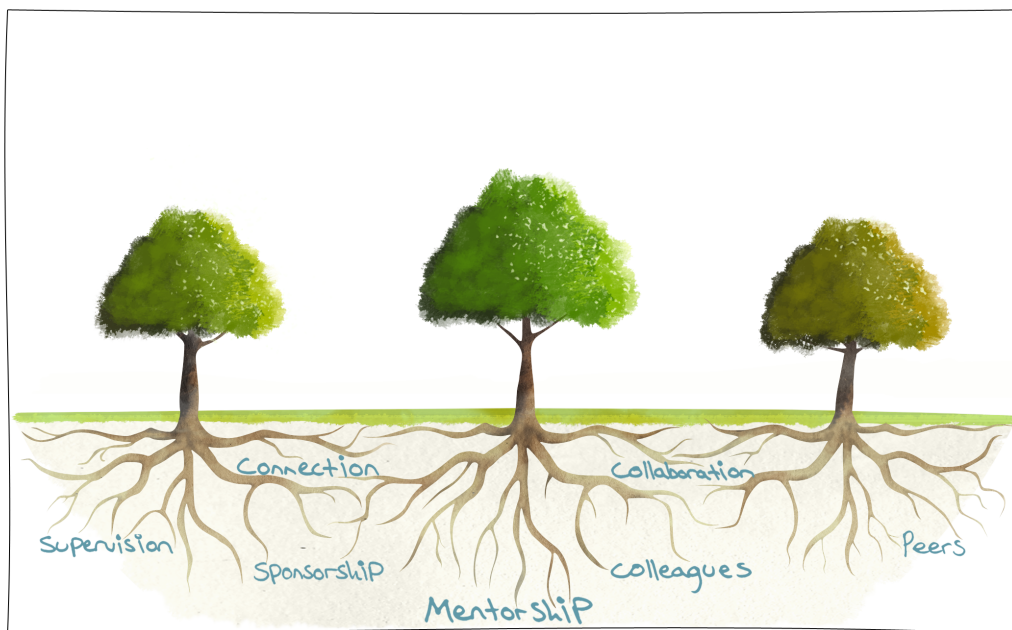




Career mentoring and sponsorship in SEFS: *A resource for academics and graduate researchers*



Mentoring and sponsorship work as a network of relationships that support the career health and function of each person and supports the growth of the school...much like the root systems of trees that provide nourishment to the individual tree (a person and their career) and communicate and support the growth of neighbouring trees in a community to develop the health of the forest (school).

SEFS Mentoring and Sponsorship Working Group

Kate Lee, Andrea Rawluk, Jen de Vries, Payal Bal, Lauren Bennett, Tim Fletcher

November 2022

**School of Ecosystem &
Forest Sciences**

We are delighted to share this resource with you. You are welcome to distribute, adapt, and build upon the material with appropriate acknowledgement.

Please cite the document as follows:

Lee K., Rawluk A, de Vries J, Bal P, Bennett LT, & Fletcher T. (2022). Career mentoring and sponsorship in SEFS: A resource for academics and graduate researchers. Report prepared by the Mentoring and Sponsorship Working Group for the School of Ecosystem and Forest Sciences, Faculty of Science, The University of Melbourne. Parkville, Victoria, Australia.

Foreword

While academia can sometimes seem to be a very individual (and perhaps at times, even self-focussed) pursuit, the reality is that success of academic groupings (Schools, Faculties, and indeed, Universities as a whole) depends on culture, collegiality and a shared concern for the wellbeing and careers of colleagues.

In the School of Ecosystem and Forest Sciences, we have worked as a collective to establish a culture that aims to support the development and success of our people. It is a cliché of course to say that our people are our greatest resource, but it is nonetheless entirely true.

This resource for supporting the mentoring and career sponsorship of academics within our School came about as a result of a discussion between two early-career researchers (Kate Lee and Andrea Rawluk), who courageously asked “could we do better in the way we support academics to develop careers, both in academia and outside?” From that simple question, the SEFS Mentoring and Sponsorship Working Group (Kate Lee, Andrea Rawluk, Lauren Bennett, Payal Bal, Tim Fletcher) was formed. I was very happy to support this initiative, through long-term engagement of a highly regarded consultant in this area, Dr. Jen de Vries, who had developed excellent mentoring and sponsorship programs for organisations such as *Universities Australia*. Dr. de Vries thus joined the working group, which was directly supported by both our *Diversity and Inclusion* and our *Research and Research Training* Committees, and by our School Executive.

This resource document is based on data and evidence gathered within SEFS (from HR data, but also from discussions and events conducted by the working group). It provides a robust framework for developing mentoring and career sponsorship within our School, with a focus on building an enabling, inclusive and productive academic culture for all. It is a guide that is both aspirational and practical. We will all have new ideas as a result of reading this guide, and it offers us practical ways to develop better career support within our School.

While this resource has been created by the School of Ecosystem and Forest Sciences, I believe that its findings and recommendations will be widely applicable. I hope that it will be useful to other Schools, to our Faculty, and to the broader University, as we develop our career mentoring and sponsorship culture. Most importantly, I hope that it’s an important source of hope and guidance for our talented academics, as they navigate their way through what can often be an uncertain and challenging, yet rewarding, career.

Ian Woodrow

Head of School - School of Ecosystem & Forest Sciences

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1 Purpose of this document

This document provides ideas on developmental mentoring and career sponsorship and gives guidance on how to effectively operationalise these practices within the School of Ecosystem & Forest Science (SEFS). The document is authored by the SEFS Mentoring and Sponsorship working group, which arose from conversations in 2019 between Kate Lee and Andrea Rawluk (SEFS ECRs) that they'd like to see changes that supported academic career paths in a more wholistic way, and from the subsequent support and championing provided by the SEFS leadership.

The goal of this documents is to help build awareness, common language and shared aspirations around career mentoring and sponsorship, and to highlight the role that everyone in the school and faculty can play in building their careers and the careers of others within SEFS. Specifically, the document aims to:

1. Provide guidance in mentoring and sponsorship to academics and graduate researchers to assist them in being proactive in crafting their careers.
2. Provide guidance to supervisors and leaders to support SEFS staff and students in developing rewarding and satisfying careers (be that within or outside of academia).
3. Create increased opportunities for all SEFS academic staff to develop their supervision, mentoring and sponsorship skills.
4. Examine ways in which the School can enable and support this initiative, through its culture, policies and established practices.

The discussion and recommendations are targeted at three levels: (i) all staff within the school regardless of seniority, (ii) those in leadership and supervisory roles, and (ii) the School as a professional community.

The document starts, in Section 2, with an overview of mentoring and sponsorship, including key definitions and concepts. Section 3 describes how these practices are applied in Higher Education and key issues that must be considered in their application. Section 4 articulates the mentoring and sponsorship aspirations for the school based on the model of mentoring and sponsorship developed by Dr. Jen de Vries. Section 5 presents the school and faculty data on career progression and retention, diversity and inclusion and staff experience, to establish the current status of career mentoring and sponsorship within the School, and to highlight the gaps identified. The final section explores potential actions and strategies needed to develop a robust career mentoring and sponsorship culture in SEFS.

