

Vacation Work Guidelines for Employers

Attracting and retaining skilled professionals is critical to the success of the minerals industry, particularly during a period of sustained growth. Vacation work is one of the ways in which the minerals industry can foster the development of these much needed professionals. In support of the minerals sector, The AusIMM has developed guidelines for vacation work to assist companies decide how to set up and manage a successful vacation work program.

A well designed and effectively implemented vacation work program offers benefits to companies, students, and the industry as a whole. In the current competitive climate for the best graduates, companies that offer vacation work are able to identify possible future employees by observing the potential and cultural fit of students who participate in their vacation work programs. Students are able to build on the technical skills and knowledge learnt at university and shape their employability skills to the mining and minerals work environment. This prepares them to integrate into the company and become productive sooner when they become employed as graduates.

Vacation work can also be a useful vehicle for career development as students will quickly find out if the minerals industry is the right place for them. Many students who experience vacation work in the minerals industry return to their studies committed to a career in the industry, while others are able to discover early enough that they are not suited to the industry. This is invaluable to the individual student and the industry, as well matched career aspirations are key to a sustainable, productive workforce.

The guidelines take into account the responses given by students who participated in the Vacation Work Survey conducted by The AusIMM in June 2007. The experiences of the students depicted the advantages and learning that were gained in well-structured programs, highlighted examples of good practice and also pointed to aspects that could be improved. The survey elicited responses about every aspect of vacation work, from the application process to types of roles, work environments, organisation of the vacation work, professional behavior, safety, accreditation and benefits of the vacation work program.

Currently the demand for vacation work by students far exceeds the supply of vacation work opportunities provided by companies. It is anticipated that these general guidelines will be used as a tool to assist companies identify more work opportunities for students of all academic year levels as well as optimize the value of current programs being offered.

The guidelines cover 5 stages of developing and running a vacation work program.

1. Planning
 - Establish Viability
 - Involve the Right People
 - Set Objectives
 - Provide Adequate Resources
2. Program Design
 - Relevance
 - Structure
 - Relationships

- Development
 - Commercial Context
 - Health & Safety
 - Accreditation
 - Feedback
3. Recruitment
- Marketing
 - Accurate Information
 - Application Guidelines
 - Recruitment Process
 - Equal Opportunity
 - Updates
 - Feedback
 - Terms and Conditions
 - Offer of Employment
4. Running the Program
- Coordination
 - Induction
 - Monitoring
5. Evaluation
- Performance Management
 - Feedback Interview
 - Campaign Appraisal

1. Planning

Establish Viability

For a vacation work program to run successfully it needs to be regarded as a viable business proposition by the company. To do this:

- Establish and demonstrate how a vacation work program can meet current operational needs and add value
- Position vacation work as a means to attract and retain suitable and committed future employees
- Include it as an integral part of corporate strategy and policy
- Align it with the overall business talent management plan

Involve the Right People

A range of people may need to be involved in preparing for a vacation work program. Company staff may include departmental/site managers, HR, hiring managers, line supervisors, crew leaders. If the program is to be closely aligned with university course work and projects, or if it is to be given credit as part of a degree, you will need to work with the relevant university personnel. To do this:

- Establish buy-in from key stakeholders (top down)
- Engage discipline leads for support

Set Objectives

Incorporate vacation work objectives into annual work force planning:

- Determine what the business hopes to achieve in the short and long term.
- Set KPIs for the vacation program
- Consider the transition of students from a vacation work program to a graduate program
- Establish the length of the program and the disciplines you will recruit for

Provide Adequate Resources

Committing the required resources will ensure that the vacation work program objectives are achieved.

Analyse what is required and allocate resources such as:

- Time
- People
- Equipment
- Facilities
- Capital

2. Program Design

To be effective a vacation work program should offer practical experience within the minerals industry. It should provide the student with constructive learning experiences and opportunities to add value and gain a sense of accomplishment. This can be achieved by including the following elements into the design of a vacation work program:

Relevance

Vacation work positions should entail the practical application of knowledge learnt at the university. Duties and tasks should relate to the course program being studied, the skill level and academic year level of the student.

Structure

To enable students to build on their competencies, a vacation work program should provide hands-on, live project work with clear objectives and a logical flow of work. Have the manager establish a development plan for each student relevant to their discipline which outlines the technical objectives to be achieved over the vacation period of time.

Relationships

The vacation work program should allow students to learn from technical experts within the minerals industry and offer opportunities to network with industry professionals. Their interactions should provide them with opportunities to model professional behavior and experience equity and diversity in the workforce.

Development

Students appreciate learning additional skills to those taught at university. Tacit learning occurs simply by being immersed in the workplace, however an effective vacation work program should include intentional developmental opportunities for technical skills and employability skills such as leadership, teamwork and problem solving.

A combination of hands on experience within the students' capacities, on-the-job training and opportunities to observe or assist with higher level tasks can be offered.

