



## Using developmental mentoring and coaching approaches in academic and professional development to address feelings of ‘imposter syndrome’

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### ABSTRACT

We are three women who have all helped each other in our university careers. We are from different backgrounds, have varying educational experiences and have different roles. All three of us are neurodiverse and champion inclusive learning, teaching, and assessment in our professional roles and from personal experiences. Developmental mentoring and coaching brought us together to address feelings of discomfort in work situations where we second guess our own abilities. We have felt the effects of ‘imposter syndrome’ (Clance and Imes, 1978) but through mentoring we recognise our successes are justified. In this article we question the notion of ‘imposter syndrome’ and ask why this might be disproportionately applied to women (Tulshyan and Burey, 2021). We also offer an affirmation model of disability (Swain and French, 2000) as a framework, asking how this can be applied in a broader intersectional context. Recognising our abilities and not having a tragic view of disabilities has enabled us to challenge attitudes towards inclusive learning and teaching. We can all demonstrate our abilities but some of us would like to do this differently than in a Higher Education (HE) traditional environment. We give a theoretical, personal, and professional context and appraise two different mentoring models - sponsorship and development (Megginson, Clutterbuck, Garvey, Stokes and Garret-Harris, 2006), reflecting on how developmental mentoring and coaching can be used for academic and professional development related to inclusive learning and teaching.

**Keywords:** imposter syndrome, mentoring, coaching, neurodiversity, academic practice, affirmation model, professional development.

### Introduction

This article is based on reflective analysis of our own academic practice, and we hope to raise issues for you to explore in your own careers and contexts. We are three women who, over our vastly different careers in HE, have all felt at some point and probably still do at times, that we are not worthy of our successes. In other words, we have experienced what could be defined as ‘imposter syndrome.’ To start our reflections, we set ourselves the task of saying eight things about ourselves that we believe have had an impact on who we are in our work setting. We ask you to consider what you would say about yourselves. In no order, Fiona picked, strategic big picture thinker, problem solver, specialist tutor (neurodiversity), ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and dyspraxia, Member of a management board of a college, learning Gaelic, and a member of a race equality delivery group. Megan identified Professor of learning and teaching, DIY and crafts, dyslexia, curiosity, visual research methodology, Co-Chair of a disabled staff network and mentor and coach. Sarah offers ideas generator, first generation student, hiker, Senior Lecturer in academic practice, wellbeing and mindfulness, ADHD, emerging mentor, and coach and aspiring National Teaching Fellow. These are not definitive characteristics and depending on different situations, contexts, and times one or more of our identified traits have either helped or hindered us in our careers.

Our mentoring triad grew organically from brief, friendly conversations in the course of our work, which then brought about the realisation we had more in common than we initially expected. Formed on the basis of shared values regarding social justice, inclusion and human worth, it became clear that we shared some challenges and also aspirations, both for ourselves and the colleagues and students we work with. Importantly, we share a desire to develop others, which in many ways contrasts sharply with the neoliberal, competitive and performative culture that typically pervades the university sector (Mula-Falcón and Caballero, 2022). A safe space for joint reflection grew into a more formal commitment to grow and develop one another and our professional identities. As colleagues working across the university in different faculties and departments, our shared space was an honest and freeing one, where we could consider the ‘big picture’ and impact of our roles and career trajectories, outside of our immediate departments. Regular monthly meetings gave us ‘thinking environments’ to explore and examine our ideas and practices, in addition to developing our emotional agility.

Firstly, our analysis offers a theoretical context communicating our shared meaning of imposter syndrome, the affirmation model of disability and two different mentoring models – sponsorship and development. Following this, we each reflect on our intersectional identities and share our thoughts about how our mentoring triad has developed our academic and professional

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practice related to inclusive learning and teaching. Finally, we offer some suggestions for the transferability of our learning into your own context.

### Theoretical context

#### What do we mean by 'imposter syndrome'?

The debilitating phenomenon which underpins the achievement of so many women in HE roles can be described in several ways. Kets de Vries (2005) and Want and Kleitman (2006) describe the term 'impostorism' as an inability to accurately self-assess regarding performance. Furthermore, Clance and Imes (1978) add that imposter syndrome is doubting one's own abilities and feeling like a fraud. Despite impostorism feelings affecting both men and women, typically occurring in novel situations such as starting a new job (Clark, Vardeman, Barba, 2014; Cowman and Ferrari, 2002; Cozzarelli and Major, 1990; Kets de Fries, 2005; Kumar and Jagacinski, 2006; September, McCarrey, Baranowsky, Parent and Schindler, 2001; Langford and Clance, 1993), there are persuasive arguments cited in the literature which suggest that disadvantaged or marginalised groups, specifically women, experience the continuation of those feelings much beyond an initial period (Tulshyan and Burey, 2021; Clance and Imes, 1978; Robinson and Goodpaster, 2000; Thompson, 2004; Kumar and Jagacinski, 2006).

