



Evaluating the effectiveness of the Researching Professional Development Framework

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Report date: 20th November 2017

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1. Executive Summary

- This paper reports on a longitudinal study, funded by the Open University Research into Teaching and Learning Fund, which aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of part-time doctoral students using an online supplementary resource, the Researching Professional Development Framework (RPDF), in order to evaluate its effectiveness in supporting their development as *researching professionals* as they progressed through the first year of their EdD programme. A paper describing the development of the resource was published during the year (see Lindsay, Kerawalla, and Floyd 2017).
- The RPDF offers EdD students an opportunity to reflect on key areas of their professional development. They do this by drawing upon the descriptions of experiences provided by other EdD students and graduates, and use their reflections on these to generate their own researching professional development plan for the forthcoming year.
- All first-year students were asked to volunteer to take part in the pilot and six were selected who represented a range of EdD students and their research interests. An initial questionnaire to the students and their supervisors identified sufficient support for the full research programme to proceed. That programme involved three longitudinal qualitative research interviews with each student during their first year of study (beginning, middle and end).
- The findings suggest that students found the RPDF had been of particular value early in their studies. The part of the framework that focused on *developing ways of thinking* had helped them realise they were not just seeking a qualification but were developing as professional researchers. This suggests that the RPDF helped participants reflect on and develop new identities as they progressed through their EdD.

- The section covering *moving on with your research* helped them appreciate that they should seek to talk about their research from an early stage and that they, and their research findings, had the potential in due course to make a difference far bigger than they had previously anticipated. Once again, it appears that using the framework helped students reflect and develop new identities as they moved through the EdD on their way to becoming *researching professionals*.
- Students found the quotes from previous students and the points the framework prompted them to consider particularly helpful and all wished to continue to use the framework as they continued their studies.
- Following the success of this evaluation, there are a number of recommendations for how the RPDF can be further developed going forward. These include increasing its profile in the EdD programme, involving supervisors more in the initiative, and sharing the findings with other doctoral programmes within the Open University and beyond.

2. Project Overview

The Researching Professional Development Framework (RPDF) has been developed over the last three years as an online resource for EdD students at the Open University. The framework is not a formal teaching resource; instead it offers EdD students an opportunity to reflect on key areas of their professional development as they progress through their studies. They do this by drawing upon the descriptions of experiences provided by other EdD students and graduates, and use their reflections on these to generate their own researching professional development plan for the forthcoming year. The framework draws on a model developed by one of the authors to reflect the learning of fellow professionals (Lindsay 2013, 2016). That model and the current framework are based on three dimensions of learning: cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal (Illeris 2009, Kegan 2009). The framework is of particular relevance in the EdD context because it addresses the professional development and learning needs of *researching professionals*. In doing so, it draws attention to the practice-based nature of an EdD; a characteristic which is not seemingly addressed by the current PhD-centric Vitae resources provided by most universities. A paper describing the development of the framework has recently been published in *Studies in Higher Education* (see Lindsay, Kerawalla, and Floyd 2017).

The content of the framework was informed by an analysis of interviews with current and past EdD students. An EdD student can click on each of the nine areas of development in the framework (see figure 1) to reveal interviewee responses and quotes and a list of questions to encourage self-reflection. EdD students are then encouraged to draw up their own development plan (see figure 2).



Figure 1 - The Researching Professional Development Framework (RPDF)

	DEVELOPING RESEARCH AND STUDY SKILLS	BLENDING THEORY AND PRACTICE	BUILDING SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS
Working as a researcher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing ways of thinking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moving on with your research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 2 - A blank RPDF plan

The framework and plan were made available to Year one EdD students who started in May 2016 and some of those students volunteered to take part in a programme of research into the value of the framework during their first year of study.

3. Aims and Research Questions

The purpose of this research project was to explore EdD students' perceptions and experiences of using an online supplementary resource, the Researching Professional Development Framework (RPDF), in order to evaluate its effectiveness in supporting their development as *researching professionals* as they progressed through the first year of their EdD programme.

To achieve these aims, the main research question (RQ) was:

- How effective are the RPDF and Plan in supporting EdD students' development as researching professionals?

4. Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, our work draws on theories of social identity (Simon 2004, Burke and Stets 2009, Lawler 2014, Jenkins 2014). More specifically, we draw on the notion of academic identity-trajectory proposed by McAlpine et al. (see, for example, McAlpine 2012, McAlpine and Lucas 2011, McAlpine et al. 2012). The notion of academic identity-trajectory links students' personal and professional experiences to help form biographical views of academic identity formation, maintenance and change: "individually distinct past experiences and emotions influence present intentions, emotions and engagement in doctoral work as well as future imagined possibilities..." (McAlpine et al. 2012, 511). This thinking links to adjacent work in organisation studies exploring career trajectories. For example, Chen (1998) argues that a person's career is determined by a wide range of influences over time and cannot be viewed as separate from a person's life experiences. He explains:

....career is seen as an integral, active and essential component in a person's life. While one's career experiences always intertwine with other experiences in life, the person's life experiences can well reflect a general picture of his or her career development. (p. 439)

The suggestion here is that career trajectories cannot be studied in isolation without taking into account key personal and social influences over a person's lifetime such as childhood experiences and self-efficacy (Bandura et al. 2001), personality disposition (Bozionelos 2004), identity and family stressors (Bird and Schnurman-Crook 2005), work-life balance (Moen and Sweet 2004) and decisions on parenthood (Kemkes-Grottenthaler 2003). These influences are also integral to help us understand the transition that EdD students go through: how they move from being a *working* professional to becoming a *researching* professional as they progress through their doctoral research journey while continuing to work full time.

While such thinking has been used to explore and understand traditional PhD doctoral students' journeys, it has not so far been used to explore EdD students' experiences. Thus, this framework offers an original contribution to the literature. It is hoped that applying this framework, and using a longitudinal research approach,

will give rise to a more nuanced understanding of how EdD students understand their developing academic identities and how they might use the RPDF on their journey to become *researching professionals*.

5. Methods

To address our research question, the study was undertaken from an interpretive perspective, in line with social constructivism. Within this paradigm, we used a two-stage, longitudinal research design:

- Stage 1: scoping questionnaires to students (and their supervisors) in July 2016
- Stage 2: Three longitudinal qualitative interviews
 1. Initial interviews in November 2016
 2. Interim interviews in March 2017
 3. End-of-year-one interviews in June 2017

5.1 Participants

The population sample began their EdD in May 2016 and volunteers for the research project were sought in June. While all year one students (n=19) have access to the framework and have been invited to engage with it, six of the cohort (and the supervisors and co supervisors of those students) were recruited to the programme of research. The aim was to involve students who, between them, best represented the subject range, geographical coverage and gender mix of the cohort. Out of 10 students who volunteered to take part, the six chosen participants were all from different subject areas of the programme (for example, leadership and management, language and literacy, technology enhanced learning). Four were based in the UK and two outside the UK (the cohort figures were 15 and four). Although our ideal participant selection would have included men and women, all six participants were women, there being only two men in the cohort of 19 and neither volunteered. All those participating, and indeed all the cohort, were mid-career.

5.2 Research Process

Stage one

In stage one, the six participants were asked to engage with the framework and plan after completing their first progress report (which consists of a detailed research proposal), but before an annual residential weekend in early July. They were then

encouraged to discuss the framework and their plans with their supervisors during the residential school. Following this, students and supervisors were asked to complete a questionnaire to evaluate their initial reaction to the RPDF.

The student and supervisor questionnaire included 10 questions. Most questions were directly comparable across the two questionnaires but some related specifically to students or supervisors. All were asked whether the framework made sense to them, was it discussed at the residential weekend, did it add value, and did it result in students raising issues they would not otherwise have considered. Feedback was sought on whether, and if so how, students or supervisors thought the resource could be enhanced. Finally, all participants were asked to comment on the potential value of the RPDF. All 6 students completed and returned the questionnaire as did 5 of their supervisors and 4 of their co supervisors. At least one of each student's supervisors responded.

Stage Two

In stage two, three longitudinal qualitative interviews were arranged with each participant at times convenient for the students and took place in November, March and June to avoid course related deadlines. They were carried out using Skype (with the interviewees using Skype or phone). The interviews were recorded and transcribed and the transcripts shared with the participants for them to amend if they wished. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Whilst the interviews inevitably covered the progress being made by students in their research, the interviewer took care not to get involved in any matters relating to a student's supervision.

The interview schedules are shown below. As can be seen, similar questions were asked in the first two interviews. In the final interview the questions were changed so that the focus was solely on the impact and influence of the RPDF framework and plan.

Table 1 - Interview 1 Schedule

Interview 1
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. In connection with the RPDF, what did you discuss with your supervisor at the residential school?2. Can you please talk me through the content of your plan?<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. working as a researcherb. developing ways of thinkingc. moving on with your research3. How much chance have you had to act on any of your plans yet?4. Have you identified any areas of development activity that are not covered by the RPDF and plan?5. Has your workplace been supportive of your development needs (e.g. communicating your research to others)6. Has the plan featured in any of your discussions with your supervisors following the year one residential school?7. Any other comments?

