



**Monash University/WhyDev Online Mentoring Program**

**September – December 2015**

**Final Report**



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## 2. Acronyms

INGO	International non-government organisation
KPI	Key performance indicator
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
M&M	Mentor and mentee
MIDP	Master of International Development Practice
NGO	Non-government organisation

### 3. Executive Summary

Funded by a grant from the Office of the Vice Provost (Learning and Teaching) at Monash University, *Colab m* is a partnership between Monash University and WhyDev. It delivers an innovative new online mentoring program for Monash University students studying the Master of International Development Practice (MIDP). The program is designed to fill the gap between tertiary study and professional employment in the development and humanitarian sectors, by matching students with an experienced development practitioner. The pilot round commenced in September 2015 and concluded in December 2015, with 27 students and 27 mentors participating. This report contains the evaluation for this pilot round; including the design of the program, sourcing of the online architecture, and mentor-mentee matching.

The main objectives of *Colab m* were that participating students will:

- Develop communication, planning, interpersonal and reflexive skills;
- Learn more about the particular sector they would like to work in, building their tacit knowledge;
- Improve their ability to network; and
- Build a sustainable and long-term relationship with their mentor.

*Colab m* consisted of eight modules that students and their mentors completed together online over 14 weeks. In order to create these modules, a systematic research process took place, consisting of a literature review and surveys of mentors, mentees and potential employers. The research and design process commenced in May 2015 and concluded in September 2015 (4 months).

The pilot consisted of 27 students from the Master of International Development Practice (MIDP) cohort. The students' backgrounds were extremely diverse, with a mixture of domestic and international students of varying ages and levels of experience. Mentors were recruited in two stages. First, through the professional networks of both WhyDev and Monash University. Second, through a public call for applications. The criteria for mentors included at least two years of experience in development or humanitarian work. Altogether there were 60 applications and expressions of interest. As there were only 27 students participating, only 27 mentors were matched. The 27 participating mentors all had at least five years of experience in development and/or humanitarian work, and were based in Australia, Cambodia, Dominican Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Fiji, Italy, Marshall Islands, Nepal, Scotland, Switzerland, UAE, and the U.S.

Six factors were chosen to determine the matching criteria based on the research. The criteria and corresponding weighting for the algorithm were as follows: sector (30%); understanding of the concept of mentoring (30%); age (20%); organisation type (10%); region (5%); and gender (5%).

During the program, mentor and mentee engagement with *Colab m* online platform (fortnightly use of the online platform, as well as their fortnightly communication with each other, measured by module feedback, mentor and mentee's (M&Ms) login report, and Calendar meetings), was relatively low.

However, this did not mean that they did not engage; after using the platform for initial introductions, engagement occurred via Skype and email. All but one pairing completed the program over the 14 weeks. The regularity of contact was an important factor in determining positive experiences for students and mentors.

Students reported that having a mentor inspired them while helping improve their skills, tools and knowledge to pursue their career of choice. This assisted in improving their confidence with respect to how prepared they felt to work in the sector after graduation. In addition, students valued relationship building with someone in the sector, the mentor's skills and insight into the sectors, and understanding how the sector worked. Overall, students reported positive experiences with the program.

Mentors reported they had passed on knowledge and skills to their mentees including supporting them in applications for jobs and internships. Information and advice on finding employment in the sector was also shared. Mentors commended the structure and professionalism of the program. The majority of mentors had a positive experience with the program, and felt it met their expectations while imparting constructive knowledge for their mentees. Most importantly, it provided mentors with the opportunity to reflect on their own career paths and felt that mentoring was a way of 'giving back' to the sector and supporting the next generation of development practitioners.

Key improvements put forward by students and mentors included providing more in-depth material for discussion on the modules, providing all modules at once for review rather than releasing them week by week, live interactive workshops, a Facebook group, and more autonomy over matching mentors. A few suggestions were made to improve functionality of the online platform such as allowing attachments in messaging.

At the end of the project, the majority of the students and mentors who completed the end-line survey reported they would or would try to maintain contact with their mentor.

Recommendations include continuing the partnership and the *Colab m* program; improving functionality of the online platform; developing off-line activities including workshops and seminars that bring mentors and mentees together where possible; and developing other professional development programs for stakeholders who have expressed interest.

## 4. Introduction

### 4.1 About Colab m

*Colab m* a partnership between Monash University and WhyDev. It is an innovative new online mentoring program for Monash University students studying the Master of International Development Practice (MIDP). The program is designed to fill the gap between tertiary study and professional employment in the development and humanitarian sectors, by matching students with an experienced development practitioner.. It is hoped that the program will help create a community of practice in the development sector, with a continuous mentoring loop, whereby former mentees eventually go on to become mentors for the next generation.

The pilot round commenced in September 2015 and concluded in December 2015, with 27 students and 27 mentors participating. The next round of the program will commence in Semester 1 (March-June), 2016.

The program has been funded by a grant from the Office of the Vice Provost (Learning and Teaching) at Monash University. Ethics approval for all research and evaluation activities was granted by Monash University (Monash University Human Research Ethics Project Number MUHREC LR CF15/2404 - 2015000968).

### 4.2 Objectives

The main objectives of *Colab m* are that participating students will:

- Develop communication, planning, interpersonal and reflexive skills;
- Learn more about the particular sector they would like to work in, building their tacit knowledge;
- Improve their ability to network; and
- Build a sustainable and long-term relationship with their mentor.

To this end, *Colab m* consisted of eight modules that students and their mentors completed together online over 14 weeks. However, the content in these modules are proposed as ‘talking points’ only and the pairing may choose to talk about other relevant themes. The program was designed so that mentees and mentors would read through the modules, and then hold a Skype or Google Hangout call to discuss the module content, once a fortnight. *Colab m* also included features such as communication and information sharing on a Timeline, and regular live Q&A sessions with a guest development practitioner, all of which are exclusive to participants of the program.

### 4.3 Mentortrack

In order to create the online platform for *Colab m*, Monash University and WhyDev partnered with a small Australian start-up Mentortrack, an organisation of young professionals and recent graduates who were able to build a customised mentoring space specifically for the *Colab m* program.



