

*“For me, mentoring is a
knowledge exchange...”*

A mentor program for skilled
migrants in Australia.



**A report on professional mentoring in
AMES Australia’s Skilled Professional
Migrant Program (SPMP)**

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Executive Summary

For more than two decades Australian Government policy has focused on attracting skilled migrants to fill labour market shortages. This group of new arrivals consistently encounter numerous barriers to finding employment comparable to their qualifications resulting in systematic under and unemployment for many newcomers.¹ There is mounting evidence to suggest that early intervention support in the form of professional mentoring can help skilled migrants to overcome these hurdles. This report provides a closer look at the ways in which professional mentoring can help skilled migrants in Australia to find work, and in particular, work that is aligned to their skills, expertise and qualifications.

Purpose:

AMES Australia's Skilled Professional Migrant Program (SPMP) Mentoring Program offers a unique opportunity for skilled migrants in Australia to learn about the local labour market and fine-tune their skills with the support of a mentor from the same or similar professional background. The mentoring program is relatively low-cost, yet individualised, as mentors volunteer their time to the program and are matched and partnered with a mentee one-on-one. Many mentors work full-time, choosing to volunteer as a mentor outside of their working hours. This style of professional mentoring is widely used in countries such as Canada, which has led to improved employment outcomes for skilled migrants living there². Mentors have also reported benefiting from the mentoring experience³. However, little is known about the outcome of such mentoring programs in an Australian context.

Methodology:

- A sample of mentors (eight) and mentees (four) from twelve independent mentor-mentee partnerships in the SPMP in 2015 were interviewed.
- The mentors and mentees came from a variety of different professional backgrounds.
- Interviews were qualitative and semi-structured with individual sets of open ended questions designed to explore the mentoring experience from the mentors and mentees' individual perspectives.

Findings:

- All mentees reported that their personal and professional development skills were significantly improved through guidance from their mentor.
- All mentors reported that their involvement in the program also broadened their own knowledge base, culturally or professionally, in a way that could not be achieved through professional practice.

¹ AMES Australia (2016) *Hidden Assets: Skilled Migrant Women and the Australian Workforce*, AMES Australia & Office of Women, Melbourne.

² ALLIES (2013) Mentoring Report, ALLIES (Assisting Local Leaders with Immigrant Employment Strategies), Canada. <http://alliescanada.ca/>

³ Shan, H & Butterwick, S (2016) Transformative learning of mentors from an immigrant workplace connections program, in *Studies in Continuing Education*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0158037X.2016.1167032>

- At the time of the interview, all of the mentees interviewed were successful in securing a job commensurate with their skills and experience.
- All mentees reported that the matching process of mentees and mentors could be strengthened given that they all had slightly different backgrounds and/or agendas from their volunteer mentor.

Recommendations:

1. Recognition of, and investment in, programs such as the SPMP Mentoring Program to strengthen and expand them in Australia as an effective means to improve migrant inclusion in the workforce and ensure that the skills of highly talented people are maximised.
2. Recruitment and engagement of committed employers and other key stakeholders with professional mentoring programs to help more skilled migrants to find a job in their professional field. This will also help to strengthen the suitability of mentor-mentee matching.
3. As securing employment is a high priority for many new arrivals and a key indicator of successful settlement, the features of the SPMP Mentoring Program could be replicated and offered to other newly arrived asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in Australia beyond the current skilled professionals cohort.

Introduction

The aim of this report is to provide an overview of mentoring and how it can be useful in assisting newly arrived migrants secure work. The report provides a brief review of the types of mentoring available to migrants both nationally and internationally to ascertain the key components of good mentoring. The report will then discuss the different approaches to mentoring including the role of the mentor and the mentee and how the two must work in unison for a successful partnership.

The findings of this report are based on interviews with former participants who have completed the Skilled Professional Migrant Program (SPMP) at AMES Australia and mentors in the program. The SPMP is a 112 hour program delivered over 4 weeks and covers the following knowledge and skill components: understanding the Australian job market and workplace culture, writing Australian style resumes and cover letters, understanding job advertisements and applying for a job, interview skills including preparation, practice and feedback, and telephone and networking skills.

