

BELONGING THROUGH EMPLOYMENT INTERNSHIP PILOT

Insight Report

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Executive summary

Skilled migrants have a lot to contribute to Aotearoa New Zealand, however longstanding systemic inequities mean that many skilled migrants are underemployed and find it difficult to find work that matches their skills and New Zealand-ready qualifications. Underemployment of skilled migrants significantly impacts their sense of belonging and well-being and disrupts the settlement process for both them and their families.

To bridge the gap between employers and migrant employees and assist skilled migrants into work, in 2020 Belong Aotearoa developed the Belonging Through Employment Internship Pilot. The project provided a three-month paid internship (half of which was subsidised by Belong Aotearoa) for seven highly qualified interns with employers such as Diversity Works, Sport Waitakere, St John, and the Eden Park Trust. Belong Aotearoa supported the interns and host organisations throughout the pilot through regular communication, check-ins, capacity building opportunities and post-internship career advice.

The road to the internship was a difficult one for the interns. Prior to their internship, all seven interns had faced significant challenges, including leaving unhealthy workplace environments, being made redundant before Christmas, submitting many unsuccessful job applications, and returning to work in a post-COVID lockdown. Many reported experiencing racism in their search for work, with recruitment agencies and potential employers implying they would be 'taking jobs' from New Zealanders. As a result, many struggled with low self-confidence, social isolation, and poor mental health. They were, however, highly motivated to find meaningful work which matched their skill set, to learn more about New Zealand culture, workplace environments, and communities, build professional networks and gain valuable work experience.

Following the internship, all seven interns were employed, five by their host organisation and two had secured new employment during or after their internship. All host organisations and interns said they would recommend internships to other businesses and skilled migrants.

This evaluation of the pilot project found that:

1. The living wage subsidy provided by Belong Aotearoa was a key enabler for host organisations to join the internship pilot.
2. Belong Aotearoa found high-quality candidates and made the recruitment process seamless.
3. A less formal interview process put candidates at ease and provided a friendly environment for host organisations to confidently choose the interns that matched

the roles they had to offer.

4. Host organisations were impressed by interns' skills, productivity, positive attitudes, bringing fresh ideas and perspectives.
5. One of the greatest strengths of the internship pilot was the opportunities for cross-cultural learning.
6. Host organisations are committed to supporting skilled migrants into employment, value diverse workforces, and agreed better employment pathways need developing to reduce barriers.
7. The extent to which interns were struggling before applying for the internship indicates there is a huge gap between skilled migrants looking for work and people who need their skills and knowledge in their sectors.
8. Interns felt the 3-month paid internship helped them regain their confidence, improved their mental health and well-being, and increased their sense of belonging.
9. Interns felt they were able to share and contribute their ideas, perspectives, skills and be productive in their new workplace. Many felt if the internship were longer, they could support some of the new ideas to be implemented.
10. The internship has supported interns to understand more about New Zealand workplace culture and increased their confidence speaking English in professional settings. Interns wanted more opportunities to grow their knowledge and confidence around communication in the workplace.
11. The internship opened doors and opportunities for interns, through offering local experience, references, and networking opportunities. For some, they explained the pilot as providing a bridge between skilled migrants and employers.

Introduction

In 2019 Belong Aotearoa (BA) set a new strategy which identified underemployment of skilled migrants as a key priority. Underemployment continues to be a persistent pain point in migrants' settlement journey and impacts their sense of belonging, well-being, and the contribution of skilled migrants to Aotearoa New Zealand.

The issue is particularly problematic for partners of skilled migrants, who experience poorer employment outcomes than their partners. Just over half (52%) of partners of skilled migrants are in work which match their skills and New Zealand-ready qualifications compared to 85% of skilled principal applicants¹. Furthermore, research shows that principal skilled migrants are more likely to settle in work and families are more likely to stay if their partners are well settled, which includes finding suitable employment².

Belong Aotearoa's own research into the impact of COVID-19 on migrant communities identified that challenges to belonging and participation for newcomer migrants were intensified at this time of heightened uncertainty, making migrants much more vulnerable. The research identified key issues for skilled migrants including negative impacts on wellbeing, increased experiences of racism, increased economic hardship and people contemplating reskilling to keep or gain employment, or re-migrating/leaving New Zealand. The research also highlighted longstanding, pre-existing systemic inequalities for skilled migrants³. In this period of economic recovery, retaining the expertise of skilled migrants has been highlighted as a major consideration for the current and future economy and labour force of New Zealand.⁴

BA developed the Belonging Through Employment Internship Pilot to respond to the employment opportunities and challenges faced by skilled migrants. The belief is their sense of belonging and well-being will improve when they find meaningful pathways into employment that match their skills and expertise. BA is a systems focused organisation and wanted to test how internships might eliminate barriers to help employers recruit skilled migrants easily into their organisations.

