

Paper Number: 2982

Education programmes and facilities at Geoscience Australia

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Nearly 10 000 students visit the Geoscience Australia (GA) Education Centre each year and in February 2016 the 100 000th student visitor came through the door. Central to the ongoing success of the school-age education programmes are the physical facilities and the dedicated staff involved in face-to-face delivery. The education team also continues to add to and update the wide range of classroom resources now made available on the GA website.

The GA building contains a dedicated Education Centre where visiting school groups gain hands-on experiences and from which they access the National Mineral Collection display and the outdoor 'TimeWalk'. Visits to the Education Centre are now so popular that many bookings are requested one to two years in advance and come from across the country. There is little need to advertise, as approximately 70% of the groups are repeat visits. This ongoing popularity is due to a number of factors including a small team of committed staff who take pride in their work and enjoy interacting with students of all ages. The content of visits is kept relevant to the current Australian Curriculum and makes use of various 'hooks' for engagement, such as adding a layer to a column of sediments to permanently record each visit or making a group earthquake recording (Figure 1). The education staff also make a point of engaging with the teachers accompanying visits to make them familiar with resources they can access once back in school.



Figure 1: Students jumping to record an 'earthquake'.

Since the inception of education activities at GA during the 1990s, resources have been published to support teachers in the classroom and enhance their confidence and ability to teach earth science topics. A strong influence on recent education activities has been the new Australian Curriculum, now

implemented in all Australian states and territories. The curriculum changes have assisted the education staff to tailor products and programmes for maximum relevance to teachers and students across the country. Many of the existing teacher resource booklets and student activities have been updated and modernised and feature on our webpages along with posters, cut-outs, maps and much more. The classroom resources page (www.ga.gov.au/education) now includes a 'filterable' list of all our products together with quick links to other content on GA's extensive website that is relevant to teachers.

In addition to curriculum drivers of resource development, we have responded to the massive interest in the online video game Minecraft, by developing a poster and display on the 'Geology of Minecraft'. This has popular appeal to large numbers of school-age students who have played the game.

The Education Centre at Geoscience Australia is a unique facility with staff working to grow student interest in geoscience and enhance the expertise and enthusiasm of earth science teachers. The current school-age education programme focuses on face-to-face interactions with students and teachers and the online provision of classroom resources. The future challenge will be to juggle current onsite demands with the development of alternative online methods, such as virtual tours, to make our products and facilities available for all.