The qualitative interviews with mentors and mentees illustrate the importance of mentoring as an adjunct to the SPMP in terms of improved employment outcomes for skilled migrants, and the features of this model may be replicable to other groups of new arrivals to Australia.

On average, skilled migrants arriving in Australia are of prime working age and tend to have higher educational levels than their Australian born counterparts. In 2016, 60% of adult migrants had a post-school qualification before arriving in Australia compared with 54% of people raised in Australia (ABS, 2017). Securing employment is a high priority for many new migrants and one of the key indicators of successful settlement (Larson, 2013). However many migrants often have to overcome a number of known barriers to find work. These barriers include a lack of understanding about Australian workplace culture and recruitment practices, lack of professional networks and local work experience, difficulties and delays in gaining recognition of overseas qualifications and level of proficiency in English (AMES Australia, 2016).

There is mounting evidence to suggest that when skilled migrants receive early intervention support, including targeted assistance with job searching, they are more able to navigate the Australian labour market and secure a job that is aligned to their skills, expertise and qualifications (AMES Australia, 2016). This research has identified that one way to enhance the employment prospects of highly skilled migrants is to provide them access to a mentor program that is embedded in a broader employment focussed program. This approach to mentoring has been widely used in Canada, the US and in parts of Europe to great effect (Petrovic, 2015). It was shown to be not only cost effective, but one of the most successful ways to provide the support that assists new migrants to gain employment. However there is limited documented material or evaluation about the outcomes of similar mentoring programs in an Australian context.

Professional mentoring

Mentoring is best described as “a reciprocal and collaborative learning relationship between two (or more) individuals who share mutual responsibility and accountability for helping a mentee work toward achievement of clear and mutually defined learning goals,” (Zachary, 2005, p.3). What sets

professional mentoring apart from other forms of mentoring is the focus on the *professional* career development of the mentee.

Research from Canada suggests that mentoring as an intervention to support new migrants to obtain employment is overwhelmingly successful. ALLIES (2013) a Canadian organisation found that mentees were more likely to secure full-time employment after 12 months and receive higher incomes; and they were more likely to find employment in their field of expertise. These findings make a compelling case for the inclusion of mentoring in early intervention programs for skilled migrants.

Successful mentoring programs in Canada include the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council's (TRIEC) Mentoring Partnership program which was launched in 2004. TRIEC aims to assist skilled migrants to secure employment by matching them with professionals in the same or similar field. Between 2004 and 2014 the program matched 9,000 skilled migrants on their mentor program and saw 70% of mentees employed in their professional field (Petrovic, 2015).

In Denmark, the Danish Centre for Research and Information on Gender, Equality and Diversity (KVINFO) Mentor Network was founded in 2002 to link migrant and refugee women with mentors to help them to access the Danish labour market by building their social and professional networks. Mentors and mentees are matched according to their professional backgrounds and work together for up to 12 months meeting on average every fortnight. In 2016 a total of 247 mentees joined the Mentor Network, and of those looking for work 54% found a job that corresponded with their education and professional qualifications.⁴

When newly arrived skilled migrants seek to enter the Australian labour market they are often confronted with a range of barriers including a loss of professional and social capital as well as a lack of knowledge about their occupation in an Australian context and the nuances of seeking employment here. New migrants tend to have smaller and less diverse networks when compared with Australian-born or longer term residents. There is also the perception among some employers that newly arrived migrants do not have the necessary 'soft skills'⁵ or 'cultural fit' to work in certain workplaces, making it difficult for them to secure a job in these organisations (Colic-Peisker, 2011). In many instances there is a disparity with what migrants are qualified to do and the jobs that they undertake to earn an income. Those who advocate mentoring as a way to increase migrant inclusion into the workplace argue that it is an effective way to address issues of marginalisation and inequality by ensuring that the skills of highly talented people are not wasted (Clutterbuck et al, 2012).