¹ New Zealand Migrant Settlement and Integration Strategy: Outcome Indicators 2018. Supplementary Report (see page 7)

² Immigration New Zealand: supporting new migrants to settle and work (see page 59) [Immigration New Zealand: Supporting new migrants to settle and work \(oag.parliament.nz\)](https://www.immigration.govt.nz/immigration-new-zealand-supporting-new-migrants-to-settle-and-work)

³ Migrant experiences in the time of COVID Survey Report 2020 www.belong.org.nz/migrant-experiences-in-the-time-of-covid

⁴ Why ethnicity diversity is essential in a post-Covid world by Paul Spoonley (June 2020) www.hcamag.com/nz/specialisation/diversity-inclusion/why-ethnicity-diversity-is-essential-in-a-post-covid-world/225415

Pilot Description

The Belonging Through Employment Internship Pilot ran in Auckland from June 2020 to June 2021. The pilot provided a three-month internship. The interns were paid the living wage. The host organisations provided half (50%) of the salary. The remaining 50% of salary was subsidised through funding secured by Belong Aotearoa.

Belong Aotearoa recruited host organisations through their existing networks including Diversity Works, Sport Waitakere, St John, and The Eden Park Trust. BA also provided an internship in their organisation. Interns' job descriptions were developed by host organisations for a particular project or service role that could be completed in the three-month period. BA built a clear picture of the work environment and expectations as well as the skills, expertise and personal characteristics required to fulfil the role.

BA promoted the internship roles through social media and their community networks including key community partners Work Connect and Migrant Careers Support Trust. They shortlisted candidates with skills and expertise specific to the roles for the host organisations to consider. BA provided candidates with support before, during and after their interviews.

Throughout the internship pilot BA provided both the host organisation key staff and interns with support through regular communication and check-ins. They provided capacity building opportunities for host organisations and interns including post-internship career advice.

Pilot Objectives

- To gain key insights about gaps in the system from interns' and employers' experiences to inform BAs future work improving employment pathways for skilled migrants.
- To support positive employment outcomes for partners of skilled migrants and included two principal visa holders recently made redundant due to COVID-19 to support retention of skills in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- To provide support to organisations to tap into an underutilised talent pool to support economic recovery in the current COVID-19 business context.
- To test the role of internships in bridging the gap between employees and employers.
- To provide support to interns to re-establish their careers.

Evaluation method

An outcome evaluation was undertaken using pre and post surveys. All host organisations and interns took part in semi-structured (one on one or group) interviews with an external researcher. This report is a summary of findings of the outcome evaluation and key insights from interviews.

Findings

Pre internship

Applications

Belong Aotearoa received eighty-two applications⁵ from migrants living in Auckland with an additional fourteen enquiries. Applicants' ethnicities included Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Russian, Romanian, Vietnamese, Persian, Colombian, Afghani, Libyan, Polish and Sri Lankan. Half of the applicants were on work visas (43). Others were on resident visa (18), permanent resident visa (13), student visa (6) and NZ citizenship (2). Unsuccessful applicants and those who were not eligible were guided to the Belong Aotearoa online Employment Guide to ensure they were aware of job seeker programmes such as Work Connect, New Kiwis and Migrant Careers Support Trust.

Seven applicants proceeded to the internship process.

Pre-internship experience

Six of the seven interns migrated to New Zealand between 2018-2020 and one arrived in 2014 to undertake a PhD. Ethnicities of successful candidates include Chinese, Vietnamese, Colombian, Indian, Libyan, and Polish.

Interns collectively spoke nine languages including Mandarin, Polish, Spanish, Hindi, Arabic, Turkish, Vietnamese, Teochew (Chinese dialect) and English. Four of the seven interns were bi-lingual and three interns tri-lingual.

Six of seven interns held overseas qualifications, with most holding graduate and post-graduate degrees. The seventh intern had completed a PhD in New Zealand.

When applying their highest qualification was:

- Diploma (1)
- Bachelor's Degree (2)
- Master's Degree (3)
- Doctorate degree completed in New Zealand (1)

There was a wide range of disciplines including: Accounting, Psychology, Marketing Management, Business Administrations, Intercultural Communications, Public Service Interpreting and Translation, Management and Leadership.

