

Talking trusted teaching – talking trusted middle leadership

Video transcript

Session overview (00:00 – 03:11)

Jac: Hello, welcome to this General Teaching Council for Scotland's 'Talking Trusted Teaching, Talking Trusted Middle Leadership' resource.

In this recorded session, we are connecting with the Standard for Middle Leadership using the lens of Section 2, Professional Knowledge and Understanding, and we will be putting a particular focus on aspects within 2.2, Professional Responsibilities.

This will be a professional dialogue that puts a spotlight on the role of middle leadership in terms of how we understand and demonstrate self-awareness and inspire and motivate others, in 2.2.2 in the Standard for Middle Leadership.

The themes that thread through this recorded conversation relate to the following professional illustrations in understanding and demonstrating self-awareness and inspiring and motivating others, which outline that as middle leaders we continually develop self-awareness.

We regularly challenge our thinking and practice through critical reflection and inquiry, and we manage ourselves and others effectively, supporting and enabling teacher professionalism through a commitment to collegial and collaborative practice.

We continue to look at building and sustaining professional and personal credibility by modelling our commitment to ongoing professional learning, supporting and enabling a culture of trust and respect, and finally, encouraging and enabling the development of leadership skills and capacities in others, and cultivating trust and respect among colleagues by creating leadership opportunities across and beyond the school.

This recorded event aims to offer a provocation for discussion for those in or aspiring to middle leadership roles. Drawing upon the outlined themes in professional responsibilities, in conversation, we will explore 4 key themes:

- Part 1, the role of the Standard for Middle Leadership as an underpinning framework to becoming, being and growing as a middle leader.
- Part 2, the professional and personal credibility of a middle leader as a lead learner, and the ways the Standard can support reflection on who we are becoming as leaders, not just what we are doing.
- Part 3, the middle leadership role in growing leadership skills and capacities in others.
- And finally, part 4, the professional responsibilities of middle leadership as a learner and as a leader for helping colleagues to engage meaningfully with the suite of Professional Standards.

Welcome: Introduction to speakers and overview (03:12 – 04:38)

Jac: Hello and welcome to Talking Trusted Teaching, Talking Trusted Middle Leadership. In this recorded session, we're connecting with the Standard for Middle Leadership through the lens of Section 2: Professional Knowledge and Understanding, with a particular focus on 2.2: Professional Responsibilities.

We'll in fact be drilling down into the area that looks at the role of middle leadership in understanding and demonstrating self-awareness and inspiring and motivating others.

Hello, I'm Jacqueline Morley, a Teaching Standards Education Officer here at the General Teaching Council for Scotland.

And I'm delighted to say I'm joined by Kathleen Kerrigan, who is a lecturer at the School of Education in the University of Glasgow. She has experience of leading and teaching a number of programmes, including the Postgraduate Certificate in Middle Leadership Management in schools and the MEd in Educational Leadership.

Kathleen taught in Scottish secondary schools for over 20 years. During this time, she held middle leadership posts. This probably grounded the focus of her recently completed doctoral thesis on 'Learning to lead, the leadership learning of secondary school middle leaders in Scotland.'

Kathleen, welcome and thank you for joining me.

Kathleen: Thank you, Jac, for that very warm welcome.

I'm really delighted to be joining you today to discuss middle leadership. It's a subject very close to my heart.

As you've said, I've worked as a middle leader for many years and I've maintained an interest in that level of leadership in my role at the university, where as you said, I teach middle leaders and those aspiring to the role

And I've also conducted research in that area.

So, thanks Jac.

Jac: It's great to talk to you.

So, this section is recorded in four parts, and we'll be clear to flag those up

Part 1 - The role of the Standard for Middle Leadership as an underpinning framework to 'becoming, being and growing' as a middle leader (04:40 – 08:32)

So, part 1. The Professional Standards provide a framework that supports what it means to become, to be and to grow as a teacher in Scotland.

So, Kathleen. Let's look at the first area of our conversation, the role of the Standard for Middle Leadership as an underpinning framework to that becoming, being and growing as a middle leader.

How do you see the Standard for Middle Leadership as a framework to guide our professional journey from aspiring to an experienced middle leader?

Kathleen: Yes, thanks Jac.

I think it might be helpful to begin by thinking about school middle leaders in Scotland and actually what we mean by that.