Table 2 - Interview 2 Schedule

Interview 2
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What do you think of the RPDF overall?2. Has it been valuable to you? In what way?3. Can we talk about how your plan has had an impact on you.....<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. working as a researcherb. developing ways of thinkingc. moving on with your research4. Has the plan prompted you to carry out activities that you would not otherwise have considered?5. Have you recently discussed your RPDF with your supervisor?6. Do you have suggestions about how the RPDF process might be improved?7. Do you have suggestions for how the RPDF online resource might be improved?8. Any other comments?

Table 3 - Interview 3 Schedule

Interview 3
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. In what ways has the framework and your own development plan influenced:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. how you have carried out your research?b. how you have carried out your professional role?c. how you have blended your role as a researching professional with your professional role?d. how your colleagues in your professional role perceive you?e. how you perceive yourself?f. your relationship with your supervisor?g. how you developed your support network as a researching professional?h. how you developed contacts in your area of research?i. any involvement you have had in research-related communities?2. Has your work environment and culture been a help or a hindrance to you in trying to develop as a professional researcher? What agency do you feel you have in trying to change the structures in which you work to help you develop as a professional researcher? Has the framework helped you in this regard?3. Has the plan prompted you to carry out activities that you would not otherwise have considered? If so, what are these and how did the framework influence these?4. Do you have suggestions about how the RPDF process might be improved?5. Do you have suggestions for how the RPDF online resource might be improved?6. Do you plan to use the framework as you continue your research?7. Any other comments?

5.3 Analysis

The interview data were analysed using established thematic analysis techniques outlined by Lichtman (2013) and Bryman (2012). This involved reading and coding each transcript, merging and reflecting on these codes to form larger categories and emerging conceptual themes, and then further analysing these themes by comparing and contrasting them across the data sets. The findings have been combined by stage and organised thematically, and are presented in section 5.

5.4 Ethical considerations

The study adhered to published ethical principles for educational research (BERA 2011). Prior to data collection, a full application was made to the Open University Ethics Committee. Following ethical approval being granted, all participants were given an information sheet which set out the aims of the project and highlighted key ethical concerns such as informed consent and anonymity. In addition, all interviewees were asked to sign a consent form beforehand, agreeing to the interview and for it to be audio recorded. Finally, any identifying characteristics or context have been excluded from this report to protect the identity of participants.

6. Findings

6.1 Stage One Results

As mentioned above the students and their supervisors had been asked complementary sets of ten questions.

- All 6 students and the 7 supervisors who had seen the framework all thought it made sense.
- 4 of the 6 students had discussed their plan with their supervisors at the residential school.
- When asked to rate the potential value of the RPDF and plan to students, from 1 = no value whatsoever to 10 = extremely valuable, the average student rating was 8. The average rating from the supervisors who responded was 6. Supervisors were asked whether they thought the ongoing study should proceed. Of those who answered, 5 said 'yes' and 2 said 'no'. One who said 'no' added that it did not seem to have helped their student. In fact, their student rated the resource as '8'. The other was concerned about the time required, noting in another response that 'there is a worry that filling in the framework takes time away from the EdD study itself, so the framework has to be used with care'.

Students and supervisors were asked to comment on how they had discussed the RPDF plans at the residential school and to describe what, if anything, students seemed to have gained from engaging with the framework and completing the plan. Comments were necessarily brief although one student had 'used the "Points for you to consider" prior to the meetings with supervisors ... to help structure the supervisor sessions'. Five students specifically mentioned that they felt reading about the experiences of other students had been helpful:

- *'Seeing the experience of other students helped me identify where my difficulties might lie.'*

- *'It helped me to think more broadly about the skills and attitudes I need to bring to the EdD.'*
- *'I liked reading the previous students' comments and it made it feel much more real and achievable.'*
- *'I was encouraged from [the former students'] comments to move on and I was motivated that I can do it.'*
- *'There were a couple of questions/anxieties in my mind that I thought were unique to me, but they're not!'*

Supervisors overall felt it was too early to say what students had gained but one commented how their student did seem now to appreciate the link between theory and practice. Another mentioned that the framework provided a useful structure around which research can be planned.

Students and their supervisors were also asked whether completing the plan had resulted in students raising issues they would not otherwise have considered. Although the supervisors did not think this was the case, the five students who had completed their plan all gave examples where they felt the framework and plan had made a difference:

- *'Really practical things about managing my references ... I was able to ensure I addressed these during the library session at the residential. The need for reflection – my original proposal addressed this as a topic, yet I hadn't thought clearly about the importance of doing this intentionally as part of the EdD.'*
- *'It made me think about presenting my work and possibly publishing it, which I hadn't thought of at all. ... It also made me think of the future beyond the EdD, which I haven't done either, though friends have asked me what I am doing it for!'*
- *'The part of blending theory and practice, for me, is the most difficult that needs lots of critical thinking and reading.'*

- *'How to develop my resilience. ... It is helpful to identify actions I can take to develop my resilience.'*
- *'I like that I can tackle one of the nine parts at one time and it calms the rising panic when I can see that others have experienced the same.'*

Students were asked to describe the insights (if any) they had gained from engaging with the RPDF regarding what it means to be a Researching Professional. All gave examples of what they had gained. The students' understanding of being a researching professional was understandably limited at this stage of their EdD journey:

- *"Building supportive relationships" was an insight. ... I am going to need new support networks to get me through.'*
- *'The framework helped me to think clearly about the importance of [blending theory and practice], and to consider ways of ensuring this happens.'*
- *'It gave me insight from the students' comments that it is a very up and down journey and it is okay to not know what you are doing and have times of self-doubt'*
- *'I expect this roller coaster to continue, but reading the comments it appears to be normal.'*
- *'You have to allow time reflecting on your work and be prepared to change things that do not work so [well] with your research.'*
- *'To be able to have one eye on the future; to explore new opportunities and to put myself 'out there.'*

Students were also asked to describe how they hope to use their plan over the first year of their studies. Mention was made of referring to it during supervision sessions and at times when more momentum was needed. Different parts of the RPDF were seen as having differing importance at various times. One student said that they

want to use it 'as part of each supervision – reviewing my progress as a researcher rather than simply reviewing the progress of my research'.

Finally, students and supervisors were asked for any suggestions about how the content of the framework could be enhanced, and for any other comments they had on the framework and plan. Not many suggestions were made. One student commented that 'even more examples/comments from previous students about how they organised their references, ethics forms, literature etc. would be really beneficial'. Another mentioned that 'the tool itself is a little 'clunky' to use' and the document formatting could be enhanced. It is in the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)). And a third said 'it would have been good to have had chance to discuss it with my supervisors at an extra session, without cutting into one of our three sessions'. One supervisor commented that 'the effectiveness of the RPDF depends on how it is applied by the students and the support he/she receives'.

Conclusions from stage one of the research

The questionnaire responses showed that:

- Students rated the RPDF and plan as a valuable resource (8/10) while supervisors at that stage were somewhat more reticent (6/10). However, the majority of supervisors felt the programme of research should continue.
- Students found the experiences of and advice from former students both helpful and reassuring. Several mentioned how they now realised feelings of apprehension were normal.
- Students gave examples of where the framework had prompted them to consider extra issues, although the supervisors were not always aware of these insights.
- The students had developed ideas around how they hoped to continue using the framework and plan during the first year of their studies. One student commented that the framework and plan would help her to review their

progress as a researcher rather than simply reviewing the progress of her research.

- The framework seemed to have encouraged students to think beyond the more basic activities involved in working as a researcher, including thinking about publishing research and what students might do after they graduate.
- Students' suggestions for enhancements included better functionality of the VLE, more time to discuss the RPDF plan with supervisors and more information and tips from former students.
- A concern was raised that the RPDF and plan could be too time consuming. This suggests that care needs to be taken to ensure students appreciate that the RPDF is not a formal assessed part of the EdD programme but is a complementary resource aimed at helping their development as Researching Professionals.

The initial findings indicated that the framework and plan were considered by students and their supervisors to be of sufficient value for the next stage of the research (three interviews with each student during the first year of their studies) to be undertaken. The interviews enabled an ongoing evaluation into the research question being explored, namely how effective the RPDF and Plan were in supporting EdD students' development as researching professionals as they continued through their first year of research.

6.2 Stage 2 Results

Interview 1

Overall reactions to framework and plan

The quotations below indicate the students' overall response to the plan and framework. Two students mentioned having the plan on their wall and others mentioned how the plan had helped them organise their studies. Its benefit as a support mechanism was also mentioned.