⁵ Applications were received from 63 women and 19 men

Only two interns were in part or full-time employment. The remainder were seeking their first job in New Zealand (3), had recently been made redundant due to COVID-19 (2) or were volunteering (3). One intern had completed five job seeker programmes. The remainder completed four programmes (1), three programmes (1), two programme (3) or no programme (1).

When applying to the internship pilot their visa status was:

- open work visa as a secondary applicant (4)
- permanent resident as a secondary applicant (1)
- resident visa as the principal applicant (1)
- permanent resident as the principal applicant (1)

Employment journeys and pain points

All seven interns had faced significant challenges before entering the internship pilot, including leaving unhealthy workplace environments, being made redundant before Christmas, submitting many unsuccessful job applications, and returning to work in a post-COVID lockdown. Many reported experiencing low self-confidence, social isolation, poor mental health, struggling with a lack of a routine and sense of belonging.

Many experienced forms of racism while looking for work for example, some recruitment agencies, potential employers, and colleagues implying they would be 'taking jobs' from New Zealanders. They felt many people assumed migrants are predominantly here as unskilled workers. Most of them (6 of 7) had internalised experiences of racism which impacted their confidence, identity, well-being, sense of belonging and potential income. Six interns had changed their first name to avoid mispronunciation of their given name and wanting to make it easier for others.

Before starting their internship most of the successful candidates (6 of 7) considered New Zealand home, furthermore many felt confident they could contribute to their community (5 of 7). However, most of the interns disagreed or were unsure people treated them fairly in New Zealand (6 of 7) and half disagreed or were unsure they had opportunities to help themselves and their family grow (4 of 7).

Most interns agreed they had the necessary skills to secure a job (6 of 7), and half felt confident their skills and experience would help them apply for work they wanted (4 of 7). However, some interns thought they did not have enough information about employment programmes designed to help skilled migrants into employment (3 of 7). Half were unsure or disagreed they had contacts that could help them secure a job (4 of 7). The majority did not have local references to use when applying for a skilled position they wanted. It is worth noting that some also were unsure of their employment rights in New Zealand (3 of 7).

Purpose for applying

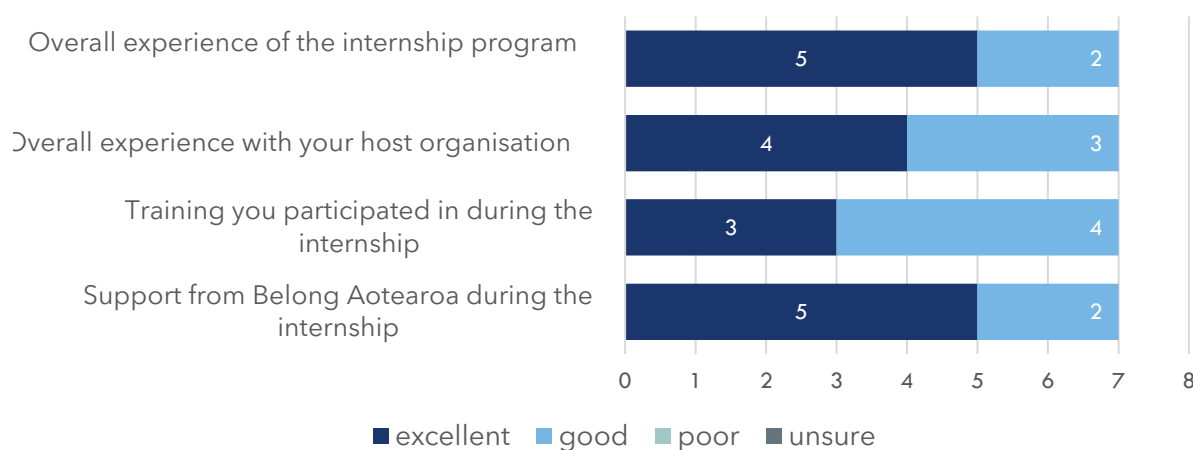
Interns were highly motivated to find meaningful work which matched their skill set, to learn more about New Zealand culture, workplace environments, and communities, build professional networks and gain valuable work experience in New Zealand. They expected to gain self-confidence, feel valued, use their skills and expertise, and gain a New Zealand reference. They also wanted support from Belong Aotearoa and their host organisations to bridge the gap of their overseas work experience and finding meaningful employment in New Zealand.