So, the term middle leader is used to describe a wide range of roles and these roles vary greatly in terms of their day-to-day practice and their levels of responsibility.

And within Scotland, we tend to assume that middle leaders are those who have formal leadership posts within that school leadership hierarchy. So they're located somewhere between head teachers and senior leaders and teaching colleagues.

And in practice, this also includes middle leaders in primary schools, secondary, specialist settings. It can involve leading a stage, a department or a faculty, leading an area of pupil support or leading a whole school developmental target.

So the roles and responsibilities of these people that we call middle leaders are broad in scope.

However, I would say what the Standard does is that it provides a framework, which effectively underpins the work of all of those middle leaders who I've just described there, regardless of their specific role or their level of responsibility, whether they're experienced or whether they're aspiring to the role.

By doing that, it provides a really clear articulation of what we expect our school middle leaders across Scotland to aspire to. It contributes to a consistency of understanding across the system about middle leadership as well.

And whether you're an aspiring or an experienced middle leader, the Standard for Middle Leadership therefore provides a developmental framework for evaluating your leadership practice, identifying strengths and identifying areas where you can continue to grow and develop as a leader.

Jac: I agree.

I feel you can really see the complexity of the middle leadership expressed in the Standard for Middle Leadership. And that perhaps reflects the voices of the middle leaders who contributed to writing this professional standard.

It talks about the different areas of responsibility a middle leader will have in addition to their enhanced pedagogical skills, because many of them are still closely collected to the classroom.

And I'm quoting from the Standard here... it says "this may include curriculum leadership, departmental faculty, pastoral leadership, leadership and additional support provision, leadership of interdisciplinary teams or projects or leadership of school improvement priorities."

Middle leaders have line management responsibilities for a team.

They could have a leader team delivering specific areas of provision or a team involved in developmental activities.

It's very, very diverse, as you said.

And the Standard for Middle Leadership helps to achieve consistency of understanding across all levels of the system and offers a shared language for middle leadership no matter where they work.

We can talk from Edinburgh to Highlands and we can still have that shared understanding.

Part 2 - The professional and personal credibility of a middle leader as the lead learner (08:35 – 25:08)

So, that leads us to part 2.

Let's look at the professional and personal credibility of the middle leader as the lead learner.

What are your thoughts around this? What does it mean to be recognised as the lead learner within our teams or our departments?

Kathleen: Yes, thanks Jac.

I would say there are probably two key dimensions to being a lead learner.

And it's that leadership of high quality learning and teaching.

And it's also the leadership of your own professional learning and development.

Research tells us that many middle leaders are appointed on the basis of their professional and personal credibility, particularly in relation to that teaching expertise.

Being a lead learner involves modelling high standards in all aspects of that middle leader role.

And of course, that includes modelling high quality classroom teaching, engaging all learners in learning, and using their knowledge of the context to ensure the best and most appropriate curricular and pedagogical provision for the children and the young people that they work with.

But that other important dimension of leading learning as a middle leader is the important work that they undertake to shape the rich learning culture for the pupils and the colleagues.

And this role is more nuanced because middle leading is highly relational and leading from within their teams brings both challenges and rewards.

So, a middle leader needs to know each colleague within their team and beyond. And they need to be able to carefully nurture those colleagues, their strengths, their areas for development.

They need to be able to inspire, challenge and support them towards ongoing improvement in the teaching and learning practice. But more than that, they also need to establish a reflective and productive culture where the working relationships across their team are such that it's the norm for teachers to share their practice and to learn from the practice of others.

Indeed, research tells us that one of the most important aspects of middle leading for colleague well-being and further professional learning is establishing a productive, collaborative learning environment where individuals feel valued and where they have opportunities to engage formally and

informally in collegial professional dialogue and where those discussions of areas of improvement are fairly routine. And where possible, that might generate some innovative and creative improvements that can be tried individually and collaboratively and evaluated. And then they can decide whether that's going to be embedded into practice or not, as the case may be.

So all of that can happen within that productive ethos of improvement.

I would say probably, to look at that second dimension of being a lead learner... through their own practice, a lead learner will also show that evaluative information is welcome and it's helpful. And they will model how they use that evaluative information to inform their next steps in practice and indeed in their own professional learning.

And this commitment will probably begin with a reflective stance, in which you constantly evaluate your practice to develop a knowledge and understanding of yourself, first and foremost, your strengths, your areas for development.