This is where a professional mentor can offer valuable support. Mentors can build self-confidence, engender hope, enhance self-esteem and dignity and provide guidance and constructive feedback to new migrants on how to overcome these challenges. Mentors can help new migrants to learn about Australian workplace culture; improve their English; learn about recruitment norms and effective job searching strategies; assess their resumes and how they comply with specific industry expectations;

⁴ <http://www.kvinfo.dk/side/674/article/109/>

⁵ Soft skills refer to personality traits that allows a person to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people and includes an understanding of social norms, communication, languages, personal habits, friendliness, work ethic, attitude, communication skills and emotional intelligence.

prepare for job interviews and identify potential employers. Through mentoring, a mentor may develop a greater understanding of different cultures and the structural and cultural barriers that people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds face entering the labour market (Shan & Butterwick, 2016).

Mentees can also learn about other issues in the workplace such as understanding hierarchy, how to interact with peers, supervisors, clients/customers and behavioural norms around formality and informality. They may also canvas career pathways and career progressions (Allies, 2013, CRIEC, 2011).

Mentoring programs can differ in terms of program focus, outcomes, modes of matching, availability of training for mentors, frequency of meetings and evaluation methods. The pairing of mentors is premised on someone with experience providing another person with less experience an opportunity to impart knowledge, information and expertise with the view to up skilling them. There is no doubt that there is a power hierarchy between mentors and mentees. However, when the relationship between the two parties is based on mutual respect, mentors can learn just as much from the mentoring experience as mentees where the relationship between the two parties fosters co-learning and co-integration (Shan & Butterwick, 2016).

SPMP Professional Mentoring Program

There are very few professional mentoring programs for migrants in Australia.

- In Melbourne, the Skilled Professional Migrant Program (SPMP) run by AMES Australia includes an adjunct professional mentoring program for SPMP participants.
- Fitted for Work, a not for profit organisation, also offers employment programs for disadvantaged job seekers in the City of Melbourne. One target group includes female job seekers who arrived in Australia on a humanitarian visa and mentoring is one component of the program. The mentors are recruited from the corporate sector and work with individuals on job search skills and to introduce them to the Australian workplace.
- Another mentoring program in Melbourne is run by the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and provides an intensive settlement and employment mentoring to humanitarian migrants that runs over a 12 month period.

AMES Australia's SPMP is a full-time, intensive course that supports professional migrants to develop the skills they need to find employment commensurate with their skills and qualifications. The students' employment outcomes are tracked annually by AMES Australia via a voluntary survey, with students from courses between 2013 and 2016 surveyed approximately 12-15 months following completion of the course. Table 1 below details the employment outcomes of those surveyed during this period, broken down by the number of those professionally employed, not-professionally employed or unemployed. Of the participants surveyed, approximately 75 – 85 per cent had secured work at the time of survey with the vast majority employed in professional fields.

Table 1. SPMP Employment Outcomes Data 2013 – 2016

	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	TOTAL SURVEYED	TOTAL PROFESSIONALLY EMPLOYED	TOTAL NON-PROFESSIONALLY EMPLOYED	UNEMPLOYED
2013	159	131	80 (61%)	26 (20%)	25 (19%)
2014	131	95	51 (54%)	23 (24%)	21 (22%)
2015	146	74	45 (61%)	11 (15%)	18 (24%)
2016	158	79	49 (62%)	18 (23%)	12 (15%)

As part of the program, participants are matched with volunteer mentors from relevant industries to provide them with professional advice and support to guide their career in Australia. It is estimated that nearly 50% of the mentors are skilled migrants themselves⁶ who recognise the value of mentoring for newcomers. It enables a symbiotic and reciprocal relationship whereby both the mentor and the mentee are benefitting from the other's experience.