Experience with the internship pilot

Overall Satisfaction

All interns rated their overall satisfaction with the internship pilot as positive⁶. Most of the interns rated the overall pilot and support they received from Belong Aotearoa as excellent (5 of 7) and (2 of 7) as having had a good experience. Half rated having had an excellent overall experience with their host organisation and others (3 of 7) reported having had a good experience. Half (4 of 7) rated their experience of their training as good and (3 of 7) rated theirs as excellent.

Figure 1. Overall satisfaction rate of their experience (post n=7)

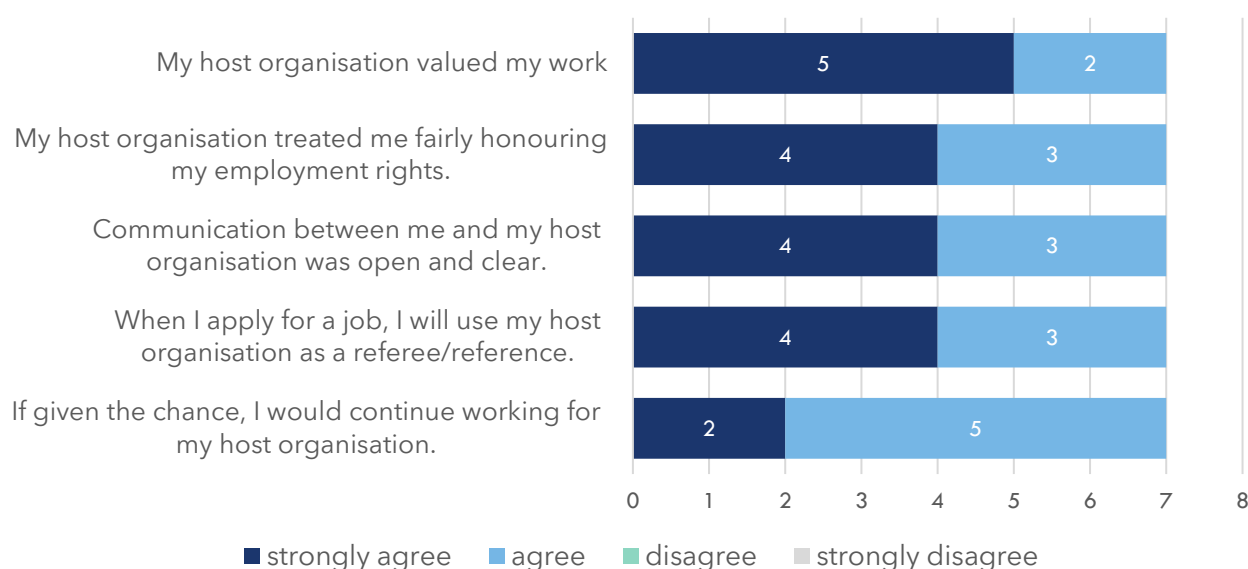


⁶ One intern was with the host organisation for three-weeks when she secured a full-time job. She completed the first phase of her host organisation's project before taking up her new employment. Five of the seven (5 of 7) completed a 12-week internship and one completed 10 weeks

Experience with their host organisation

All five organisations provided interns with a positive employment experience. Interns rated their host organisation as positive across six key areas. Most strongly agreed their organisation valued their work (5 of 7), and half for open and clear communication, treated fairly fulfilling their employment rights, and interns able to use the host organisation as a reference (4 of 7). The rest of the interns rated having had good experiences across all these key areas. Several (2 of 7) strongly agreed and (5 of 7) agreed given the opportunity they would continue working for their host organisation.

Figure 2. Feedback regarding host organisations (post n=7)



Employment status at the end of the internship

After completing the internship five interns were offered an extension with their host organisation of between three and six months, two had secured new employment during or after their internship. All interns said they would recommend the internship to other skilled migrants looking for work opportunities.

Having attended and tried other programmes and services that support migrants through employment, I can say this one is the only one that is really doing something meaningful for us, knocking on the door of employers, preparing them, and finding opportunities for us. [intern]

Key learnings

The living wage subsidy provided by Belong Aotearoa was a key enabler for organisations to join the internship pilot.

- The organisations were managing the financial impact of COVID-19 on their services and staffing capacity. Many hosts thought finding skilled staff and having the living wage subsidy was a win/win opportunity for them and the potential interns.
- Key staff thought the living wage subsidy component gave them confidence they could get leadership in the organisation onboard.
- Several organisations had projects focused on reaching migrant communities, which needed staff with specialist skills. The living wage subsidy as part of the pilot came at the perfect time to ensure these projects went ahead.
- The living wage subsidy had enabled one host organisation to offer three interns in different parts of the business.
- The living wage subsidy enabled one organisation to retain an existing staff member in full time employment and the intern tested a new role for three months.
- Several organisations had IT projects to increase their capacity to improve their data collection for reporting and to help them secure new funding for future projects. The living wage subsidy enabled them to offer these jobs to skilled migrants rather than put the projects on hold.