Much debate exists about the behaviours and traits of women experiencing impostorism feelings which continue and do not dissipate. These feelings can "activate the dangerous cycle of women attempting to forecast others' perception of them and then performing behaviours based on those assumed perceptions" (Edwards, 2019, p.19). This is sometimes also referred to as 'stereotype threat' (Carr and Steele, 2009). The four types of behaviours performed by women with imposter syndrome that perpetuate the phenomenon are as follows:

- working hard to prevent others from discovering their status as an imposter
- choosing to conceal their true ideas and opinions, and only voicing ideas and opinions they believe will be well received by their audience
- seeking to gain the approval of their superiors by being well liked and perceived as intellectually special
- being cognizant of society's rejection of successful women and consciously exhibiting themselves as timid.

Many of these behaviours, causing women to feel like 'fraudsters', can also lead to a lack of belongingness in work environments despite objective qualifications, achievements, and accomplishments (Wang, Sheveleva and Permyakova, 2019). Furthermore, the added millstone of stereotype threat has been shown to adversely affect perseverance, decision-making and flexible approaches to problem-solving (Carr and Steele, 2009).

As neurodiverse women with intersectional identities, our feelings of fraudulence do not dissipate and despite our achievements and accolades, we frequently do not attribute our success to our own abilities and perceive them as overestimations of our gifts and talents. Impostorism is often present alongside perfectionism tendencies, workaholic behaviours, low self-efficacy and poor confidence. Clance and Imes (1978) suggest that the syndrome disproportionately affects high-achieving people, who find it difficult to accept their accomplishments. This certainly could be true of HE professionals and as Zorn (REF) claims "scholarly isolation, aggressive competitiveness, disciplinary nationalism, a lack of mentoring and the valuation of product over process are rooted in the university culture. Students and faculty alike are particularly susceptible to imposter phenomenon feelings" (Zorn, as cited in McDevitt, 2006 p. 1). Similarly, McCormick and Barnes (2008) and Parkman and Beard (2008) share that within HE, vague performance targets, inconsistent support and a highly competitive climate may inadvertently create a setting conducive to feelings of self-doubt and fraudulence. Therefore, the challenge we present is a common one for exceptional women aspiring to get ahead in busy, competitive work environments. Inequalities persist despite underpinning rhetoric within the university sector and Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy (i.e. Equality Act 2010, disability frameworks and charters); navigating these is almost as important as professional skills and subject knowledge.

However, the fundamental issue around imposter syndrome is that the concept was 'coined' in the 1970s with limited consideration of systemic bias and exclusion. Not only did this lead to those in advantaged positions seeking to 'fix' those diagnosed with imposter syndrome, but it pathologised the condition and generated an emerging generation of women that experience discomfort, mild anxiety, and significant self-doubt. Interestingly, Tulshyan and Burey (2021) posit that we must take account not of the 'individual', but of the 'environment' women work in. This sets the scene to reflect on the historical and cultural contexts that we find ourselves working within, thinking specifically about intersectional identities such as gender and neurodiversity, and the precarious position this puts us in at work. Amidst significant efforts across the HE sector to reduce inequalities and foster liberation, there remains a culture of biased practices with an inability for those from underrepresented groups to justly prosper.

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Consequently, imposter syndrome, alongside stereotype threat and intersectionality are not just theoretical frameworks for understanding emotion and behaviour; they also provide an applied lens into our lives as first generation, neurodiverse mothers in the predominately middle-aged, White, male working environments of hierarchical universities.