Mentors are expected to commit to face to face meetings with each mentee weekly for the first four to six weeks followed by contacts via Skype, phone or email for a period of six months. Prior to the program, mentors are briefed on their volunteer roles and expectations and provided with information about mentees' backgrounds and the barriers they face as well as cross-cultural communication and awareness.

Focus of this study

Research Objective

A review of the research literature on mentoring for skilled migrants suggests that mentoring benefits everyone involved; including mentees, mentors and the organisations for which they work. Not only does mentoring impact on mentee employment outcomes but also on mentor wellbeing.

The objective of the research was to examine the efficacy and relevance of professional mentoring to enable skilled migrants to secure employment commensurate with their experience and skills in Australia. The project was also interested in exploring the reciprocal benefits of mentoring, and the way in which mentoring contributed to self-actualisation for mentors.

Research Design

Data on mentoring was collected as part of an evaluation of the effectiveness of AMES Australia's Skilled Professional Migrants Program (SPMP). Participants in this research project were a sample group of mentors and mentees, chosen randomly. They consisted of mentors (eight) and mentees (four) from twelve independent mentor-mentee partnerships. Due to the non-compulsory nature of the mentoring component of the program and the fact that some students secure work before

⁶ AMES Australia Skilled Professional Migrants Program 2013-2014

completion of the SPMP, not all students are subsequently matched with a mentor, and therefore there were fewer students available to participate in this study than mentors. All of the participants were individually interviewed. Each mentor was interviewed face-to-face while individual mentees were interviewed over the phone. All interviews were tape recorded for transcription.

The eight mentors came from varied professions and respectively specialised in aviation, business management (including asset, risk and change management), IT, environmental planning and regulations, social planning and engagement, and mechanical engineering. The four mentees came from different professional backgrounds; healthcare engineering, legal and policy, environment and ecology, and advertising and marketing. The participants were contacted to participate in the study one to two years after being matched through the SPMP mentoring program. Due to random sampling, a majority of mentor participants (five out of eight) were male and a majority of mentee participants (three out of four) were female. Table 2 and 3 below summarise the profile of mentors and mentees by gender, country of birth and profession.

Table 2: Mentor Profile

	Gender	Country of Birth	Professional Background
Mentor 1	F	Netherlands	Risk & change management
Mentor 2	M	Australia	Business management
Mentor 3	M	India	Mechanical engineering
Mentor 4	M	Australia	Information technology
Mentor 5	M	Australia	Aviation
Mentor 6	F	China	Asset management
Mentor 7	M	Australia	Social planning & engagement
Mentor 8	F	Australia	Environmental planning & regulations

Table 3: Mentee Profile

	Gender	Country of Birth	Professional Background
Mentee 1	M	Iran	Healthcare engineering
Mentee 2	F	Greece	Law & policy
Mentee 3	F	Columbia	Environment & ecology
Mentee 4	F	Malaysia	Advertising & marketing

The interviews were qualitative semi-structured with individual sets of open ended questions designed to explore mentoring experience and relationships from the perspectives of both mentors and mentees. All interview questions can be found in the appendix of this report. During the

interviews, participants were invited to talk about their involvement with the program, experiences of working with mentees/mentors, learning and changes in personal and professional lives, and viewpoints on mentoring skilled migrants.

Additionally, to deepen the researcher's understanding of the program, staff members coordinating the SPMP Professional Mentor Program were interviewed about its background, purpose and how it operates. For a greater understanding of mentoring programs available within the context of newcomer services, the coordinator of the Asylum Seeker Innovation Hub Empowerment Mentoring Program (run by the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in Melbourne) was also interviewed.

The narratives of the participants were thematically analysed in relation to the research questions, with particular focus on the employment outcomes of mentees and benefits to mentors as a result of their mentoring experiences.

Limitations of the study

There are a number of limitations to be considered when interpreting the data collected for this qualitative research.

