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## Research Mentorship scheme

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*Professor Mary Hickson*

*University of Plymouth*

<https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/staff/mary-hickson>

I moved to the University of Plymouth as Professor of Dietetics in January 2016. In this role I focus on my own research programme and support the development of others to increase the research

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capacity and capability within the dietetic team and School. I lead the Dietetics, Human Nutrition and Health research group and I am the deputy director of the Institute of Health and Community.

I am also part of the South West Clinical School, an initiative that links the University of Plymouth to the NHS providers in the SW. We aim to link research to practice and work with staff in local NHS Trusts to develop research ideas, support training and help find funding. I work specifically with Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust.

I am also an Adjunct Professor with Imperial College London. This recognises my contributions to both research and education within the College. I am a member of nutrition and dietetic research group.

**Background:**

My background is in dietetics, particularly in the field of nutrition and older people. I spent the first eight years of my career working as a clinical dietitian in hospitals and the community, covering a range of specialist areas in the UK and Australia. I have continued to support clinical activity throughout my career including work in weight management, diabetes, and hyperlipidaemia management.

In my previous role as the Therapy Research and Education Lead for Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust I managed and led education and research within Therapy Services. This included influencing and negotiating at a strategic level, both in the Trust and nationally, as well as commissioning training, supporting individuals with research and creating an environment where research can flourish and education is accessible.

**Clinical and academic interests:**

My main clinical and academic interest is nutrition and ageing, but I am also interested in how dietitians work, effective dietary modification, and hospital food provision. I have also spent a large proportion of my career working to enhance the research capacity and career opportunities for my own and other allied health professions. I have supported numerous clinical staff to apply successfully for NIHR awards, I am part of the Clinical Academic Careers Implementation Network, I am on the judging panel for the current NIHR ICA scheme, and I was actively involved in lobbying to include AHPs when the scheme was first proposed.

**Research interests:**

During my research career, I have investigated ways to improve nutritional care on acute elderly medicine wards, studied nutritional interventions to combat sarcopenia, tested the efficacy of probiotics in preventing antibiotic associated diarrhoea, as well as other nutritional studies and validation work for a nutrition-screening tool.

My publication record is more diverse reflecting the support I provide to individuals doing research. I have publications relating to medication harm, physical activity, laryngectomy and voice prostheses, critical care, and renal nutrition.

**Motivations for mentoring:**

I facilitated the first collaboration for the NIHR Mentorship for Health Research Training Fellows and I am now working to build a network for dietetics supported by the BDA and the NIHR Training Advocates. I believe our scheme will be vital in ensuring dietitians can develop as clinical academics, are supported to attain what is expected of them, and to become the clinical research leaders of the future.

I have benefited from mentoring throughout my career but I have never had access to this kind of structured and managed programme. I believe mentoring can really change perspectives and help people move forward in their careers and that is what I hope this scheme can achieve for you.

**My mentoring style:**

I am a good listener and after having some mentees have discovered that I have a host of useful experience to draw upon. I expect you, the mentee, to lead our discussions, but I will question and challenge your assumptions and expectations. I hope to be able to steer you towards the expertise you may need and provide opportunities to expand your networks. I will try and make you think critically about your choices and help you utilise your current support networks effectively. By being your mentor I would like to help you find the confidence and drive to succeed in your endeavours.