## 5. Research and Design Process

In order to create a valuable and relevant online mentoring program for students, a systematic research process took place, consisting of a literature review, online surveys and a design workshop, which informed the design process. The research and design process commenced in May 2015 and concluded in September 2015.

### 5.1 Literature review

A literature review on mentoring in the humanitarian and international development sectors was undertaken by an independent consultant. One major finding was there are few formal, structured mentoring programs in place at Australian universities, let alone within development studies programs. Mentoring generally took place through informal settings such as alumni networks and in-department contacts. Similarly, Australian non-government organisations (NGOs) with a development, aid, and humanitarian focus did not appear to have any formal mentoring programs in place, though informal mentoring is quite common.

However, in both cases there appears to be significant interest in implementing more formal mentoring programs, providing Monash University and WhyDev with substantial justification for the creation of *Colab m*, as well as a unique opportunity to set a precedent for online mentoring in the global development and humanitarian sectors.

Key recommendations that were subsequently implemented include:

- A matching process whereby mentees have some input into the type of mentor they are assigned, with program managers providing manual oversight of this process;
- Frequent meetings between mentors and mentees, to enable more successful outcomes from the mentee's perspective;
- Adequate preparation and support throughout the program, to ensure both mentors and mentees are prepared and equipped with the appropriate resources; and
- A substantial learning component, to complement the mentoring activities and the students' current studies.

### 5.2 Surveys

In addition to the literature review, three online surveys were created to research the attitudes and opinions of development employers, development practitioners and development students, with regards to employability of graduates, career trajectories, and the role of mentoring.

### 5.2.1 Employers survey

Development employers were defined as those working within human resources, or those involved in the hiring process of a development organisation. Nine (9) development employers took the survey, and were contacted through WhyDev's networks and through cold calling and emailing.

Most of the respondents came from international non-government organisations (INGOs), and indicated that having a degree (undergraduate and/or postgraduate), relevant volunteer or work experience, a strong interest in the field, and a friendly and personable attitude were essential attributes for a graduate.

The top four graduate skills identified by respondents were written and verbal communication, critical analysis, teamwork, and organisation and planning skills. Diligence, integrity and empathy were also identified as important qualities to have.

*Interestingly, respondents reported that the most common method of recruiting new graduates was through offering ongoing positions to previous interns and volunteers, though networking was also identified as an important activity for graduates.*

Most respondents indicated that soon-to-be graduates should have an industry mentor, and that they would be somewhat likely to employ a graduate who had been mentored.

### 5.2.2 Practitioners survey

Development practitioners were defined as those working for a development organisation in any capacity other than HR. Fifty three (53) development practitioners took the survey, and were contacted to take the survey through WhyDev's networks, website and social media.

Most of the respondents also came from INGOs, and indicated that they had secured their first paid job in development by either *responding to a job advertisement, or through interning or volunteering with the organisation first*. Most had also taken development studies courses or degrees at a Masters level.

Some words that they used to describe a good mentor included: guide, listener, experienced, honest, supportive, knowledgeable, and prompting self-reflection.

Over 90 per cent of respondents believed that soon-to-be graduates should have an industry mentor, so that graduates could receive a 'reality check' about working in the sector, advice about the skills and knowledge necessary for development work, emotional support and informal learning, career guidance, and so that graduates could expand their networks.

Almost half also indicated that they would be somewhat likely to recommend a graduate who had been mentored.

### **5.2.3 Students survey**

A survey was also distributed to students studying international development at Australian universities. Sixteen (16) students took the survey, and were contacted to take the survey through WhyDev's and Monash University's networks and social media. Most of the respondents were between the ages of 25 and 34 and attended Monash University.

Some words used to describe a good mentor included: guide, knowledgeable, experienced, kind, and inspirational.

None of the students surveyed currently had a mentor, though almost half indicated that they had previously had an informal or work-based mentor in the development sector.

The primary reasons given for seeking a mentor were to expand personal and professional networks, to have someone for general guidance and support, to manage expectations about working in development, to gain a greater understanding of the sector, for career guidance and for confidence building. Forty per cent of respondents cited getting a job as the primary reason.

Most respondents also indicated that they would like to work for a large INGO or for the government (federal, state or local), and the top five sectors where they would most like to work were: human rights, livelihoods, gender, government, and policy. Australia, New Zealand and Southeast Asia were the most popular regions for future work.

Most respondents indicated that they did not have a gender preference for a mentor, but they would prefer a mentor who worked in their desired sector.

### **5.3 Recruitment of students and mentors**

The 27 students were drawn largely from the final year MIDP cohort. Students submitted an expression of interest, and all of them were accepted to participate. The students' backgrounds were extremely diverse, with a mixture of local and international students of varying ages and levels of experience.

Mentors were recruited in two stages: firstly through WhyDev's and Monash University's professional networks, and secondly through a public call for applications. The criteria for mentors included at least two years of experience in development/aid/humanitarian work.

Altogether there were 60 applications and expressions of interest, though only 27 were matched with a student. The remaining number will stay 'dormant' in the database until the next round in 2016. The 27 participating mentors all had at least five years of experience in development/aid/humanitarian work, and were based in Australia, Cambodia, Dominican Republic, DRC, Fiji, Italy, Marshall Islands, Nepal, Scotland, Switzerland, UAE, and the US.

### **5.4 Program design**

The data generated from the literature review and surveys led to a number of important considerations for the program content and the matching process.

### 5.4.1 Matching

As per the recommendation in the literature review, to allow for mentees and mentors to have input into the matching process, they filled out online profiles with demographic and professional information about themselves. This information was used to determine a suitable mentor or mentee firstly through the algorithm, and secondly through manual oversight by program managers, in case the automated process yielded unsuitable results.