And these identified areas for development might be quite specific in relation to your area of responsibility, but something that's often overlooked and equally important, I would say, they should also relate to your leadership development.

So where are you as a leader and how are you developing in that area as well?

Jac: That's interesting you say that. I really agree.

One very useful starting point is the Standards for Middle Leadership self-evaluation coaching wheel.

It can be a really useful tool for reflection, self-evaluation, discussion, both in identifying strengths and potential areas for development and next steps in learning.

But it's probably makes sense if I try to share my screen...

Where the Standard for Middle Leadership is just below it, we have it in the Gaelic version, but also here you'll find the self-evaluation wheel for the Standard for Middle Leadership.

And I have this opened here and you can see that around the side of this are key aspects taken from the Standard for Middle Leadership.

And it uses a very straightforward coaching tool of scaling, so 0 to 10. 10 being, you know, highly competent, you've really nailed this, it's an area of expertise. And 0/1 is possibly, it's a very new area in your practice, it's an emerging part, you need to find out more about it. And you can map yourself on here using that scale of 1 to 10.

And the great thing is, whether it's a 2 or 5 or 7, it's my 2, my 5, my 7, it's my meaning. Why have I put that there? And there's some guidance here as well, which helps you show how to complete it. But it helps you be able to see areas that are really strong for you. and where you might want to go with those.

Can be very useful at the start of, say, a professional learning programme where you can take it as a baseline to say, well, I think I'm here and then have a look at the end of the professional learning to say, what areas have moved on, have developed, what's emerging practice that's coming out from that.

So, you can see here, this section, I think, if you can... "critically engage with policy, research and practice to inform, model, lead and promote a collaborative culture of professional learning." That's exactly what we're exploring here today in terms of that role of middle leadership.

So, it can be a really useful tool just to provide an area of focus to work out what my key strengths are.

So, it leads us to my next area in this section, which is how can middle leaders balance that dual role of being both a learner and a leader, remaining open to feedback while guiding others?

Kathleen: Yes, that's another great question, Jac.

So, I think middle leaders can model their commitment to being a learner, to their professional learning, by being authentic in their engagement with others and open about their areas for development and the steps that they're taking to address these.

For example, some students on our middle leadership programmes talk of their openness with colleagues when they return to the school about sharing highlights from their learning or aspects of policy or particular pieces of literature that they've found significant to the context or particularly interesting.

And I think that's an example of that openness about their learning and the fact that they are learners.

As we previously talked about, Jac, they need to be able to model their willingness to individually receive and use constructive feedback to improve their practice and ultimately, hopefully, with that shared aim of benefiting the children and young people that they work with.

So ideally, they will have middle, they'll have systems in place to formally gather feedback, self-evaluative information relating to themselves and indeed to their area of responsibility.

However, if they've been successful in that work, and I think this is where the coaching wheels come in, they can contribute to those constructive professional dialogues.

And if they've been successful in their work to nurture that collaborative culture, then giving and receiving constructive feedback formally and informally will be the norm across the team.

And those discussions may well be viewed as developmental and focused on improving practice rather than anything particularly personal.

And I briefly touched on the importance of middle leaders knowing their team members well. And when they do, I think another really important dimension of middle leadership is that they can be key facilitators in the process of sharing areas of strength and expertise across the team.

They can identify and nurture particular talents and the expertise of others, and they can provide opportunities for those individuals to share the knowledge and skills and practice that they have with colleagues or even allow them opportunities within the team to lead in those areas.

And I think what's important here is that open recognition that the middle leader can learn from the expertise of their colleagues demonstrates their commitment to learning and to being perceived by colleagues as a learner as well, but it also celebrates the knowledge and skills of others within the team.

And it gives them the opportunity to grow in confidence. It gives those individuals the opportunity to help establish their professional credibility. And it can help provide some experience of leadership as well if they've been invited to lead in that area.

Jac: It's interesting.

Within my team, we often reflect on the complexity of teaching and leadership. And at GTCS, that's set out in the idea of trusted teaching, which is the sort of banner we fly under for our five-year strategic plan.

And it incorporates the role of the Professional Standards and the Code of Professionalism and Conduct and the key role they play.

We talk about teaching as complex, relational, intellectual work that teachers and leaders work in relationships of authority and trust, which really plays out well in the role of middle leadership.