- *'My plan has been a central core to me but then from that I have naturally branched out. So, if I didn't have the central core I wouldn't have been able to make those branches. To sit and do it before I had that first research weekend was useful. To then fill it in further after that first research weekend to help me make it part of the plan for the year and part of the timetable for the year, that was useful. When I've got back to it I've looked at it but I haven't changed it since then. I've got it stuck to the wall. What were you going to do? What were you thinking when you started? And it helps me get up and running again.'*
- *'It was helpful at the beginning because it helped me organise my studies. Furthermore, I realised that this is how I should work, and things that might be added or not added, erased. The comments are very helpful also. It can help you have a path, organise the steps that you have to make in order to succeed.'*
- *'I have a printout [of my plan] which I stick on my desk wall, and I just write notes as and when I complete it. I'm not sure if there's a more efficient way of recording progress against my objectives. I suppose it's kind of making it into a bit of a living document so that it can be updated easily. Maybe we could just have some space in it to write comments or to give myself little time goals or something like that.'*
- *'[The framework's] been a sort of psychological crutch that I'm not on my own floundering around with my research questions and stuff. That this is sort of normal. Otherwise I think I might be panicking.'*

RPDF plans in more detail

Students were asked to talk about their plans and any resultant actions for each of the three areas of the framework, *working as a researcher, developing ways of thinking and moving on with your research.*

Working as a researcher

The three elements of the framework in this area are *developing research and study skills, building supportive relationships* and *blending theory and practice*. The first two areas had been the main focus of the activities at the residential school and the students' comments about their progress in those areas did not refer specifically to the plan. The comments that were made were more about how the framework and plan had helped them to plan or had added an extra perspective.

- *'I have updated [the plan], and I think that things haven't changed much. I have made significant progress with literature review. I have made contacts with other academics. I'm using notes. I'm keeping a reflective journal. I think that the things that I put here in the framework are things that I shall use all the time during my studies.'*
- *'What I'm really interested in is developing my writing and opportunities to present. That's something I've always wanted to do. And for me this framework helped at a really early stage for me to think about not doing it right now, but the kinds of things I could be doing throughout the process to lead in that direction.'*
- *'It was helpful about how do I reframe my research question. So how do I take the interest that I've got and reframe it in the light of my new work setting? And I think what was really encouraging was that whole thing about that's quite normal. I think just reading what other people said about how things had developed for them in the early stages, that's just really helpful, isn't it, to see that you're not the only one.'*

Developing ways of thinking

The three elements in this part of the framework are *reflecting on theory and practice, developing your identity* and *building your resilience*. All three areas were specifically mentioned in the students' comments, and again ideas were prompted that students would not otherwise have considered. Two students mentioned the diaries or journals they were keeping. Another had thought about the emotional

support she might need and that she would need to accommodate change along the way.

- *'I think [the plan] helped me to see that the process of reflection is really important. And also, that sense of the developing identity. Again, those areas just hadn't really occurred to me. Thinking about myself as a researcher, what that means, how do I reflect on that on an ongoing basis and who can I use to help me reflect, it was really useful.'*
- *'I keep my journal going at all times and there was something about reflection becoming a habit in that section [of the framework]. And so, I've gone OK this is what I need to be doing. And sometimes when I feel at the end of the week I really haven't done much doctorate work I can sit and do some reflection on the things I've been thinking about during the week: those thoughts that come to you in the shower, the thoughts that come to you on your journey to work and home from work. So just, you know, thinking about thinking. I treated myself to a decent fountain pen and a really nice Italian journal, so it's a pleasure to do it.'*
- *'I have kept a reflective diary. I started it from when I filled in the development plan. I remember reading something in there. Someone put that it was good to keep a reflective diary. When I came back from the weekend away I started it and I think that's been really helpful. And just putting things down when things have been hard or things I need to remember to read.'*
- *'Building my resilience is a priority at the moment so I had some point around identifying sources of emotional support, and really just understanding that things will always change. And trying to become comfortable with the fact that what I start out with and what I think I'm going to do probably won't be what I end up with.'*
- *Probably my identity surprised me the most. I hadn't really thought of that. I feel that through circumstances I've been pushed into lifelong learning from the age of five when I started school. Just because of how my life's been*

organised. But I hadn't ever really stopped to think about my identity in all of that. And it's true, [starting to do research] has changed my identity.'

Moving on with your research

The three elements in this section are *disseminating your research*, *engaging with new opportunities* and *making a difference*. Again, the students volunteered comments on all three elements and again this section gave them a longer-term perspective on their research than they had previously considered. For several, writing down proposed actions in a plan had helped make things happen. For two students the 'making a difference' concept had really helped them understand their motivation for their research:

- *'I think it was really good at the beginning of my research just to think about this. For example, I'd never thought about disseminating my research, hadn't even thought about it. One of my supervisors said, 'Oh you might want to change that date because you might want to publish'. And I think because I'd read [in the framework] about disseminating your research I thought ok. Because I'm not in the academic world it didn't even cross my mind. You don't think about three and a half years later 'Oh what am I going to do with it?' You're just trying to get through it.'*
- *'I have some objectives that I wrote. To make some new connections with people in my field of research. And I've been building up some. I attended an online conference and I was interfacing with other delegates and adding them to my network. And that was really helpful because it fed directly into my practice as well as my study, so that was really quite beneficial for me and my team. So that's been really valuable. I have an action to do actually, which is around identifying some areas where I could probably publish some research. I've started my pilot study, and I have gathered all of my data, and I'm just in the process of transcribing and analysing. What I would like to do is perhaps try and submit something to a publication soon-ish, just to get some practice and go through the motions.'*

- *'In terms of disseminating research and making a difference, then the things I had down were attending a conference relevant to my research area and taking an opportunity to present initial work in a relevant setting. And, in the early weeks of the new job, seek opportunities to situate my research within the context of [my new] role. And I would say that all of those things have happened.'*
- *'The other thing I think it helped me with was just the making a difference [section of the framework]. I thought it was quite interesting because it made me really think why am I doing it? And for me it is about the students. So it made me really think about that, and that helped me keep going in the summer where I had absolutely had enough of [obtaining ethical approval].'*
- *'There's a question in there in 'points to consider'. How does your study play to your strengths? And I sat there, and I thought it's about teaching xxxx, I really believe that teaching xxxx could be done a whole lot better. And I really believe that I could do something about this. [That's] where I could actually make a difference.'*

Comments on their workplace contexts

Overall students found their workplaces were supportive of their research. Some had recently changed their jobs and were needing to revisit their research topic in their new work context.

Discussing the framework and plan with supervisors

Students were asked to reflect on any discussions they had had with their supervisors about the framework or plan at the residential school. Few had been involved in specific discussions but one commented that interacting with the framework beforehand prompted her to consider wider areas at residential school. The quotations below reflect the focus the framework provided but also the lack of dedicated time to consider it.

- *‘There are a few questions on the model that really helped me focus. So, I would’ve had the same conversations yes. I don’t know that they’d have been as focussed in the same way.*
- *‘Because [discussing the framework] ended up being on top of the research, the research takes over. You just need an extra special time on its own I think.’*

Students commented there had been little opportunity to discuss their framework and plan with their supervisors in recent months. Their supervision time had been focussed on the research itself as the quotation below indicates.

- *‘In summer after the residential weekend we talked about how [the plan] helped me to organise. I told them where I am at the moment, and where I think I need further development in the future. But when we talked again it was about the research, the methodology, not about the framework.’*

Further development of the framework and plan

Students were asked for any suggestions they had about how the framework and plan might be improved going forward. Several suggestions made were around how students could be encouraged to engage with the framework on an ongoing basis.

- *‘The area on the website is a little bit clunky. I think for me it could be a bit more interactive. So you get there and there’s a lot to read, there’s not so much to do and reflect on. Now whether people would engage with it if there was more to do, I don’t know, but I think that building this framework as an integral part of the ongoing work that you do would be a really interesting thing to do. For me that kind of integral embedding of it in the ongoing work that I’m doing would be really helpful.’*
- *‘I don’t know how you’re planning to roll [the framework] out but I think if people were going to use it to discuss, and have some time with their supervisors then that would make you fill it in. Because you’ve then got a reason to fill it in for someone else to go through it with you. Whereas if it’s*

something you're doing for yourself and then you're short of time what happens is you don't do it. If you're going to chat through it with your supervisors you will do it, won't you?'

- *'Although I'm aware that I've done [my plan] and I've got it in the background, it's not top of my radar. So, it will be interesting to think about how we as students can be encouraged to use it. I think going forward if it's something that we're all encouraged to use, that kind of 'how do you build it into the ongoing activity of the EdD', you'd be encouraged to revisit it regularly. I think that would be useful. Within the weekly plan, maybe. It could be something that is just kept on the radar, even to talk about I think.'*

Some conclusions from the initial interviews

- The plan had helped students organise their research. Some had a copy of the plan on their wall.
- The plan had helped some through difficult times or when some were doubting their ability to continue.
- It had helped them realise it was normal for research to evolve.
- Several had been prompted to keep a journal.
- Identity and resilience were mentioned as key issues.
- It had helped them realise there could be something they could publish and that the EdD was an opportunity to make a difference.
- Having a plan seemed to make activities more likely to happen.
- There had been no time and no prompting to discuss plans with supervisors.
- Students suggested the online resource could be less clunky and that there could be time dedicated to discussing their plans with supervisors, with ongoing prompts to refer to it.