6 factors were chosen to determine the matching process, based largely on the survey responses from development employers, practitioners and students as outlined above. These factors and their corresponding weighting for the algorithm were as follows:

1. Sector (30%)
  - For mentees, these were the sectors in which they desired to work
  - For mentors, these were the sectors in which they had experience
  - This was weighted highly as most students who took the survey indicated that they would prefer a mentor who worked in their desired sector
2. Concept of mentoring (30%)
  - Given the variety of responses in answer to the question of what makes a good mentor, having a similar understanding of what a mentor should be was deemed important for a successful mentoring relationship
3. Age (20%)
  - It was agreed that mentors should be older than their mentee
4. Organisation type (10%)
  - For mentees, these were the organisation types in which they desired to work
  - For mentors, these were the organisation types in which they had experience
  - This was weighted lower as students who took the survey did not demonstrate a particular preference for a mentor who worked/had worked in their desired organisation type
5. Region (5%)
  - For mentees, these were the regions in which they desired to work
  - For mentors, these were the regions in which they had experience
  - This was weighted lower as students who took the survey did not demonstrate a particular preference for a mentor who worked/had worked in their desired organisation type
6. Gender (5%)
  - This was weighted lower as most students who took the survey indicated that they did not have a gender preference for their mentor
  - However, mentees still had the option to request a mentor of the same or different gender

## 5.4.2 Modules

Modules were designed primarily as a means of structuring the mentoring program. Each module also contained instructions, useful information, tips, resources and tools to address the recommendations that adequate preparation and support be provided to mentors and mentees, and that a learning component be included to complement the mentoring activities. Module topics were selected based on the survey responses, especially those surrounding desirable skills and qualities that graduates should possess, as well as why having a mentor is important.

Figure 1: *Colab m* homepage

The screenshot displays the Colab m homepage. At the top, there is a dark navigation bar with the Colab m logo on the left, a search bar in the center, and a notification bell icon on the right. Below the navigation bar is a sidebar menu with the following sections:

- NAVIGATION**
  - Dashboard (with a home icon)
  - Users (with a group of people icon)
  - Programs (with a document icon)
  - Calendar (with a calendar icon)
- ADMIN**
  - Accounts (with a person icon)
  - Matching (with a circular arrow icon)
  - Reporting (with a document icon)
- PROFILE**
  - Profile (with a person icon)
  - Messages (with a speech bubble icon)
  - Settings (with a gear icon)
- Support (with a speech bubble icon)
- Log out (with a door icon)

The main content area features a large heading "Welcome to Colab m". Below this heading is a text box that reads: "Colab m is a unique platform that facilitates one-to-one mentoring relationships. After completing your profile, you will be matched with a suitable mentor or mentee so that you can start communicating and completing the modules together. There are lots of tools and resources that you will find on Colab m. To get started, click on the 'Programs' tab, then 'View Program' to read more about the Colab mentoring program." Below the text box is a section titled "Events this week" which contains a card for "Module 6: Self-care". The card lists the following tasks for completing the module:

- Read through the module content
- Schedule and hold a meeting with your mentor/mentee
- Provide module feedback

The card also shows the date "11/30/2015" at the bottom.

## 6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Like any development intervention, *Colab m* involved monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities from beginning to end, to ensure that key successes, challenges and outcomes could be captured, analysed and improved for the following round.

### 6.1 Program LogFrame

A program LogFrame (Figure 2) was drawn up at the outset to capture the goal, purpose, outputs and activities of *Colab m*, including corresponding key performance indicators (KPIs), means of verification, and risks and assumptions.

### 6.2 M&E framework

An M&E framework was drawn up based on the information contained within the LogFrame, particularly the KPIs.

#### 6.2.1 Three M&E components

Three M&E components were gleaned from the KPIs.

1. Overall experience:

- Monash International Development Practice students' (mentees) overall impression of the mentoring program, the extent to which they feel empowered to pursue the career and path of their choice, and their confidence in skills and resources at their disposal;
- M&Ms' satisfaction with the program and the mentorship; and
- Functionality of the online platform.

2. Engagement:

- Mentors and mentees' (M&Ms) fortnightly use of the online platform; and
- M&Ms' fortnightly communication.

3. Administration:

- Activities completed on time; and
- Regular communication with key stakeholders.

#### 6.2.2 Activities and tools needed to carry out three M&E components

The 3 M&E components were measured systematically and progressively through a mixture of quantitative and qualitative indicators.

1. Overall experience:

- Baseline and endline surveys (quantitative and qualitative)
- Module feedback (qualitative)
- Focus group discussions and debriefing interviews (qualitative)

- Follow-up survey 6 months after program’s end (quantitative and qualitative)
2. Engagement:
    - Module feedback (quantitative)
    - M&Ms’ last login report (quantitative)
    - M&Ms’ scheduled Calendar meetings (quantitative)
  3. Administration:
    - Comparison of original GANTT chart timeline with actual timeline, and reason for discrepancies (quantitative and qualitative)
    - Meetings held with key stakeholders (quantitative)

### 6.2.3 When M&E activities took place

Figure 2: Activities and dates

Phase	Activity	Dates
Phase I (Design): May to September 2015	GANTT chart processes	Ongoing
	Stakeholder meetings	Ongoing
Phase II (Implementation): September to December 2015	Baseline surveys	Module O+1 (21 September to 4 October 2015)
	Module feedback	Ongoing
	M&Ms’ last login report	Last Sunday of every module
	M&Ms’ scheduled Calendar meetings	Ongoing
	GANTT chart processes	Ongoing
	Stakeholder meetings	Ongoing
Phase III (Evaluation): November 2015 to February 2016	Focus group discussions (Hangouts call) with M&Ms	Module 6 (30 November to 13 December 2015)
	Endline surveys	Module X (14 to 20 December 2015)
	Final Evaluation Report	November 2015 to

		February 2016
	Follow-up survey 6 months after program end	June 2016
	GANTT chart processes	Ongoing
	Stakeholder meetings	Ongoing

#### 6.2.4 How M&E activities were carried out

GANTT chart processes were followed, and stakeholder meetings monitored as they took place.

Baseline surveys were distributed upon M&Ms' commencement of *Colab m*, during Modules O and 1. Endline surveys were distributed at the conclusion of the program, during Module X.