2 Introduction to mentoring and sponsorship

2.1 Mentoring versus sponsorship

Mentoring is a learning relationship where one person takes an interest in the development and career of the other, and spends time listening, supporting, providing another perspective, guiding, challenging, and talking through strategies and career opportunities. Sponsorship, on the other hand, is the active creation of career-enhancing opportunities. The sponsor draws on their networks, resources, social capital, power (the ability to affect others) and influence on behalf of and for the benefit of the other (Figure 1).

Both mentoring and sponsorship are important for enabling a person's intended career trajectory. Mentoring without sponsorship provides support and a sense of career direction, without the opportunities required to progress. Sponsorship without mentoring can result in opportunities that are not well matched to a person's ambitions or their desired career path and circumstances or may even result in too many opportunities without the support to think strategically or discern what is right for the person.

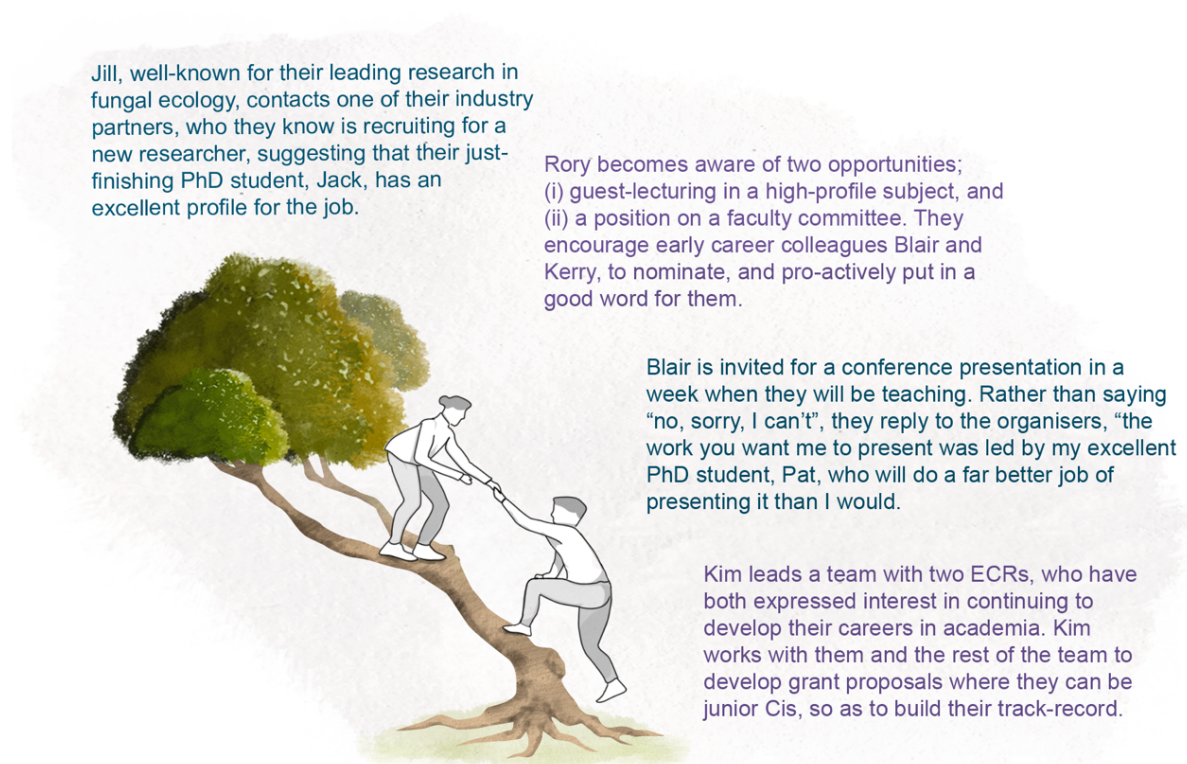


Figure 1. Examples of career sponsorship in academia (image: Scott McKendrick).

2.2 Why is it important to distinguish between mentoring and sponsorship?

It is now recognised that sponsorship is critical to career success. Research has shown that while some people receive both mentoring and sponsorship in mentoring relationships, others don't¹, leaving some at a significant career disadvantage. *The role of sponsorship in shaping careers can be overlooked unless we treat it as separate to mentoring.*

Identifying sponsorship as a distinct entity has the advantage of making it, or the lack of it, visible and discussable. This can help everyone involved to understand the importance of sponsorship, as distinct from mentoring, in progressing careers. A separate focus on sponsorship also helps to identify the gaps within current systemic processes for career progression.

Sponsorship can be far less visible than mentoring, as it involves techniques such as networking among colleagues on behalf of another, rather than obvious “meetings” or “mentoring sessions”.

It is also known that some people may be great sponsors but poor mentors, and vice versa. Recognising that sponsorship and mentoring are separate roles and require different but complementary skill sets is helpful in identifying the strengths and weaknesses in the organisation towards providing support for enabling career trajectories.

2.3 Building a developmentally oriented culture

Leaders and supervisors often have the greatest capacity to mentor and sponsor; however, they should never be just one person's responsibility. Careers take place within webs of enabling relationships. Peers can mentor and sponsor each other, and seniority needn't be a prerequisite for acting as a mentor or sponsor for others. Everyone needs to be involved, everyone forms part of 'the enabling-ecosystem'.

It is important to develop everyone's understanding of how mentoring and sponsorship works in careers, to support the development of mentoring and sponsorship skills and to develop a culture where mentoring and sponsorship sit at the centre of building a developmentally oriented culture, where all staff can thrive and make their best contribution.

¹ Ibarra, H., Carter, N. M., & Silva, C. (2010). Why men still get more promotions than women. *Harvard Business Review*, 88(9), 80-85.