Interview 2

Overall reactions to framework and plan

The quotations below indicate the students' overall response to the plan and framework. Its value in the early days of study was emphasised and how it had helped students to begin to think of themselves as researchers and to plan their studies. In one instance it had been a support when a student had faced difficulties with their studies.

- *'For me the real value in it is helping you to see yourself as more than someone who's just a student on a course, but to see yourself as a developing researcher. And all that goes with that, which is more than just reading your books and writing your literature review, particularly in year one. I think that sense of developing an identity as a researcher is very well embedded in this plan, and that's why I think it's got real value.'*
- *'Overall, I would say it was really helpful particularly in the early stages in terms of getting me thinking about, not just the kind of the research project itself, but the periphery of that and just being a doctoral student, thinking about managing my workload, thinking about how I might develop. Ongoing, it's something that I refer back to occasionally. Particularly if I hit a bit of a block I might go back and have a little look and think right, what was I saying, where was I going with this? I wouldn't refer to it regularly, but I do certainly go back to it and have a little look at it.'*
- *'Overall I think it's a great idea. Overall it really helps clarify the mind. Overall it gave me ideas at the beginning that I'd never even thought of as part of my doctoral study.'*
- *'I think it was helpful because I planned my work through the first year and it helped me very much to organise my study.'*
- *'It definitely gave me a boost back in January when suddenly I thought well what on earth do I do now? And walking away and then reading through [the plan] I was able to bounce back so there was nothing that I was sort of left*

thinking still, gosh where am I with that? I think it is something that we need because we are relatively isolated with our study just because of how the system works.'

- *'I would like to use it for the next year of the course. Now, towards the end of year one, I realise how important it is. I knew that it was important when I was organising but through the year it's shown me how much I did using it, how much progress I've made using it. So, I would like to use it for the final years.'*

The value of the framework and plan

At this point in the year, over nine months into their studies, students were asked whether the RPDF had been valuable to them and, if so, in what way. All felt it had been valuable with a range of different reasons mentioned. Mention was made of the broader perspective it provided and of it helping students to think of themselves as developing researchers. One mentioned the much-welcomed scaffolding it provided while two others referred to the comments from other students and the feeling it gave that you are not alone in this venture.

- *'I would want to encourage all doctoral students to look at it right at the start because I think it gives you that broader perspective on what you're doing. I think it's very easy just to get honed in on the nitty-gritty of the research without thinking about yourself as a doctoral student and researcher. I think for me there's a difference there between just doing the doctorate and thinking about your identity as a researcher as well, and I think that's what that framework really helps with.'*
- *'Work I've done before has been nothing like this so, with the framework, I have at least had something that I feel that I'm hanging my work onto, as opposed to, I don't know, writing into empty air. Because we're working on our own, we're away, we don't have very much tutor input and it gives us something to hold onto. I feel like it's the scaffolding. I'm glad I opted in to [the pilot] because it has given me valuable scaffolding to the whole process,*

which felt overwhelming, but once I had a strategy in place it was easier to deal with.'

- *'I think it has made me think more. It is quite good on the whole about building your resilience. You can read what other people thought which I think is really helpful. Then you can think, 'Oh I'm not alone in this'. And it does make you think about things that I would not necessarily have thought about.'*
- *'There have been moments where you feel a little bit out on a limb. I mean geographically even I suppose I'm out on a limb. But it's nice to go back and know I'm not the only one that feels this, but I think I had the biggest moment of doubt after I sent in PR03. I sent it in and I suddenly felt completely lost and thought well which direction do I go in now. I just thought well what do I do now? I had two or three days where I just walked off and did something else. And then I did go through your plan. And sort of thinking around that and then I sort of set off again.'*

RPDF plans in more detail

Students were again asked to talk about their plans and any resultant actions for each of the three areas of the framework, *working as a researcher, developing ways of thinking and moving on with your research.*

Working as a researcher

The three elements of the framework in this area are *developing research and study skills, building supportive relationships and blending theory and practice.* In the interim interviews students made more specific mention of how the plan had helped them in this area. They referred to how the framework helped with organising their studies and that the process is very much a learning curve. Two students reflected on their experiences around blending theory and practice.

- *'The framework was helpful because I organised all the stages that I needed to do in order to succeed with a good literature review and it helped me to organise things and to be reflective and plan my timetable for studying and develop a strategy for academic writing. Academic writing is a challenge not*

only for me but also for native speakers in English because academic writing is a different writing style, so everyone has to develop in that area.'

- *'It's given me markers of what I should be doing in each of those areas and how to find that support. I identified in the beginning reference management tools and defining the scope of my literature search. [It's helped] particularly with literature searching and boundaries and seeing how other people have managed that.'*
- *'I went through it again yesterday and I thought 'Oh it is interesting having done it at the beginning and then deciding to do it this time on paper'. I found there's a whole area about developing research and study skills and I found one of the things I'm learning now is about how you edit work and that has been quite hard, especially when the word counts are very, very tight. That has been quite something. That is a learning curve I think and I'm not there yet.'*
- *'Around developing as a researcher, I think what it's done is that I question everything now, so I had some xxxx training. I questioned so much that I never would have questioned. Somebody put some figures up on the screen and I just said, 'Well where's the source' and she didn't know and I said 'Well obviously unless we know where it comes from and what the context is how can we say that that data's true?' So, I'm now questioning everything.'*
- *'I think for me where it's been really good is in the middle column, the blending theory and practice, because I think it identified for me that I wasn't in this on my own. That firstly, I could integrate it into my job role and secondly, that I can find people to help me with that not just in the OU side of things but in my job role and I hadn't thought of it like that.'*
- *'It's made me think more perhaps about theory and practice. I think I said last time with the Masters we had a little bit of practice but that wasn't really what we were being marked on. I do find blending theory and practice more difficult than I thought I would actually. I think just from inexperience. I knew I had to*

do it but the plan does underline it again for me and makes me try to think about it as much as I can. I have to admit I find in a way the theory is often a lot easier than the practice. Even when you read other people's articles it's pretty rare they tell you about their research participant disappearing. You get the impression that they just strolled along at half past eleven each week and did their observations and went home again.'

- *'If you then go to building supportive relationships, I think that's been a massive area where I've come back to [the framework] and thought right how do I do that? It has had an impact in just thinking those things through.'*

Developing ways of thinking

The three elements in this part of the framework are *reflecting on theory and practice, developing your identity and building your resilience*. As in the initial interviews all three areas were specifically mentioned in the students' comments. One student described how her reflection led to learning and increased confidence: another that the framework helped develop skills for life and there was a comment, drawn from the framework, that the process helps you to think in terms of grey instead of seeing things as black and white.

- *'I think this [helped] very much at the beginning, thinking about how I was going to use feedback and manage my notes and all of that, to make sure that I'd got everything in place, to make sure that I could keep on track throughout.'*
- *'The framework was very helpful because I used it as a way to reflect on things and on my work. Think about the wrong steps I take, the wrong procedures I've made and improve. I'm now more confident. We are almost at the end of year one and I think that I am more confident because I've learned a lot of things. I know that it's OK to make mistakes as you can realise that and correct, improve them. I realise that no one's perfect and having this framework has helped me organise my work, but also helped me to build up my confidence about continuing my studies.'*

- *'The developing your identity I thought was quite interesting where it was the whole thing about building confidence. And reading some of the things that people have said, I actually think I would never have thought about developing that identity. But it has actually given me more confidence and just reading some of the other things I thought, yes, doing this course is multi-faceted isn't it? And I think this whole model here shows how multifaceted it is in that there are lots of parts to it. It's not just about getting an academic qualification. It's developing yourself as a researcher and developing skills for life. Things that you wouldn't necessarily always have without doing this course and I think this model helps you think about that.'*
- *'I think there was something I read the other day [in the RPDF resource] where somebody said it's made her not so much black and white, but more grey and I think you do realise that there are so many facets to problems and there's not a cut and dry answer.'*
- *'Psychologically the plan has helped me a lot.'*

Moving on with your research

The three elements in this section are *disseminating your research*, *engaging with new opportunities* and *making a difference*. Again, the students volunteered comments on all three elements. One student had realised that they could begin sharing their research early in the process, another that they now felt confident to talk about it and that they valued the circular nature of the framework.

- *'One of the biggest things about this was identifying that, whilst you're doing your study there are still opportunities to share your research and get involved in that research community, not just in the OU but elsewhere, and so as a result of that I have actively looked for opportunities to do that.'*
- *'Thinking about the relationships that I've got with people [where I work and am doing my research], I think I would've just ignored all of that side of it and felt it was more of a sort of practical exercise rather than networking, when I*

talk about my research with them. I think that is an extremely important part of it. The plan pushed me in that direction.'

