

Case Study

Industry mentoring fosters innovation in STEM



Picture: The Industry Mentoring Network in STEM (IMNIS) MedTech-Pharma program launched in Melbourne, Victoria on June 15, 2017. Peter Laver FTSE, Sue MacLeman, Dr Mike Wilson, Dr Marguerite Evans-Galea, Hon. Philip Dalidakis MP, Claretta D Souza, Ronnie Wood, David Gelb. Photo: A Bizzarri Photography for IMNIS

The Industry Mentoring Network in STEM (IMNIS) has seen positive results from its MedTech-Pharma program with 141 students participating across 11 Universities in four states (VIC, NSW, QLD and SA). It has become an award-winning initiative of the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering, receiving funding from MTPConnect's Project Fund Program to take it national. The 2016/17 pilot program in Victoria recorded more than 80% of mentors and mentees considered the program to be very valuable and would participate again.

With the program beginning national roll-out in 2018 – and the view of expanding to at least five states in Australia in 2018 – IMNIS is facilitating a strong connection for industry mentors to engage with highly motivated PhD students. IMNIS's MedTech-Pharma program aims to support mentees as they upskill, network, and break down barriers to foster a diverse STEM ecosystem; where mentors and mentees can readily engage, collaborate and transition from education to industry. In 2016, IMNIS received the prestigious Best Higher Education and Training Collaboration award (B/HERT) for its work in the sector. IMNIS Executive Director Dr Marguerite Evans-Galea said the program has been very beneficial to encourage PhD students to network and broaden their horizons.

"Participating Universities demonstrate outstanding leadership by offering their PhD students the golden opportunity of engaging with high profile, executive-level industry leaders," Dr Evans-Galea explained.

"Not only will they get sage advice and become more informed about the industry sector, but they will also extend their professional network beyond academia."

IMNIS falls under MTPConnect's 10-year Sector Competitiveness Plan (SCP) objectives to improve coordination and collaboration across the sector between researchers and industry; as well expanding the commercialisation pathway and process. Through their industry mentors and the program's education and networking events,

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IMNIS encourages its mentees to expand their knowledge, engage with industry professionals, effectively pitch their research and become more aware of the wide variety of career opportunities available in the sector. Through mentoring, the IMNIS initiative provides mentees the opportunity to develop a broad professional network beyond academia and strengthen core 'implicit skills' including networking. Mentees also gain an understanding of commercialisation and enhance their strategic planning skills.

PhD student mentees expressed gratitude and enthusiasm for the opportunity to participate in the IMNIS MedTech-Pharma programs, and three PhD students from the pilot program have secured roles through their mentor's networks. Sebastian Quezada, an IMNIS Mentee from the 2017 MedTech-Pharma program in Victoria, said the positive impact of the program will inform his approach to his career in the sector.

"I believe the most important aspect of this program is the opportunity to directly ask a mentor who is engaged with the industry how things work from the inside," Mr Quezada added.

"I can now manage to scope my career and I have the ability to make myself more attractive to people who enjoy innovation as much as I do."

As well as the enthusiasm expressed from mentors, the industry leaders have also reported a clear and genuine desire to foster a positive culture shift and stronger ties with academia, and to help their mentees learn and gain 'industry savvy'. Executive Director of Covance – the multinational contract research organisation – and IMNIS mentor in the 2017 MedTech-Pharma Program, Beth O'Leary said it was great to pass on her experience to the mentees from Sydney.

"Over the years I have accumulated experience and knowledge of how organisations work and how to maximise my effectiveness in an organization," Ms O'Leary said.

"I hope to be able to pass on insights to help individuals transition between the academic and commercial environments."

IMNIS hosted events in several states in recent months and have trialed some new events with its network of supporters:

- VIC: IMNIS Pitchfest - Pitching to Industry, RMIT University, Melbourne (October 4, 2017)
- NSW: Meet the Entrepreneur, Creative Space 99, Darlinghurst, Sydney (November 1, 2017)
- VIC: STEM Careers in Industry, partner event with The Royal Society of Victoria for Innovation Week 2017, Melbourne (November 16, 2017)
- SA: STEM Careers in Industry, Adelaide Convention Centre (November 30, 2017)
- QLD: STEM Careers in Industry at QUT's Kelvin Grove campus (January 31, 2018)

IMNIS has also collaborated with two more Industry Growth Centres (METS Ignited and NERA) to launch programs in Energy Resources and Minerals Resources in WA, SA and QLD. KPMG has shown its support of these programs, and AusIMM and Engineers Australia are now IMNIS supporters at a national level. IMNIS hopes to increase the profile of the initiative to include more Universities and recruit more PhD students across Australia, encouraging its past and current participants to act as goodwill ambassadors for the program.

To become involved in the IMNIS MedTech-Pharma program as a mentor or a mentee, visit www.imnis.org.au.

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Project details

Project name	Industry Mentoring Network in STEM
Consortium lead	IMNIS
Consortium members	AusBiotech Ltd
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Industry contribution	\$210,000
Project duration	January 2017 – December 2018
Key contact	Dr Marguerite Evans-Galea, Marguerite.Galea@atse.org.au



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