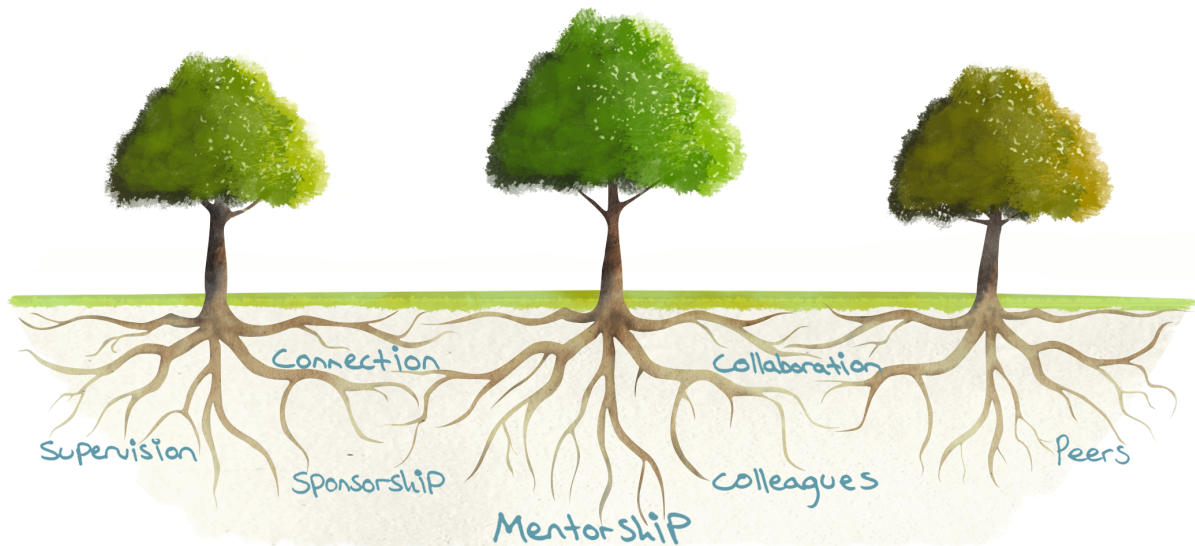


Figure 2. Surviving and thriving in academia is achieved through curating a person’s web of enabling relationships or ‘the enabling-ecosystem’. This includes supervisors and peers, as well as access to formal and informal mentors and sponsors (image: Scott McKendrick).

There are aspects of how groups and schools operate that can provide effective scaffolding or foundations for building these enabling relationships. Research by de Vries² has shown that these include healthy social and scientific communities, networks of user friendly ‘go to’ people that assist colleagues, and an understanding of the written and informal rules that govern academic environments. The de Vries model of career sponsorship will be explored further in later sections.

Surviving and thriving in academia is achieved through curating a person’s web of enabling relationships or ‘the enabling-ecosystem’. This includes supervisors and peers, as well as access to formal and informal mentors and sponsors.

3 Mentoring and sponsorship in Higher Education³

3.1 Mentoring approaches

Research conducted by de Vries⁴ identified that the most commonly adopted approach to mentoring is a traditional or instrumental approach, where a senior person instructs or advises a more junior colleague on how to succeed, based on how they themselves have

² For a full list of publications by Jennifer de Vries: <https://scholar.google.com.au/citations?user=z4ASjUcAAAAJ&hl=en> or visit jendevries.com/publications

³ de Vries, J., & Binns, J. (2018). Sponsorship: Creating Career Opportunities for Women in Higher Education. Universities Australia Executive Women (UAEW): <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/UAEW-Sponsorship-Guide.pdf>

⁴ de Vries, J. (2010). A Realistic agenda? Women only programs as strategic interventions for building gender equitable workplaces. PhD thesis, University of Western Australia Business School.

built a successful academic career, and on their experience of how universities work. *Traditional mentoring* is a replicatory model, often reinforcing the notion of an ‘ideal’ academic and a narrow range of ways to succeed.

Fewer people adopt a more developmental approach to mentoring, from here on referred to as *developmental mentoring*. This relationship-based and guiding approach still draws on the knowledge and wisdom of the other person (colleague, mentor, supervisor etc), but leaves much more room for the mentee to work out their own way forward. This approach is more responsive to the individual, the current context including funding regime and employment possibilities (inside and outside academia), and more adaptive to the ongoing changes in higher education. It is a more future-proof and agile approach. This style of mentoring can be more demanding of the mentor’s time and requires greater skill.

3.2 Problems with current mentoring practices

Traditional mentoring works best for mentees, PhD students or supervisees, who can (and want to) follow in the footsteps of their mentor/supervisor/Professor and thus build a similar career. However, it works less well for those who aren’t able or don’t want to follow this path. Differences in age, gender, context (e.g., funding regimes, employment prospects), career mobility, aspirations, personal circumstances etc, all undermine the effectiveness and thus appropriateness of this approach. It can be alienating and contribute to feelings of not belonging and not having what it takes to succeed.

Developmental mentoring is less common in academia. For many this is an unfamiliar approach to mentoring, and one they have not personally experienced. In addition, they may not have had the opportunity to develop the skills required to be a developmental mentor or may find this approach too time consuming.

The complexity of building a successful academic career within a competitive career structure, the lack of diversity in career paths that have been seen as successful, and the time-poor nature of academia, have all contributed to reinforcing the predominance of the traditional mentoring approach. However, developmental mentoring is required to broaden and re-define pathways to success, to achieve more equitable, diverse and inclusive universities, and to adapt to an ever-changing landscape.

3.3 Sponsorship approaches

Sponsorship is critical for academic progression and success, as it provides access to the right opportunities at the right time. These opportunities are required early in academic

careers and are critical to employment outcomes after PhD completion⁵ and in establishing a lasting academic career. Postgraduate students and junior colleagues are particularly dependent on senior colleagues for many of these opportunities e.g., inclusion on grants, opportunities to contribute to book chapters, teaching opportunities, introductions to the right people in the field, etc. For academics at the early career stage, senior colleagues who are closely aligned in the discipline make particularly suitable sponsors.

Traditional sponsorship, much like traditional mentoring draws on past models of success, often assumes what is best for the individual and provides opportunities that work best for those able to tread a more normative linear career path. *Developmental sponsorship* is more responsive to individual needs, crafting more diverse paths to success, and is more focussed on providing the right opportunity at the right time for the individual.

We know that access to sponsorship is highly variable in universities, ranging from brilliant to entirely absent, and that the absence of sponsorship can be career-breaking, often resulting in stagnation and exit.

Sponsorship practices play a critical role in determining who succeeds in meeting their career aspirations in and beyond academia.

3.4 Problems with current sponsorship practices

Sponsorship within academia is currently largely ad-hoc, unstructured and left to the initiative of individual leaders and supervisors. Some see sponsorship as discretionary, while others consider it as a systematic duty (i.e., a responsibility they have to all the staff and postgraduate researchers they supervise).

Informal processes that lack accountability, accompanied by a lack of transparency, increase the risk of bias (particularly affinity bias), which can result in winners and losers. Women and minority groups are most at risk of missing out in this situation.

Organisational rewards are often more aligned to individual success, and leaders are not necessarily recognised or valued for their development of others. This works against leaders developing inclusive and developmental sponsorship practices, which takes more reflection, time, and effort to tailor to individual needs.

Not all academic leaders are equally well positioned to offer sponsorship, perhaps due to flow-on effects from their own lack of sponsorship. They may have, for example, limited international academic networks or less access to funding.

⁵ Dever, Maryanne, Laffan, Warren, Boreham, Paul, Behrens, Karin, Haynes, Michele, Western, Mark, and Kubler, Matthias (2008). Gender differences in early post-PhD employment in Australian Universities: The influence of PhD experience on women's academic careers: Final report. Action Plan for Women Employed in Universities 2006-10. St Lucia, Qld, Australia: University of Queensland.

Sponsorship can also be problematic when it is motivated by the needs/desires of the sponsor, rather than the recipient. Tasks that are delegated without consideration of the benefits to the recipient is just delegation, and sometimes this is required. However thoughtful delegation may be sponsorship. Dressing delegation up as sponsorship, that is selling it as a good opportunity to meet the needs of the 'sponsor' can be exploitative, have negative career outcomes and lead to long-term resentment and conflict.