- *'The results from the pilot study cannot be generalised but I think that I can talk to people about my research at this point because I'm feeling more confident and I also have something to say. I have developed my thinking and can talk and argue about issues that concern my research.'*
- *'It's made me think about things I wouldn't have thought about. So, for example, the whole disseminating of research. And it's funny because when I look back on my first plan when [the framework] first came out I thought 'Oh I haven't even thought about that' and I wouldn't see myself as someone publishing or anything like that, but I think the more you go into the process you think 'Oh perhaps I could, though I would never have thought of that'. I think that the framework also helped me because it's a circle. You can begin from every part of the circle. So, engaging with new opportunities is not the final part, but it's also essential with the other parts in the circle.'*

The impact of the plan

In the interim interviews the students were asked whether their RPDF plans had prompted them to carry out any activities they would not otherwise have considered. The responses showed the plans had had a range of different impacts. Mention was made of how the plan had helped shape one student's research, that it had helped another student develop several strands of work and that a third student valued the process of reflection stimulated by the research diary she kept. One student had visited their plan just before the interview and found that prompted process of reflection helped them realise how much they had developed.

- *'The framework means you can blend theory and practice, share ideas with colleagues, learn as much as you can from your supervisor, build supportive relationships with your supervisors. I think all of these were in the framework.'*
- *'I think I would have done [certain activities] partly because my boss here is very supportive on that side of things, but I think reading through the plan as I*

got started and then going back to it and thinking what did I say, yes, it absolutely has made a difference in terms of me thinking yes, I do need to do these things. I think it's a combination of the two. I wouldn't say it was just the plan but certainly having thought about it and then actively searched for things I think the two things worked quite well together. I would have thought I would have just got on with the research for three-and-a-half years and then kind of emerged as a fully-fledged EdD person, rather than that it was an ongoing process.'

- *'What it did do was it gave me strands, it was a strand of literature but then also a strand of literature searching for methodology which I hadn't really thought of, how did other people already do this. So that was a new idea for me which I've now done.'*
- *'I've got a research diary which has got everything in it. It's sort of a mishmash of what's going on, what I need to do, reflections and then I've written all my things from [the framework and plan] in there as well. So yes, I am keeping that and it is useful to write things down and go back to because when I was doing my data analysis I was going back and thinking oh what did I say about that interview and I've written it down.'*
- *'When I read [the online resource] at first, I suppose, I didn't really think because I was new to it. But when I read it again yesterday and went through it I thought 'Oh, other people have had similar experiences' which I thought was interesting. So, reading it further down the line has been good, whereas at the beginning because I was new, I hadn't had that experience necessarily. And it's just been interesting doing it again how different my thinking is from when I first did it in June. It's been interesting how I've changed. I've noticed a change by going through the plan again. I've noticed how I've developed. So that was quite helpful going through it again.'*

Discussing the framework and plan with supervisors

Again, the students were asked if they had recently discussed their RPDF with their supervisors. The majority had not but a minority had discussed it but not as a significant topic.

Further development of the framework and plan

Students were asked for any suggestions they had about how the framework and plan might be improved going forward. Several proposed ideas that would seek to embed the framework into the EdD programme, including through online discussions around it or by prompts to revisit and review the plan.

- *'I think it would be interesting to have some mechanism within the EdD where we discuss this. Where, if you're using it, there's a way of sharing things with other people on the course. Probably just your cohort, because I think you build a relationship with them at the residential weekend. So I think that sense of building our identity together as researching professionals rather than just I'm doing an EdD, I think that would be a really good thing.'*
- *'I don't know how easy it would be to fix up and whether anyone else would actually be interested, but possibly little sort of Skype groups with other researchers to discuss how they feel about things. But then we're all so different, would that help? I don't know. Even if we're doing very different research we're all human beings, but then we've got very different sort of lives and life experiences and stuff so it could be that yes, we offer ideas to each other.'*
- *'We've got a weekly calendar of what we should be doing, maybe if there was something in there that said now you've submitted X progress report let's revisit this and have a bit of a chat about it this week, I think that would be useful.'*
- *'I think if it's going to be done I think it almost needs to be part of the whole doctorate because I think otherwise it would not be done.'*

There were also suggestions about how the online resource might be enhanced or made more accessible.

- *'I think [you need] a much more interactive way of reading, filling it out, watching a video would be good. I think it's quite wordy as it is.'*
- *'What I've found probably the most helpful is the quotes from people. Because that's real. So more of those, I just found them really helpful. Because they're all different but you can relate to some.'*
- *'I think that I found it personally much easier putting things down in writing, rather than in a document. I'm probably more likely to use it, go through it more, if I can write it in my research diary, you know, like just by hand. I found it so much easier to make notes and things. How people actually record their stuff needs to be up to them.'*
- *'I think it needs to be obvious [to find] otherwise if it's not obvious people haven't always got time to find things. Is it actually on the site live? I can't find it. I've found I've struggled to; I've had to go through the link that you sent me at the start. And I just don't know where it is. I think it's too tucked away because I found it really hard to find. I think it needs to be a lot easier to find.'*

Finally, the question prompted one student to comment on the overall issue of supporting distance-learning doctoral students.

- *'So as a tool, as a scaffolding tool to think what to do at the beginning [the framework is] great, to keep yourself on track as you're going, great. But I wonder how much the process of supporting students is a much, bigger question than that. And so, what are our times, who do we talk to, how does it work. I do feel out here in the abyss. If we didn't have the framework I'd have nothing at all of course.'*

Some conclusions from the interim interviews

- The plan helped students realise they were developing their identities as researchers.
- Some had found it a source of support during difficult times.
- It had encouraged students to think early on about possible dissemination, publishing or presentation opportunities.
- Revisiting and reworking the plan could help a student see how they had developed.
- The students felt the tool should be more embedded within the EdD with prompts to refer to it and forums to discuss experiences.
- It should be easier to access on the website.
- There had been little discussion around the plan with supervisors.
- One student raised a bigger issue about the support provided to distance EdD students.

Interview 3

The influence of the framework and plan

At the start of each of the final interviews, the interviewer commented that the aim of the RPDF is to help EdD students develop as researching professionals, that is someone carrying out research while holding down another role. Students were then asked a series of questions about the influence the framework had had on the issues described below.

a) on how a student carried out their research

Several of the students commented on how valuable the framework and plan had been when they started their research. Another theme that emerged was how the framework had helped them develop as a researcher and to realise that their

research was not just about becoming an EdD but about the influence you could then have and the opportunity to make a difference.

- *'It helped me to organise my research and reflect on my work.'*
- *'What I found was that the plan when I started, and the framework when I started, really helped me put together what my research might look like. It really helped me in the beginning when I was very confused, very bewildered, thinking will I ever manage this, that I had a framework to put together. But as the year has gone on, I've looked back at the framework from time to time and it's more about developing me as a researcher as a whole which has been valuable and how I look at what being a researcher is has changed. How I've gone from writing at that master's level to seeing myself not as a teacher who occasionally writes an essay but as a teacher researcher. '*
- *'It was good to use it in the beginning. I think the plan has helped me feel more some of the things that were in the plan about being more confident. I think one was on developing your identity wasn't it, and developing yourself as a practitioner. It made me think that my research isn't just about getting my doctorate. It's about having influence through that as well. One was about making a difference, wasn't it, I think. So, it's not just do your research and then it's on a shelf, no one looks at it and then you do nothing with it. I think the plan helped me think beyond that. '*
- *'I think it gave me lots of areas to think about that perhaps I hadn't considered. I think in my mind it was you did a piece of research, so you did your reading, you did the research and that was what you did. The framework helped me to think about some of the things I could do to do that better than perhaps I would have done before. So rather than I'm doing my EdD I think what it's done is said to me actually you're a researcher and there are other things that come into that and that's been really exciting for me.'*
- *'It has sort of helped me focus on how I'm going to do it. '*

- *'In the beginning, I found them of more use. So, it helped support and facilitate the initial conversations I had with my research supervisors.'*

b) on how a student carried out their professional role

The framework and the quotes from other students had helped students realise the importance of developing relationships at work.

- *'Absolutely, yes. I mean the bits on developing identity, relationships, new opportunities and disseminating research. Those things I would say have been really influential. So, for example I have actively sought out in my organisation supportive relationships. I had that on my plan at the beginning.'*
- *'Making connections I think has always been really important. So, it has helped me, given me that space to dedicate more time to nurturing those opportunities I guess.'*
- *'What has changed, and it's partly the framework and it's partly the process of doing the first year, is that I'm spending more time being happy as a teacher to talk about the research.'*
- *'There are quotations from other students, what they did in this area. And this urged me to do the same, to follow other student's steps.'*

c) on how a student blended their role as a researching professional with their professional role

One student specifically mentioned the blending theory and practice area of the framework, another commented that the framework had helped them feel more confident while a third had realised from the framework the importance of building relationships and talking about their research. More than one student had moved into new work roles during the year. In some cases, the new role had helped and in some cases hindered their research.