### Affirmation model of disability

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Living with a disability or neurodiversity can be a rich, fulfilling experience, yet too often Disabled and Neurodiverse people are problematised by a normative set of criteria and societal expectations. Failure to acknowledge this perpetuates power imbalance: discourse around what is 'normal' tends to benefit the self-construct of 'normal,' neurotypical people only: they become the default and all others are deviants (Cameron, 2014). Considering the work of Foucault on notions of power and resistance (e.g. Foucault, 1982), we observe that disabled and neurodiverse people commonly experience these power imbalances within universities. These imbalances are typically underpinned by policies and processes that disempower people, coaxing them into a performance management and key performance indicator culture and reducing control over their own workload (Kenny, 2018; Loveday, 2018). Not only do these neoliberal structures impede productivity (Kenny, 2018), they also encourage the burn-out and masking behaviours associated with imposter syndrome (Chapman, 2017; Edwards, 2019).

Herein lies, the affirmation model of disability which avoids both the deficit-based assumptions of the medical model, which problematises impairment (Retief and Letšosa, 2018), and the limitations of the social model, which forgets that even if society was fully anticipatory and inclusive, many people would still experience the world differently due to impairment or genetic variation. It can be summarised as "essentially a non-tragic view of disability and impairment which encompasses positive social identities, both individual and collective, for disabled people, grounded in the benefits of a lifestyle of being impaired and disabled" (Swain and French 2000, p.569).

The added value of the affirmation model is that it avoids polarised thinking. Disabled people are not obliged to celebrate difference, nor are they expected to extol the virtues of being oppressed or minoritised. Grief over not being 'normal' is not mandatory, and experiences are not always shaped by others' perceptions (Swain and French, 2008). Rather than being consumed by societal and environmental barriers which inhibit daily life, the affirmation model focuses on a positive disability identity, akin to that of ethnicity or other protected characteristics, together with the shared experience of engaging with a world that is very much designed by and for the neurotypical or non-disabled majority (Brewer, Brueggemann, Hetrick and Yergeau, 2012).

Working together to co-develop our identities as neurodiverse women has been key to negotiating power imbalances and attitudinal barriers from non-disabled peers and there is compelling evidence that identity construction is correlated with persistence and resilience in the HE sector (Kohli and Atencio, 2021). As women with hidden disabilities, we have all experienced an emotional soup of discovery and journey towards self-acceptance before finding ways of working that unleash and showcase our capabilities. There is a strength in shared experience and by 'coming out' and being open about our neurodiversity, we have positively impacted the culture of our institution, becoming visible role models for students and boosting the engagement of colleagues with hidden disabilities in our disabled staff network. We have used mentoring as an approach to benefit from all our latent abilities supporting each other with regular affirmation, promoting self-efficacy, challenging stereotypes, and hearing our own and others' imposter stories (Johnson and Smith, 2019).

### Developmental mentoring

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In the introduction to 'Techniques for coaching and mentoring' Megginson and Clutterbuck (2004, p.5), the authors specifically decline to debate the distinction between the definitions of what is a coach or a mentor, but that both exist alongside other functions, such as counselling, in a 'flexible space' where development is the focus. Bray and Nettleton (2007) concur, observing that there is little or no universal agreement on the roles and functions found in mentoring. However, the following definitions of coaching are appropriate to the relationships that we find ourselves in: "primarily a short-term intervention aimed at performance improvement or developing a particular competence" (Clutterbuck, 2003) and "a coach is a collaborative partner who works with the learner to help them achieve goals, solve problems, learn and develop" (Caplan, 2003, p.130).

We argue that in learning and teaching in UK HE, the term 'coaching' is not well used. Conversely, the term 'mentoring' is overused. Our perception is that 'coaching' is associated with activities where the 'coach' directs a person to achieve a particular end, pulling a person towards a goal. The mentor pushes or nudges someone to gain personal insights and that this is perceived as more acceptable. We believe 'mentoring' is therefore seen as a more desirable term. Parsloe and Wray (2000, p.81) offer two definitions that support this perception "coaching is a process that enables learning and development to occur and thus performance to improve" whereas "mentoring is a process that supports and encourages learning to happen".

Mentoring in HE is a term that is widely used often without a definition. We struggle with these definitions of coaching and mentoring as in many definitions it is often stated that one is different to the other, but it is not always clear or consistent as to what those differences are, as Western (2012, p.41) comments, "some people use them as interchangeably and others clearly differentiate them". Stone (2007, p.76) states, "does it really matter what we call one process or the other? Not really. But it is important that you are clear about the purpose of each process as you use it." For us what is important is that "coaching and mentoring are learning relationships which help people to take charge of their own development, to release their potential and to achieve results which they value" (Connor and Pokara, 2012, p.124).

