

In2science background

In2science aims to **increase engagement in STEM** by placing volunteer university students as **peer mentors** in maths and science classes to act as **role models** for secondary school students. The program, which started in 2004, creates **collaborative partnerships** between universities and schools that facilitate meaningful relationships between university students, teachers and school students over a 10 week placement and beyond. It is a joint project between La Trobe, Melbourne, RMIT and Swinburne Universities.

In2science currently partners with more than 50 Victorian **low SES and regional and rural schools**.



Impact

The program has been very successful in its mission to increase science engagement of secondary students. Several external evaluations of the In2science program show that:

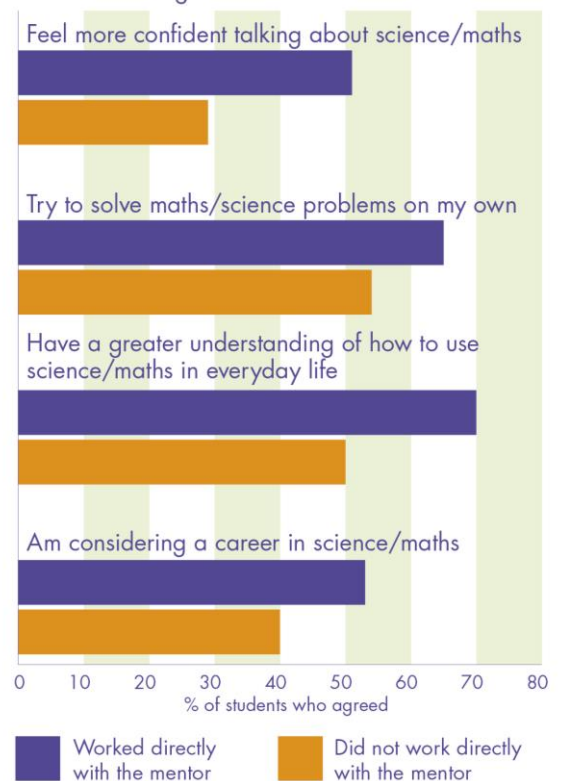
- In2science improves student confidence and enjoyment of STEM subjects, as well as their appreciation of the relevance and importance of these disciplines
- Mentors enabled teachers to run more interactive lessons with activity based learning
- In2science prepares university students for the work force improving their communication, problem solving and organisational skills

Partnerships with Industry

In2science is looking to form partnerships with Industry to develop and extend the impact of our program.

ACER Review Student Survey: Mentor Impact

After having an In2science Mentor I now...



Responses to questions

2.3 What are the barriers to creating effective school industry partnerships?

Over the past 6 months we have been working towards creating industry partnerships for our program. The main barrier has been finding and accessing key people and decision makers in industry.

There are two things that could significantly assist us to create effective partnerships with industry:

1. A list of industry companies, organisations and institutions who are enthusiastic about engaging with schools, and specifically, information about how they would like to engage with schools and their best way to contact them.
2. A list promoting potential school partnership opportunities to industry, with an accompanying list of established school partnership programs.

b. How can universities and vocational training institutions help industry to develop partnerships and support STEM education in schools?

At a STEM Industry Summit in Sydney in September, a number of industry representatives said that they felt uncomfortable directly approaching schools to 'improve' STEM education because they were not education experts. They said that they needed 'relationship brokers' to facilitate interactions between industry and schools.

Given universities' expertise in working with and administering programs for both school and industry partners, we firmly believe that a university-based initiative like In2science is very well placed to act as a conduit between industries and schools. We are a well-established partnership program working with underrepresented students to increase engagement in STEM. By partnering with industry we would be able to deepen and extend our impact on students. We would also be able to create opportunities for industry to directly interact with students and teachers in schools.

4.5 How can schools and industry work together to provide support, increase confidence and raise aspirations for all students in STEM related education and STEM related careers, particularly from underrepresented groups?

In2science works specifically with low SES schools and regional, remote and rural schools to provide mentors who support, increase the confidence of and raise aspirations for underrepresented students. Mentoring is one of the most effective ways to improve student attitudes towards STEM, particularly for students who lack the 'science capital' and familiarity with tertiary STEM pathways more frequently found across their high-advantage peers. With industry partnership we would be able to work with more students from underrepresented groups in a more effective way and facilitate interactions between industry and schools.

5.1 – 5.4 How do schools and industries make decisions about who to partner with and how do they evaluate the partnership's effectiveness?

As stated in response to question 2.3 b) above, we believe that schools and industries need university-based partnership brokers to facilitate partnerships. Neither schools nor industry have the expertise or resources to directly work with each other. Utilising existing university-based partnership programs like In2science would enable effective partnership creation. It would also take the burden of evaluation off the schools and industries.