M&Ms provided module feedback progressively after completing each module, but also had the option of going back to edit or fill in their responses for any module at any time.

M&Ms' login activity was noted at the same time each fortnight, on the last Sunday of each module (the day before the next module commenced). As the analytics only provided M&Ms' last login, it was only possible to note whether M&Ms had accessed the platform in that fortnight, and not the number of times.

M&Ms' scheduling of Calendar meetings through the *Colab m* platform were tracked progressively throughout the program, and noted in full at the conclusion of the program.

Focus group discussions with mentees took place via google hangouts on December 14 with 4 volunteer participants. One-on-one debriefing interviews with mentors took place during Module 6 (30 November – 13 December) via Google Hangouts.

A follow-up survey for M&Ms is scheduled to take place six months after the conclusion of the program, in June 2016.

#### 6.2.5 What resources were required

Most resources took the form of software, and included:

- Google Drive and Dropbox for storage of information and data
- Google Docs and Google Slides for documents and presentations
- Google Forms for online surveys
- Ganttter for GANTT chart



- Mentortrack for analytics (module feedback; M&Ms' last login; scheduled Calendar meetings)
- Google Hangouts for live Q&A sessions, focus group discussions and debriefing interviews

## 7. Overall experience

As outlined above, M&Ms' overall experience with *Colab m* is defined as their overall impression of the mentoring program, the extent to which, in the case of the mentees, they feel empowered to pursue the career and path of their choice, their satisfaction with the program, and their impressions of the functionality of the online platform. Overall experience was measured by the baseline and endline surveys, module feedback (qualitative), and focus group discussions and debriefing interviews, with the 6-month follow-up survey to be conducted in June 2016. Based on the results of these activities and tools, M&Ms' overall experience with *Colab m* was positive.

### 7.1 Baseline surveys

Baseline surveys were distributed to the 27 mentees and 27 mentors upon commencement of *Colab m*, to establish a baseline against which change or continuity could be observed.

#### **Mentees**

The aim of the baseline survey for mentees was to understand mentees' ideas about mentoring, career prospects, and general employability. 15 out of 27 mentees took the survey. Most mentees were between the ages of 25 and 34.

Just over half of the respondents (53.3%) felt that their studies had given them the skills, tools, and knowledge to pursue the career of their choice. However, in qualitative statements provided, some respondents said they felt "under qualified" for entry level positions, and would have liked to have seen more extracurricular activities offered, such as internships and fieldwork trips.

60% of respondents said they felt they had someone to talk to about their career and future, and most indicated that this person was either a lecturer or industry professional. Their understanding of mentoring included ideas around mutual enrichment, learning from experience, personal and professional development, networking, career advice, guiding and knowledge sharing.

Reasons given for participating in *Colab m* included understanding the skills needed for a career in development, networking, confidence-building, finding direction, sharing concerns, gaining knowledge and insight from someone with more experience, managing expectations and going beyond academic knowledge.

Most respondents felt moderately prepared for a career in development, moderately satisfied with their current knowledge of the specific sector they wished to work in, and

moderately satisfied with their current career prospects. However, many felt very dissatisfied with their current networking skills.

60% of respondents had already worked in development before in some capacity, though most did not have a mentor during this time.

### **Mentors**

The aim of the baseline survey for mentors was to understand mentors' prior experiences with mentoring, as well as their motivations for becoming a mentor. 18 out of 27 mentors took the survey.

Most mentors were between the ages of 25 and 44.

Their understanding of mentoring included ideas around providing practical advice, personal trust, information exchange for learning and professional development, sharing resources and ideas, facilitating, listening and asking challenging questions, debating, role modelling, career guidance, mentee-driven, discussion between someone with more experience and someone with less, and self-realisation.

Reasons given for participating in *Colab m* included developing leadership and mentoring skills, preparing people for the realities of development work, giving back to the next generation, passing on lessons learned, understanding the latest development literature from the mentee, job enrichment, gaining new technology skills, influencing current thinking around development, critically reflecting on own development practice, and familiarity with WhyDev.

Two-thirds of respondents said that they had not received mentoring during their studies or when first starting out in their careers, and many expressed regret in not having had this support. For the one-third who did receive mentoring, most stated that their mentor helped them by providing advice about the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in development work, and also by introducing them to valuable contacts.

In answer to the question of what they hoped to pass on to their mentor during the program, respondents said practical career advice, confidence, more understanding of the opportunities, challenges and key issues in international development, awareness of self-care, an alternative perspective, guidance, moral and emotional support, improved networking skills, assistance in job and internship applications, and greater understanding of ethics, privilege, and gender in development.

## **7.2 Endline surveys**

### **Mentees**

There were 14 anonymous respondents to the endline survey. Ten were women and four were men. Five were aged between 18-24 years and the rest were between 25- 34 years.

### *Communication*

The regularity of contact with mentors was important in determining positive experiences of Colab m. Eight of the students reported communicating with their mentor once a fortnight. Four reported this only happened in some periods and 2 reported that they did not communicate regularly. Eight students reported they will definitely maintain contact with their mentor, five said they would somewhat try to maintain contact, while two said they would not.

### *Satisfaction with skill and knowledge development*

The majority of students (11) reported that having a mentor has definitely (3) or somewhat (8) improved their skills, tools and knowledge to pursue a career of their choice. Two students reported it had 'sort-of' improved, while one said these attributes had definitely not improved. In terms of networking skills the following ratings from 1-10 were made about satisfaction with networking skills. Eight students rated this 7 and one student rated this 8.

On a scale of 1-10, 11 students gave a ranking of 7.5 on how prepared they feel to work in the development and/or humanitarian sectors after *Colab m*. Three students gave a rating of 6 while one student gave a rating of 4. The same 11 students gave a rating of 7.5 on a scale of 1-10 when considering their current knowledge of the specific sector they wish to work in.