Teaching is rooted in highly specialist knowledge and skills. We're a degree qualified profession, you know, and people go on to leadership by having done and undertaken extended study, developing their professional learning.

And that idea that standards, ethics and values are core to what it means to be a teacher, and of course, then in setting that culture as a middle leadership for the teachers who are in their teams, their groups, they work alongside.

The standards set out the professional values and professional conduct along with the knowledge and understanding and the impact of this on our skills and ability.

And this really speaks to me of, say, my professional identity.

So that takes me to my question to explore.

In what ways does the Standard for Middle Leadership help us reflect on who we are becoming as leaders, not just what we are doing?

It's the being and the doing aspect. So how we're becoming as leaders, not just the actions.

Kathleen:

Yes, that's an interesting question, Jac. Thank you.

I would say from my middle leadership experience and from my research in this area that I know that when you ask a middle leader about their professional learning, they understandably focus on activities directly relating to their areas of responsibility, such as updates to subject information, to pedagogical approaches or indeed a new policy.

But as you mentioned, Jac, the Standards contained within that Standard for Middle Leadership are broad and varied and they can help individuals to look beyond those immediate priorities to consider the multiple other dimensions of what it means to lead at middle leader level in schools.

And they can draw from these when reflecting upon their practice and to plan their next steps in development as a middle leader.

So, for example, a quick glance at the professional responsibilities that are there in standard 2.2.2 moves us well beyond those task-focused responsibilities, and it shines a light upon the need to, for example, regularly reflect on our personal beliefs and our potential biases and our values, and to make sure that we're alert to any potential biases and can address these so that we are able to ensure equitable practice, in terms of ourselves and indeed across our teams.

And another dimension of that standard 2.2, they look again at collaboration. And when they discuss collaboration, they look beyond collaboration within the team, which of course is very important.

But they look beyond that to highlight the importance of collaborating with parents and with partners to ensure that all the pupils and the young people and the children that we work with are well supported.

So, I would say that to get back to your question, Jac, the Standard for Middle Leadership can therefore be used by all middle leaders as a tool for evaluating their leadership practice and it can aid them in identifying the leadership knowledge and skills that they need to further develop in that area.

Jac: I agree and it's interesting, drawing from my previous experience in a local authority setting where we set up and ran with leadership development programmes, we went out of our way to make a critical link to coaching support.

This was both in a confidential one-to-one setting with someone who was skilled in this area and had, for example, completed something like the Coaching for Success programme.

But that offered a confidential space that somebody could sit down and talk with another colleague to be supported to bring out their best thinking.

We also created spaces as part of the programmes for them to think through complex problems collaboratively with colleagues through regular action learning sets, which take are founded on the coaching approach. These supported professional learning conversations offered the opportunity for both challenge and support for the participants to think differently, to adopt solution-focused approaches.

In the person holding the conundrum, the problem, the area for exploration, were supported to identify actions going forward that would work well for them.

I don't know if Einstein or somebody said, the person who holds the problem is often the person who holds the solution.

Part 3 - the middle leadership role in growing leadership skills and capacities in others (25:10 – 32:21)

Jac: So I suppose that leads us to part three, middle leadership role in growing leadership skills and capacities and others.

So, the Standard for Middle Leadership says, as a middle leader, you encourage and enable the development of leadership skills and capacities in others and cultivate trust and respect among colleagues by creating leadership opportunities across and beyond the scope.

Kathleen, what do you understand by this?

Kathleen: Yes, I suppose I'm tempted to think back to some of what we previously explored and the role of middle leaders in establishing that trusting, respectful learning culture where individuals can share and observe good practice and they can give and receive constructive developmental feedback and collaborate to improve practice.

And I would say that a culture such as this also lends itself well to developing leadership skills and capacities.

Because as we mentioned, knowledge of colleagues allows middle leaders to recognise and showcase the expertise and talent within their team.

But they can also distribute leadership activities as opportunities arise and ideally providing some support with those distributed tasks to allow the individuals to learn from that experience.

So that's one way that middle leaders can nurture those leadership skills and capacities and the learning from that and from that experience.

Jac: How does it relate to your learning and your research?

Kathleen: Yes, I was actually just thinking about that, Jac, because my research into middle leadership development in Scotland suggests that experienced middle leaders can be central to developing the leadership capacities of colleagues.