- *'That blending theory and practice section has very much influenced me. The fact that I should be thinking that way has influenced me and the framework itself made me at the start of the year think more about that.'*

- *'It's made me feel more confident in my role as a xxxx and given me more, I don't know, I just feel like I've got more knowledge than I did have, and I think I've got more confident in speaking out.'*
- *'[I've developed] a direct link between my research and an organisation where it could have some impact. Now I think that's come through being aware that building relationships and talking about my research (which is not something that comes naturally to me, I've studied with the OU because I like to study on my own and so for me that's been a real challenge) has been something that's going to be really important.'*
- *'It's really difficult to say because had I been in my original job I would have said yes, although having changed roles my practice has kind of become a bit more detached from my research.'*

d) on how colleagues at work perceived a student

Two students mentioned how the framework had helped them feel more like a researcher and that this had changed how colleagues perceived them, whether or not they knew of the framework.

- *'Yes, it's very positive for that.'*
- *'At the beginning of the year, I was very much a junior member of the research team. As the year has gone on, I've been able to feel that I have a little bit more gravitas. I feel more like a researcher as opposed to somebody with a skill inputting into an otherwise successful research team and I've certainly grown and developed. Now the areas of the plan were about engaging with new opportunities, that was just taking an opportunity in both hands to get involved in other research around the university and to feel more as a researcher in my own right and less just a research assistant on a team.'*
- *'Yes, the framework helped me to think about it and share the results. There is a point in the framework that explains theory and practice. So, if you try to practice what you learn from your study at work, this will be great.'*

- *'Yes. I don't think they'll be aware that it's the framework that's done it but yes I think it has because I think I see myself now as more of a researcher rather than a student and I think what I'm finding is that having that kind of identity, doing the EdD, thinking wider than just my project, yes it's giving me opportunities that I perhaps wouldn't have had if I hadn't thought these things through in advance.'*
- *'Not particularly, I suppose my immediate colleagues now are more sort of embedded in professional services.'*
- *'I don't know really. They haven't got a clue what a doctorate is really.'*

e) on how students perceived themselves

One student did not feel the framework had had an impact on how she perceived herself, but the others did. Feeling more like a researcher was again mentioned along with having more confidence, more resilience and a plan. One student had found it very helpful to read that previous students had not found the process easy.

- *'Definitely, yes, and that comes back to the fact I don't see myself as a student anymore. I see myself as a researcher and I think that's quite a shift for me. I think because it's so combined with my work I see it as part of my professional identity and now that professional identity has a research strand to it, rather than I've got my job and I'm doing an EdD on the side.'*
- *'Yes, it's very interesting. Now I see myself as a teacher primarily, a teacher of teachers and a teacher of undergraduates but I also see myself as a researcher in my own right and somebody supporting research going into schools and saying, are you doing anything interesting or creative, would you like help writing it up? But the other side of things is very much, and I hadn't thought of it at the start of the year, but I come very much from a social justice background, I grew up in one of these tower blocks that's in the news at the moment and people like me didn't go to university. This imposter syndrome that we've all read about but it was very, very real. The more I read it, and as I read the developing your identity and the more I looked at the research that*

was out there, the more I thought you know what, actually, this social equality, this social mobility and this social justice aspect of me that I feel so strongly about, could actually be part of my research and I can research from that perspective and as long as I'm saying this is my perspective, I'm researching from this point of view, then I can actually do the research and now I'm feeling like I'm making a difference in some of those areas.'

- *'Yes. It helped me with my confidence because it's difficult when you start. But now I'm in the middle of my study I feel more confident. I think that the framework helped me to be more confident because it helped me to reflect on what I was doing wrong or where I should try harder, what I should do in order to improve.'*
- *'Yes. I think some of the things like building resilience. And in the plan were things about it will be hard and I think it's good in the plan there are realistic things because I think otherwise it can all feel like everyone else is having it easy.'*
- *'Yes, I would say that very much, I'm more sort of structured than I perhaps would have been otherwise.'*
- *'I'm not sure.'*

f) on a student's relationship with their supervisor

While some students had used the framework as a discussion tool or to prompt questions, the framework and plan had been less likely to have a significant impact on this relationship.

- *'Yes, from the beginning, I think because there's a significant part in the framework that I have to establish a good communication with my supervisor. This is what I tried to do from the beginning of my studies because it's essential.'*
- *'It helped as a discussion tool to help guide discussions that sometimes could be a bit freewheeling, I guess, and to help kind of identify opportunities to*

develop in certain areas. Especially my confidence of being a researcher, I still feel a bit of a newbie in that space, which has been helpful.'

- *'I don't think so. It did last July when I had that first face to face meeting. It gave me a set of questions that I could ask.'*
- *'I would say less so actually. I mean it's influenced the way in which I think about what I'm doing but I haven't really shared it explicitly with my supervisors.'*
- *'Probably not in terms of I haven't gone through it with them. I haven't really discussed the plan.'*
- *'We haven't ever actually had time to discuss it I have to admit, which I think I've said before, which is a real shame.'*

g) on how a student developed their support network as a researching professional

Whether or not students had yet developed their networks, the framework had made them aware of the benefits of doing this.

- *'Very much so actually. That was the thing for me. Right back at the beginning was this section on building supportive relationships and it never occurred to me, but then I looked around and I realised not only is it OK but it's positively encouraged to go and seek out people in your field. But also, once you start making those links you can see they have done research, they have found perhaps more up to date reading than you've been able to find or different channels of reading than you've been able to find and that in itself is really helpful.'*
- *'I talked about my research to other academics in general at a conference that I participated in in May.'*
- *'Yes definitely, I think for me it was about the fact that it's not just about me and my EdD and my supervisors in the OU but that there is that wider*

community that you become part of, of people that have done similar things or are doing similar things.'

- *'I do still plan to do that, and I keep looking and thinking yes, I must do that and I think if I hadn't read those sorts of things in the plan, I probably wouldn't have thought about it.'*

h) on how a student developed contacts in their area of research

Three of the students mentioned activities in this area that had been prompted by the framework while again, as with the previous area; others had not yet done this.

- *'Yes, I've contacted some academics about my research from the beginning, in order to exchange questionnaires.'*
- *'Yes, so I think there was engaging with new opportunities. So I've used social media and I probably hadn't really thought about that. I've used social media to contact people. I've become much more of a networker at conferences than I ever thought I would be because as I say I'm a bit of an introvert really but I've been at a couple of conferences and a couple of professional development days and I found myself making the effort to track people down. Now I would never have done that before but thinking about the framework and thinking about building relationships, engaging with new opportunities, I think for me that given me a whole wider context to what I'm doing.'*
- *'Yes, I attended a conference last year around xxx. I've become familiar with names in that space. I've signed up to alerts from publishers, so if there's any journal article in specific areas then that comes through and I add that to my library.'*
- *'I'm quite limited in what I can reach out to do at the moment.'*
- *'No, not really. That's probably an area to explore more, yes. I have thought about it but it hasn't really come about.'*

i) *on any involvement by a student in research-related communities*

The responses here follow a similar pattern.

- *'Yes, very much. Indeed, I updated my page on ResearchGate. I also updated my LinkedIn page, in order to talk about my research to other people, and the framework encouraged me to do that also.'*
- *'Yes, absolutely and I think my research related community is probably in my workplace where I've got a number of people in my department.'*
- *'No, because I think mine is more school based. It's just in school and about student voice.'*

The impact of a student's work environment and culture

Each student was next asked whether their work environment and culture had been a help or a hindrance to them in trying to develop as a professional researcher. The responses showed that some students were fully supported while others were not. One student now worked in a more supportive environment while another had moved away from a research-based function and felt less supported.

- *'My university encourages research and it gives me 20% of my timetable in which to conduct research and to write up research.'*
- *'Most of the researchers themselves, the qualified researchers, the supervisors themselves are women of my age, so they've been extremely supportive, and they think it's a really good idea that I'm doing this.'*
- *'I think it's helped because I think mine is insider and outsider based research. I'm not really inside and I'm not really outside but I think it has helped me see more and I've had better access.'*
- *'I think it is important to have experience, work experience before you do your research, because you have to use your research as a reflective practice on your work.'*

- *'It couldn't have been more helpful. I think had I stayed in my previous job where I had a very lovely supportive boss and she was really encouraging of me doing this but there just wasn't the space in the working timetable and context to do anything.'*
- *'I think the intention's there to support me as a researcher, although it's kind of like the business as usual day-to-day stuff kind of takes over. And it's really hard to kind of carve out that time and energy for my research. That's been really tricky. But it might just be because I've just changed jobs, I've only been doing it for about six months.'*

The students were then asked to what extent they felt they had had any influence in trying to change the structures in which they work to help them develop as a professional researcher. The answers suggest that for a variety of reasons this is not yet happening to any significant extent.

- *'[My area of research is relevant to the roles of the other researchers] so they're more than interested in any comments I've got to make or coming and asking me questions about things and discussing things.'*
- *'I've just been asked if I want to make a poster of my research for an internal away day. We're all going off for a day to plan for next year with all the teams and it was do you want to make a poster of your research.'*
- *'Studying at a doctorate level, it changes your way of thinking. And this also helped me at my work. I think I can contribute more. I can be more precise, more critical, more organised. I think that this was prompted from the framework.'*
- *'It's hard to know that.'*
- *'I don't know.'*
- *'Not really, it's not really a research area where I am.'*

Students were then asked if the framework had helped in this regard. Some students suggested it had had an impact.

