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Fintern Fever: job in 5 minutes, if you're lucky



Shikanta Asad Zahid Iqbal and Shantana Florida (left) speak with Blue Temple founder Lakshmi Balasubramani of Fintern.

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TIM DODD
Higher Education Editor Sydney @TimDoddEDU

The bell rings, interviews wrap up and students move on, making way for those who are next in line to have five minutes with a potential employer.

Last week, 120 students were "speed dating" with 20 startup companies at the Sydney Startup Hub in the CBD, looking for the employer who could offer them the right job.

For Vitasta Kaul, a master of finance student at the Australian National University, it was worth coming from Canberra for the event, Fintern Fever, run by the CSIRO-Data61 job matching platform Ribit, backed by the fintech hub Stone & Chalk.

Ms Kaul's first "date" was a little intimidating, "but once you sit down you relax a bit", she says.

Before the first round of dating begins, students hear Blair Slater, the work integrated learning industry engagement manager from the UNSW Business School, tell them to treat it like a real date.

"Consciously relax," he says, also reminding them that they wouldn't highlight their negatives on a real date.

Hovering around is Stephen Rutter, the "pitch doctor", there to offer advice to students on how to make the best of their five minutes. Mr Rutter, founder of The Scale Institute, which specialises in entrepreneurial education, says he tells students to "reverse their interview" and ask questions of their potential boss.

"I want them to interview the company and identify what pain points they have. It allows students to say 'here's how I can provide value'."

One of the employers, Lakshmi Balasubramani, began her startup journey at the first Fintern Fever event in November 2015. (This one is the fifth.)

Then an actuarial science masters student, she says she came to that event knowing nothing about the startup world.

"I was like, 'Recruitment as speed dating? That's interesting,'" she says.

As it turned out Ms Balasubramani was offered an internship and it turned into a job with a startup.

Now she's here with her own startup, Blue Temple, to hire a couple of interns. She describes her company as a Red Balloon for business — an employee engagement facilitation platform.

"Employers can look for events for their teams. They just have to come on to Blue Temple and it's done. They don't have to spend time organising it themselves," she says.

Ribit founder and director Liz Jakubowski says that all employers at Fintern Fever offer paid jobs to students, not unpaid internships. But they could be full-time, part-time, casual or project-based.

She says that aside from working for startups, some past Fintern Fever participants had gone on to jobs at Microsoft, the Commonwealth Bank and McKinsey.

Fintern Fever is part of a portfolio of Ribit speed-dating events across many industries, including medical technology, cyber security and defence.

Part of its success is due to the partnership with Stone & Chalk, which helps source employers for the event and drive student enthusiasm.

"Smart people like you don't want to work for a company, they want to work for a startup," Stone & Chalk chief executive Alex Scandarra tells the students.



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