



## CRITICAL REFLECTION ON PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT

### The Queen's Nurse Excellence Profile: A framework for expert practice in our communities

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#### Abstract

*Background:* In 2015 the Queen's Nursing Institute Scotland, a charitable organisation with a 130-year history, took the decision to reintroduce the Queen's Nurse title to Scotland. We co-created an 'Excellence Profile' to set out what a new Queen's Nurse might look like, and in 2016 I applied for a Florence Nightingale Leadership Scholarship to support my role in enabling this new programme.

*Aims:* This article aims to describe and critically reflect on the journey of Scotland's Queen's Nurse programme from inspiration to realisation, and my parallel journey of developing as a leader and expert facilitator.

*Conclusions:* The Excellence Profile truly resonates with practitioners and has enabled transformational personal and professional development journeys over the course of the first nine-month Queen's Nurse programme. It has also provided a useful framework for my own learning and development in seeking to become the best I can be.

*Implications for practice:*

- The Queen's Nurse Excellence Profile has a strong resonance with expert community nursing practitioners as a framework for personal and professional development

**Keywords:** Person-centred nursing, community nursing, excellence, professional development, clinical leadership, reflective practice, Scotland

## **Introduction**

There are two Queen's Nursing institutes in the UK and they have a shared history. Founded in 1887 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, the institutes were established to provide home nursing for the 'sick poor'. The Queen's Nursing Institute (QNI) supports England, Northern Ireland and Wales, while the Queen's Nursing Institute Scotland (QNIS) has covered Scotland since 1915. Both are registered charitable organisations. The purpose of QNIS is to promote excellence in community nursing to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Scotland. From 1887 Queen's District Nurses were trained by the institutes located in cities across the UK. In 1969 agreement was reached with the government to replace Queen's Nurse training with a National Certificate for District Nursing. There are currently around 450 retired Queen's Nurses in Scotland who trained under the previous system and remain active members of our community.

The Queen's Nurse title was reintroduced by the QNI in 2007 'to promote the highest standards of patient care in the community'. There are more than 1,100 Queen's Nurses in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

In 2007, QNIS was offering a diverse range of education and development opportunities. Witnessing the momentum and profile of the Queen's Nurses increasing across the rest of the UK in the ensuing years, by 2014 Scottish community nurses were asking for QNIS to introduce the title. In 2017 we awarded the first 20 Queen's Nurse titles in Scotland. They are profiled on the QNIS website (QNIS, 2017). What follows is the story of our journey to this point.

## **Co-creating the Excellence Profile**

In 2015 QNIS started a consultation process to consider what a new Queen's Nurse could look like for Scotland. A summit in January 2016 brought together experts from across public sector professions to share learning around developing leaders. Senior staff were invited from the prison service, voluntary organisations, medicine, allied health professions, social work, primary education and nursing. Each delegate shared the approach they had taken to develop frontline leadership within their area and, importantly, the lessons they had learned. Strong influences at the summit were the work of:

- The Person-centred Framework (McCance and McCormack, 2016)
- The Step into Leadership Programme (Scottish Social Services Council, 2015)
- The College Fellowship Scheme (Primary Science Teaching Trust, 2017)

There were striking commonalities between the experiences of the professional groups at the summit, with a range of personal qualities emerging from the discussions that were considered central to the profile of a new Queen's Nurse. These included: skills in negotiation, enabling safety and challenging others (being courageous); personal resilience; and a commitment to addressing inequalities. Also vital was the ability to:

- Build trusting relationships
- Have conversations that are enabling in their approach
- Take people (team and organisation) with them
- Be an agent of transformational change within their team
- Draw on a range of approaches and resources
- Be a catalyst for societal change within their communities
- Take time for deep reflection

Lessons learned from other programmes included:

- Outcomes should be societal and transformational changes that demonstrate benefits for employers
- A culture of person-centredness is the driver and the context for personal development

- Organisational sponsorship is key to sustainability, balancing this with selecting people who will challenge the organisations who sponsor them
- High-quality coaching could provide an important enabler of personal development
- The award should be a recognition of existing qualities and the programme should strengthen those qualities

