



Australian Government

Chief Scientist

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BRIDGING A GAP BETWEEN STUDY AND WORK

Tertiary science and ICT students in Australia are being disadvantaged by a lack of industry experience to help them prepare for the workplace after graduating.

A paper released today by the Office of the Chief Scientist shows that just one in seven undergraduate students in the natural and physical sciences participates in an industry placement. Only three in 100 participate in a longer term placement.

The paper, which focuses on the growing need for work-integrated learning (WIL), shows 73 per cent of IT students participate in projects but only a minority have access to longer term experiences.

Australia's Chief Scientist Professor Ian Chubb AC said change was needed as studies consistently show that industry placements were invaluable to students of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

"We need industry and universities working better together to prepare our future workers to innovate, collaborate and adapt," Professor Chubb said.

"In the decades ahead we will need people trained in STEM to be working in every industry, in many roles, including roles we haven't yet imagined.

"Yet we still offer placements to a minority of science students and they are usually ad hoc."

The paper, *STEM-trained and job-ready*, is based on two commissioned investigations: one conducted by ACER of university staff and the other by NCVER involving employers. An industry working group with representatives from peak industry bodies and the university sector oversaw the research.

University staff reported a lack of time and resources as well as low employer participation, while employers were often unsure who to approach.

Industry placements have played a marginal role in science and IT education in Australian universities, unlike engineering faculties which require all students to complete industry placements in order to graduate.

Professor Chubb called for business leaders and universities to work together so student industry placements or projects are built into every STEM degree.

"These are skills that will serve a graduate well in any career in any sector of the economy," he said.

The four-page paper is available at www.chiefscientist.gov.au

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