

# What's your superpower?

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There are many people in the City who do not realise they have a superpower. A lawyer with imposter syndrome who had palpitations if she was asked for advice outside her specialist area of law, spent a few hours a week helping a designer run his studio.

To the designer, the lawyer's ability to scan detailed information quickly, prioritise and order it, create an action plan and succinct communications, was a thing of wonder. The lawyer didn't give it a second thought. She didn't know she had a superpower.

A visual artist sat puzzled watching a group of managers in a large corporation grappling with a problem. So many words without seeming to get anywhere. The artist's ability to encapsulate ideas in diagrams and spark unexpected connections helping the managers generate new solutions, was a revelation. The artist had a superpower.

It is easy for an individual to take for granted their expertise and experience when the individual is surrounded by others with similar training and a shared work culture. At the Centre for Commercial Law Studies within Queen Mary University of London, our postgraduate law students already show signs of approaching the world in a certain way – thinking like a lawyer. This is a blessing they can put to the use of others. Students give free legal advice to start-ups including creative enterprises via [qLegal](#), Queen Mary's pro bono commercial law clinic. An example of the commercial world providing direct practical support to the creative sector.

However, this is only a small part of the story as the blessing may also be a curse. Habitual ways of thinking can stultify and constrain. To help our lawyers and our clients realise their greater potential we purposely break down silos and encourage cross-disciplinary learning. It starts from the moment we train the law students. Our workshops incorporate elements of music and movement at key moments to enhance the students' focus and bring a new energy. Even the more introverted report the benefit.

The students are also taught the importance of storytelling and the way that can enable them to connect with a given audience. Essential for making complex legal information meaningful to others. They are trained in Design Thinking, and work with students from across Queen Mary's faculties applying this process to solve real problems for real clients. They learn the world is too nuanced to see an outcome in terms of binary success or failure. The impact is profound and you can see shoulders drop.

Collaborating with and learning from others who think and behave differently is an enriching experience for the students and produces a better outcome for the clients.

The advantages of this type of cross-fertilisation have long been recognised. Numerous reports on the Future of Work have flagged the need for inter-disciplinary collaboration and diversity of thought, interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence and creative problem-solving. Numerous articles have highlighted the benefits of a more holistic approach to wellbeing and practical support for people across all sectors.

The challenge is that institutional structures set up in a different time have not changed sufficiently to support this in practice. While businesses have talked about their desire for creativity and innovation, standard practices of onboarding ('this is how we work here'), a focus on a short-term cost-benefit analysis, and reporting lines and practices that can perpetuate a fear of failure, have meant the creativity project has been doomed before it starts. It's not for lack of talent.

It is too soon to know the full impact of the pandemic but it would be a missed opportunity if things reverted wholly to business as usual. We are encouraging our students, the future workforce, to explore new ways to get to know and understand their neighbour, to get to know and understand themselves, to seek new ways to collaborate and learn from each other, to recognise and use their superpowers. It is inspiring to know that cultural and commercial organisations, the current workforce, are doing the same.