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Leonard-Cross (2010) explores whether developmental coaching does deliver business benefits. Her results suggest that coaching can impact positively upon an individual’s level of self-efficacy. Within her study she identifies that the benefits identified include teamwork, quality, communications, job-satisfaction, flexibility, performance, ownership, succession planning and career planning (Williams and Offley, 2005). With self-efficacy comes the ability to cope with change and new events and to be more resilient in the workplace (and life in general). She reports that those who had been coached moved towards a problem-solving approach to their work and an increase in job satisfaction, being more aware of their strengths and how to address weaknesses. In conclusion, she highlights that “the reported study aimed to explore whether developmental coaching does actually deliver business benefits and results suggest that coaching is indeed a developmental tool, capable of producing a range of positive workplace outcomes” (Leonard-Cross, 2010).

Meggison *et al.* (2006, p.17) offer a distinction between the characteristics of sponsorship and developmental mentoring:

**Table 1:** The characteristics of sponsorship and developmental mentoring (derived from Meggison *et al.*, 2006)

Sponsorship	Developmental
The mentor is more influential and hierarchically senior.	The mentor is more experienced in issues relevant to the mentee’s learning needs (perhaps life in general).
The mentor gives, the protégé receives and the organisation benefits (Scandura <i>et al.</i> , 1996).	A process of mutual growth.
The mentor actively champions and promotes the cause of the protégé.	The mentor helps the mentee do things for him- or herself.
The mentor gives the protégé the benefit of his or her wisdom.	The mentor helps the mentee develop his or her own wisdom.
The mentor steers the protégé through the acquisition of experience and personal resources.	The mentor helps the mentee towards personal insights from which he or she can steer his or her own development.
The primary outcome or objective is career success.	The primary outcome or objective is personal development, from which career success may flow.
Good advice is central to the success of the relationship.	Good questions are central to the success of the relationship.
The social exchange emphasises loyalty.	The social exchange emphasises learning.

We can see the value of having a sponsorship approach for career success. Being mentored by someone who is more senior and can be an advocate for you is very desirable. However, for many this is not a preferred option. We believe it is important to have a range of mentoring/coaching approaches that are relevant to the outcomes that the mentee/coachee requires. We particularly value that developmental mentoring recognises that the mentor has more relevant experience than the mentee but is not necessarily hierarchically senior. The emphasis is on mutual growth, with the mentee developing their own understanding and ownership of the learning. In addition, the key to the relationship is good questioning. Using the developmental mentoring approach has enabled us to address our feelings of imposter syndrome and affirm our strengths and capabilities.

**Reflections on practice**

Our developmental mentoring triad has enabled us to navigate some of the challenges we face with our own intersectional identities and unpack the imposter syndrome concept for ourselves and others. It is in this space that we aim to share with you our own individual reflections on how mentoring and coaching approaches have been used within our academic and professional development related to inclusive learning and teaching.

Fiona shares that working with Megan and Sarah has helped her to ‘come out’ as neurodiverse- she uses the term ‘neurodiverse’ rather than ‘neurodivergent’ because she does not consider what she experiences to be a deviation from the norm; she now sees herself as part of a substantial group of marginalised people. Seeing the strengths of these neurodiverse colleagues has shifted her thinking, reframing how she feels about herself and inspiring her to embrace aspects of her intersectional identity that had previously deliberately remained hidden. Developmental mentoring helped her to process the emotional soup that late neurodiversity identification brings. Fiona could see that things could have been different for her if the world and curricula had been designed more inclusively. She then started to see some of the power imbalances at play, not only for Disabled colleagues and students, but also across other protected characteristics and class. She found her voice and started to have the conversations that few others wanted to: Fiona had previously avoided challenging conversations about race and disability as she questioned whether her lived experience was authentic: at the time, she was presenting herself as a white British neurotypical person, when actually her truth is far more complicated. Interestingly, her true identity is far more useful and insightful to her role in inclusion and widening participation. In recent years she has used this understanding to bring institution-wide change, having authored the intersectionality section of her university’s Race Equality Action (REC) plan, and having co-founded and developed the principles of

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an institution-wide Disability Equality Action plan, which provides a framework for continuous improvement for students, staff and governance, in a similar vein to REC and Athena Swan (a charter framework used within and also beyond the UK to support and gender equality within HE and research). She has recently shared this with Advance HE as an example of good practice which she hopes will drive positive sector-wide change.

