 'work ready' graduates for the growing Dunedin ICT industry, and also encourage secondary school students to consider a career pathway in ICT.

Background

We can provide our students with excellent technical and professional skills, but there is no substitute for the learning which takes place in the workplace. In only a few weeks of exposure, they would have opportunities to discover how a real business operates, learn valuable self management skills and make useful contacts in the ICT community.

Currently, many of our students leave Dunedin to seek work in the IT field. By engaging with the ICT community through internships, these students will recognise Dunedin as a future career choice. The promotion of the internships and the increased likelihood of local employment will be an added drawcard in attracting students to ICT training in

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Dunedin. This may offer some resolution to the identified global skill shortages in this area.

Process

Matching students and employers was achieved through an evening "speed dating" event in September. Students did a round of short interviews to "convince each employer that they will be the best employee ever for their job". In preparation for this, we schooled the students – performing roleplays, and working on their CVs.

The employers were subsidised to employ the students through a grant from the Council's Industry Development Fund. While this funding will increase next year, the amount per intern will decrease over the next two years, with the intention of the scheme becoming self-funding. Having the interns actually employed has obvious financial benefits for them, and means the companies take responsibility for employment relations (ACC, insurance etc.).

Outcomes

With funding secured for this year, we go into the second round with the experience of the first. We will refocus the training and preparation. While our students were lucky to get fantastic employers, we will be investigating a mentoring scheme for students over the internship with a view to providing pastoral support and to help reinforce learning opportunities.

From our perspective – 9 interns placed, five were funded and four outside the scheme. Of those, one was immediately offered a full time position, two have been in part time positions and (having graduated in June) are now on fixed term contracts, one is still in part time work with full time offered on graduation. Overall a very positive experience for all which has raised the profile of our graduates and demonstrated the value of 'work ready' Polytechnic graduates.



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Mr Philip Kerr
Chief Executive Officer
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Dear Mr Kerr

DUNEDIN ICT BUSINESS CLUSTER: THANKS TO LESLEY SMITH AND DR SAMUEL MANN

We wish to express our sincere thanks to Lesley Smith (Head of the IT Department) and Dr Samuel Mann from the Otago Polytechnic IT Department for the role they played in helping the Dunedin ICT Business Cluster successfully develop and implement the Dunedin ICT Internship Programme.

Facilitated by the City's Economic Development Unit, NZTE and the UPSTART Business Incubator, the Dunedin ICT Business Cluster developed an internship programme in response to the ICT companies in the city having difficulty in finding quality staff. One means to overcome this problem was to find a way to attract and retain quality students in the city, in particular from the University of Otago and the Otago Polytechnic.

We are very grateful for the role that Lesley Smith and Dr. Samuel Mann has played in the success of the programme. There is no doubt in our mind that without their support and commitment the programme would not have been the success it was. This is evident by the first year results achieved (please see below):

Internships awarded by companies:	32
Jobs created once internships completed:	17 (4 permanent full-time; 6 permanent part-time; 7 on short-term contract)
FTE's:	7 (excludes the 7 short-term contracts)
New business created by intern after internship completed: ..	1
Expected GDP value creation due to FTE creation:	\$805,000
Paid Internships:	24
Unpaid Internships:	8
Companies involved:	12

Feedback from companies who took on Otago Polytechnic Interns from your IT department was extremely positive. In many respects companies felt that the students certainly "hit-the-ground-running" and were well prepared to take on the rigours expected in the work environment.

We are aware that for one significant IT company in the city, the work of Otago Polytechnic interns did contribute profit to the bottom line of the company they were with. A great outcome for the business involved and testament to the teaching focus and skill of the Otago Polytechnic team.

In our view, the IT Department is playing an important role in helping us combat some of the staff shortage issues Dunedin ICT business are facing today and we wished to take this opportunity to share that with you.

We are looking to place 43 interns into Dunedin ICT Companies in 2010/2011. It has been brilliant working with such an enthusiastic and dedicated team from the Polytechnic and we look forward to continuing to do so in achieving that goal.

Thank you again and if you have any questions at all, by all means please let me know.

Yours sincerely

Graham Strong
Business Development Advisor