



## NSW Hunter region to pilot new virtual work experience program for high school students

Program seeks student, school and business interest

Hunter high school students will soon be able to take part in the pilot of a, locally developed, virtual work experience program – a first for the region.

The Virtual Intern program has been developed by Hunter-based social enterprise, She Can, to connect students with employers and work experience in a relatable, interactive and immersive format for young people.

Founder and director, Tricia Martin, is calling on local businesses and organisations to join the program and for interested students and schools to register their interest. Ms Martin is initially targeting the hospitality, business services and retail industries.

She said The Virtual Intern Platform has modules for different industries that contain real world tasks for students to complete as well as mentor videos, CV builders, career maps and other soft skills resources to give them a practical understanding and experience of that industry. Prior to starting the program, students match their interests with specific career clusters and businesses.

“Virtual Intern tackles the misalignment between young people’s work expectations and the assumed knowledge and capability expectations of local businesses,” Ms Martin said.

“Young people commonly enter work experience programs lacking basic skills such as problem solving, financial literacy or basic communication,” she said.

The Foundation of Youth Australia’s The New Work Reality report says the two main barriers for young people transitioning to full time careers are lack of career management skills and not enough work experience. The report says 75 per cent believe they do not possess the relevant vocational and practical work experience to gain the work they desire.

“We are creating a capacity building program where students are engaged, rather than being passive, and are building their self-efficacy, not just their knowledge.”

“Students gain tangible, company accredited, skills that employers are looking for, to help them enter the world of work. They get to build relevant networks before they enter the workforce.

We work with employers to capture and transform their expertise into virtual internships that mirror real-world tasks.

“Employers get to identify future employees, understand the needs of a future workforce, and play their part in ensuring their business workforce is future-proofed.”

“Importantly, the platform helps to even the playing field, allowing students, regardless of socio-economic background, location or demographic, to access 21st century workplaces and mentors.”

The program has been built by working with more than 200 Hunter students in career-readiness workshops and consultation with local business leaders and teachers. It has received funding and support from Charter Hall, Edified and the Layne Beachley Foundation. Virtual Intern is also benefitting from being accepted into the Foundation of Youth Australia’s Social Pioneer Accelerator incubator program.

She Can is a Hunter-based organisation that equips secondary students with career-readiness skills that can be transported into post school life. Ms Martin, who is 25 years of age, has worked with almost 35,000 students throughout Australia as a behaviour change facilitator for in-school career readiness workshops.

The program’s aim is to offer work experience to 500 Year 9 and Year 10 students across three industries in the second half of 2020 pilot, expanding

to 2,500 students across 15 industries in 2021. The program expansion will specifically target students from low socio-economic and high unemployment areas.

To register or find out more visit [virtualintern.info](http://virtualintern.info)

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