Fiona has always been a strong, strategic thinker. However, working within professional services in a student-facing role meant the opportunities to shape university policy and have a 'voice' were extremely limited. A second challenge for her is that ADHD makes her curious about everything. She wants to learn it all, and therefore in the past, she has not prioritised or sustained focus on a particular area of her professional development: she has a versatile skillset as a result, but depth rather than breadth of knowledge and skill tends to be valued more in many roles across the sector. Working with Megan and Sarah allowed her to approach professional development in a more targeted way- she completed Senior Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy and gained a Post-graduate Certificate in Academic Practice to build credibility with faculty. This enabled her to traverse the great professional services – academic staff divide. Fiona was then able to form a leadership identity and became the non-teaching representative on the Academic Board, as well as taking on two external roles as a Director of the National Association of Disability Practitioners, and Independent Board Member of University of the Highlands and Islands Outer Hebrides. She is doing things she would not have had the courage to attempt even three years ago and whilst Fiona still has setbacks and moments of self-doubt, she is no longer consumed by them.

Megan states that she had always been classed as 'non-academic' due to her dyslexia and therefore felt unsure of her own capabilities. When she did her doctorate, (still thinking she was non-academic though having a degree, postgraduate teaching qualification and a Masters) she was introduced to visual research methodology, Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) (Checkland and Poulter, 2006), which played to her strengths and enabled her to express herself. She felt that the mentoring she experienced from her supervision team particularly the use of good questioning enabled her to own her own way of working. Interestingly, as her doctorate developed, using concept maps and rich pictures a solution emerged to her research was the use of developmental mentoring (Lawton, 2010). This model of mentoring became the framework for how she wanted to be mentored and how she wanted to mentor others. Still shocked by enjoying her doctorate she realised that other people wanted to know more about her work (Lawton, 2018) she became the person to go to if you wanted to do things differently. To date, she has successfully supervised five doctoral students using visual research methodology. She highlights the mutually beneficial aspect of developmental mentoring as being fundamental to addressing feelings of imposter syndrome. Her journey to becoming a professor was again helped by mentoring. Over her academic career she has felt fear over academic writing as the review process can be quite brutal for someone whose writing skills have often been derided. However, as a confident speaker, innovator, and ideas person she had evidence of inter/national impact on learning and teaching. With new routes into Professorship and at a career hiatus she felt able to apply. She originally thought of applying for an Associate Professor in Learning and Teaching but due to her referees and colleagues, Sarah and Fiona, who encouraged her to apply for a full Professorship she was able to work through the imposter syndrome feelings and was successful. She says she still has feelings of inadequacy which she will also acknowledge aren't true. The impact of childhood put-downs and traditional approaches to HE that did not affirm or offer opportunities to work in the way that played to her strengths made her shy of her writing but not of her ideas. On becoming a Professor, she says she now does feel a validity to speak out about being neurodiverse to change attitudes that affirm people's abilities she feels that a developmental mentoring approach provides the framework that enables other to gain their own insights through good questioning and a mutually beneficial relationship.

Sarah has found much empowerment and support from the developmental mentoring triad. She has not only risen to the challenge of coming back from parental leave, just prior to the pandemic, but has also moved towards leading and teaching a considerable proportion of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice course. On reflection, the affirmation and strength of the triad has willed her to foster networks internally and externally to the university via Twitter and JISC communities alongside encouraging her to 'voice' her own perspectives and thinking outside her faculty. This is true of her requests to Senior Leaders of the university, including the Vice Chancellor, to facilitate and record sessions with her for the Inclusive Curriculum by Design module and having the courage to facilitate difficult conversations about bias, stereotypes, discrimination, and disadvantage in the sessions. Mentoring has also provided her with a much-needed sense of belonging during lockdown periods where teaching and learning was solely online, and feelings of imposter syndrome were heightened. Feeling included with Megan and Fiona propelled her into modelling behaviours that facilitated inclusion with the students on the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice course, creating groups for conversations within and out of scheduled teaching sessions, topic led discussion forums and drop-in sessions for catching up. Sarah remarks on the joy and immense satisfaction of observing the students interact and work with ease, knowing that they were from different disciplines and would be unlikely to ever meet face-to-face. However, post pandemic many students are regularly in contact forming their own communities to engage in dialogue related to inclusive teaching, learning and assessment practices on campus or on Twitter.