- Professional mentoring is an optional component of the SPMP designed for those participants who need advice and support from a professional person to guide their career after completing the program. This may result in difficulty determining the specific impact of the mentoring component in isolation from other components, and from the program as a whole.
- Purposeful sampling techniques were employed in this study. Consequently, the experiences of the eight mentor and the four mentee participants who volunteered for the study may not be the experiences of all mentors and mentees in the program.
- This study relies on narrative reports from participants (mentors and mentees) to justify the effectiveness of professional mentoring for new arrivals. These reports are subjective and subject to the perceptions of individuals. The findings may reflect the partiality of reporters who are supportive of the program and its goals.
- At the time of data collection, we were unable to recruit mentees who completed the SPMP in years other than 2015, resulting in four mentees from 2015 in addition to the eight mentors for a total number of twelve participants. This small sample size makes it difficult to generalize findings to the broader participants in the program.

Findings

Mentoring Partnership

There were a range of findings as to important features of the mentoring partnership. The frequency of the face to face meetings between mentors and mentees varied between weekly, fortnightly and three weeks depending on mentor/mentee availability and flexibility. Most participants met every week while a couple of participants met every two to three weeks due to long travel time involved. One mentor requested face to face contact with their mentee at least three times during the whole process to understand more about the mentee.

“I have a minimum requirement of seeing the person three times to notice body language and observe the person properly.” – Mentor 3

All participants considered that the frequency of these meetings were sufficient to cover industry specific resumes and cover letters, networking and referrals, local workplace culture, labour market intelligence. They felt the duration of six months was also sufficient to work on goals, values and expectations, and to monitor progress. All reported the time allowed for them to develop mutual trust to the degree that they could share personal as well as professional stories.

“I begin by getting them to tell me all about themselves, putting the CV aside for the moment. What they are interested in looking for, what their work drivers are, what is important to them, what are their values and any other [thoughts about] what is happening for them around this, family stuff without getting too personal. Then writing all that stuff down and delving into some of the important things. I try to understand in the first two sessions what they want to achieve.” – Mentor 8

“When reviewing CVs you need to know their qualifications, you need to know what their story is and who they are. Having that conversation, trying to work out what the issues are for that particular person. No one is the same. Just developing that relationship...Some mentees like to share personal stories with me. That is the coaching part. We don't do it without their permission and you have to be very careful about it. I say to mentees that everything will be confidential...It is about establishing trust between the mentor and the mentee.” – Mentor 2

All participants stated that they had other forms of contact with each other in between each meeting via Skype, emails or phone calls to allow more flexibility in the process.

Meeting places were located at a mutually agreed location convenient to both the mentor and mentee, mostly at their mentor's workplace, while some participants met at a local café or a library. The average duration of most meetings was 1-1.5 hours.

Mentee Experience

At the time of the interview, the mentees interviewed were successful in securing a job commensurate with their skills and experience in healthcare engineering, public policy, marketing and environmental management sectors.

Overall, all mentees stated that they were satisfied with the matching process and thought they were matched appropriately with their mentor based on professional backgrounds and experiences. Nevertheless, they all agreed that they could have been matched differently as they might have slightly different backgrounds and agendas from their volunteer mentor.

One mentee with a medical engineering background who was matched with a HR professional in the healthcare sector stated that they could still share industry information particularly those relating to recruitment which made it a positive and pleasant experience for them so far.

“Realistically, it is very difficult to find people with the same background so they are trying to find people who have at least some minimum match. As in my case [my mentor] is working in the healthcare sector. It is a great help for me as we are in the same industry.” – Mentee 1

Given the mentors’ local experience and industry knowledge, all mentees felt appreciative of their mentor for helping them improve their resumes and cover letters to align with local industry requirements in ways that would increase their chances of getting an interview. They also found that their personal skills were significantly improved through confidence building, networking, job interview preparation and career pathway guidance from their mentor.