For example, for individuals who are aspiring to the role, they're a vital source of advice and support.

They can help identify the strengths and areas for development, as we've discussed, but they can often signpost opportunities that might be rich, relevant leadership development opportunities, perhaps that the aspiring middle leader hasn't been able to identify themselves.

So, these opportunities might exist within school or beyond. And on a largely informal basis, they act as role models, as mentors, as critical friends.

In the PRD situation, ideally, it may be something like the coaching wheel that you've just shown, Jac, could be used to help individuals to explore their strengths and areas for development as an aspiring leader.

And they quite often as well allow individuals to shadow them.

They are collaborative and they're transparent about the factors that influence their decision making and that allows colleagues to learn from that process as well.

But interestingly, my research also found that middle leaders are a vital source of support to each other, or they can be, and to helping colleagues at middle leader level to further develop their leadership practice.

So for example, one of the possibly the more challenging aspects of my study was that when those aspiring middle leaders that I just spoke about there who had role models, mentors, critical friends, when they actually were fortunate enough to gain a substantive middle leader post, a lot of that support stopped, particularly if they had moved to a new school where they first needed to develop their networks, their knowledge of the context.

And they were also still very much learning in that leadership role. And they were encountering, therefore, many aspects of middle leadership for the first time, particularly around that leadership of colleagues.

And at that point, induction or mentoring or critical friendship from an experienced and established middle leader could really support those beginning in the role at that stage.

But in addition to that, the study also unearthed the potential for experienced established middle leaders to support each other through peer support, critical friendship and sharing practice.

And some of the colleagues mentioned experiences that they'd been fortunate enough to have where they had days away from school with their middle leader cohort to build those types of critical friendships and supportive relationships across the middle leader layer of the school.

Jac: It's interesting. There's a couple of things that spring to mind in that.

One was, you know, how people come into leadership roles. They're often talent tapped.

I asked a group of leaders, you know, what made them become learners. And it was often that somebody in their career, their working life, had actually tapped them on the shoulder and said, hey, you should try for that, you should go for that, you'd be really good at that. When they were, oh no, I haven't got the skills, knowledge, but somebody else had really encouraged them to go forward.

And I suppose the piece you were talking about turning up authentically as a lead learner, expressing areas you want to and need to learn more about helps set a really honest approach to learning, not being afraid in a leadership role... I don't know, but I'll find out.

This can really open up some space for sharing learning experiences and speaking about the impact of that learning on ourselves, our context, the

learners, whoever they be, and looking to see what the next steps and learning for me as the leader and learner need to be.

But you're so right about the supported induction as a middle leader.

We get a great deal right in the provisional registered teacher phase where an experienced teacher acting as a supporter or a mentor, but we could really do with drawing a more structured approach to those newly in leadership process.

Again, drawing on that coaching, mentoring approach to help build on the strengths that brought the teacher into that leadership role, particularly when they're probably suffering from imposter syndrome, but allowing them the confidential spaces to explore their solutions and what next steps that would work well for them.

Part 4 - the professional responsibilities for Middle Leadership as a learner and a leader for helping colleagues engage meaningfully with the suite of Professional Standards (32:23 – 46:30)

Jac: So finally, let's explore the 4th and final parts.

And this looks at what are the professional responsibilities for middle leaders as a learner and a leader for helping colleagues to engage meaningfully with the Professional Standards.

I suppose it's about embedding the Professional Standards, but what is their role in helping them engage meaningfully with the Professional Standards?

Kathleen: Yes, I think as we all know, it's really important to the profession and for the children and young people with whom we work, that every one of us involved in teacher preparation helps to ensure that those entering the profession have a strong grasp of the expected standards of teacher professionalism and understand that requirement to engage with the standards throughout their career to inform their professional learning and development.

And similarly, I would say the Standard for Middle Leadership plays a strategic role in achieving that shared understanding of what we expect of school middle leaders across the system.

And it's really important for us as a profession and for the children and young people with whom they work. So, there's an important role for the Standards there.

So as such, the Standard for Middle Leadership can serve as a development tool for those aspiring to middle leadership.

And it can be a tool for all middle leaders in evaluating their leadership practice and identifying their areas for development.

And I would say that why that's important is because middle leaders play a vital role in keeping the Professional Standards alive by modelling them on a daily basis.

