

Mentoring: success encouraging success

'I got the job!' Four words that give me joy every time I hear them.

I have the pleasure of being the national coordinator of RACI's Mentoring Programme, which has grown over the last couple of years to also offer the wider RACI Careers Development Programme.

Through webinars, podcasts, training, blogs, workshops, facilitated networking and more, we're reaching hundreds of students every year with the message that 'anyone can find a great job if they just know how'. Because finding a job *is* a job, and like anything else it involves skills that can be learned.

In the RACI Mentoring Programme, we match (mostly) university undergraduate and postgraduate mentees one-on-one with a mentor who suits their area of interest. Working in this fashion, we aim to help our students better understand the workplace (improve their 'workplace readiness'), develop the skills to find and capture great jobs quickly, and develop their networks.

Responding to COVID, we've moved our offerings entirely online, including the wonderful new 'Chemraderie' online networking initiative. And both of our most recent online webinars have set consecutive records for attendance.

Over recent years, more than 90% of our mentored students have graduated with jobs waiting for them. That's significantly better than the national employment average.

Consider this: the national median period of unemployment for recent graduates is four months – worse for STEM students. Even being conservative, if we can help a young person develop the skills and network to find a job within one month of graduation, then at a starting salary of (say) \$60 000, that makes \$15 000 difference to the life of that young RACI member.

In many cases, our mentees have leveraged their mentoring experience to land dream jobs. They testify to the transformative effect that this focused support has offered them. After graduation, many of them have stayed to become active early career RACI members. And this year, the first former mentee returned as a mentor, to share what she has learned.

The RACI Mentoring Programme is about so much more than money, more even than just jobs. It's about inspiration, discovering exactly that right path, and developing the confidence to go out, and find and capture the opportunities before they are even advertised.

'Even with all the information available on the internet

today, I've found that the mentees are still unsure about the diverse range of opportunities available to chemistry graduates', says Heidi Doak, one of our founding mentors. 'My own experience has been a useful resource for me to discuss mentees' questions about job seeking and chemistry careers. The time commitment has been very flexible, and it's been great to meet the other mentors and learn from their experiences too.'

2021 is going to be a major year for the RACI Mentoring Programme. We hope to extend from our current five states and territories (ACT, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria) into the rest of Australia. We also hope to extend beyond students and recent graduates to offer our support to early career chemists as well.

All of this is built on the efforts of our wonderful volunteer mentors. Giving just one hour a month of their time, they get the chance to make a huge difference in the lives of their mentees.

So we're reaching out to our membership nationally. We're asking for your help. The main thing that is challenging the growth in the RACI Mentoring Programme is the need for more mentors. If we want to continue to grow into 2021, we need you.

For all of our academic members, we ask that you spread the word: the RACI Careers Development Programme has a huge amount of resources, and it's free. And for our industry, commercial, academic, government and active retiree RACI members, we ask this:

- Would you like to share the benefit of your experience? There is a chemist out there right now who wants to listen.
- Can you offer an hour a month of your time, in person or online? There is a chemist who wants to talk.
- How can your network serve to inform and assist a fellow RACI member? Even at the graduate level, most jobs are found through networks.

This is an appeal to each and every one of our members: we know that you have something to offer. Our membership has such a wealth of knowledge and experience that it cannot be measured. If you would like to feel that warm glow of knowing that you made a difference, or if you just want to learn more, I ask that you reach out to us at mentoring@raci.or.au.

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