“This is a great idea...having someone to help you...my mentor helped me a lot to know about the terminologies used in my CV and cover letter because [my mentor] used to work as a HR specialist in the same field...[my mentor] would tell me what terminologies and what phrases are eye catching for the HR people.” – Mentee 1

“We worked through my cover letter and my CV in a broad range therefore the language for each sector, whether it is sales or marketing or communications, would be tailored separately. So the key words for each sector again were different. We worked through that but also very broadly.” – Mentee 4

“...one of the things [my mentor] did was very helpful. [My mentor] gave me like some indicators that their Department looks [for] when they are going to hire people. They look to some indicators depends on the position. So [my mentor] talked about what is the perspective for every position in the Department, then the selection criteria I have to write for this position have to be like in the same sort of language. [My mentor] was very strong in that. I wrote the key selection criteria like following the same words and the same style of language. I think using key words is very important.” – Mentee 3

All mentees were of the opinion that the SPMP Professional Mentor Program is most beneficial to new arrivals, particularly those with professional skills who do not know about the Australian workplace culture. They stated that being new to the country they needed the local insights and access to professional networks that a one-on-one connection with a local mentor can offer to succeed in the Australian labour market. The mentor could help them understand the Australian context of their profession, workplace culture, and know how to translate their skill sets.

“No matter how experienced you are, no matter how skilful you are, you need to know the way people think here in the job market. So it is a great idea to have someone from the industry to let you know how they think and how you have to present yourself, how you have to prepare your CV to catch their eyes. You have to find a way to attract their attention otherwise your CV would not matter, they don’t pay attention to your CV so you can’t get any job.” – Mentee 1

“It’s helpful and brilliant because when you arrive here you don’t have much like people you know. In the course was great like to find all these people they mentor in AMES. Also people who were like me taking the course you feel the companion, being part of it and feel inspired to believe you can be in the workforce in Australia. The mentor is [there] to help you, encourage you and motivate you to believe you can.” – Mentee 2

Mentor Experience

How mentors became engaged with the Professional Mentor Program varied. Some described chance encounters that brought them to the program while others learned about it by word of mouth. Four mentors attended an information session presented by the AMES Australia Mentoring Program Coordinator at their workplace and saw the value of sharing their local knowledge and experiences to help newcomers find suitable employment in a similar field. In one case, a mentor was seeking volunteer opportunities to help new arrivals and came across the program. In another, a retiree who was looking for meaningful civic involvement started as a volunteer English tutor for non-English speaking background arrivals before undertaking a mentor role. A third mentor was looking for meaningful activity after retirement.

All mentors described being motivated to give back to the community no matter whether it was a deliberate choice or chance opportunity that brought them to the mentoring program. They were passionate about helping skilled migrants transition and integrate into the local professional labour market. Not only did they take personal interest in their mentee's career, they also shared their industry knowledge and expertise, encouraged their mentee's ideas, and helped them gain self-confidence. Two of the mentors noted that they felt fulfilled and satisfied after having assisted their mentees to move on with their lives and careers. Some of them described how being a mentor created space to be acknowledged and to broaden their knowledge base, culturally or professionally, in a way that could not be found through professional practice.

"They kind of see me I guess as someone with local knowledge, perhaps someone [who] knows a bit more about Australian culture and Australian working industry. But I see it two-way, I can learn much from them as they also learn from me. I can learn about their culture, their experience, what they want out from the program. And also I think it brings growth for both parties.....I was inspired by something that I can do, something that I am capable doing without compromising my lifestyle, something that I can give it back to the community and I am interested in. I can keep my eyes open and have the direction." – Mentor 6

"It is not a game, it is a bit of an objective to get them work... getting the person a job makes me happy...even though I am fairly mature, it has matured me a bit. I can now do something to help someone else. It has made me feel comfortable. People are respecting you [in a] different way than the professional and corporate world, but it is a different type of respect...You constantly have the adrenalin flowing and you're pedalling and pedalling in the corporate world and then you get a lot of satisfaction out of earning money and winning contracts...This is a different sort of perspective, it almost broadens your character a bit. It makes you a lot more confident. Another level of self-fulfilment." – Mentor 4

Another mentor saw it as an opportunity to learn about the world of others when being in touch with someone from a different cultural background.