For example, in practice, they could be role models of professionalism for those beginning in the profession, for those aspiring to leadership roles, and indeed to colleagues across the school.

They also set the professional tone of their team and contribute to that professional ethos of the whole school community. And if needed, they can draw from Professional Standards and other relevant literature or policy to inform and justify the decisions that they make.

Jac: Yes, it's that meaningful engagement with the Professional Standards as a scaffold for us as learners. And that modelling aspect you talk about, middle leadership role, talking about the content of the standards.

And I suppose that highlights the critical role, and we touched on this briefly, of the professional review and development, or PRD, both the formal aspects of the yearly meeting, but also as part of the ongoing process of professional dialogue.

Now, I know you know this, Kathleen, but it seems not that long ago, but Professional Update was introduced in 2014.

And in essence, Professional Update or PU is the way we maintain our registration as teachers and leaders. It refers to the process teachers must undertake to confirm they continue to reflect against the standards and develop their knowledge and understanding and the skills underpinned by that PRD process, the opportunity to stop, to reflect on ourselves as the learner and the differences our learning is making.

And middle leaders have a key role here, don't you think, Kathleen?

Kathleen: Yes, definitely, Jac.

I would say that, as you've mentioned, that, you know, PU has a regulatory function and it builds on that expectation that teachers and school leaders at all levels will engage annually in the PRD process, which begins with that self-reflection using a relevant professional standard and is followed by that

professional dialogue in the PRD discussion, which explores those strengths and areas for development.

And again, the tools that you showed us earlier would be fantastic vehicles for helping inform that self-reflection and the dialogue in the PRD discussion.

But more importantly, Jac, research highlights the importance to teachers and leaders of all levels of taking ownership of their professional learning.

In fact, one model of leadership learning suggests that in order to learn from a leadership experience, individuals need to evaluate their learning needs to begin with.

They then need to undertake that experience to address those learning needs, and ideally receive some support with that experience, for example, through coaching, as you discussed, to help them make sense of their learning from the experience.

And with its link to Professional Update, PRD, of course, plays that strategic function, but middle leaders and school leaders, I think, play an important role in promoting an understanding of the developmental value of professional reflection and of that professional dialogue that takes place in that PRD interview.

Because those opportunities offer individuals the chance to evaluate the learning needs as is recommended in the model that I've just mentioned there.

And they possibly provide a vehicle by which that support could be offered to help them make sense of the experiential learning that they've undertaken.

And as you know, Jac, there's been a national focus on the development of coaching across the system and you've been at the centre of that for many years.

And middle leaders could use those coaching approaches, as we've talked about, to lead that professional dialogue in a meaningful and empowering way, empowering the colleague to take ownership of their next steps in learning.

So, I suppose in answer to your question, in this way, middle leaders can ensure that the valuable time spent with that colleague in PRD is... not only fulfilling a regulatory requirement, it's also fulfilling a vital developmental requirement as well, or for meeting a vital developmental need might be a better way of putting that.

And I would say that double dividending, if you like, is particularly important during times like these when time is short and resources are stretched.

It's also one of the ways that a middle leader can lead professional learning as is articulated in standard 3.3 of the Standard for Middle Leadership, which will ultimately further the development of the colleagues and their team and hopefully the enhancement and improvement of practice.

And again, we need to come back to again through commitment to their own reflective practice and PRD.

And by encouraging that meaningful reflection in others and ensuring that rich and rewarding PRD experience for others, middle leaders can help ensure that PRD fulfils that developmental potential, I think.

Jac: I like the idea you said, you know, making sense and, you know, it provides the opportunity and space and time to actually stand back from the hectic worlds we work in to say, you know, what about me as a learner?

What's my next step?

Kathleen, you might be interested, and you may have already come across some of this, but at GTC Scotland, a review of Professional Update was taken because it was part of our strategic planning period, but in the light of the 10-year anniversary in 2024,

And we got some really, I mean, we're steeped in richly data informed settings and have it, we reviewed all of the Professional Update data and it was from 3 perspectives.

So there was external research and the findings from the University of Glasgow project.

We also have a summary of a decade of data, really comprehensive review of the data collected from teachers and teachers as reviewers who completed Professional Update over the period 2014 to 2024.