These potential disparities in sponsorship capacity, motivations and susceptibility to bias highlight the need for formalised expectations and processes to support sponsorship.

3.5 The role of programs in facilitating mentoring and sponsorship

Mentoring programs are a popular intervention in higher education, and indeed within the University of Melbourne. They have a valuable place, assisting in building mentoring and sponsorship skills and practices. They often provide access to senior people as *formal mentors* (matched and assigned), and peer mentoring can provide access to peers in other parts of the faculty or institution. These relationships would not otherwise naturally occur and have a number of advantages. They can provide invaluable mentoring and occasionally sponsorship, strengthen networks, provide fresh perspectives, and are devoid of any conflicts of interest or competition that can occur closer to home.

Such programs strengthen the web of enabling relationships but are not a replacement for the *informal mentoring relationships* (occurring naturally without being 'matched') within the discipline that are so essential to career progress. Neither can they replace the role of the supervisor as a primary mentor and sponsor of GR students and staff.

Leaders play a critical role in creating workplace structures and cultures that can facilitate and support the development of these informal discipline-based relationships, and support supervisors in their role.

4 What are we aspiring to in SEFS?

4.1 A healthy ecosystem

Mentoring and sponsorship work as a network of relationships that support the career health and function of each person and supports the growth of the school. Salient to our school, this is much like the root systems of trees (plant and fungi) that provide nourishment to the individual tree (a person and their career) and communicate and support the growth of neighbouring trees in a community to develop the health of the forest (school).

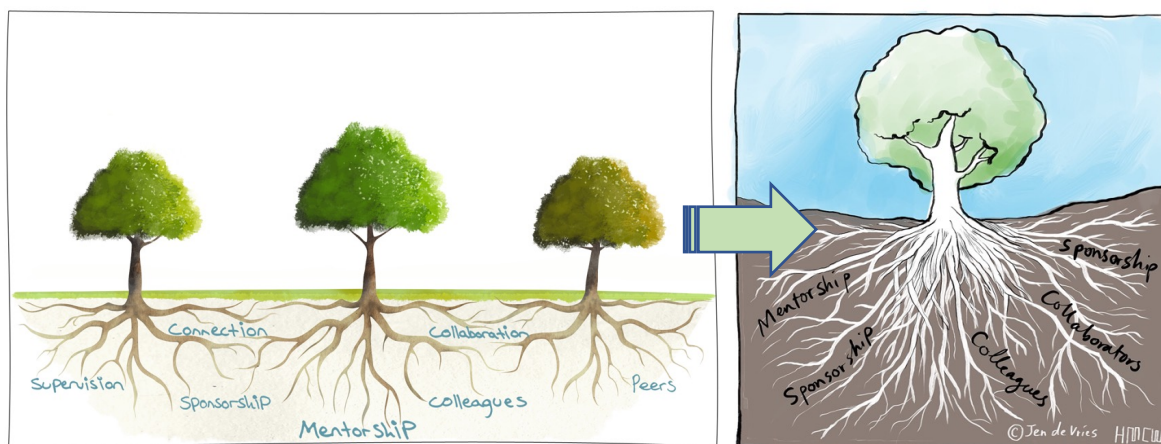


Figure 3. Mentoring and sponsorship create a healthy career ecosystem, which in turn leads to healthy individuals (images: Scott McKendrick, Hamish McWilliam © Jen de Vries).

A healthy ecosystem of developmental mentoring and sponsorship provide benefits to those who receive them, to those who provide them, and to creating an inclusive and enabling culture within the organisation. Given this, effective mentoring and sponsorship will create happier and more productive staff and teams within our School. They will enhance career trajectories and flexibility. Indeed, local and international examples show that groups with a strong culture of supporting the careers of others consistently have high *performance*. Both the providers and recipients of sponsorship in these groups tend to have better career track records.

Building this healthy ecosystem is a co-responsibility, where the individual, supervisors, leaders, and the practices of the school all contribute. Individuals understand the role of mentoring and sponsorship in careers, are proactive in building webs of enabling relationships, and recognise they are both receivers and givers of sponsorship.

Mentoring and sponsorship is understood to be everyone’s responsibility, while still recognising that some have more capacity than others. A cascade model that engages everyone is encouraged, where leaders set the tone, and colleagues mentor and sponsor peers and more junior colleagues, at all levels.

Within this ecosystem, everyone can build a customised career inside or outside academia. They are supported to think and reflect, make strategic choices and be proactive, in line with their personal circumstances, ambitions, and disciplinary interests. They have access to opportunities that support their aspirations wherever possible.

We thus want to create a culture where effective mentoring and sponsorship are available to all staff and graduate researchers within SEFS.

4.2 Conceptual framework: the *de Vries model*

The de Vries model pairs developmental mentoring with developmental sponsorship. However, rather than seeing mentoring and sponsorship as something that occurs just between individuals, the model includes elements of an ecosystem (or *scaffolding*) that will support and enable mentoring and sponsorship practices. The work of building the scaffolding and the enabling mentoring and sponsorship practices become shared between individuals, supervisors, leaders, and the school as a community.

4.2.1 A developmental approach to mentoring and sponsorship

The School recognises the need to move away from the more traditional approaches to mentoring and sponsorship towards developmental mentoring paired with sponsorship. This requires a solid foundation or scaffolding, as indicated below.

While individual staff and groups may already be aligned with a developmental approach, it will still require significant changes in how individuals, supervisors, and leaders across SEFS think about careers and cultures, and how the school supports careers to make this a more universally adopted approach.

The opportunity – and indeed arguably the obligation – for SEFS, is to ensure that all staff in SEFS have access to high levels of development mentoring and sponsorship. Each aspect of the de Vries model and what can be aspired to is outlined below.