Host organisation feedback:

In terms of making this an attractive proposition for [us] in our financial position right now, knowing it was part funded, that sort of thing ticked all the boxes.

The subsidy meant we could bring an intern onboard and at the same time retain an existing staff member.

If I were going to the organisation for the full amount for an internship, I don't know if I would have been as confident. It gave me a strong selling point. Look it is part funded by the government, so it is obviously something that the government has invested in. It was just a win-win to be able to sell it that way.

I think if we were to have to pay the full amount it probably wouldn't have happened just because we are not in a financial position to do so. Having Belong Aotearoa go halves with us was great.

Belong Aotearoa found high-quality candidates and made the recruitment process seamless. The process involved in setting up the legal contracts between the host, intern, and Belong Aotearoa was time consuming.

- Belong Aotearoa played a critical role in cultivating and maintaining a network of organisations looking for skilled staff and skilled migrants looking for work.
- In the past, some host organisations had struggled to fill roles when using a recruitment agency. Key staff felt BA had provided excellent information and clarified their questions about candidates making the process easier.
- BA recruitment and preparedness coaching for interns enabled candidates to build their confidence to go into the interviews and internships better prepared.
- BA provided support at all stages of the recruitment process and supported the interns in their new roles.
- Several hosts thought being part of the internship pilot allowed them to take a chance on a candidate that may otherwise not be selected.
- Interns appreciated the ongoing support throughout the internship and felt able to reach out to the BA intern coordinator with questions and they felt someone was there for them.
- Most host organisations thought the time involved going 'back and forth, setting up the legal contracts was time-consuming and involved HR, legal counsel, and CEO time. This process needs simplifying to be more effective in the future.

Host organisations and intern feedback:

Really comprehensive in terms of the list of the candidates that we got.

[Belong Aotearoa] had done all the good work. They had already profiled this person, and we were able to match the role with the personality, knowing already that they are probably quite a good fit, so it is just a matter of interviewing them.

What was great is I was having Belong Aotearoa's continued support, so Yasmin was always there. I received emails or text messages from her which gave me more confidence. I felt there was someone there for me when I needed it. [intern]

I am not HR... We offer total remuneration, the living wage piece and how you work this with Kiwisaver contributions got a little bit complicated, and we needed to have her on our system... It meant she had to apply twice [when going through internship recruitment process and then the host organisations HR process] so I don't think that was awesome for her.

A less formal interview process put candidates at ease and provided a friendly environment for host organisations to confidently choose the interns that matched the roles they had to offer.

- Many of the candidates went through the host organisation's normal recruitment processes and screening. However, hosts and most interns reported benefits from the use of a less formal interview style which was friendly and conversational. The semi-structured, longer interviews had many advantages. Such as:
 - It provided candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their conversational English skills. The hosts were confident they could match candidates with the ideal role.
 - Candidates shared more about themselves, their overseas work experience, and their motivation for migrating to New Zealand.
 - There was time for the host and candidate to explore the potential internship role and ask questions.
 - The host organisations gained a strong sense of the candidate's personality and whether they would be a good fit for their team.

Host organisations and intern feedback:

I will recommend keeping this in mind that less formal interviews help you to get the best candidates. The candidate could carry a conversation long enough and demonstrate [they] were fluent [English] speakers.

We met in quite informal surroundings. The minute we met and heard her story, she was very serious about things, and we just turned to each other when she left and went, 'We want her'... We knew she was the right fit.

I felt that was the right approach for this programme. That reflects well on how we are Kiwis anyway, a little bit less formal. I enjoyed taking that approach and felt you could get a vibe for the candidates that way.

An internship allows you to take a chance you may not otherwise take. On paper, the skillset was there, but we needed a personality fit. It was really important to understand their story of why they wanted the internship.

It lasted an hour, and we talked a lot, I felt super comfortable, and they were really kind. We had a really good conversation, so I felt good in the interview. I compared it to a couple of interviews where I left them in the past thinking no, they didn't go well. Of course, if you compare me with someone from here or someone whose English is the first language I am always going to lose. [intern]

Host organisations were impressed with their interns' work capabilities including their skills, productivity, positive attitudes, bringing fresh ideas and perspectives.

