Professor Kathryn Almack

Professor of Health, Young People and Family Lives

“Ensuring the Athena SWAN charter principles are embedded within the School and University presents many challenges and requires the commitment of all; I look forward to leading on that work in the School of Health and Social Work with Hubert.”

I still feel quite new here at the University of Hertfordshire but I’m delighted to take up the Athena SWAN Champion role (on a job-share basis). I’ve moved from the School of Health Sciences at the University of Nottingham where, amongst other roles, I was a member of the Athena SWAN SAT team. As such, I am familiar with the Athena SWAN agenda and I bring that experience and knowledge with me into job-sharing the Champion role. It will also be an ideal opportunity for me to get to know people across the School and University (and for people to get to know me!).

My background contributes to a strong commitment to equality and diversity. I’m from a rural working class background and it wasn’t common for girls from my background to go on to further education. I worked for two years before deciding I would do a degree and I was the first member in my immediate family to do so. I went to Trent Polytechnic (now Nottingham Trent University). I then stayed in Nottingham and for the next 10 years or so worked in the voluntary and statutory sectors in homelessness, welfare rights, domestic violence and community development. During this time I did a part time MA in Women’s Studies (University of Bradford) and that whet my appetite to study further and do a PhD. I had no idea how I might manage that but a few years later a combination of factors led me down that route.

Since completing my PhD I have worked in academia – taking a research only career pathway (although not planned as such). I am a family sociologist and my research interests broadly address family lives, health and well-being across the life-course. For the past 10 years I felt very fortunate to have a post funded through a Family Trust donation made to the University of Nottingham to set up a research centre into palliative and end of life care. It is rare to have such long term funding as a Research Fellow and in those ten years I progressed to Senior and then Principal Research Fellow. I’m very committed to supporting and mentoring early career researchers.

My daughter was one when I started my PhD so my academic career has spanned her lifetime (she is now 20). She was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome when she was 15. That’s had a big impact on her life and - as her only parent - on my life too. Having a work/life balance can sometimes sound a bit clichéd but it is incredibly important to me. I consider raising my daughter to become the young woman she is, to be my biggest achievement. That said, my work is also important – and my daughter is incredibly proud of her mum becoming a Prof!