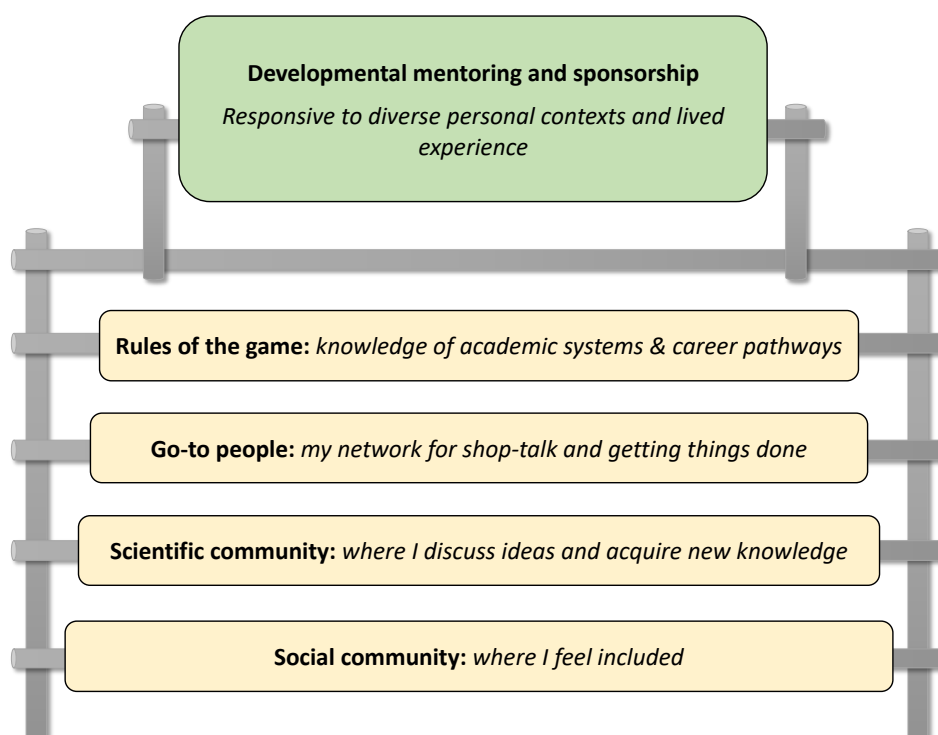


Figure 4. The de Vries model for building a developmental approach to career mentoring and sponsorship. Yellow boxes represent the scaffolding that supports developmental mentoring and sponsorship.

Developmental mentoring can occur in different contexts and with different colleagues. It may be part of a supervisory relationship, take place during a coffee chat between peers, or be part of the performance development review process. These conversations are based on establishing a trusting relationship, providing time and a safe space to explore current issues and future aspirations. The underlying assumption is that the person can be guided and supported to find their own way forward, rather than being advised what to do. Sponsorship needs may emerge during this process, leading to the next step of identifying these needs and finding suitable sponsors. Sponsorship may be provided by the mentor, but this needn't always be the case.

Developmental sponsorship can be a collaborative, legitimised practice, where all leaders are expected and enabled to sponsor. The culture is driven by the desire to provide the right sponsorship at the right time, and at all career stages, so that everyone can thrive and reach their potential. Opportunities may be allocated to the person most in need of a development opportunity and may be used to support a broader range of individuals and career paths. This approach to sponsorship is a more reflective and intentional practice and can include checks and balances regarding inherent biases.

Developmental sponsorship is an inclusive practice that prioritises equity in providing opportunities to the wider community, rather than confining opportunities to those who best fit past models of academic career success.

It is acknowledged sponsorship takes time, work, leadership deliberations, and resources. Leaders and senior staff must work together to ensure people do not fall through the cracks. The School must put appropriate policies and practices in place to strengthen a developmental culture and support mentoring and sponsorship practices, for example by placing a greater emphasis on these approaches in the selection of leaders, PDR processes, and through supervisory arrangements. Furthermore, implementation of developmental approaches to sponsorship requires that leaders and supervisors are (1) supported in developing inclusive sponsorship practices, (2) held accountable, and (3) valued and rewarded for excellence in M&S efforts and achievements.

Sponsorship must be visible and transparent, openly discussed, expectations clarified, and gaps identified and rectified where possible. This optimisation of sponsorship is essential to improving the performance and effectiveness of individuals and the organisation as a whole.

4.2.2 Scaffolding for building a developmental mentoring & sponsorship culture

Social community

A strong social community lays the foundation for people to feel they belong and can be their authentic selves at work. Particularly in difficult times, it helps us to care for and support each other because we know each other's circumstances and needs. A sense of belonging helps to build safety, trust, and connection. Inclusive social community breaks down the notion of "in" and "out" groups and contributes to dissolving affinity bias, as all people become known. Social community supports scientific community.

For SEFS, a strong social community will involve strengthening relationships both within each campus and between them, as well as within each discipline and across them. Doing so will enable the formation of communities that create a safe and supportive social structure across the school.

Scientific community

A healthy scientific community builds knowledge and skills, enables and welcomes contributions from people at all levels, breaks down disciplinary or group silos, creates linkages between people, and can contribute to building interdisciplinarity. It can act as a safety net, ensuring individuals are not totally reliant on their supervisor or group, while building connections between and reliance on peers not just senior academics. It is a place where it is safe to do blue-sky thinking, where new ideas can be tested, and independent thinking is encouraged and developed.

Go-to people

Identifying go-to people within schools and faculty can help reduce the frustration of navigating unfamiliar administrative tasks or apprehension of tackling new roles, all of which contribute to workload stress. This requires building rapport between academic, teaching and professional staff through informal catch-ups, deliberate induction processes and creating a culture of a cohesive School community.

Having a range of approachable go-to people builds connection and collegiality, improves the sharing of know-how and allows people to get on with their job effectively. It can create innovation across organisational units and contribute to building a supportive culture where good citizenship is valued.

Rules of the game

Building a successful and sustainable academic career is complex and requires an understanding of various written and unwritten rules, for example PDR and promotion processes, finding and maintaining relationships with mentors, sponsors, and collaborators, effectively engaging with external partners, etc. This understanding underpins and enables a

strategic approach to careers, where people can make informed choices regarding their careers and are active agents in building their careers.

Why is all this important to SEFS?

In the generic sense, having a body of academic staff and students who are well mentored and whose career development is well sponsored by others, will both (i) enhance their own job satisfaction and wellbeing, and (ii) increase performance in their roles. But beyond the generic (albeit important) reasons, we know from HR data, our mentoring and sponsorship workshops, and the Faculty of Science's 2021 Diversity and Inclusion Consultation, that there are several specific reasons why mentoring and sponsorship are important to SEFS and its future performance and culture.

5 Where are we at in SEFS?

The School HR data, the Faculty of Science's 2021 Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Consultation and the SEFS mentoring and sponsorship workshops provide several insights into the importance of mentoring and sponsorship for SEFS and for its future performance and culture. In section 5.1, we summarise the 2020 and 2022 HR data (the latter after QAECO had joined SEFS) and the outputs of the Faculty's 2021 D&I Survey to provide insights on important implications and lessons for mentoring and sponsorship in SEFS. In section 5.2, we present the 2021 SEFS mentoring and sponsorship workshop data to examine current experiences of mentoring and sponsorship within SEFS staff.

5.1 Staff profile and survey data

Career precarity and opportunity

Based on May 2022 HR data, only 31% of SEFS academics are in continuing positions, clearly indicating that career precarity is a significant issue. It is an issue that is unevenly spread between genders, with, for example, only 21% of women in continuing positions, compared with 39% of men. Almost 70% of continuing positions, largely teaching and research roles, are held by male staff. Senior staff are more secure than junior staff, with Level E staff the most secure (Figure 5).

The ongoing lack of secure employment, particularly for junior staff, suggests a need to prepare junior staff (PhDs, ECRs) for a diversity of career paths, noting that failing to do so could lead to disillusionment, stress, and associated under-performance.

This level of precarity is a risk not only to the individuals, but to the core tasks of SEFS in teaching and research and as a research partner.

