

▶ Work Placement Program



Industry

Financial services

Challenge

Westpac NZ was seeking SAS trained students to assist with a number of projects.

Solution

SAS Work Placement Program

Benefits

The placements exceeded Westpac NZ's expectations with one student being offered a fixed contract.

Westpac NZ benefits from SAS initiative

Participating in the SAS Work Placement Program turned out to be a "win-win" situation for Westpac NZ. The program not only provided the financial services organisation with talented students who assisted with a range of projects, but the experience helped the students confirm whether a career in data analytics was what they wanted.

The SAS Work Placement Program has been running for more than 10 years and aims to provide Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics students with valuable industry experience, with the employer benefiting from the students' analytical skills and knowledge. The program matches penultimate and final year students with SAS customers, and a typical placement runs for 12 weeks over the university break. Students also need to have studied at least one SAS subject.

Students showcase ability

Westpac NZ Analytics Manager, Craig Hamilton, says the organisation was very happy with the program. "It was a great opportunity for students to gain experience while showcasing their ability to a company that they might be interested in joining after they graduate," he says.

It is the first year that Westpac NZ has participated and after being impressed with the technical level of the two potential students offered as candidates, the decision was made to employ both. Kai Huang is still working at the organisation after being offered a fixed-term contract while Darryn Karl had his internship extended to four months until he left to travel abroad.

Huang says the SAS Work Placement Program provided him with a job he is passionate about. "In this program, what you gain is

not only data analytics and modelling experience, but also the opportunity to build business thinking by working within real industry," he says. "I found the more value you can bring to businesses by delivering insights from data, the more valuable you will be."

Exceeding expectations

Hamilton says both students exceeded Westpac NZ's expectations. "It wasn't a case of giving them a little project and just seeing how they'd get on," he says. "They were both adding value within a month of being here; they were technically very good while also being quite business savvy."

One project the students assisted with involved successfully converting what was a manual production of a weekly report using Excel into an end-to-end SAS process. "The table used to take an analyst 45 minutes every week to produce," Hamilton says. "Now it is an automated process which has freed that analyst's time for more stimulating work."

Hamilton says the students fitted in very well with Westpac NZ staff who were constantly trying to book time with them for help with projects. "The students brought in fresh ideas and tools, which some of the analysts who had been coding the same way for 10 years found refreshing," Hamilton says. "The placement was definitely not a one-way event; there was a lot they were teaching us."



He adds this type of workplace program is a great way to bridge the gap between university and business. "It also gives graduates a chance to see if it's what they want to do," he says. "We would definitely consider participating in this program again."

The program is a partnership between SAS, educational institutes and SAS customers. More than 200 students from Australian and New Zealand universities apply each year for the 12 placements SAS organises across 21 organisations.

Hamilton says employers who worry these programs are too time-consuming should think again. "Employers could feel too much time is required to oversee students in order to make participating worthwhile," he says. "But I don't think this is the case with analytics – especially if the students are technically gifted and good problem solvers. In our case, the students were even teaching me things about coding by the end."

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Craig Hamilton
Westpac NZ
Analytics Manager



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