Given the above results, we can conclude that the majority of students who completed the survey had a positive experience with regards to improving job preparedness in terms of knowledge and skills required for their chosen career path. Looking at the answers to the question, "Overall, did Colab m meet your expectations", eight students replied *definitely*, four replied *somewhat*, two replied *no*, and one said *sort of*. Those that had a supportive and open mentor where two-way conversations took place reported having expectations met:

"It created a mentoring connection, where two way conversation took place, and each session was encouraging and left me with things to 'do' or continue thinking about."

A sense of being inspired was also important:

"This is a great experience to know someone with rich experience in the industry, and interesting and inspiring personal profile."

Most reported that they gained employment search skills, learned of opportunities, and gained knowledge about practical experience.

Those who had negative experiences reported being unable to connect with their mentor owing to time. One student reported a lukewarm experience, as she believed she was mismatched.

#### *What was valuable about mentoring?*

Students were asked about what they valued about having a mentor. For many, the sense of being able to build a solid relationship with someone in the sector was important:

“Being assigned a mentor and having managed to build a solid relationship with her makes me feel less nervous about the sector. It is very important to be connected with someone who can be a friend, a supporter as well as a magnificent source of knowledge.”

The students reported valuing the mentor’s skills, knowledge, experience and support in giving them insight into the industry, frank and genuine advice about career paths and skills needed:

“Having a mentor means you got someone who have experiences and know what's really going on out there then they can provide some advice for you. I really appreciate that I have a mentor from *Colab m.*”

The trust that grew between the mentor and mentee was also appreciated:

“Having someone who understands the sector that I can speak openly with.”

Understanding how the sector worked was also valued:

“It's good to have someone in the professional field work that guide you to know what's really happening.”

“It provided me the insight into how the development sector works in Australia.”

#### *Perceptions of mentoring*

Student’s ideas of mentoring had changed as well, particularly for those who recognised the relationship-building element of the process:

“It [idea of mentoring] has change [sic] to built [sic] relationships as well”

“It's more about guidance and working together to achieve something or to learn from each other about issues”

“In a way it has changed. I used to see it as something less tangible. Someone you may meet and, at times, she/he happens to give you advice

when you need it. I think eventually that could be the case with my mentor, but I like to see it now as something that can be more structured and logical, so that the relationship grows from that.”

The progression of a more organic relationship was surprising for some students:

“From my experience mentoring is a open and safe dialogue between people. I thought it would be more formal, given the well-outlined modules, but was pleased that conversation just flowed without awkwardness.”

Others realised that mentoring can help you get an insight into the sector:

“Before this, I thought mentoring can help you to improve yourself, but now I know it's not only about that, but also helps you to see the real world out there and help you adjust yourself for the real world. It's not only sitting in the library and thinking what I'm gonna do or what's happening out there, how I can change the world. My mentor helped me to know the real work for development.”

One student specifically mentioned networking:

“My understanding has changed about the networking part. Because I never thought that a mentor could help you with network before.”

Seven students reported that their ideas remained the same and that mentoring was about:

“A senior professional/industry person who shares their insights of the sector with the junior, and help the junior colleague to plan for their successful career progression.”

Others emphasised the advice giving aspect:

“A senior professional either from the academic or workplace who helps a junior identify their strengths and weaknesses (or at least the awareness of them); prepares the junior with employable skills and reality of the sector; and enables the junior to explore other future possibilities.”

“I understand a mentor to be more of a guide and a friend and my expectation of it still remains the same”.

#### *Dislikes and what needed improving*

Students were also asked what they disliked or would recommend improving for the program in the next round:

1. In terms of content of the modules, two students recommended revising the guiding questions in the modules (one said they were 'banal and not useful' and the other said they were no suitable to their career stage). One student requested 'heavier content' to discuss.
2. Others suggested opening the modules earlier:  
"I think the modules could have been 'opened' earlier, so we could choose which modules we wanted to focus on each session. I was glad we did a module on careers/CVs the week I had a job interview - which really helped my confidence and preparation for the interview."
3. Students requested greater diversity in terms of mentors; 3 students reported that they wished to find mentors who could guide them in academic /researcher careers
4. Students wanted more interaction in the live Q & As. One student suggested that instead on online Q & As, student suggested a live facilitated workshop that engaged with guest speakers on topics students nominated. Another suggested having mentees send question before hand for the live Q & A.
5. A key concern was the time constraints of mentors and availability/expectations. The students recognized that the mentors had demanding roles but reported not being able to contact them as necessary. Solutions proposed were:
  - a. Provide more activities/information for when mentors were not available.
  - b. Clearer explanation about establishing joint expectations
  - c. Meeting matching via surveys to find mutually convenient times
6. One student believed that matching should be a 'more detailed process'
7. One student believed student and mentors should choose each other instead of being matched.

### *Navigating the platform*

Many of the themes in the focus group were replicated in the survey. The platform itself was user friendly although some students found they had to go through too many clicks to get to the program.

Engagement occurred off the platform – via skype and email. One student reported Google hangouts were not allowed via Monash university email accounts; this was an issue as the live Q & As were hosted through Google hangouts.

Students requested to be able to see other mentors too.

One student recommended getting notifications for internal messaging between mentor and mentee so that they could log into the system in a timely manner to reply to mentors.

One student also requested being able to send attachments via the messaging function.

## **Mentors**

There were 13 anonymous respondents to the end line survey for mentors. 9 were female and 4 were male. 2 were of the age bracket 25-34, 7 were 35-44, 1 was 45-54 and 1 was 65+.

### *Communication*

Regular communication with mentees throughout the program was an important factor in ensuring both mentees and mentors could gain the most from *Colab m*. 10 mentors reported that they communicated with their mentees frequently, that is, at least once a fortnight. The remaining three reported that this only happened sometimes, usually dependent on their own work schedule.

Three mentors reported that they would definitely continue communication with their mentee in the future. Seven said they would probably continue communication, 2 said they are happy to continue however have left it up to the mentee to initiate future correspondence, and 1 said they probably would not.