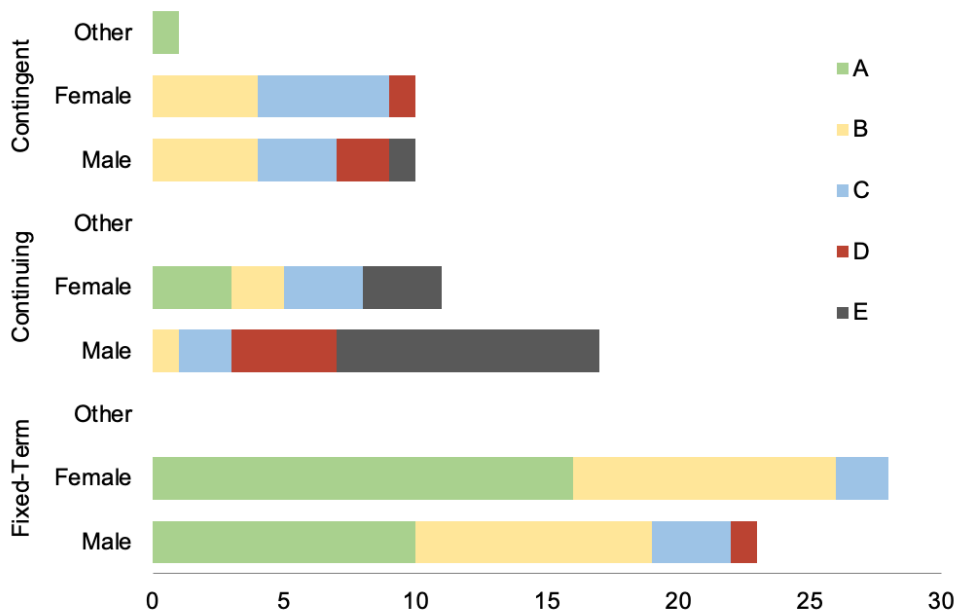


Figure 5. SEFS academic staff profile: Men/women/other by employment type and academic level (data from May 2022). *Contingent* means a continuing position that depends on research funding (and is thus in reality a hybrid between fixed-term and continuing).

Gender and diversity

Based on the May 2022 data, women are under-represented at senior levels (D and E), irrespective of position type (Figure 5). In addition, the Faculty D&I survey shows that the diversity profiles of junior and senior staff are markedly different, suggesting that only certain types of staff are thriving within the School/Faculty. Respondents felt that many staff simply didn't understand bias or discrimination and were unaware of how the existing systems prioritise those with privilege.

Mentoring and sponsorship are both susceptible to bias and discrimination and are processes that can entrench privilege. However, they can be part of the solution.

Supervision load

HR data in 2020 also showed that SEFS supervisory responsibilities are concentrated within a small number of senior male staff. The current gender imbalance in supervision at least partly reflects the heavy supervision load of the head of School (male) and that most current senior staff are male. Concentrated supervision load might also align with leadership and grant funding responsibilities. In any case, the data indicate a potentially heavy mentoring and sponsorship load for a relatively small number of staff.

Concentrated supervisory loads may be unrealistic and suggest the need to re-assess supervisory allocation, to involve more staff, particularly women, as well as building a stronger ecosystem whereby staff are less reliant on their supervisor to meet all mentoring and sponsorship needs.

Stress

The Faculty D and I Consultation identified high levels of stress, primarily due to workload, caring responsibilities, and insecure employment. This trifecta is impacting a significant number of people in the SEFS profile. A high proportion of SEFS staff at levels B and C reported feeling highly stressed (88%), and high proportions of stress was reported across the school (81% amongst people with disabilities, 79% in LGBTQA, 72% in women and 60% in men). Only 50% of staff felt supported. Junior status intersected with gender, and cultural background, with women (72%), and those who came to SEFS from outside Australia found to be even more stressed.

Staff who are overloaded and stressed are even more in need of strong ecosystems of mentoring and sponsorship.

Belonging

D&I survey results show that 77% of staff and 64% of students agree that they belong in the School. Those who experienced the least belonging included people from non-western backgrounds (56%), GLBQA+ (64%), and those who spoke another language at home (50%).

A lack of belonging in the workplace undermines individuals' capacity to contribute and can be addressed through mentoring and sponsorship

Mentoring & development opportunities

D&I survey results show that approximately half of the staff from the Faculty had mentors (54%), and only 28% of staff mentor people from under-represented groups. Importantly, more than half the staff surveyed felt that opportunities for development were not evenly spread throughout staff.

Inequitable distribution of sponsorship creates divisions (winners and losers) that are detrimental to the morale and performance of individuals within the Faculty/School. This is a problem.

5.2 Staff experience of M&S within SEFS

As part of the development of our approach to career mentoring and sponsorship in SEFS, the working group conducted workshops to understand the experiences of SEFS academics. We used the de Vries model (Figure 4) to identify key experiences and challenges in career progression, mentoring and sponsorship for SEFS staff. Data were collected in two online workshops in 2021, one with 22 level A-C participants and the other with 18 Level D–E participants. The data generated from these workshops were both qualitative and quantitative, and provided valuable insights about the experiences of SEFS staff for each of the factors outlined in the de Vries model (Figure 6).