- For most host organisations the impact of interns on productivity was considered "immense". Interns often offered to help others. Their positive attitude, being prepared to 'roll up their sleeves' made them more visible in the organisation.
- Interns' productivity and adaptability contributed to their team's ability to respond to new opportunities in a post COVID-19 lockdown period.
- Interns work ethic allowed organisations to respond promptly to tasks that would normally end up on their 'to do list'. These skills complemented how New Zealand works, having talented staff rather than lots of staff.
- Host organisations appreciated having highly skilled interns 'move at pace' applying their specialist skills with confidence and involving others when needed.
- Hosts thought interns were a fresh set of eyes and many were innovative and offered creative solutions to make improvements.
- Host organisations thought good planning was essential to ensure the interns had a high-quality experience. Many hosts and interns suggested improving the onboarding of interns, recognising it takes time and resources to do this well.
- Many organisations felt the internship could be longer to recoup time on recruitment and offer interns enough time to settle in and work on high value projects.

Host organisations feedback:

Her skill set is extensive, but she was the first one to stick her hand up be involved and say I will do that for you. She adapted to the culture in a team of 32 who deliver some of New Zealand's biggest events. We are all very multi-skilled, talented and don't mind rolling our sleeves up. So, she fitted in immediately which is a big tick for me.

We have had a highly skilled person that can hit the ground running and we can provide and task her with detailed documents and have a good understanding that she is going to be able to complete them.

She has been proactive and says, 'I am running out of work, is there anything anybody needs?'

To be honest in that small business environment that is the best way to keep yourself visible to be that person that says: 'Yes, I will do it.'

He started to put solutions forward 'Have you thought about doing this?' and ways we could do things better. Anyone that has an idea and experience in something it is worthwhile listening too. I am pleased he felt confident to do so.

One of the greatest strengths of the internship pilot was the opportunities for cross-cultural learning.

- Having skilled migrant interns in the workplace raised curiosity and interests in people's ethnicities and cultures amongst the team and in some case across teams. It also made some organisations more aware of the often-unconscious cultural norms present in our society and in their line of work.
- Host organisations noticed interns had moments when they were managing themselves in situations, while deciding what was the appropriate response or course of action, because the New Zealand ways of doing things felt foreign to them. These were great learning moments if responded to by someone they trusted.
- Some organisations had strategic projects that needed to engage migrant communities. The internship had sparked an interest at a leadership level of how they could work more broadly with Belong Aotearoa and thought the internship could be a pipeline to recruit skilled migrants in the future for other projects.
- Some host organisation key staff had to respond to incidents where they could see someone was undermining, being insensitive or dismissing the intern in a professional setting. Some thought the word 'intern' may have contributed to the situation as it implies in a New Zealand context the person is unskilled or inexperienced.

Host organisation and intern feedback:

It is a two-way thing, we have learnt a lot about her, her culture and family which has been enlightening to us as well.

The one thing I learnt recently is we have a habit of trying to bolster people along and the good old kiwi way of doing it is to tease somebody or make light of something. We sat down and had a conversation and she said I would rather you say straight 'that is a great idea' or 'I don't think that is going to work'. For me it's taking a step back before you make light of something so she will feel comfortable and won't stress.

Being culturally sensitive and having some cultural awareness. Being prepared for the fact we are all different. For me it is very important to keep in mind that English is not our first language. I spent a lot more time writing emails and making sure I wasn't making any mistakes. That is something you can do without much thought but for me it takes a lot of energy. I can imagine all the interns are dealing with similar issues but are also excited to be working. [intern]

Host organisations value diverse workforces and are committed to supporting skilled migrants into employment, however there are many challenges for employers and potential employees when tackling this on their own.

- Many organisations would like to host interns in the future and know other organisations who would be interested. Some had recommended Belong Aotearoa as a potential way to find good candidates for positions because of their experience with the internship pilot. All were keen for the internship to continue but they would not have the capacity to set up their own internship programme in-house.
- Some host organisation staff wanted to have opportunities for large and small organisations working on community engagement to come together to share experiences, and to do something collectively. Focused on improving pathways for skilled migrants to find employment in the sector including working on projects addressing the needs of migrant communities.

Host organisations feedback:

We often have conversations with new migrants and some of the things they deal with, getting out there and getting their CVs together, that type of thing. I have been here five years and have been across a lot of those conversations with people. Some of them are just desperate to get a job; they will do anything. It is a real struggle, so I am aware of some of those sorts of issues.

