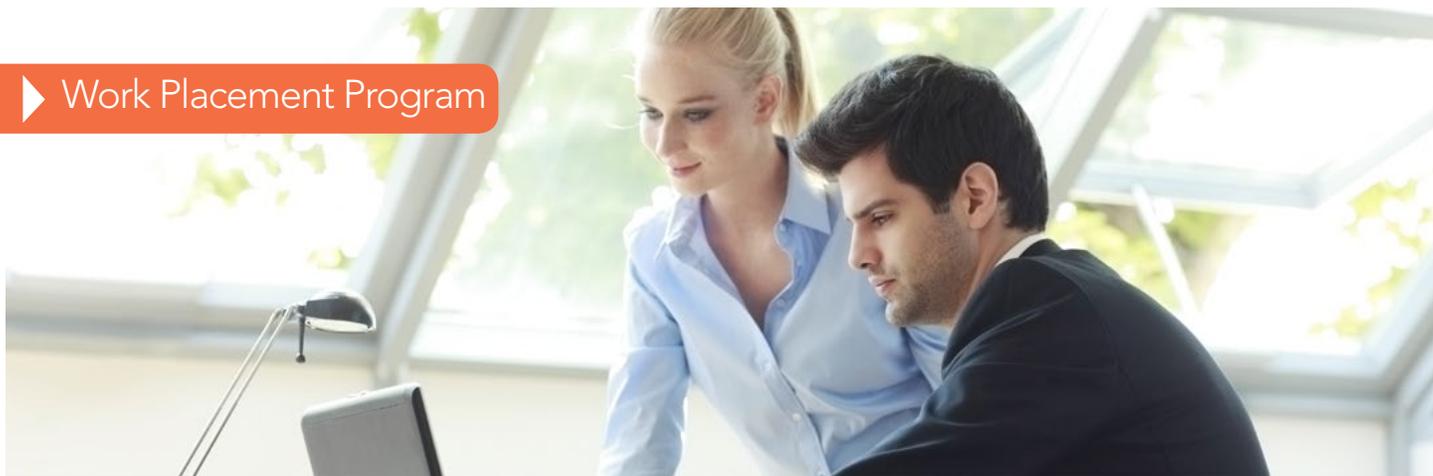


## ▶ Work Placement Program



### Industry

Financial Services

### Business Issue

To address the 'big data' skills shortage and better equip graduates with real-world experience in analytics.

### Solution

SAS® Work Placement Program

### Benefits

Zurich found the placement to be so well aligned with their needs that they offered the student Jason a full-time role.

## SAS puts students to work – in the workplace

A 'big data' skills shortage is looming and this is highlighting the need for more students to study analytics. But a major concern for organisations employing analytics graduates is their lack of practical experience.

SAS is addressing this concern through its Work Placement Program, which has been running for 10 years and is free to both employers and students.

One participant is Zurich Financial Services. Senior actuary Bo Wang was the supervisor for University of New South Wales commerce and economics student Jason Sun, who participated in the workplace program towards the end of his combined degree. Within three months of his placement finishing, he was offered a full-time position at Zurich as an actuarial analyst.

"When the opportunity arose to work with a student who was experienced in SAS we immediately saw the value in it," Wang says. "We felt that such a person could help us think about how we could do things differently and bring in some new ideas."

### A fresh approach to existing procedures

Having someone to view existing operations through fresh eyes was a major benefit of the program for Zurich. Wang says the company changed some of its procedures to make them more efficient as a result of the placement.

"Jason's keenness to apply the techniques he was learning at university to the business world was a huge advantage," he says. "Sometimes those who have worked in an organisation for a long time are more comfortable with current processes rather than how they can inject new ideas."

A typical placement runs between 6 to 12 weeks, generally over university holidays. Because of the success with Sun's placement, Zurich is keen to take part in the program again. And in addition to securing a permanent role, Sun has also seen the benefits for other students or graduates.

"The placement is very useful in breaking down barriers between universities and business," Sun says. "It's great to get that 'real industry' experience to complement the academic side from university learning."

"It provides the bridge to transition skills into practice," he says. "Personally, I gained a lot of valuable experience and was lucky enough to be offered a permanent role straight away. This program lets you put your knowledge to real business use and provide a platform to start building your business network."

### Flexibility of program benefits employers and students

One of the main attractions of the program is its flexibility. SAS works with students around their availability and with employers around their needs, ensuring everyone is well aligned.

Wang says they were initially concerned that an externally driven program might mean that candidates wouldn't be closely matched to their organisation's particular needs.

"This is where SAS really helped," he said. "They chose two candidates whom



they believed would be a perfect fit and then let us review to choose the one we thought best suited. We couldn't have been happier."

SAS academic program manager Geordie Tait says the program is also a cost-effective way of assisting an organisation's recruitment strategy. "A company can save between \$10,000 to \$15,000 per hire by not needing to market themselves to students or employ a recruitment consultant."

He adds many hiring managers have said they would have benefited hugely from the opportunity for a work placement when they were at university, so they are keen to provide it for today's students. "Many students are coming out of university with skill sets that could be enriched with more practice in business and industry," he says.

Wang stresses other employers interested in joining the program need to have a clear idea of what the candidate will be doing. "Without a clear task the placement could be difficult as you end up with a candidate who doesn't know what they're supposed to be doing. We had a task in mind even before we looked at the candidates and that really helped."

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Bo Wang  
Senior Actuary, Zurich Financial Services



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