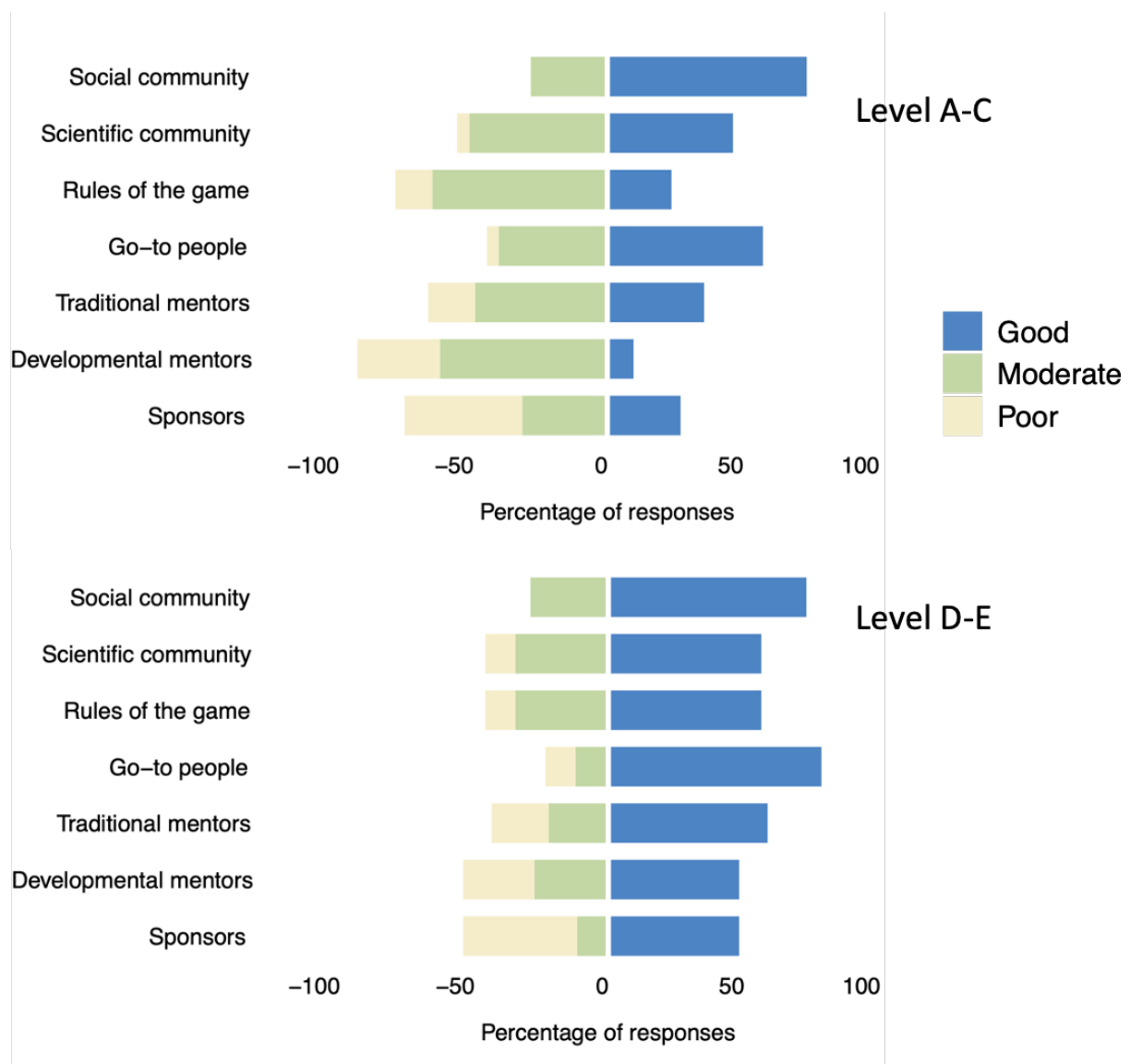


Figure 6. Response data to surveys conducted in two on-line workshops by the working group with SEFS academic staff in 2021, combined for levels A-C (top), and D-E (bottom).

Overall, the data show that there is considerable room for improvement for all levels of staff, with some distinct differences between level A to C and level D to E staff. Ideally all staff would rate each item as good, shown here in blue, with all ratings of poor of particular concern.

Level A to C staff rate social community the highest, go-to people the next highest and developmental mentoring the lowest. Of the first 4 items (*scaffolding*) it appears that the relationships developed in the social and scientific community are not translating into staff learning the rules of the game.

There is a disparity between access to traditional mentoring vs developmental mentoring, with more traditional mentoring on offer. Approximately a third of staff are experiencing good sponsorship. However, sponsorship is almost entirely lacking for more than a third of

staff with the highest poor rating of all items. There are a small number of staff rating all mentoring and sponsorship as poor, suggesting they are almost devoid of supervisory or leadership support in building their career within SEFS. Some A-C staff get more sponsorship than developmental mentoring, suggesting their sponsorship is aligned to developing a traditional career.

Level D and E staff have a more consistent good rating across all items, and particularly social community and networks of go to people. This would be expected as many of these staff have continuing and longstanding employment with SEFS. However, some still rate rules of the game as OK or poor, suggesting this remains a career-long process, where different layers of the university need to be understood with increasing seniority. Of most concern is the lack of mentoring and sponsorship experienced by these senior staff. Almost half rated sponsorship as poor. Some senior academics were ambivalent about the need for sponsorship at their career stage, while others experienced it as a gap.

All staff have the highest scores for social community, suggesting this is a foundation on which to intentionally build some of the other scaffolding items. Sponsorship was scored as less than OK by half of all staff.

The qualitative data from across the workshops generated key themes for career progress:

- Participants identified that **Early career sponsorship** was essential to career progression.
- Participants discussed the importance of sponsorship as being a **transparent process**, both for those giving and those receiving. This transparency can prevent people from being excluded as well as acknowledging those who offer sponsorship.
- Participants identified that **part-time status and precarious employment** can be a challenge to career progression.
- Participants from the Level A-C group discussed that the actions and **ideas of men get talked about and highlighted more** than women and gender diverse.
- Participants shared that there was a **culture and focus on “figuring career progression out for yourself”**. For many, it was not something that was discussed in the school or shared. This led to isolation for some.
- Participants shared that there were two critical career stage points:
 1. Securing a Level A position. This is often very difficult for researchers to do and without it can be a significant challenge for developing a career.
 2. Promotion from Level C to D. There was the perception that getting category 1 funding was critical to leveraging this transition and Category 1 funding success can be low for women/gender diverse people.

What can we conclude?

Experiences of mentoring and sponsorship within SEFS are mixed, and the high levels of career precariousness within the School (and within the University more broadly) reinforce the need for a responsive and flexible approach, suited to the context and opportunities of each person. That mentoring and sponsorship will need to grow with the person being sponsored (and thus with the evolutions in their career). This may come from within the School but, given the need to provide flexibility for career paths beyond academia, mentoring and sponsorship from outside should be a consideration.

6 Where to from here? Recommendations for SEFS

Mentoring and sponsorship (M&S) that serves the ongoing development and growth of the School of Ecosystem and Forest Sciences requires key supports, roles and processes within the School. Four key areas have been identified as needing focus are: capacity building, career paths, supervision, and processes.

1. Capacity building

Building the School's M&S capacity requires an ongoing M&S program that is financially and logistically supported into the future.

The SEFS M&S program needs to support the diverse career pathways of PhD, early career, and mid and late-career staff, involving all academic staff in the School. It will require workshops and initiatives to build awareness and skills of developmental mentoring and sponsorship and include scaffolding activities to build enabling networks across disciplines. The support that is offered will need to consider diversity and inclusion e.g., carers, part-timers, diverse cultures, etc

Some of the areas for capacity building include:

- Diversity training for leaders and supervisors
- Mentoring skills – all levels (including GR students, professional staff)
- Developmental mentoring and sponsorship specifically for supervisors and leaders
- Peer mentoring program (with groupings to include specialist pathways e.g., academic specialist, teaching specialist)

- Incorporation of developmental mentoring and sponsorship awareness and skills into other development opportunities e.g., supervisory training, leadership development.

2. Career paths

The second component of the program requires the valuing of and seeing success in different **career paths** and models of being connected to academia, such as collaborations, interdisciplinarity and movement between sectors. Key recommended actions here are:

- Acknowledging the current nature of the School's academic profile including the precariousness of many positions, minimal diversity at upper levels, and increasingly challenging work loads – makes it imperative that the School's M&S program is fit for purpose to mentor and sponsor diverse individuals and different (non-traditional) career paths
- Increasing the visibility and recognition of diverse career paths both within and outside academia so that they are seen to be equally successful and equally valued (i.e., moving beyond a singular career path)
- Providing scaffolding to support and enhance teaching specialist and academic specialist roles including ways to connect across the School and Faculty
- Focusing beyond academia to increase opportunities to build connections and working relationships with other sectors including mechanisms for improving the mobility between academia, government, and industry.

