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NEWS RELEASE

Scholarship a stepping stone to sweet career

A scholarship that gives university students the chance to complete work placements at several Australian sugar mills has given Kristen Nel a stepping stone into a career with the nation's largest sugar miller, Wilmar Sugar.

Miss Nel commenced work as the Process Improvement Engineer at Wilmar's Invicta Mill in January after completing her chemical engineering degree at QUT last year.

She applied for an [Australian Sugar Industry Scholarship](#) with the Sugar Research Institute (SRI) while undertaking her engineering studies and was awarded the scholarship in recognition of her excellent results, drive and interest in the sugar industry.

"When I first went for the scholarship I hadn't really experienced a processing facility," she said.

"The opportunity for on-site, practical experience from this program got me interested."

Miss Nel completed a series of SRI-organised sugar mill internships in her final two years of study. Her placements included a stint at Wilmar's Victoria Mill at Ingham.

Invicta Mill Production Superintendent James Wallace said Wilmar targeted graduate engineers who showed initiative and a willingness to learn.

"Kristen demonstrated this during her scholarship placements," Mr Wallace said.

"She has a good understanding of chemical engineering foundations and her enthusiasm to learn and push through engineering problems has been exceptional."

Miss Nel said her quick transition from study to work had been rollercoaster, particularly leaving family and friends on the Sunshine Coast to move to North Queensland.

"I had to take the leap and see what I could achieve," she said.

"The sugar industry is challenging but the staff at Invicta Mill are very supportive and are helping me to develop my knowledge and skills in the industry.

"Working at the mill is unique as every day is different. The sugar industry offers a diverse range of unit operations to challenge me and develop my skill set.

"It provides an opportunity for me to not only apply my engineering foundations but also quickly learn how to manage people, which is something not taught at university."

Australian sugar mills process about 30 million tonnes of sugarcane each year to produce about 4.3 million tonnes of raw sugar. The industry directly employs about 10,000 people across the sugar supply chain and injects about \$4 billion into the Australian economy annually.

Miss Nel was happy to share tips for students interested in an Australian Sugar Industry Scholarship and future employment in the sugar industry.

“Have passion and purpose to learn all you can from each work situation,” she said.

“This is best done by getting your hands dirty. The operators are often your best sources of knowledge so you will do well to lean in and listen, as innovation is not found in a textbook.

“With the scholarship placement program, I was able to gain valuable experiences that have greatly assisted me in obtaining employment.”

Applications for the 2021 Australian Sugar Industry Scholarship are now open.

Scholarships are awarded to students in their penultimate year studying chemical, mechanical, process or electrical engineering or science degrees with an interest in working in the Australian sugar industry.

For more information visit: <https://www.sri.org.au/australian-sugar-industry-scholarship/>

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Kristen Nel's scholarship led to her first graduate position as Process Improvement Engineer at Wilmar's Invicta Mill in the Burdekin.

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