

ACS Foundation drives skills growth

THE ACS FOUNDATION is helping to alleviate the challenges of the ICT skills crisis in Western Australia by connecting employers with quality graduates.

For technology company CSG Limited, a decision to sponsor Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) scholarships for three ACS Foundation students has not only provided them access to valuable skills, but has afforded an introduction to potential future employees.

A national company with operations in all states and territories, CSG's WA branch specialises in business software solutions (ERP, CRM and Business Intelligence), support, customisation and training.

CSG Applications general manager Services, Mark Bogos, said the company has sponsored three students to date, each for a 16 week WIL placement worth \$10,000.

"The ACS Foundation scholarship program is really working well for us," he said. "We sponsored two students last year, and have already employed one, but the other was here on a special working visa and we couldn't offer him a position at that time. He is back at university this year and has successfully applied for another CSG scholarship, along with a third student, who will also be offered a position with the company on the strength of his performance to date."

Because CSG wanted the students to gain more skills and experience during their placements, the company hired them part-time for several weeks prior to starting their internship to train them on the products they would be using within its environment," he said.

"The WIL program not only provides a good opportunity to provide bright students with relevant work experience prior to them leaving university, but it allows us to achieve our goal of having a constant flow of graduates coming in, working with more experienced staff and growing with the organisation," Bogos said. "We've adapted our approach this semester, giving our students a month on ERP, a month on Business Intelligence and a month on .NET, which gives them a good breadth of experience and allows us to identify their strengths."

Based on its success with the ACS Foundation Scholarship Program, CSG plans to expand its involvement to explore options for sponsoring students even earlier in their degree and develop them further prior to graduation.

Western Power

Western Power is another company that has embraced the ACS Foundation Work-Integrated Learning Program over the past 12 months, sponsoring three students thus far and finding the program useful for connecting with potential future employees.

The company currently has one student training as a test analyst, another in the package support team, while a third is being trained on a range of different tools in preparation for a six month stint in the SOA (service oriented architecture) team beginning in December this year.

"This is a really good way to build a relationship with promising students and it helps to give them valuable relevant experience and some direction," said Daniel Söderström, Application Services Delivery Manager of Western Power's IT Branch.

Recognising that few young people are choosing to work in niche areas like ERP systems, Western Power is planning to use its scholarship placements to give students a taste of these tech-

nologies in the hope that exposure will encourage some to continue on that path.

"We are looking at taking on more people into niche areas like ERP systems to create a balance of age groups through all of our teams and technical areas. We want to develop a constant flow of people coming through and we're building a comprehensive professional development program that supports an individual's goals and professional planning, allowing us to provide a complete career path for any graduate."

Söderström said the quality of students available through the Foundation has been excellent.

"The key things we are looking for in undergraduates are really their drive, enthusiasm and attitude as well as a proven ability to learn. The skills shortage means there is a dearth of good people, so we need to make good people, and that requires quality raw materials. We can't buy polished diamond anymore, so we're now finding who can provide quality uncut diamonds that we can polish up."

Western Power appreciates the ACS Foundation's ability to facilitate relationships with a range of universities, providing access to a larger pool of talent.

"Different universities have a different course structure and accreditation procedures, so working with the ACS Foundation allows us to select students who meet our criteria rather than having to fit in with a single university. We currently have two students from Curtin University and one from Murdoch and are definitely planning to take on additional students over time," he said.

"Since the costs associated with taking on scholarship students is commensurate with their skill level, we don't have the commercial pressures for them to be as productive as if we're paying them a developer's wage. It makes it very easy for us to participate and provide a supportive learning environment for these students." ♦



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Mosaic Project Services Pty Ltd, 13 Martin St., South Melbourne, VIC 3205