We also established that the programme should:

- Provide long-term support that truly facilitates growth and development
- Provide a safe, engaging, facilitated space
- Enable people to grow in confidence, building on their existing skills
- Build a critical mass of excellent practitioners

Participants were asked at the end of the summit to share a word to capture the essence of the new Queen's Nurse. The following were among the salient words to emerge:



While analysing and writing up the summit discussions I had an opportunity to reflect on the experiences shared by participants. As I looked, with others, at the richness of the material, we were mindful that the word 'leader' might not be helpful. Nurses who demonstrate the qualities identified often see themselves as clinical practitioners and associate the term 'leader' with those in more senior roles. The various contributors to the summit had quite differing views on the role of leadership development; for some it meant an emphasis on developing people for senior strategic roles, rather than enhancing the skills of staff closest to care.

In considering what a Queen's Nurse might be, it became clear that we were looking to develop expert practitioners who were themselves thriving as individuals so that they could be role models for others. I was concerned that using the word 'leadership' could put some practitioners off applying, by suggesting the programme was for more senior staff. *Roget's Thesaurus* (1999) has 'authority' and 'superiority' as synonyms for leadership and I wanted to ensure the language we used would accurately communicate the nature of the programme: to inspire hearts and minds so that the new Queen's Nurses might in turn inspire others.

Kouzes and Posner (2012) describe five leadership practices: 'modelling the way'; 'inspiring a shared vision'; 'enabling others to act'; 'challenging the process'; and 'encouraging the heart'. As described by the authors, these are entirely compatible with the emerging qualities of the Queen's Nurse, yet as I reflected with others, the word 'leadership' continued to sit uncomfortably with our vision because of its association with power and hierarchy. So although the programme was clearly all about leadership, we were choosing not to label it as such.

We engaged a group of experts to help take the thinking to the next stage. A 'task and finish' group was convened of QNIS trustees, executive nurse directors, and leaders from the third sector, research and higher education, including a professor at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh (QMU), known internationally for his expertise in person-centred practice research. After robust reflective discussion, what emerged was the final Excellence Profile, which describes the qualities of the new Queen's Nurse (Box 1).

### Box 1: The journey of discovery – enabling the Excellence Profile

#### Queen’s Nurses... inspiring others by making a difference

They find opportunities (or circumstances find them) for changing how things are currently done, recognising how things should and could be, making things better for individuals, families and communities, and/or helping others to make a significant impact

#### Queen’s Nurses... inspiring others with tenacity and resilience

They find their way across boundaries, around obstacles, through bureaucracy and successfully challenge ‘but we don’t have control over that’ or ‘that will never work here’ attitudes. They just keep bouncing back, finding new doors to open each time one closes

#### Queen’s Nurses... inspiring others by bringing people with them

Through ‘coming from the heart’, their enthusiasm and persuasive nature, they create a groundswell of support and recognition that ‘carries the day’, getting others to commit and get things done

#### Queen’s Nurses... inspiring others with humility and reflection

They listen deeply, seeking to understand what really matters. They approach life reflectively, always learning, and are kind to themselves. They will sometimes be surprised by personal recognition for their achievements, and are quick to attribute success to the contributions of others

The next step was to design a programme that might enable those selected to realise their potential to inspire others. A group of three – one of the QNIS trustees who is a senior educationalist with NHS Education for Scotland, the QMU professor with expertise in person-centred practice research and the author (CG) – spent a year working collaboratively, supported by the task and finish group to create the nine-month programme, which we called the ‘journey of discovery’. It includes a careful balance of masterclasses, individual reflective space, action learning, mindfulness, intense conversation and creativity (see photo below, the Queen’s Nurse mandala). The journey starts with a five-day residential course and includes two further one-day workshops, with each candidate being supported with monthly co-active coaching (Kimsey-House et al., 2011) as well as ongoing conversations on social media with peers and facilitators.