Talking about myself, I understand there are systemic and institutional barriers that migrants face when applying for jobs so providing opportunities like this is essential. There are a number of people I have spoken to across various sectors, and they will see a name and the qualification [from oversea universities] and think 'I am not sure about this'. They are familiar with AUT, the University of Auckland, University of Otago. Many are not giving migrants with overseas qualifications a chance. There needs to be a pathway for skilled migrants into the workforce.

[She told me her name and then a different first name she had chosen]. I asked if she was ok with me using her original name. There are so many other people in organisations that will default to the easier option.

The extent to which interns were struggling before applying for the internship indicates there is a huge gap between skilled migrants looking for work and people who need their skills and knowledge in their sectors.

- Many struggled to find work, and some had recently been made redundant during 2020 due to COVID-19.
- Before the internship, many interns had been applying for a large number of jobs weekly and receiving many rejections or not hearing back at all.
- People expressed the strain this had put on their mental health and shared feeling frustrated, stressed, desperate, socially isolated, anxious, and feeling like they were not good enough or that something must be wrong with them.
- Some had applied for low skill roles at supermarkets, and some were close to giving up on finding even an entry level job in their field, instead looking for work as a cleaner or in a café.
- One intern was experiencing high levels of stress in an unsafe work environment but felt unable to change her situation. She was under pressure as the sole income earner and felt trapped in a job because she had to pay their bills.
- One intern who was highly skilled with years of experience in the IT industry was returning to work after caring for small children. She was shocked and lost her confidence because of how she was treated or ignored by recruitment agencies because her experience was overseas.
- One intern was a highly skilled and experienced accountant with a young family. After seeking employment for over 12 months, she was suffering from poor mental health due to financial stress.

Intern feedback:

I was struggling somehow. I had time with my children but was thinking I need to do something myself. I need to work. I need to accomplish more.

I felt depressed and hopeless. I felt like I had no use.

Before we came to New Zealand, we planned financial support for three months only. We thought that during his study my husband could find part time work and I would find some work. During the pandemic it was out of control. It took me a year to get a job. The job I have is part-time but may be full-time in the future.

I found it hard finding a job. I tried looking for a job and I was rejected, When I applied through Seek, they were asking for the residency status.

Interns felt the internship helped them regain their confidence, improved their mental health and well-being, and increased their sense of belonging.

- Interns felt the internship had provided them with greater psychological support especially after an extended period of looking for work.
- Interns felt being back in the workforce had helped them regain their self-confidence, improved their mental health and general wellbeing.
- Interns felt joining the workforce had enhanced their sense of belonging and an opportunity to contribute to New Zealand society.
- Some thought the internship had helped them build networks and connections within their community.
- The internship had helped interns create a greater sense of achievement through having a day-to-day routine going to work. Achieving something at work improved their overall state of mind, mood, and confidence.
- Some interns felt the paid internship and their subsequent new jobs had reduced some financial stress.
- One intern has realised a new career goal to moving into community development in the not-for-profit sector.

Intern feedback:

When I started working there my husband said it is so nice to see me smiling when I come home.

Before the job I didn't think about this type of thing but now things have changed. After work ideas about work keep jumping into my brain which was good. I feel fulfilled and it's a big accomplishment.

As a person I found something to do which was a real relief for me. I could say to everyone in the morning, I have to go to work too. I felt like I was back to a routine again which helps my mental health.

The most important thing is my confidence. Sometimes I felt isolated with my friends but after finishing my project this changed. It boosted my confidence a lot.

It has been good for my mental health because I was feeling terrible. It almost feels magical.

Interns felt they were able to share and contribute their ideas, perspectives, skills and be productive in their new workplace. Many felt if the internship were longer, they could support some of the new ideas to be implemented.

- Interns could see how their skills and perspectives were being utilised by their host organisation and that they were making a difference.
- Interns thought the internship was an opportunity for both host organisations and individuals to learn from the experience and be exposed to new perspectives and approaches.
- The short-term nature of the internship was seen by some interns as a barrier to host organisations being able to closely consider new ideas and how these could be acted upon.

Intern feedback:

When you have been on a long journey instead of sitting in the same place, you see things differently.

They like an idea but sometimes they just need to take more time, I don't have the time because I am leaving. If the internship was longer that person could learn the skills and take things to the next level if you have more time.

I am super happy, and I think she is super happy because I am giving her a new migrant perspective, showing her a lot of things she didn't pick up before, because she hasn't had the opportunity to learn about it. I think if the internship was longer, we could take our ideas even further.