3. Supervision

The third component recognises the current concentration of supervisory roles amongst a small number of staff and the fragility of (over) reliance on a single supervisor. Key recommended actions here are:

- Ensuring that SEFS' supervisors are supported and equipped to foster developmental mentoring and sponsorship that is guided by this supporting framework.
- Examining alternative models of supervision with the intention of improving collaboration, collegiality and sponsorship. For example, supervision teams could increase opportunities for more people to develop mentoring and sponsorship skills, broaden connections across the school and enable sponsorship. Utilising supervision teams can normalise career conversations, introduce greater transparency and provide inspiration for practice.
- Considering the supervision, mentoring and sponsorship needs of new RHD students and staff when allocating roles, and simultaneously address scaffolding needs (e.g., go to people, diversity networks) as part of the induction process.

4. Processes

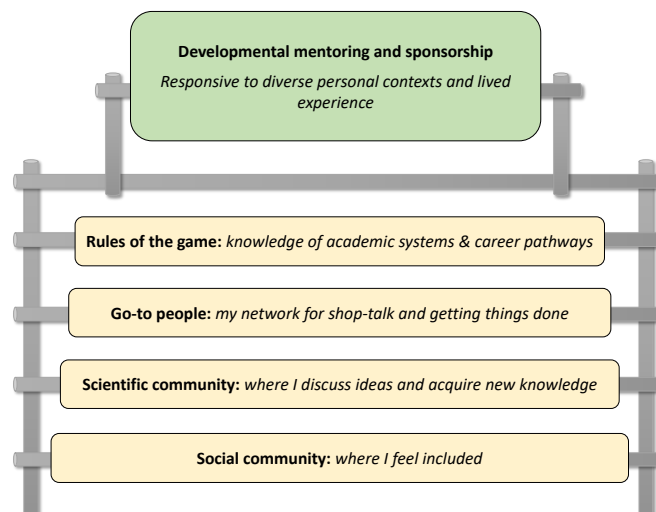
In order to implement developmental mentoring and sponsorship in SEFS there is a need for the formalisation and transparency of various **processes** (and responsibilities for them):

- Strengthen the professional development review (PDR) process as integral to building developmental culture.
 - Ensure that developmental conversations are integral to the process
 - Use the PDR process to identify opportunities for providing improved support to supervisors in their mentoring and sponsorship practice.
 - Identify and rectify any gaps
 - Use the triennial review process to build connections for researchers across the School.
- Ensure clear and systematic processes are used to distribute opportunities such as committee memberships, access to travel funds, expressions of interest (replacing taps on the shoulder), establishing minimum agreed expectations, having selection criteria and processes.
- Ensure process for identification and open communication of opportunities such as awards and university-wide programs for all levels.
- Establish a systematic and transparent process for inclusion on grants.
- Ongoing identification and rectification of processes that undermine the School's commitment to a fair, open and transparent way of doing sponsorship and developing all staff
- Establishment of a SEFS M&S steering group to enable ongoing momentum, review and accountability for the School. This steering group can be supported by different school committees, because developmental mentoring and sponsorship in SEFS is an all of School process.

On the following page, we provide a quick 'reference-card' of roles and responsibilities for Mentoring and Sponsorship for:

- *Individuals*
- *Supervisors*
- *Senior staff and committee members*
- *Senior Leaders (School Head and Executive)*
- *Faculty and University*

Academic Career Mentoring and Sponsorship: Roles, Responsibilities, and Actions



Development mentoring and sponsorship (M&S) involves roles for all members of the University community, and actions relating to both M&S itself but also the underlying scaffolding (yellow in the above figure). In the following table, roles and actions are cumulative from left to right (acknowledging the multiple roles of individuals within and beyond a School). Enabling is offered from right to left (acknowledging that the Faculty and University support the School, which in turn supports senior staff, committees, and supervisors to support individuals).

	Individuals	Supervisors	Senior staff and committee members	Senior leaders (School Head and Executive)	Faculty and University
Role	Active participants in careers of self and others <i>All staff and students share responsibility in developing the careers of their colleagues and should expect the same for themselves</i>	Career enablers and relationship builders <i>Supervisors are attuned to diverse career pathways and are responsive to individual circumstances and aspirations</i>	Enablers of organisational culture <i>Senior staff and committees facilitate and maintain enabling and developmental organisational culture</i>	Visionaries and builders of organisational structure and culture <i>Senior leaders build and implement culture and structures to facilitate robust M&S practices</i>	Provider of organisational support and incentives to drive behaviours <i>The University ensures adequate resourcing, and the appropriate values, priorities and policies are in place to fulfill diverse aspirations</i>

	Individuals	Supervisors	Senior staff and committee members	Senior leaders (School Head and Executive)	Faculty and University
Actions: Mentoring and sponsorship (M&S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop awareness and skills of developmental M&S • Seek out and support sponsorship opportunities with peers, supervisors and colleagues irrespective of seniority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in ongoing discussions and learning about M&S, with a keen focus on developmental practices • Develop an intentional and reflective approach to sponsorship • Develop awareness of D&I issues • Practice active listening to understand supervisee aspirations and provide tailored support (to identify mentors, sponsors, career pathways and opportunities within and outside academia) • Convey the concept of career co-responsibility to supervisees • Identify potential external mentors and sponsors where appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for all staff and students to build awareness of D&I and M&S culture and practices • Identify how their committee can contribute to the work of enabling M&S • Ensure inclusiveness and accessibility of opportunities, keeping an eye on equity, transparency, and bias • Be aware of and facilitate collaboration between School and Faculty committees to build enabling cultures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and rectify gaps in M&S and any hindrances to building within-School enabling cultures • Fund M&S programs (existing and new if needed), and advertise M&S programs offered across the University • Provide frameworks, set expectations, oversee accountability, and support inclusion of M&S contributions in the PDR process • Develop structures and processes that enhance distributed and inclusive leadership and supervision • Recognise, value and reward excellent M&S efforts and achievements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-level messaging to support a University-wide culture of M&S and the valuing of diverse career paths • Increase the diversity of Academic Career Benchmark Indicators for mentoring, and develop indicators for sponsorship • Refine PDR and promotion processes to support M&S activities • Ensure equitable M&S opportunities
Actions: Scaffolding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build one's network within and beyond the school • Participate in what is offered by one's social & scientific community at the university 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support supervisees to connect with and attend a diverse range of School/Faculty/University programs and events, and network with industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build social and scientific community, within and across areas of school • Lead by example and participate in events and programs that build the social and scientific community • Create opportunities for all staff to expand their community by providing links beyond the School/Faculty/University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endorse initiatives that strengthen the social and scientific community • Ensure the School provides appropriate induction/onboarding processes for new staff/students. • Advocate for creation of opportunities across universities and with industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a diverse, inclusive, and connected academic community • Provide opportunities, guidance to pursue alternate academic/ non-acad. career paths • Create cross-Faculty networking opportunities • Create opportunities for networking across universities and with industry