"On a personal level, I enjoy it. I enjoy meeting people from different backgrounds, seeing where they are from, their struggles and see how I add value. For the company, I relate it to my job, sometimes use it as an example. I do work with a lot of people, like a very international environment where I work, lots of people from India." – Mentor 1

Not only did the mentees learn from their mentors, some mentors described mentoring as a non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationship between mentors and mentees where, while working towards specific professional and personal outcomes for the mentee, mentors also learn from their mentees.

“...people are the experts in their own lives. People come to mentoring for a contextual placement of that knowledge and networks. For me mentoring is a knowledge exchange. A mentor learns as much from the mentee. Often mentees have more experience than mentors, some mentees have impressive backgrounds. The mentors may not have that length of experience, what they have is people that they know and Australian workplace experience.” – Mentor 7

“I think it made me more mature, let me understand my limitations and my skills better because as a mentor you need to share information and therefore explore what you know and don't know much better when you teach someone else.” – Mentor 6

While seeing their work as valuable and useful as they observed their mentees gradually integrating into the local labour market, most of the mentors felt a need for feedback from their mentees on individual expectations to the mentor.

“...the challenge would be to keep the mentee motivated, but also be realistic of the expectations. Challenges as in not sure whether your assistance is going to be beneficial for the mentees...challenges not just to mentees but to know that you've done a good job.” – Mentor 6

Similarly, while feedback from the mentor on mentee expectations is a valuable element of a productive mentoring relationship, this is not always an easy matter to negotiate. One mentor found it hard to point out where the mentee could “improve” or change in order to meet local requirements. The difficulty was that the mentee had worked in a senior role in their home country, but when their specific tasks and duties were unpacked by the mentor they found that the mentee was applying for roles that were too senior.

“I think the biggest issue is their perceptions of what they think they can do versus my view on what the market will see what their skills are and whether or not they are up to it. That is both technical and language based. That self-reflection stuff and conversation is really difficult to have. I have said this is for your benefit. That is the toughest part of the conversation.” – Mentor 8

Most of the mentors agreed that the mentoring relationship needs to be a two-way street where the mentor and the mentee share mutual responsibility and accountability for offering each other advice and support to work towards the fulfilment of clear and mutually defined goals, whereas setting goals and helping the mentee meet the goals can be an ongoing challenge.

“...as a mentor, [I] give a lot of advice other than on employment issues. We talk about broader things, the invitation is made to keep in touch. Occasionally they do, but not often...The ongoing contact with the [mentees] is not strong, there is no long term connection.” – Mentor 5

“The main thing as a mentor is to get them into a job that is suitable and that they like. Not going into a job that is low paid because they have to have a job... we encouraged people and gave them the responsibility and accountability to just run with it.” – Mentor 2

“As a mentor I try and correct the approach that the people I mentor use to get a job. The major problem is that they are trying to bring their thinking in their country to Australia and it is different...I aim to correct their approach so that they get their dream job.” – Mentor 3

Conclusion

The success of the Skilled Professional Migrant Program (SPMP) Mentoring Program is clear. It is an example of a low-cost, high impact intervention that delivers on the promise of opportunity made to new arrivals to Australia. The findings in this report reflect the success of similar mentoring programs in Canada and Denmark.

Through interviews with mentors and mentees, the SPMP Mentoring Program was shown to have positive effects on improving and sustaining the professional and personal growth of mentees in order to find a job commensurate with their skills and qualifications. The mentors and mentees were overall satisfied with the program and believe it met most of their expectations.

Flexibility and variability in the mentor/mentee partnership was aided through a mix of face-to-face meetings, Skype, emails and/or phone calls, which gave the mentors and mentees the opportunity to establish a mentoring relationship that worked best for them.

Most participants in the study (both the mentor and the mentee) believe they were matched appropriately based on similar professional backgrounds, which facilitated mentees’ networking in, and understanding of industry expectations related to their skills and qualifications. However, all mentees agreed that there may still be room for improvement in the matching process, given they all had slightly different backgrounds and/or agendas from their volunteer mentor.