When you go for an internship, you think it is about you gaining something, but I think the need is from both sides. Someone like me who is a new migrant who has worked in many places has a lot of experience and exposure which they can really utilise. I was a good match because I have many ideas and perspectives they have never thought about.

I was so happy because I could demonstrate my skills to support them to go to the next level.

I would recommend taking the internship period into account. For example, stages which required other colleagues to get involved and they might be taken long holidays e.g., Christmas and New Year as it may impact on the intern's performance and achieving their projects.

The internship has supported interns to understand more about New Zealand workplace culture and increased their confidence to speak English in professional settings. However, interns wanted more opportunities to grow their knowledge and confidence around communication in the workplace.

- One intern noted that some interns have come from very hierarchical workplaces and are not always confident asking questions or raising concerns at work, as this is not what they are used to.
- For many the workplace culture in New Zealand is very different from their past experiences. Exposure to Māori culture was a highlight for one intern. It changed her sense of belonging and she has taken this confidence into her new job.
- Pākehā New Zealanders often use humour in different ways which can be difficult for new migrants to understand if people are being serious or light-hearted.
- Interns needed opportunities to reflect on how they are doing and what skills or knowledge they are trying to develop. Some interns thought having a coach who met with them regularly and helped them reflect, set goals, and get advice would have been helpful.

Intern feedback:

I totally understand the culture is different here and people speak a different type of English. I understand it is different and I need to understand the culture.

I am super shy and super quiet in English but at work I can't be so talking with people, asking things, and going to meetings is helping me practise a lot. I am all the time thinking in English and writing in English. It has helped a lot.

It would be great if there was a career coach from Belong working alongside interns providing support. They could help us when we have problems in the workplace, like how to express my opinion, how to ask permission or questions in a nice and professional way. I found communicating in the workplace so different from in social settings. It would be helpful and useful.

A lot of the team were Māori so every day I learnt something new. That was the first time I had worked in a Māori team, but it was so relaxing. In my new job many of my team members are Māori and with my internship experience I feel more comfortable when I approach them.

The internship opened doors and opportunities for people, through offering local experience, references, and networking opportunities. For some, they explained the pilot as providing a bridge between potential employees and employers.

- Interns felt the pilot was a great first step into the local job market and commented that the internship was working with skilled migrants and organisations in a different way than a job seeker programme.
- Interns commented on the barrier of not having local work experience or references which is essential to find work that matched their skillset and expertise. Some started getting enquiries from recruitment agencies online soon after updating their internship role on their profile.
- Interns felt the internship had offered them business networks and relationships and thought these could support them to get their next opportunity.

Intern Feedback:

I started applying for jobs and now I am getting calls because I have put it in my CV and on my LinkedIn profile. This is something that was not happening earlier. This happened within a month of starting my internship.

Of all the different programmes for migrants and job support, this one is doing that different thing that is trying to fill that gap. I felt I was super prepared. I don't know how many copies different tailored CV's I have from all the programmes, all the cover letters and interviews but those organisations are not ready for us. I feel that Belong has worked with the organisations and us. I found this internship an amazing opportunity.

Before I felt my 14 years of experience is of no use here because I had no local networks. Now, let us say if a client is thinking of hiring someone with similar skills to my skillset and my organisation might say we have a woman here on an internship which is finishing soon, maybe you could have a chat with her. These things can at least help me network and maybe get an opportunity.

The internship is allowing me to build contacts because I am getting to know a lot of people in meetings.

Conclusion

The Belonging Through Employment Internship Pilot supported seven skilled migrants to achieve positive employment outcomes and re-establish their careers in New Zealand. In addition, it enabled employers to tap into an underutilised talent pool and bridge the gap between employees and employers.

During their internship, interns regained their confidence, improved their mental health and well-being, and increased their sense of belonging. They have a far better understanding of the types of cultural norms and expectations that are present in New Zealand workplaces and have increased their confidence speaking English in professional environments.

Employers, too, reported a positive experience with the pilot. They found the interns brought a wealth of skills, fresh ideas, and perspectives. They were productive and positive, and their workplaces particularly benefitted from the cross-cultural learning experience.

As a result of their participation in this pilot, all seven interns have found employment which utilises their skills and expertise, and employers report they are committed to supporting skilled migrants into employment and creating a more diverse workforce.

Whilst the impact of this project is limited to seven skilled migrants and five workplaces, it is hoped that the key insights generated from this pilot will inform the future work of Belonging Aotearoa to improve employment pathways for other skilled migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand.

