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MEDIA RELEASE
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Students gain industry experience

Hailing from cities all over Australia, 17 university students were fortunate to attain vacation employment at QAL during their summer break and will now head back to university with invaluable experience under their belts.

QAL's 2008/2009 Undergraduate Vacation Program wrapped up this week with students presenting the results of their projects to QAL management.

QAL Managing Director Phil Campbell said he was impressed with the high calibre of work students undertook while employed at QAL, with all projects value-adding to the plant's operations in some way.

"Over the last 12 weeks we employed students studying in the areas of engineering, science, health, information technology and human resources. Students were teamed with QAL professionals who mentored them throughout their projects," Mr Campbell said.

"The projects were either stand alone or part of a larger project, though all projects had an overall outcome that benefited both the student and QAL. Projects involved developing new information technology systems, the analysis of QAL's high voltage power distribution, monitoring of hand tool vibration and debottlenecking issues with conveyor systems in Raw Materials, along with many other significant projects."

Kavita Devaharan, studying Mechanical Engineering at Adelaide University, made the journey to Queensland after her friend recommended QAL as a great place to be employed as a vacation student. Kavita worked in Major Maintenance with the asbestos removal team and focussed on drawing construction specifications for pipes in Digestion.

"The main reason I really wanted to do my placement at QAL was because I knew that the work was practical and I didn't want to be in the office all the time," Kavita said.

"Every time I went out into the plant I noticed something new or different, it was a very exciting place to work. It was also great to see in person what I was actually working on."

Jason Caggiati, Chemical Engineering student at University of Queensland, has also been employed at QAL as a vacation student and will continue his work until May when he completes his work placement under the Professional Engineering Placement Scholarship scheme.

Jason is placed in the Research and Development team working to understand how various factors and conditions affect the precipitation process and therefore impact the final size and quality of alumina crystals. While Jason is building on the data compiled by previous vacation students, the ultimate aim of the project is to develop an accurate precipitation growth model and establish a control system, enabling QAL to maximise production and improve control over alumina quality.

"My project involves taking liquor samples and simulating various plant conditions, such as temperature, caustic and alumina concentration, agitation speed and seed load to analyse the change in particle size distribution over a two hour period. I accomplish this in the laboratory using an optical particle sizing instrument called an accusizer, along with several other technical pieces of equipment," Mr Caggiati said.

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Working in a large industrial environment has helped Jason to understand his studies even further, in addition to realising how important it is for students to gain practical work experience.

“Prior to vacation employment I had limited laboratory experience. I’ve now been able to put a lot of the theory I’ve learnt in my studies into practise and have an appreciation for how these principles are applied in the real world.”

QAL’s vacation student program has been running for over 30 years and applications open annually in June.

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QAL Vacation Student Jason Caggiati undertakes liquor sampling and analysis in QAL’s laboratory.