- *'It did make me think about the relationships that I needed to build. I mean some of them were already there, but I didn't know everybody. And this idea of actually purposefully building the relationships, again [the plan] did bring it to the forefront of my mind that it was something that was definitely worth doing.'*
- *'Yes. It helped me to organise my work.'*
- *'I've used the framework, so I suppose that in a way it influences how I look at things because I've gone through the framework in that way.'*
- *'I think probably I would have made the suggestions anyhow in that context. I don't think necessarily the framework impacted on that particular thing.'*
- *'I don't think the framework has helped me there. Except for me to say, actually, as far as my work is concerned, what has changed is my confidence to disseminate my research.'*

The impact of the framework and plan

In the next part of the interview each student was asked if the plan had prompted them to carry out activities that they would not otherwise have considered, if so what those activities were and what had been the influence of the framework. Students mentioned building relationships and developing their identity. They talked about the framework not only giving them new ideas but giving them the confidence to try them out. Others had found it a useful planning tool.

- *'Yes, there's a couple of things there. The very first thing was building other relationships, seeking out other people in my field and, you know, asking for help. So, that idea that it was acceptable and encouraged, that was new to me and that would not have happened had it not been in the framework. The second one that would not have happened had it not been in the framework was the developing your identity where I came out with this idea of myself and*

my background as actually being an essential part of my research persona. Other parts such as disseminating my research, looking at theory and practice together in my day-to-day job, those two areas, I think it's partly the framework which set me off on the pathway and partly the fact of having done the initial study that's changed those opinions. And it's like a warp and weft between those two: there's no way of separating them out and saying which one had the effect the most and in what way. It was the two together.'

- *'Yes. When I see my targets, the first one was establish good communication with my supervisor. The other one is participating in online forums in order to have communication with other students. And the third one was try to have work and research life balance. I think that I wouldn't have dared to have a page or sign in on ResearchGate because I'm not so confident as a person. The framework has made me think about other listings also. Otherwise I would be hiding, I think, and shy in a corner and wouldn't talk about my research until I have my results or until I finish, I think. The framework makes me start thinking about these ways also.'*
- *'I think having gone through the framework, it's helped me develop myself. Like just looking at different areas. I think because I'm not in the academic world, I'm not a lecturer, you can feel less confident and I think it's more a confidence thing. I think I probably initially thought I'll just get this, put my thesis on a shelf and I wouldn't even disseminate it so the fact I was even thinking of that and even prepared a slide show, having never done a PowerPoint ever in my life before. It was looking at the framework, that disseminating the research that made me think yes, I need to do this, this is a part of me developing, it's important even though it's hard, it's important for me to have a go. It's just developing more and more skills which is good. It's about comfort zones.'*
- *'Yes absolutely. So the engaging with new opportunities and disseminating research, I think for me I wouldn't even have dreamt of doing anything like that in my first year, I would have been like well what could I possibly have to*

say when I've barely started but I think the combination of having to think about how I might do that and then combined with the support in my work context, those two things came together very nicely. Because I'd thought about it at the beginning, I've been much more intentional in thinking OK I need to try and do these things. '

- *'It did. I mean I started a blog which I have neglected I have to say. But I probably wouldn't have done that if I hadn't reflected on what I could do. Again, I'm a structured person and I like frameworks so it kind of helped me to sort of organise my thoughts in a more efficient way, and identifying ways I can make efficiencies sort of like setting up alerts to research papers and what have you and it's kind of instigated actions.'*
- *'Yes. The identity and the relationships.'*

Further development of the framework and plan

Each student was next asked if they had any suggestions about how the RPDF process might be improved. Suggestions included giving the framework more profile and to use it to underpin the course at the residential schools and to engage with students on an ongoing basis. Several were happy with how it was, and mention was made of the value of the comments from other students and the points to consider included in each section.

- *'Yes, I think it just needs more profile really. For me I do think it could be an integral part of the first weekend, I think that would be really helpful. I found the first weekend very intimidating and I think a number of us did. And I'm looking at this now and thinking if I was planning a weekend I think I might use this as the framework for it because I think, you know, the first thing I was asked to do was to talk about the conceptual framework for my research at that weekend. I'd no idea, and to be frank I'm still not sure. I think for me the whole thing about this really supportive framework is it makes you think much more broadly than perhaps you've been thinking at the proposal stage. And I think if we can build some kind of way of it being sort of an underpinning thing*

throughout the course, and, with ways of engaging with it at various points. We've got another day, haven't we, in October and again it would be useful to perhaps come back to it then. For me if it underpinned what we did I think it might feel a little bit less lonely. I don't feel very engaged with my fellow students and I wonder if some kind of activity around this during the course of the year would help.'

- *'I found the points to consider super, very, very helpful, and I can't see a way of improving those points to consider because those questions were really helpful when I was going through it thinking, and I've gone back to those as the year has gone on, especially when I've had writer's block, especially when I'm wallowing around in my circle of research and not being able to find a way forward, so that's when I've gone back to those points to consider. As far as what previous students are saying, that has been very helpful, and I'd like to see more of that.'*

They were then asked for suggestions for how the RPDF online resource might be improved. Suggestions here included making the tool more interactive, adding some video clips, making the word document more user friendly and making sure the framework was easily accessible on the website.

- *'I like the fact it looks like trivial pursuit, so it felt quite familiar just in the way it was designed, the circle bit. When you've got questions and then quotes, you could have some little video clips of people, talking about something, what they've done. I just think seeing real people makes it more interesting. Especially when you first start. It makes it more real and more personal.'*
- *'Perhaps being more visual in some ways.'*
- *'Just making it something more of a living document. So, having something that you could input digitally, I mean that would suit me in my way of working that I could revisit and update and keep it as a bit more like an online journal in a way. So you could then track your progress over time. Or whether it could feed into some sort of online journal type of thing would be good.'*

- *'Well, you'll be aware that the template itself I found difficult. I created my own and that helped. So, a suggestion would be to recreate the framework. Because the framework itself is online, you could almost make it an online portfolio or just a better-quality Word document so that's a practical suggestion.'*
- *'I'm struggling to find it on the website. It needs to be in an easy place. The website is a bit of a minefield at points. It just needs to be much more in your face. The problem is, you're short of time aren't you and you're trying to find things and it becomes frustrating, doesn't it? I think somehow it needs to be right there, so you can see it.'*
- *'It's perfect. I didn't have any difficulties with it at all.'*

Continuing use of the framework and plan

In the final part of the interview each student was asked if they planned to use the framework as they continued their research. Students were keen to continue to interact with the framework as long as they could easily access it. Its value as a review tool was recognised.

- *'I will definitely and I still use it as it can help guide conversations with my research supervisors. And also to mark progress, it's quite helpful to look at it and see where I have made some progress in some areas, because sometimes it's easy to forget what you have done, so it's quite a nice reflective tool as well.'*
- *'I would revisit it I think and I think perhaps what I would do is, once I get my report back and all the rest of it, kind of almost revisit it then and go OK, so as I move into year two, how did I get on? You know it's the classic review tool isn't it? I'm going back to this now and I'm looking at it and thinking actually quite a lot of what's on here I have achieved which has been great so it would be great to start again and go OK so how am I going to continue to develop that into year two so I think I would want to revisit it, yes.'*

- *'I can see myself going back into it at times. When I get stuck, which is inevitable, when I feel like I just don't want to write today but I should be writing, when I have times when I just can't see how to condense all this information into what I want to say, that's the time when I will go back and read those points to consider and those guiding questions.'*
- *'Definitely, any help is willingly accepted.'*
- *'Yes, I would like to use it.'*

Any other comments

Students were asked at the end of each interview if they had any further comments. Three final comments were forthcoming, one student mentioned the bigger picture the framework could provide, another commented on the need to involve supervisors more with the framework and the final one added that they saw the framework as a force for good.

- *'It has helped me to go back and channel my thoughts and my ideas and get me to think about some of the things that are important. Things like the relationships and identity, things like that. I think it's quite easy to ignore those and get just bogged down with piles of paper and research questions and what have you.'*
- *'It would be good if our research supervisors understood [the framework] more. So they could drive the conversation as well as me doing it. So we kind of meet in the middle. That would be useful.'*
- *'No, other than it's been a real pleasure to be part of [the pilot] because it's been really helpful. It's definitely had an impact on my thinking which has been great. I definitely think it's a force for good, definitely.'*

Some conclusions from the final interviews

- Students mentioned how they now realised not only that they were developing as researchers but that the EdD provided an opportunity to make a difference.

- Changes in work roles during the year had had knock on effects on some students' research.
- Students talked about how the plan and framework had helped them feel more confident and to carry out activities they would not otherwise have done.
- There had been little opportunity to discuss the plan with supervisors. One student suggested that supervisor' awareness and involvement in the plan and framework should increase.
- The plan had prompted students to develop contacts and networks and seek presentation opportunities.
- The support students received from their workplace and any impact the plan might have had in that respect varied.
- Suggestions were made that the plan and framework should be given more profile within the EdD, that it might be used to underpin the course and that there could be prompts in the calendar to review it and opportunities for students to discuss their experiences.
- It was suggested that the online resource could be more interactive and more visual and be able to be personalised.
- Students planned to continue to use the resource in the future as a review tool and for ongoing support.