### *Satisfaction with skill and knowledge development*

All of the mentors reported that they believed they had passed some knowledge or skill on to their mentee. Seven mentors described giving insight into the challenges within the field, highlighting the “realities” of working in the sector. Three stated that they supported their mentee in applications for jobs or internships, including giving resume advice. Four mentors highlighted assisting in identifying subject choices for their mentees, in order to refine a particular skill set. However, one did counter this advice, passing on that skills are transferable so not to limit ambition, for example the belief that you must only work in one region to be successful.

Two mentors discussed the importance of networking opportunities, even providing their mentee with “access to different people and organizations in the field.” Half of the mentors specifically described communicating aspects of development work from a different perspective, for example, “looking at development work more broadly than just working overseas.”

All of the mentors reported assisting their mentee in some way as to how to get into the development sector. Whether this related to a specific job application, providing a realistic expectation of the industry or “dispelling myths,” or simply by supporting and encouraging confidence in their mentee. “I also think I helped my mentee get a better understanding of their own skills and how they can fit into the workplace, [Getting] a mentee to appreciate what they have is very rewarding.”

### *Rating the program and meeting expectations*

In rating *Colab m* on a scale of 1 – 10, six mentors gave a rating of 8 while one gave a rating



of 9 and one a rating of 10. Only two mentors rated below 5. In response to whether *Colab m* met their expectations, six mentors responded that the platform definitely did, and one mentor expressed that it exceeded their expectations. Five mentors responded that it somewhat met their expectations, and only one stated that it did not. Those that spoke positively of the program commended its structure and professionalism; “[it was] helpful to have topics as prompts even if the mentee chose to focus on one current and particular topic in several sessions.” Of the negative responses, it was expressed that the program was “too generic and superficial,” and they had progressed through several stages in their first online chat.

From these results, we can conclude that the vast majority of mentors had a positive experience with the program, and felt it met their expectations while imparting constructive knowledge for their mentees.

#### *What was valuable about mentoring?*

Mentors were asked what they did or do value about having a mentee. Half of them spoke about how engagement with their mentee triggered reflections on their own career path and development; “I love providing support and advice to younger professionals as a way of giving back, and it reminds me of my own road I’ve taken during my career.”

Many noted that they enjoyed the opportunity to share ideas and experiences of common interest, including the ability to inform decisions of an emerging development worker on a similar career path based on their own experiences. Two specifically highlighted how they would have benefitted from a mentor when they were starting out, so are happy to be that somebody themselves. A few commented on how it was rewarding to witness the progress in the way their mentee thought about development.

Ultimately, all expressed appreciation at being able to contribute to the next generation of development practitioners, particularly supporting them in their initial steps of career development. “I valued the opportunity to work with someone just entering the development field to explore what they are interested in, what they understand to be development, and to unpack the concepts [I] Valued the opportunity to share my experience to assist my mentee get a cleared understanding of what is out there and how to get it.”

#### *Perceptions of mentoring*

None of the mentors reported that their understanding of mentoring changed through the program. However, about 25% praised the modules as providing a useful structure for a mentoring relationship; “The module structure really opened my eyes to different aspects of mentoring. I've been in my profession for a long time and I forget what novices do or don't know, so without the modules there would have been many things I wouldn't have thought to bring up.”

Two mentors specifically mentioned “coaching” in addition to a mentoring relationship. That is, highlighting the importance of “meeting the mentee where they are” rather than a forced mentoring agenda. “I see mentoring as giving advice and sharing your experience, encouraging the mentee to identify his/her goals and support them in this regard. Thus, a bit of coaching too.” This was also touched on by a third mentor who noted that it was difficult to pull away from conversation solely about their own experiences, so used their own methods to engage their mentee more directly;

“I don't think my understanding of mentoring changed all that much, but I did sometimes find it difficult to not just talk about me and invite the mentee into the conversation. I think this was partly because she just wanted to hear as much as she could about what it is like to work in development, and because she has had no experience in direct practice work. I got better at using my stories as opportunities to ask her questions about what she might do in this situation, what she thought about the dilemmas etc.”

One mentor provided the constructive advice that it would be useful for them to receive ‘honest feedback’ from their mentee as to how they found the experience, including any critique, so that they may improve as a mentor for the future.

#### *Dislikes and what needed improving*

Mentors were asked about their dislikes with the program and what they thought needed improving.

1. Two mentors criticized the program due to its technical side; that is, the lack of interface with calendar, the ability to attach documents, and audio conference capabilities. One mentor found the program ‘confounding’ and stated that it got in the way of communication.
2. One mentor discussed too much of a focus on the mentee getting a job; “while I know that supporting the mentee to enter the sector was one of the objectives, it sometimes consumed our conversations and created a lot of anxiety for the mentee. Sometimes the anxiety about getting a job didn’t leave a lot of space to debate development.”
3. Two mentors discussed the difficulty of engaging with a mentee when they have had such different experiences in entering the sector. i.e. coming from a technical specialisation as opposed to a broad undergraduate degree. Suggestions to improve such issues were introducing a mentoring program earlier in the degree, and combining a “coaching-mentoring” approach in order to “help the mentees get clearer on who they are without the interference of advising or experience sharing that the mentoring process can invite.”
4. One mentor criticised the program for being too slow, and not specific enough.

5. Two mentors suggested the benefit of being able to connect with other mentors and mentees, perhaps through a “moderated Facebook group”.
6. One mentor suggested that timing was an issue, and suggested registering the webinar and giving the opportunity to listen later on.
7. One mentor stated that the program was too short; “it takes a while to form a relationship with a mentee, and once that is formed it takes longer for them to trust you and open up.” The same mentor felt the additional resources were “not that good” and allocated their own homework in order to make their mentee “engage, not just participate.” This mentor suggested a competitive process involved in order to get mentors, for optimum engagement.

### *Navigating the platform*

The main criticism with the *Colab m* website was its limited functionality (i.e. to schedule meetings & attach documents). Six of the mentors expressed negative reviews with the site and professed using other methods of communication, such as email and Skype.

The majority commended the use of modules through the site, yet suggested providing direct links to them through the reminder emails in order to limit the lengthy process of accessing the right module in the site.

