



## Case Study C: Through the Looking Glass<sup>1</sup>

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Pilot Group: **Health Professions Educators**

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### Professional Identity Group & Context

The RCSI based pilot focusing on Health Professions Educators kicked off with the introductory session on Friday January 27th. The group consisted of 8 educators from pre-clinical and clinical areas of the medicine curriculum; Nursing, and Physiotherapy. A number of members of the group had completed the RCSI PG Diploma in Health Professions Education; one member had previously completed an educator programme in another jurisdiction, and another had just completed a Doctorate in Education focusing on reflective practice. Therefore, there was a certain level of common foundational understanding of the various aspects of professional development. However, the exact format of this project was new to us all, and so there was a sense of starting on a journey of discovery together.

### Approach taken by professional identity group to support the implementation of the PDF

#### Main needs of the group

The majority of my core group were able to attend the initial briefing sessions, and we had some additional participants from other pilots adding to the interprofessional mix and the discussions. Roisin and I had some time beforehand to chat about the session which was very useful for me in clarifying some areas, and I was also able to update her on the group and provide her with some insight into their teaching contexts and backgrounds. By the time the session started, I was certainly feeling an increased confidence in being able to field any participant queries and concerns in the future. That feeling was increased by the very clear and comprehensive overview which Roisin provided during the session, and really helped to further enthuse the group as they could see that the process was both feasible and useful for them. I provided a very brief overview of what would be happening next. Throughout the process, I tried to emphasise the role of the participants as co-creators in future iterations of the framework and that their insights would be valuable in terms of informing our understanding of disciplinary contexts and needs. This, I feel, acted as an important enabler as it created a sense of ownership and personalisation of the process.

I adopted a flexible approach to organising meetings. A fixed, set schedule of meetings was not really feasible, as some participants had busy clinical roles alongside their teaching roles, and all had heavy teaching/research commitments. This usually necessitated dividing the group for multiple meetings in order to ensure that everyone experienced a group conversation and reflection. We met every three weeks approximately.

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<sup>1</sup> With apologies to my group for adopting their presentation title!



### Motivation of participants

The participants were particularly interested in reflecting on the need to align with their own professional body CPD requirements, and the role of the framework in further highlighting and raising the value and visibility of teaching in the academy. From my perspective, it was fascinating to see the potential impact of the project resonating with the group, and there was certainly a sense of energy and enthusiasm from all.

### Support sessions

The facilitation style was a participatory one. We spent some time discussing the various domains of the Professional Development Framework; with most choosing to focus on Domains 1 & 2 as starting points. Some participants had written Teaching Philosophy Statements as part of their PG Diploma HPE work and so, were interested in revisiting them and analysing them from a fresh perspective. For those less familiar with Teaching Philosophy Statements, they benefited from the open and candid sharing of the philosophies of others, and a very rich peer exchange emerged. We used resources from the PG Diploma HPE programme for some of this reflection. Identity was also a key topic of discussion and reflection; what was identity in the context of the framework; can we “name” our disciplinary/educator identities; how do we balance multiple identities in the context of professional development? Some disciplinary specific work was useful here as a reference point (e.g. the work of Lynn Monrouxe on identity in medical education<sup>2</sup>). Participants were happy to choose their own media and tools for reflection, so again a participatory approach was utilised here, and our focus was more on the reflection process rather than the choice of tool or media. We did set up a page on the institutional VLE where resources could be shared, but in practice, most sharing occurred in the face to face sessions.

### Participants’ experience of the process

Participant reactions to the process were very focused on the opportunities for reflection, establishment of a community of learning and reflection (or re-establishment for some who had already been part of a professional development group) and the opportunity to focus on the role of the educator identity, and its value, in the academy. In the words of the group in their presentation (and from which I borrowed the title) “a little like Lewis Carroll’s Alice we need to step through the looking glass, and refocus our lens”.

### Key enablers, challenges and suggestions for the future

From an institutional perspective, it was important that clear lines of communication were established about the progress and process of the initiative. It was very helpful to have an opportunity to present on the initiative at our institutional Medicine & Health Sciences Board. Conversations have commenced in relation to the place of the PDF within the teaching space in the organisation, and this is a positive sign of continuing engagement. As the institution is currently working on a new strategy, it is timely that we focus on this in the wider context of professional development and support. Maintaining clear lines of communication with senior management on such an initiative is key to keeping the message central to discussions and future planning, and is a key enabler. The biggest challenge is, as always, time, and relates again to the wider discussions in relation to dedicated time and space for educator professional development. This must be a core focus in our efforts to embed such opportunities within our institutional frameworks. The biggest risk is that the rich learning from the initiative becomes lost in the return to the business of day to day operations. The participants in my group used the metaphor

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<sup>2</sup>Monrouxe LV. Identity, identification and medical education: Why should we care? *Med Educ.* 2010;44:40–9.



of growth from seedling to tree to describe their professional development journey, and it is a useful image to apply to the continuing development of the PDF within the institution. In their words “we are always and continuously returning to the acorn state in a process of renewal and re-growth. Just as the cycle of growth from acorn to tree continues, so via reflection and personal development, our imagination and creativity in relation to our teaching is awakened” The challenge is to maintain and support this creativity and imagination.