



## Case Study F: Creating Space for Professional Development

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Pilot Group: **Mixed (Academic, Librarian, Academic Developer)**

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### Professional Identity Group & Context

An event was advertised inviting NUI Galway staff to become involved in the PDF pilot group. The group was formed based on those who expressed interest/showed up. Most of the group were NUI Galway staff (including experienced academics and early career academics, one librarian and one academic developer) and one academic from GMIT. The group represented a range of disciplines, including Medicine, Science, Law, Gaeilge, Education.

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

The one common factor between all participants was an interest in personal professional development. Following the initial Kickstart workshop with Roisin Donnelly, the group met and agreed that we would meet for one hour every second week. The date of each meeting was decided (using doodle polls) from meeting to meeting. Lack of time was identified, throughout the pilot, as a deterrent to professional development, so it was important to limit meetings to 1 hour, and to be flexible with meetings.

We also agreed that we would discuss each of the five domains in turn, one each week, to give a broad overview of the framework. It was up to each person to decide which domain or domains they wanted to focus on.

In general, meetings took the form of:

- Any updates from the National Forum
- Review of the domain from the last session: how people had engaged; what questions or issues they considered; what evidence had been identified. Often members of the group would share their reflections verbally and use the meeting to articulate their thoughts on the domain and its elements.
- Introduction to the next domain and brief discussion on any immediate considerations related to it.
- Following the meeting, the mentor would share, by email, any resources that had been identified during the meeting.

The facilitation style was very much one of participation. The mentor avoided leading the conversation and took part as one of the participants.

The form of the PDP (Professional Development Portfolio) was usually discussed at every meeting, as well as thoughts on what might constitute evidence. A recurrent question was "Who is the portfolio for?". The answer – for myself. We discussed differences between the PDP and a Teaching Portfolio.

Some people chose to blog their PDP – either in an open or a private format. At one of the last meetings we shared, very quickly, some of the portfolios that had been developed.



Learning how to reflect was difficult for some members of the group, but they found the conversations within the meetings helpful. The formation of a community for professional development (i.e. the pilot group itself) emerged as being one of the most useful things for the participants. They found that they could discuss aspects of their professional development that could not be shared elsewhere. Various prompts for reflection were discussed and shared – leading to the “lightbulb moments” presentation.

In addition to the series of one-hour meetings, a “writing workshop” half day was organised, when a room was made available to the group to work on their PDPs. Not everyone was able to come to this. It was made a very informal, drop-in session.

### Enablers and challenges

The key enabler to the approach was providing time and space in a busy working environment to reflect on professional development. By blocking out one hour every two weeks, participants gave themselves permission to reflect on their role in supporting teaching and discuss with others.

The key challenge is time. Time and space for reflection is vital for each participants wellbeing and development. One hour every two weeks is not a huge commitment, and the discussions resulted in reflection happening between each meeting. However, the meeting times did not, and could not, support all members, and two potential participants left the pilot group because they could not commit.

On reflection, choose an approach that is flexible and suits the institutional context.

### Future plans

This mentor has already embarked on a new journey with a new group of participants, using much the same approach. PDF sessions have been scheduled every second Tuesday with a small group of academic staff, with lunch provided. This time, the original pilot group participants are also availing of the time and space, and sharing their experiences with the group as mentors, but also to progress further with their own development. The plan is to use the PACT digital badge framework, and to adapt it to suit the environment at NUIG.