You may indeed have filled in one of the feedback forms yourself when you were completing your view.

And that's really helped us drill down to the use of the Professional Standards, the role of the PRD, et cetera. And also as well, our internal issues management and process reflections.

We've got extensive knowledge and experience of PU management and the processes that have come out from that.

So for example, we're in a period of reflection and modernisation of the MyGTCS platform to further support that professional learning, the Professional Update and the PRD processes.

But from all of that huge body of data we've got over that time period, here's just a few of the key points that emerged.

There are about 10 in total, but one of the things that really stood out from all of it was that high quality PRD is essential, and it has to be firmly linked to that Professional Update and it must focus on the teaching standards and that description of what it means to be, become and grow as a teacher or leader in Scotland.

The teaching standards need to be lived beyond the PRD process or just as an annual event.

They should be embedded in all the professional learning activities, the development opportunities, organisational priorities, individual practice.

They are what it means to belong to the teaching professional in Scotland.

Also, the recording of development and learning activity should be prioritised, focusing on the reflection of what has been learned and most importantly, what's the impact?

A much greater focus on the impact of the professional learning is perhaps called for. You know, what difference has the learning made to me as a teacher, as a leader, to my context, and important to my learners, but also importantly to me as a learner? And that helps me plan for my next steps.

The other one that's really resonated with things that you said all the way through our conversation, Kathleen, is that collaboration with colleagues.

It's core to the professional learning and it really matters and it should be prioritized and promoted.

This needs to include maybe a refocus on coaching and mentoring, particularly in, as you say, mentoring those early stages of middle leadership. And perhaps it needs to be refreshed to ensure a more system-wide impact of it.

And finally, the one I chair is the focus on the development of that culture you've talked about where teachers have agency and leadership really values and scaffolds this, allowing their authentic voices to come in.

People are able to say, I don't know and I need to know more about this.

All of that needs dedicated time and value to appreciate the importance of ongoing teacher development. Does that really resonate with your thinking, Kathleen?

Kathleen:

Yeah, definitely, Jac. That's really interesting. And I agree with so much of that.

And, my thinking is that it's really important that professional learning and the PRD process, that they are not seen as in isolation because they're part of a process which seeks to ensure the ongoing development as professionals and the ongoing improvement of what we offer the children and young people that we work with.

And I think what's really interesting is, there's a definition in the literature somewhere which says that professional learning needs emerge from the gap between the knowledge and skills of the individual and the skills, the knowledge and skills that they need to fulfil their role.

And a relevant professional standard can help individuals understand the expectations, what's expected of them by the system.

And as I mentioned previously, that coaching, professional dialogue can support the individual in reflecting on that as we've discussed. And the non-directive approach to coaching can facilitate that empowerment and individual ownership of the professional learning needs that they've identified.

And I would say in terms of middle leadership, I think it reinforces the need for coaching skills as a vital skill for middle leaders in PRD and in establishing those collegiate cultures that you mentioned there, Jac, and indeed for the colleagues and indeed for the young people that they work with.

So as we said, I think one of the challenges facing the profession at the moment is finding the time to engage in that meaningful PRD interview.

But again, I think it's so helpful to think about the process as a fulfilling one. It was, as you said, way back in 2014, it's not that long ago that we were talking about PRD as an entitlement.

And I think that's maybe dropped from our terminology a wee bit, but I think it's important that we recognise again as not only a regulatory function, but something that has a rewarding developmental potential, which again could ultimately enhance practice.

Jac: It's interesting that you and I keep looping back to coaching because our paths have crossed across that skill sets.

And one of the pleasures of this conversation is that... listening just, and I think, is it Charles Handy said, "how do I know I'm thinking till I hear myself say it?"

And that's one of the key coaching parts, just being fascinated by where our conversation is going.

Conclusions (41:20 – 41:54)

Jac: It's been a real lovely opportunity to talk to you.

And there is certainly a key role for the middle leaders here in both that coaching approach you've talked about, but it's set out in the professional skills and abilities 3.3. You said it earlier, Kathleen, professional learning.

I think that might have to be a conversation for a future date, Kathleen, but it's been a delight speaking to you.

Thank you.

Kathleen: Yeah, it's been lovely to see you, Jac.

Thank you so much. I hope this is helpful. Thank you.

Jac: Oh, it's fantastic. Thank you, Kathleen. Bye.