#### The Queen’s Nurse mandala





### **So who are the new Queen's Nurses?**

We thought carefully about the story that needs to be told about community nursing in the 21st century. The general public, student nurses and wider health and social care colleagues often have little idea of the range of roles that nurses undertake in communities today. We wanted to be intentional in selecting nurses to profile as expert community practitioners and thoughtful about those for whom a development programme could be truly transformational. Given the strong roots of QNIS in social justice, we were keen to ensure that we were highlighting the roles of nurses who support some of Scotland's most marginalised communities. In addition, it felt important to recognise that the NHS is not the only employer of community nurses in the UK; the independent and charitable sectors also have an important role in this respect. Scotland has a small population but a vast geography and we were committed to ensuring that we had candidates from the most remote and rural areas of the country as well as from the cities.

Twenty clinical leaders were selected after nomination by their employers, written application and attendance at assessment centres, where candidates participated in a series of rapid interviews and focus groups all based on the Excellence Profile. They each brought an extraordinary energy and willingness to enter wholeheartedly in to the experience of the programme. All 20 profiles are on the QNIS website ([qnis.org.uk](http://qnis.org.uk)). All have now completed the nine-month programme and have been awarded the Queen's Nurse title. The photo below shows the reflective Queen's Nurses outside Scottish Parliament in October 2017, at the end of their final workshop.



### **Reflections on the 'journey of discovery' as experienced by the new Queen's Nurses**

What follows is a series of quotes taken from reflective accounts of individual journeys. These written narratives were submitted at the end of the programme as a summary of learning. Each of the Queen's Nurses cited has given permission for their words to be used, and they are set out under the themes of the Excellence Profile. It was not easy to select just a few excerpts from the remarkable stories of personal transformation from each of the new Queen's Nurses through the 'journey of discovery'.

Queen's Nurses... inspiring others by making a difference

*'My Queens Nursing journey has been life changing for me professionally and personally, and has helped me to grow in so many positive ways. I will continue to go out and to strive to achieve the very best outcome in every situation for each individual. I have the courage to do this and I have discovered I am a wise, compassionate and very resilient leader. My aim in becoming a Queen's Nurse was to make a difference for the vulnerable and marginalised people that I work with. The love and compassion I have for people, as well as the injustices I observe, inspired me to do this. I have the privilege each day of observing people build resilience in the face of adversity with the right support, kindness and encouragement when needed. Witnessing them discover hope and faith in themselves and to see them flourishing wherever they are at is awesome'* (Rachel, parish nurse, Dundee).

For me, Rachel's quote captures the essence of making a difference; the inextricable link between personal flourishing and being fully present to enable others on their journey.

Queen's Nurses... inspiring others with tenacity and resilience

*'The network of experience and learning that we have built up is something I had never imagined could happen. I feel as if there is a warm blanket wrapped round me... It enabled me to find myself and continue to be the person I want to be; one who will continue to flourish, is resilient and will persevere to provide a person-centred service. I will continue to explore ways to inspire and enable colleagues to flourish to create a team of individuals who are in a continued state of wellbeing, being at their best for prolonged periods and when they're not, they have the resilience to bounce back stronger'* (Kitty, general practice nurse, Campbeltown).

I love the way Kitty has made such a strong connection between her experience of being 'held' by a network of support, her ability to be resilient herself and providing that support for others.

Queens Nurses... inspiring others by bringing people with them

*'Heartened by the team's response and consumed by a desire to transform, we agreed to create protected space, a minimum of one hour per week which would be known as our "golden time". This would be free space to reflect and share feelings, thoughts and experiences. We start each session with mindfulness and address issues or discord using action learning. I have been overwhelmed by the response to this small change in our working week. Everyone looks forward to golden time, our students love it and all staff feel connected with each other and are becoming more reflective'* (Barbara, district nurse, Ayrshire).

This is such a lovely example of 'coming from the heart', where Barbara has truly inspired her team in creating new ways of working.