Two mentors specifically made criticisms of the messaging function of the website; “the messaging service was clumsy, I didn’t get any alerts when a message was posted and the newest message was always at the bottom, so I had to scroll through all the past stuff to get there.”

Overall, responses to the platform were varied with a few giving very positive reviews; “very good and functional,” “very easy to use.”

### **7.3 Focus group discussions and debriefing interviews**

Focus group discussions with mentees and debriefing interviews with mentors were conducted over Google Hangouts to hear direct feedback from M&Ms, as well as give them the opportunity to voice their opinions on the way the program was run.

#### Focus group discussions (mentees)

All students were invited to participate in focus group discussions to provide feedback and reflect on their experience. Only 4 were able to participate; however, this lack of engagement may be explained by the timing (mid-December) as many students were disengaged with university related activities in this period, were travelling and so on.

The four students who participated all had a positive experience with the program.

“Found it helpful and great opportunity. My mentor encouraged me. Every module has something important to say for student – what is happening right now, what we have to do when you graduate.”

In terms of the content module, they reported that the modules were comprehensive even though they did not always stuck exactly to the guide.

As Q &A sessions were held live, with mentors from around the world, the modules were held at different times. The students reported not joining in owing to the time differences, but a couple reported watching the recording after. Others reported not watching them at all.

Regarding the *Colab m* website, they reported the website itself was easy to access including through smart phones, ‘clean looking’ and easy to navigate; although it took some time to find modules and programs. A single click path would be recommended. Nonetheless, some participants reported either not connecting through the online platform or experiencing some difficulty in connecting through the platform. A common communication platform was therefore Skype and email.

All of the participants reported regular contact with mentors and most planned to keep in touch after the program ended, with pairs agreeing that the student would be proactive about reaching out. Another mentee who had set up an internship in Fiji (not as a result of the mentoring, but was encouraged by the mentor to apply) over the summer reported that she would continue “to have contact with my mentor. We are actually meeting in Fiji. I am going to do in internship and we will discuss something we were talking about.”

Suggestions were made to open up the modules in advance. Other suggestions included having ‘live’ networking events as a complement to the program. A key theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was how important the mentoring program was for networking. As one participant reported when asked if she would consider re-doing the program:

“Yes – I would definitely do it again. It’s more about networking. Because I am in my first year, I can also always learn, and I need mentoring in different stages. I am very gratefully to be a part in my first year.”

Finally, another suggestion was to have a meeting hosted by the administrators in the middle of the program:

“ I would ask something – have a meeting in the middle of the program to have focus group with all mentors and all mentees to check in and see if they are ok.”

This reflected the suggestion that further accountability was needed within the program. As one suggested:

“My mentor and I discussed attitude – lack of commitment from mentees. Mentors were professional enough...the mentees they did not have a real commitment . It has to be a two way street. Both have to get something out of it.”

#### Debriefing interviews (mentors)

All mentors were invited to participate in one-on-one debriefing interviews to provide feedback on the program and answer questions about their overall experience and engagement. While many expressed an interest in participating in these interviews, only 4 mentors ended up participating because of differences in time zones and time constraints.

On overall experience, mentors had mostly positive things to say; noting the program’s importance, its potential to bridge the gap between study and work, the opportunity for knowledge sharing, while praising the structure provided by the modules.

Most mentors felt that they had been matched well, though one mentor said that they did not have a particularly enjoyable experience because of the lack of chemistry with their mentee; this might have been rectified had mentors had more of a say about who they were matched with.

All of the mentors were satisfied with the program content (modules, resources, live Q&A sessions), though most only used the module content as a guide or springboard, and ended up discussing other topics that were more relevant to them and their mentee. Most mentors were unable to watch the Q&A sessions due to time constraints.

Mentors’ impressions of the *Colab m* website were that it was functional for the most part, but problematic because of the frequent errors (e.g. A bug with the Calendar scheduling function), and also fairly limited in some cases (e.g. Inability to attach files in the private Messages function). This then appeared to dissuade mentors from using the website, as most said they only used it to access the modules, and used more conventional platforms like email and Skype to communicate, demonstrating that first impressions of an online platform are lasting.

In terms of engagement, all mentors said they met with their mentee at least once a fortnight, with some even meeting once a week. One mentor was also able to meet with their mentee face to face on a regular basis, as they were both in the same city. This appeared to facilitate a closer mentoring relationship, which is consistent with some of the findings from the literature review. In each of these meetings, M&Ms used the module content as a general guide. All mentors said they would leave the door open for further communication with their mentee after the program concluded, and would occasionally share resources or information as appropriate.

Mentors had many useful suggestions and ideas for improving *Colab m* for future rounds; including more guidance for mentors around expectations and engagement, an orientation workshop for mentees before the program commences, holding networking events or gatherings for M&Ms in the same location, enabling group sessions for both mentors and mentees to make the program more open and collegial, introducing a streamed approach (e.g. different curricula for international and local students, development and humanitarian students, to cater for different needs and pathways), and making the program twice as long, as one mentor remarked that they felt they were just starting to make progress with their mentee.

All mentors said they were happy to stay on and mentor another student in the next round.

## **7.4 Engagement**

M&Ms' engagement with *Colab m* is defined as their fortnightly use of the online platform. Therefore, engagement was measured by frequency of module feedback, M&Ms' login reports and scheduled Calendar meetings. Based on the results of these activities and tools, M&Ms demonstrated a relatively low level of engagement with the program.

### **7.4.1 Module feedback (quantitative)**

M&Ms were given eight opportunities to provide qualitative module feedback, for each of the 8 modules. Overall, 27 responses were recorded for mentors, and 10 responses were recorded for mentees over the course of the eight modules, resulting in a gradually low engagement rate for module feedback.

For Module 0 (Orientate), 8 out of 27 mentors provided module feedback, and 3 out of 27 mentees provided feedback.

For Module 1 (Connect), 5 mentors and 3 mentees provided feedback.

For Module 2 (Reality Check), 5 mentors and 1 mentee provided feedback.

For Module 3 (Network), 4 mentors and 1 mentee provided feedback.