Rather than just transferring advice, insights and knowledge, all mentors agreed that being involved in mentoring also provided some tangible reciprocal benefits, including self-actualisation and professional development that can reward them professionally. All mentors reported feeling satisfied having assisted their mentees to move on with their lives and careers.

Some of the mentor interviews also elicited important insights on possible areas for improvement in professional mentoring programs. Most mentors described mentoring as a non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationship between mentors and mentees as they work towards the fulfilment of clear and mutually defined goals. However they noted that setting goals and helping the mentee meet the goals can be an ongoing challenge. Some mentors also believed that feedback from both the mentor and mentee on individual expectations was an important part of the mentoring relationship, but that at times it was hard to point out where the mentee could “improve” or change in order to meet local requirements. This feedback suggests additional training or support for mentors in professional mentoring programs may help to strengthen the mentoring relationship and ultimately improve employment outcomes for professional migrants.

Recommendations:

- 1. The right investment should be made to see models such as the SPMP Mentoring Program strengthened and expanded in Australia to improve migrant inclusion in the workforce.**
Initiatives such as the SPMP Mentoring Program receive little to no government funding, putting financial pressure on the organisations that run them. With an estimated 60% of adult migrants arriving with a post-school qualification, increased funding for the SPMP Mentoring Program and other local mentoring programs will go a long way to ensuring that the skills of migrants are maximised. Investment could be in the form of increased government funding to support the mentoring program or sponsorship from corporate organisations.
- 2. More employers and other key stakeholders should be engaged with professional mentoring programs to help more skilled migrants to find a job in their professional field.**
Increased engagement between employers/organisations and professional mentoring programs could improve the likelihood that mentors and mentees are matched appropriately. More involvement from local organisations and key stakeholders could also help to fill labour market shortages by connecting skilled migrants with organisations that need their skills. Promotion of the benefits of such programs should be supported.
- 3. The features of the SPMP Mentoring Program should be replicated to other groups of newly arrived asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in Australia.**
Securing employment is a high priority for many new arrivals and a key indicator of successful settlement. Early and individualised employment-focused support for new arrivals would benefit everyone; employers, the community and new arrivals themselves. Not only would it help to address issues of marginalisation and inequality, but contribute to a holistic settlement response that gives new arrivals the best chance of succeeding in Australia.

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Appendix

Mentee Question set

1. Did your mentor have the same background as you? What was your mentor's role in his / her organisation?
2. Did your mentor help you find a job in your field? If yes, how?
3. Did your mentor's help align with your expectations? If yes, how? If no, why?
4. How often did you meet with your mentor? Where did you meet?
5. Do you stay in touch with your mentor after you've got the job? What is the reason for you to stay in touch?
6. Was your interaction with your mentor long enough?
7. What do you think about mentoring skilled migrants?
8. Any other comments?

Mentor Question set

1. Can you tell me a bit about the organisation you work for?
2. Can you tell me what your role in the organisation is?
3. How long have you been a mentor with AMES Australia?
4. Why did you join the mentoring program?
5. Did you receive any training prior to being allocated a mentee?
6. If yes, how did you find this training?
7. How many people have you mentored with AMES Australia?
8. Did you specify any criteria in relation to matching a mentee?
9. Does the mentee have a similar occupation and interest to you?
10. What is your understanding of your role in the mentoring relationship?
11. How often do (or did) you meet with your mentee?
12. Who defines how often you meet?
13. Where do you meet?
14. What sort of issues do you cover when you meet?
15. How do you monitor the progress between you and your mentee?
16. Have you faced any challenges during your times as a mentor? If yes, how did you tackle the challenge?
17. In relation to your roles as mentor, what does success look like to you?
18. What influence has mentoring had on you personally and the organisation in which you are employed?
19. Do you expect or have you maintained a relationship with your mentee after the program has finished?
20. Can you tell us about any success stories that really stand out?
21. Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not discussed about mentoring skilled migrants?