7. Summary of findings

This section of the report draws together the results across the programme of research in order to consider the research question, namely:

- How effective are the RPDF and Plan in supporting EdD students' development as researching professionals?

Initial reaction

In their initial questionnaire responses students rated the potential value of the Framework and Plan as 8/10. Their subsequent comments in interviews emphasised how valuable they had found it at the start of their studies and how they found it provided a broader perspective to their EdD studies. The comments from other students helped them address their initial feelings of uncertainty and to realise they were not alone.

- *'Overall it gave me ideas at the beginning that I'd never even thought of as part of my doctoral study.'*
- *'You can read what other people thought which I think is really helpful. Then you can think, 'Oh I'm not alone in this'.*
- *'It really helped me in the beginning when I was very confused, very bewildered, thinking will I ever manage this, that I had a framework to put together.'*

Supervisor involvement with the Framework and Plan

Students had not had much opportunity to discuss their own plan with their supervisors at Residential School although some did use the 'points to consider' to help them frame the questions they then covered in their discussions. One student suggested there should be a dedicated time set aside to discuss a student's plan. There was very little overt discussion of the plan during subsequent supervision sessions. Time was limited, and other research-related issues were more pressing. This was the pilot year of the RPDF, so supervisor awareness of the framework and plan was limited. In future years it would be good to involve supervisors more, not

least to ensure that the RPDF and plan do not become too time-consuming, a fear that was raised by a supervisor in their response to the initial questionnaire.

- *'Because [discussing the framework] ended up being on top of the research, the research takes over.'*
- *'You just need an extra special time on its own I think.'*
- *'If you're going to chat through it with your supervisors you will do it, won't you?'*

RPDF plans in more detail

In the first two interviews students were asked specifically about the RPDF plans each had drawn up and any resultant actions for each of the three areas of the framework, *working as a researcher, developing ways of thinking and moving on with your research.*

Working as a researcher

The three elements of the framework in this area are *developing research and study skills, building supportive relationships and blending theory and practice.* The first two of these areas had been the main focus of the initial residential school and so it was difficult to identify the specific impact the plan might have had. However, it had helped students realise the benefit of planning their research with one mentioning how they had used the framework as their scaffolding. Students were reassured to read that other students had found it difficult to develop their research skills. Several students talked specifically about the challenge of blending theory and practice and were grateful that the plan had drawn their attention to this area.

- *'I'm glad I opted in to [the pilot] because it has given me valuable scaffolding to the whole process, which felt overwhelming.'*
- *'I realise that no one's perfect and having this framework has helped me organise my work, but also helped me to build up my confidence about continuing my studies.'*

- *‘I think for me where it’s been really good is in the middle column, the blending theory and practice, because I think it identified for me that I wasn’t in this on my own. That firstly, I could integrate it into my job role and secondly, that I can find people to help me with that not just in the OU side of things but in my job role and I hadn’t thought of it like that.’*

Developing ways of thinking

The three elements in this part of the framework are *reflecting on theory and practice*, *developing your identity* and *building your resilience*. All three areas featured across the student responses. The plan had prompted several to keep research journals which they valued. The idea of developing their identity had resonated deeply. It had helped the students realise they were developing as doctoral researchers rather than merely pursuing a qualification. This had been a significant discovery for several. Resilience was another key topic for the students with several saying that their plan had been of specific help to them when they had been facing difficulties or experiencing a lack of confidence. In contrast there were a range of instances where students mentioned how their confidence had developed during the year, with the plan recognised as having contributed to this.

- *‘Someone put that it was good to keep a reflective diary. When I came back from the weekend away I started it and I think that’s been really helpful.’*
- *‘I think for me there’s a difference there between just doing the doctorate and thinking about your identity as a researcher as well, and I think that’s what that framework really helps with.’*
- *‘It definitely gave me a boost back in January when suddenly I thought well what on earth do I do now?’*

Moving on with your research

The three elements in this section are *disseminating your research*, *engaging with new opportunities* and *making a difference*. Linked to the students’ recognition that they were developing as researchers was the realisation that through their EdD they

had the opportunity to make a difference. More than one student mentioned the underpinning motivation this provided. The framework encouraged students to think about the possibility of talking about their research even at this stage and several students referred to presentation opportunities they had subsequently pursued. Their increasing confidence led to them doing this and was further enhanced as a result.

- *'You don't think about three and a half years later 'Oh what am I going to do with it?'. You're just trying to get through it.'*
- *'I realised not only is it OK but it's positively encouraged to go and seek out people in your field.'*
- *'I think that I wouldn't have dared to have a page or sign in on ResearchGate because I'm not so confident as a person. The framework has made me think about other listings also. Otherwise I would be hiding and shy in a corner and wouldn't talk about my research until I have my results or until I finish, I think.'*

Students' relationships with where they worked

Overall students felt that their workplaces were supportive of their research. While they did not yet feel they were in a position to influence the structure of their workplaces because of their research, they did mention changes in how they were behaving at work. They described instances where they were contributing more, asking more searching questions and helping others with their research. Students found it hard to decide on the extent to which the plan had contributed to this but did recognise the part their increased confidence had played. Two students had changed their roles during the year, for one it was to a more research-friendly environment but for the other this was not the case.

- *'I don't think they'll be aware that it's the framework that's done it but yes I think it has because I think I see myself now as more of a researcher rather than a student.'*
- *'I don't see myself as a student anymore. I see myself as a researcher and I think that's quite a shift for me. I think because it's so combined with my work*

I see it as part of my professional identity and now that professional identity has a research strand to it.'

- *'It's made me feel more confident in my role as a xxxx and given me more, I don't know, I just feel like I've got more knowledge than I did have, and I think I've got more confident in speaking out.'*

The impact of the framework and plan

All students gave examples of activities and approaches resulting from their involvement with the RPDF. The framework had not only opened their eyes to activities they would not otherwise have considered possible or appropriate but had given them the confidence to do things they would not otherwise have attempted.

- *'[What] would not have happened had it not been in the framework was the developing your identity where I came out with this idea of myself and my background as actually being an essential part of my research persona.'*
- *'So, for example I have actively sought out in my organisation supportive relationships. I had that on my plan at the beginning.'*
- *'There are quotations from other students, what they did in this area. And this urged me to do the same, to follow other student's steps.'*

Further development of the framework and plan

The students' suggestions for the further development of the framework and plan were consistent across all three interviews. They felt students should be encouraged to engage with the framework on an ongoing basis. They suggested there could be prompts to do so in the course calendar and opportunities to talk about their plans and learning experiences with other students. One student was very keen that the framework should underpin the course programme and provide the framework for the initial residential school. Another wanted supervisors to be brought more into the process. Views were mixed as to whether the online resource was fine as it was or whether there should be more interaction. One student suggested video clips could enhance the resource. Whatever changes are made one student was adamant that

as a minimum it should be easily accessible. All students said they would wish to continue to interact with the plan, with mention made of its value as a review tool and in providing ongoing support.

- *'I can see myself going back into it at times. When I get stuck, which is inevitable, that's the time when I will go back and read those points to consider and those guiding questions.'*
- *'If it's something that we're all encouraged to use, that 'how do you build it into the ongoing activity of the EdD', you'd be encouraged to revisit it regularly.'*
- *'It would be good if our research supervisors understood [the framework] more. So, they could drive the conversation as well as me doing it. So, we kind of meet in the middle.'*

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from this programme of research, undertaken to explore how effective are the RPDF and Plan in supporting EdD students' development as researching professionals.

- Students found the RPDF and plan to be of particular value at the start of their studies but also found they were helpful throughout their first year.
- The areas of the framework covering *developing ways of thinking* and *moving on with your research* had been a particular influence on students, both in activities they undertook and their wider approach to their research.
- Students found both the quotes from former students and the points to consider embedded in the framework of value but had some proposals to improve the functionality and accessibility of the resource.
- Students wished to continue to interact with the RPDF and plan during the next phase of their studies.

At the end of the final interview one student commented:

'It's been a real pleasure to be part of [the project] because it's been really helpful. It's definitely had an impact on my thinking which has been great. I definitely think it's a force for good, definitely.'

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for how the RPDF and plan can be further developed going forward:

- The RPDF and plan should be rolled out more widely across the EdD programme.

- The Framework should be easily accessible by students through the EdD Programme website.
- Consideration should be given to the role of the RPDF within the EdD programme, bearing in mind it is a supplementary resource outside the formal programme. This could include its possible role in face-to-face sessions and online forums and how it could be promoted in the course calendar.
- Now the research has been completed, supervisors should be briefed about the RPDF and their possible role in supporting their students with any plans they have drawn up considered further.
- The success of this pilot study (and the journal article describing the development of the RPDF) should be shared more widely within and beyond the Open University so that its possible relevance in other Doctoral Researcher contexts can be explored.

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