

## Case study: Network of Women+ Professors' Mentoring Scheme

The Network of Women+ Professors (NW+P) at the University of Hertfordshire promotes career progression and progress towards gender equality in the professoriate in line with the institutional Athena Swan action plan and supports HR to close the gender pay gap and gender ratio in the Professoriate. The network has established a mentoring scheme to support women aspiring for Reader, Associate Professor and Professor levels thus, contributing towards the University's KPI to increase the representation of women on the leadership and management pay scale. Individual mentoring support is offered to people who identify as women+ at the University by nationally and internationally recognised colleagues.

The mentoring scheme aims to ensure women are represented in higher academic roles, helps mentees understand the criteria for career progression avenues at the University of Hertfordshire and translates their unique skills into external recognition.

Thirty-four NW+P mentors with diverse careers and leadership in their field of endeavour agreed to take part in the NW+P mentoring scheme that was launched in April 2021. A list of mentors was created that highlighted their professional development, career management, training and research impact (e.g. policy). The potential mentee choose their desired mentor from the available list and contacted their mentor directly. Mentors and mentees received guidance on what is expected from a mentor/mentee. The mentor/mentee pair was asked to arrange up to three meetings in a given time period depending on the action plan. The meetings were aligned to the goal(s) of the mentoring session, with a circuit breaker/review mid-way. Upon completion, feedback was collated in order for the scheme to be evaluated for assessment and recognition.

It was challenging to prioritise the time needed for the scheme to be organised/planned and to carry out the administrative responsibilities; e.g. updating the mentoring list as new members opted-in the NW+P network as well as monitoring progress of the mentor/mentee meetings.

The impact of this initiative was evaluated through a Microsoft feedback online form with the following five questions sent to both mentors/mentees upon completion of their meetings:

1. What aspect(s) of your NW+P mentoring partnership worked well?
2. What aspect(s) of your NW+P mentoring partnership did not work well?
3. How has this NW+P mentoring partnership impacted on your career development? Depending on your role, for example, continue to offer future mentoring, apply for promotion.
4. How could we strengthen the NW+P mentoring partnership scheme?
5. Can we quote your responses (e.g. testimonials) for future promotion of our NW+P mentoring scheme?

Timely formative feedback from both mentors and mentees is essential for maximum impact.

In the pilot scheme 10 mentor-mentee pairs were set up and five out of ten have been completed. Some of the comments in the feedback are below:

*"Really felt encouraged and inspired - supported to apply for an academic promotion. I really appreciated my mentor's time and the thought and planning that went into supporting me."*

*"It has helped with my promotion application. Having a mentor who was very recently successful in their application and within my subject group was extremely helpful."*

Co-chairs of NW+P: Dr Maria Dimitriadi, Reader in Molecular Genetics, and Dr Lisa Lione, Associate Professor Research (Translational Pharmacology).