Queens Nurses... inspiring others with humility and reflection

*'I am now more mindful, and more focused on person-centred care. I listen to understand rather than to advise, and I am learning that being kind to myself is not a luxury but a necessity. I try to incorporate quietness and stillness into my busy life of family, nursing and crofting. I will gradually try to allow my more creative and emotional shadow self to have more influence over who I am and what I do'* (Ian, advanced nurse practitioner, Shapinsay).

As nurses we often pay lip service to the importance of self-care. For many participants the central importance of being kind to self was key learning on the 'journey of discovery' and Ian has captured this beautifully in his quote above.

*'Creativity is my nemesis; any thought of it immediately causes me to regress and feelings of shame, fear and anger emerge. However, in the spirit of letting go to let come, I tried to embrace this approach during the residential. Following a mindful walk we were asked to create something which represented an aspect of our walk. I wrote a poem, which I shared with my small group. I described it as a "rubbish" poem. I have included this poem in my reflective report and I know it is not rubbish. Over the months I have read it over and I see it is a clear example of my inner being knowing what was happening to me, before my consciousness caught up'* (Joan, school nurse, Stirling).

Joan's quote beautifully illustrates the power of deep reflection and personal transformation, getting in touch with the unconscious through creative media and discovering new ways of knowing.

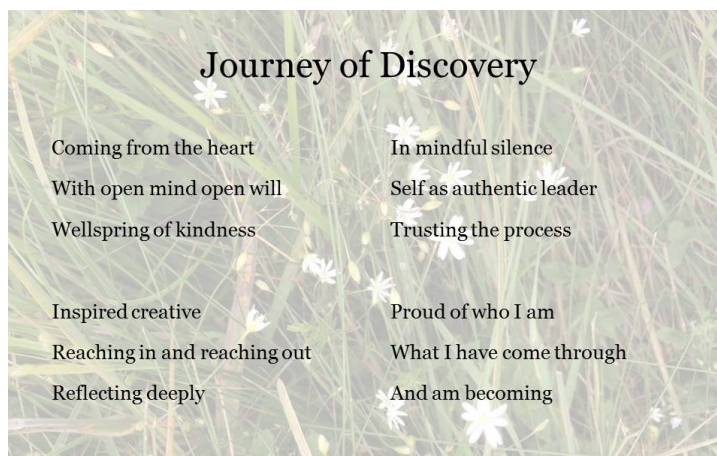
### **My personal journey with the Excellence Profile**

The Florence Nightingale Leadership Scholarship gave me the opportunity to reflect on my identity as a role model for the new Queen's Nurses and on my skills and capabilities as a facilitator. The Excellence Profile was designed for clinical experts but as I reflected on my learning through the scholarship year, it spoke equally to my professional development in a senior leadership role.

During this journey I also experienced important learning in all of the five practices set out by Kouzes and Posner (2012), which I have woven through this account. As chief executive and nurse director of QNIS I have had the privilege of being able to make a significant difference in a relatively short space of time, by enabling a set of shared values with a remarkable group of trustees. With their support we have created a collective vision with a wide group of stakeholders. The King's Fund Top Manager Programme (2018), which I undertook as part of the scholarship, enabled me to seize opportunities while developing my tenacity and resilience.

Reintroducing the Queen's Nurse title has been the first initiative of our collective vision. My learning through the scholarship gave me the courage to find my own voice and enable others to do the same as the Queen's Nurse programme has developed. My confidence to experiment, take risks and bring people with me has been greatly enhanced through participating in a foundation programme with the Presencing Institute (Presencing Institute, 2018), which enabled me to reflect deeply with others and experience a whole new level of being out of my comfort zone. Trusting that new experiences could elicit profound learning (for example, my body could know things that my head could not understand) required a significant leap of faith, but it has given me a real empathy for how difficult it can be to trust a process, and enhanced my ability as a facilitator to enable others to feel safe. One of the remarkable things that has been created with the Queen's Nurse programme is a real spirit of community and I believe this alchemy is a product of the openness, kindness and authenticity of all those involved – the Queen's Nurses, the facilitators, the coaches, the QNIS team and the programme itself.

I have summarised my learning in a poem:



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