Through developmental mentoring with Fiona and Megan, Sarah has acquired the confidence to start recording a podcast called 'The Inclusionists' where she is in conversation with numerous university colleagues about how they value inclusivity and what specifically they do to optimise the student experience. She shares this with Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice students and is aiming to disseminate it more widely during the next academic year. More recently, Sarah has had a chapter published within the Active Learning Network publication '100 Ideas for Active Learning' (Rhodes, 2022) detailing contemplative approaches to fostering effective inclusive academic practice, secured a place on the Doctorate in Education programme and gained her Postgraduate Certificate in Coaching and Mentoring qualification. Sarah claims that the mentoring has directly contributed to



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validating her feelings of sense of self, helping construct a positive identity and supporting her to learn the skills to self-advocate. Overall, the mentoring support has emphasised the notion of working smart not hard, strategically extending networks and developing strong allies to navigate the opportunities and threats that are evident in the ever-changing HE landscape.

### How can you apply the issues raised for your own practice and professional development?

The HE community has experienced momentous change due to the recent Covid pandemic. During this time of uncertainty, it was a challenge to shift from an emergency remote teaching approach to a more consolidated period of online learning retaining a high-quality supportive learning environment (QAA, 2020). The pandemic presented a disruptive opportunity to question existing practice and expose what Foucault refers to as 'subjugated knowledges' (Foucault, 2003 in Halberstam, 2011, p.11) in relation to the mode of delivery and inclusivity principles. As a sector we have changed, arguably for the better, becoming more inclusive, flexible, responsive, and open to the idea of doing things differently. However, during this period it is reported that women were more disproportionately affected due to the challenges they faced with balancing caring responsibilities and job demands (Augustus, 2021).

EDI within our sector and society has renewed focus; rightly so, and the importance placed on this now within teaching, learning and assessment practices is advocated by our professional body (Advance HE, 2021). The importance of frameworks for CPD (Continuing Professional Development) and learning partnerships have never been more crucial for supporting each other in addressing and overcoming these challenges. Creating opportunities for colleagues to know themselves, others, and value different perspectives need to be built into professional development activities. Central to this is also the importance of creating a strong sense of belonging for staff and students to their institution aiming to enhance student satisfaction, engagement, and retention (Pickford, 2016; Thomas, Herbert and Teras, 2014). In our experience, strong networks and professional development activities are more important for marginalised groups including women to explore 'fraudster' feelings and offer spaces to stretch, challenge and support each other. This is especially true as we move from the isolating period of the pandemic, combined with caring and home-life responsibilities, into a time of transformational change within the HE sector.

Therefore, we would advocate that the first step to fostering an inclusive culture and curriculum is to apply the affirmation model; acknowledging that all people have strengths. For example, our neurodiversities bring with them the benefits of enhanced creativity and problem-solving. Strategic thinking enables us to see the 'big picture,' therefore we can quickly identify departmental priorities and the benefits of one approach over another. We are used to negotiating challenging and sensitive conversations, meaning we are willing to have conversations that others may avoid.

The next step is to see beyond homogenous and generalised job descriptions and realise that teams and institutions require an array of strengths. Teams are made up of individuals and acknowledging and utilising individuals' strengths vastly enhances the capability and productivity of the team as a whole. An example might be where two team members can exchange activities based on strengths— one proofreads for another, meanwhile the other leads a conference panel because they are better able to 'think on their feet': verbal communication is their strength.

Subsequently, a focus on mutually supportive learning partnerships within organisations needs attention. Specifically, developmental mentoring is a hugely beneficial approach, facilitating a safe space for neurodiverse and other minoritised populations such as women to assess their strengths, affirm their identities, develop self-efficacy and analyse opportunities and challenges. Dialogic approaches can be particularly helpful: the opportunity to reflect upon critical incidents and explore challenges aloud mitigates the unhelpful internalisation associated with imposter syndrome. The sharing of ideas means that the helpful and feasible ones are more likely to be recorded and implemented. Similarly, shared reflections in a safe space outside of a hierarchical relationship, means that failure can be learnt from, and strengths can be developed and re-affirmed.

Finally, focus on what people can do, not what they cannot do: people should not apologise for an aspect of their identity that they cannot control. For example, rather than apologising for being a mother, explore how flexibility can be an asset to the team and organisation. This can apply to both the students and the staff.

### Biographies

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*Megan Lawton*, Professor of Learning and Teaching in Academic Practice became a National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) and Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (PFHEA) in 2017. She is passionate about challenging traditional approaches to learning from her experiences of dyslexia. She is Co-Chair of her University's Disabled Staff Network.

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