For Module 4 (Network), 2 mentors and no mentees provided feedback.

For Module 5 (Skills), 2 mentors and 1 mentee provided feedback.

For Module 6 (Self-care), 1 mentor and 1 mentee provided feedback.

No mentors or mentees provided any feedback for Module X (Sustain), possibly due to the circulation of endline surveys. The consistent decline in the number of mentors and mentees providing module feedback possibly indicates a decrease in the level of engagement with the online platform over time, but may be a result of mentors' and mentees' busy schedules at this time of the year (September to December).

#### 7.4.2 M&Ms login report

M&Ms' login activity was recorded over the course of the program. As the analytics only provided M&Ms' *last* login, it was only possible to note whether M&Ms had accessed the platform in that fortnight, and not the number of times. Overall, M&Ms' login frequency demonstrates a gradually low engagement rate with the program.

During Modules 0 and 1, all mentors and mentees logged in to the *Colab m* website at least once, as this period was when account and profile creation took place.

During Module 2, 12 out of 27 mentors logged in to the website at least once, and 16 out of 27 mentees logged in at least once.

During Module 3, 17 mentors and 13 mentees logged in at least once.

During Module 4, 7 mentors and 10 mentees logged in at least once.

During Module 5, 10 mentors and 9 mentees logged in at least once.

During Module 6, 5 mentors and 10 mentees logged in at least once.

During Module X, 3 mentors and 5 mentees logged in at least once.

As with the module feedback, M&Ms' login activity declined over the course of the program, indicating an initial high level of engagement, which gradually became lower as time went on.

#### 7.4.3 M&Ms scheduled Calendar meetings

M&Ms had the option of scheduling meetings with their mentor or mentee using the Calendar function in *Colab m*.

Overall, 7 out of 27 mentoring partnerships made use of the Calendar function throughout the program, with the frequency of these Calendar meetings ranging from 1 to 3 times. However, this does not give a true indication of the number of meetings held by M&Ms, as some may have scheduled their meetings using other methods; indeed, those mentors who participated in the debriefing interviews confirmed that other methods such as email and Skype were used to communicate and arrange meeting times.

Again, this indicates a low level of engagement with the *Colab m* website, but not low engagement with the program as a whole, given that most M&Ms went outside the online platform to mentor or be mentored.

### 7.5 Administration

Good administration of *Colab m* is defined as whether activities and tasks were completed on time, and whether communication with key stakeholders took place on a regular basis. These were measured by GANTT chart timelines, and the meetings held with key stakeholders.

Based on the results of these activities and tools, administration of *Colab m* can be described as average.

### 7.5.1 Meetings with key stakeholders

Correspondence between WhyDev (Jennifer Fang and Brendan Rigby) and Monash University (Samanthi Gunawardana) took place on a weekly and sometimes daily basis during busy periods, via email and Trello. Online meetings were held at least once a month via Skype or Google Hangouts from May to October 2015.

Online meetings between WhyDev and Mentortrack were held once a month via Skype or Google Hangouts from June to September 2015, with Monash University joining the platform demonstration meeting in July. Correspondence between WhyDev, Monash University and Mentortrack then took place on a weekly and sometimes daily basis until the program was up and running. Troubleshooting correspondence with Mentortrack took place on average once a week over the course of the program (September to December 2015).

Administration of the program in this regard can therefore be considered good.

## 7.6 KPIs

	KPIs	Met (Y), Not met (N)
1	MIDP students feel empowered through the online mentoring program to pursue the career and path of their choice, confident in the skills and resources at their disposal.	Y
2	Mentors and Mentees (M&Ms) both complete online modules every 2 weeks.	Y
3	M&Ms communicate regularly throughout online mentoring program (at least once a fortnight).	Y
4	M&Ms express satisfaction with the helpfulness of the mentorship.	Y
5	Online mentoring platform is functional and user-friendly.	N
6	Online mentoring program provides students with tools and knowledge to succeed in their desired career path.	Y
7	Research products enable comprehensive understanding of best approach for online mentoring program.	Y
8	Final Report provides comprehensive understanding of program's aims, strengths, weaknesses, achievements, and next steps.	Y
9	Activity deadlines being met.	N
10	Fortnightly meetings/communication with key stakeholders (Monash, Mentortrack).	Y
11	At least 20 M&Ms (total 40) complete initial research	N



	surveys.	
<b>12</b>	At least 20 M&Ms (total 40) are recruited for online mentoring program.	Y
<b>13</b>	At least 80% of M&Ms complete baseline and endline surveys.	N (baseline) N (endline)
<b>14</b>	At least 80% of M&Ms participate in debriefing interviews and focus group discussions.	N (mentors) N (mentees)

## 8. Key Recommendations

1. The partnership between Monash University and WhyDev has yielded a positive sustainable collaboration, and as such should continue.
2. *Colab m* should continue to be offered to Monash students through the duration of 2016.
3. Based on feedback from mentors and mentees, work with Mentortrack is necessary to improve functionality including communication, technical specifications, and useability.
4. Based on feedback from mentors and mentees, the program should be developed to include off-line elements.
  - a. A student cohort leader should be elected to help manage the current batch of mentors.
  - b. Explore feasibility of making the program a for-credit elective with associated curriculum.
  - c. More offline events should be built into the program during the 12 weeks. Existing recordings of mentor Q&As should be made available alongside complementary live workshops, seminars and social networking events.
5. *Colab m* generated a range of interest shown in the program from students outside of Monash, development organisations and the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID). These organisations expressed interest in working with the partnership to develop their own mentoring programs. As such, it is recommended that the partnership develop an alternative, diverse range of mentoring programs around different topics e.g. leadership and development or sector specific programs.
  - a. Given #4 above, WhyDev and Monash should seek advice about how to expand their partnership within the structures of the existing agreement and beyond.
  - b. Develop key partnerships with stakeholders.
  - c. Greater administrative support is needed to run and develop the program. Monash should hire a coordinator to assist with student recruitment. The partnership needs a program manager particularly to manage relationships.