Commercial Context

It is important that students understand the dynamics of a market driven business environment. Students should be exposed to the:

- Company culture and protocols to appreciate the corporate vision and values in action
- Relationship between the company, the local community and physical environment
- Global and national trends that impact on the minerals industry.

Health and Safety

Reinforce that safety is the number one priority! Engage the student in company safety culture and demonstrate how the student can contribute to safety and its awareness within the workplace.

Accreditation

Where possible students should be given the opportunity to gain a qualification, certificate or licence. This can be done through on-the-job training or including the student in relevant professional development opportunities organised for permanent employees.

Feedback

Feedback processes need to be in place to facilitate the students learning and performance. Key personnel that can be involved in this process are a manager and a mentor.

The manager needs to engage with the student on a daily basis offering ongoing direction and feedback. The development plan can be used as a guide for manager-student discussions on how the student is tracking throughout their placement.

A mentor can be assigned to give the student support, coaching and encouragement.

Rewards and recognition can be incorporated to acknowledge tasks completed and milestones achieved.

(see also stage 5. Evaluation)

3. Recruitment

The following principles can be applied to the recruitment strategy to ensure that your company attracts the best candidates who understand the process and participate to their best of their ability:

Marketing

Have a dedicated space on your website to promote your brand and position vacation work as a career development opportunity.

Accurate Information

Offer accurate information about the company and the positions available through the job advertisements and job descriptions.

Application Guidelines

Advertise the application open and closing dates. Outline what format and content is required for the job application e.g. resume, cover letter, addressing selection criteria, application form, transcript results, electronic or postal delivery, how many copies etc.

Recruitment Process

Supply adequate information about the recruitment process and include timelines for each stage. Students need to know what they can expect to happen after they have submitted their application.

Equal Opportunity

Recognize the diversity of the student cohort and adhere to EEO legislation.

Update

Update candidates on the progress of their application, particularly if there are delays.

Feedback

Be prepared to provide meaningful feedback if students ask for it. It can be written and verbal, however verbal feedback is recommended once the student has a 'face' to the organisation, ie: after they have interviewed.

Terms and Conditions

Explain the Terms and Conditions of employment, the location, start and end dates of the vacation work, travel and accommodation arrangements that may be required and who is responsible for them.

Offer of Employment

When making an offer by phone, follow up with a letter and set clear timeframes around 'acceptance by' dates.

4. Running the Program

A well-planned program needs to be followed by well-organised implementation.

Coordination

Nominate a coordinator who can monitor the program to ensure it progresses as planned. The coordinator may:

- Be a reference point for enquiries, delegation, troubleshooting and dealing with emergent issues
- Announce the vacation work program to the company so that everyone is informed
- Communicate the details of the vacation work program to those directly involved
- Liaise with the managers and recruiters (if these functions are separate) to ensure job requirements and candidates are matched
- Bring together the resources that are required for the student to perform their job
- Ensure travel and accommodation arrangements are completed
- Introduce students to each other and build a vacation student community
- Collate and provide feedback to stakeholders

Induction

An effective Induction will provide the student with the information and contacts required to have a safe and productive work placement, and therefore needs to include:

- *Welcome:* Ensure the staff member who will be the first point of contact is aware that the student is arriving and is able to welcome the student. Nominate a staff member who can lead the induction (eg. coordinator)
- *Introduce:* A balance of job specific and social information is recommended. Provide an overview of the company, explain the student's role and give information about facilities. Take student to meet site/department colleagues, explaining roles of key people
- *Outline:* Company protocols and practices that are important to the student's role, including reporting relationships, terms and conditions of employment (eg. core hours, breaks, leave, personnel forms), use of company resources (e. email, phone, internet), disciplinary and grievance procedures.
- *Train:* Provide Occupational Health and Safety training

Monitoring

Regular checks on the progress the vacation work program and the work of the student can be carried out by staff with responsibilities to coordinate and/or supervise. Log books can be an effective way to monitor tasks that have been completed and give the student a record of the competencies they are developing through the program.

5. Evaluation

It is beneficial to the student and the company to capture feedback through a range of mechanisms:

Performance Management

The company processes that are in place for performance management for permanent employees can be extended to the student on a vacation work program. This will ensure that the student:

- Has an appraisal of their work against the objectives of the program and the specific duties of their role
- Logs a record of achievements
- Can reflect on the relationship of the on the job learning to the university course work
- Has identified areas for development, and
- Appreciates the value of quality feedback in the work place.

Feedback Interview

At the end of the vacation work program, both the student and the company can benefit from exchanging information about the program. A systematic approach would include qualitative information through an interview as well as quantitative information through a structured survey.

Campaign Appraisal

All personnel involved in the vacation work program from inception to completion should be given the opportunity to evaluate its impact from their perspective. Aggregating the feedback received from students and stakeholders will allow the company to assess the effectiveness of the program and implement improvements if and where required.