



Reflection and medical electives

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Why is reflection important?

Reflecting helps an individual to challenge assumptions and consider opportunities for improvement. Developing the capacity to reflect should focus on the reflective process and how to use it productively rather than on a specific number or type of reflective notes. In medicine, engagement in reflection can be demonstrated in many ways, depending on career stage.

By the time a medical student graduates, they must be able to:

- 'Explain and demonstrate the importance of engagement with revalidation, including maintaining a professional development portfolio which includes evidence of reflection'.
- 'Develop a range of coping strategies, such as reflection' to demonstrate awareness of the importance of their personal physical and mental wellbeing.

This skill is often developed by writing structured reflections, commonly with constructive feedback. These are used as part of the evidence that certain curricular outcomes have been met. The opportunity to reflect in practical and clinical settings is also beneficial.

"Having time to reflect on both positive and negative experiences – and being supported to reflect – is important for individual wellbeing and development."

The reflective practitioner, General Medical Council



How do medical electives relate to reflection?

- A clinical cultural and personal challenge
- A perfect opportunity for active reflection
- Elective reports often capture rare insights into deep personal beliefs and professional values

Medical elective reflection challenges

- Diverse set of destinations and settings
- Often function outside of NHS but still under obligations of Good Medical Practice
- Often confuse descriptive accounts e.g. innovative video blogs, diaries with true reflection

GMC guidance on reflection

- Anonymising details in reflections - when keeping a reflective note, the information should be anonymised as far as possible.
- A reflective note does not need to capture full details of an experience. It should capture learning outcomes and future plans.

Reflection - best practice

Experience

- ✓ Draws on personal, group or workplace experience as a means of testing out theory or new learning; looking at experiences with a 'critical eye'.
- ✗ Assumes 'experience' is an end in itself; that one's own experience is typical of others' without good evidence that this is so; that experience automatically equates to 'insight' without critical thought.

Personal responsibility

- ✓ Demonstrates integrity
- ✗ Personal responsibility is addressed in a superficial way, so that the relation of action and consequence is not considered in depth.

Focus

- ✓ Selects a focus, such as a particular time period, set of events, specific kinds of incident or examples of interactions.
- ✗ Is non-specific or covers too many dimensions, so the focus of the reflection is not clear.

Scale

- ✓ The focus is broad enough to offer challenge and meaningful insights, but can be reasonably explored in the timescale and any word limits.
- ✗ Is either too narrow to provide the insights needed or too broad to look at issues in any depth.

Direction

- ✓ Begins to take direction as one starts to identify, and then focus on, selected themes for closer attention.
- ✗ Wanders or jumps about rather than finds a direction.

Depth

- ✓ Delves below the surface: it picks up on initial thoughts and insights, analysing these further with the aim of gaining deeper insights or broader applications.
- ✗ Is superficial and does not demonstrate any interest in burrowing beneath the surface to understand more.

Challenge

- ✓ Usually tackles a difficult area or enters difficult terrain, such as matters that are personally difficult, or issues that are complex and do not lend themselves to easy

answers.

- ✗ Tends to stay within 'safe territory', or deals with difficult issues in a superficial way, or does not seem to take the person forward in their understanding.

Theory

- ✓ Draws on relevant theoretical standpoints, research, or established professional practice in ways that demonstrate how these have helped understanding; where relevant, it relates the particular incident to broader social and political issues.
- ✗ Draws only on the person's own ideas, experiences and anecdotes, or makes superficial passing references to theory and research.

Criticality

- ✓ Brings a searching critical eye to the focus of the reflection, to emerging insights, and to any theories or sources of information. This criticality is used to take the person forward in their understanding of the core emerging issues by, for example, challenging their own ideas and actions, or showing how their experience supports or challenges existing knowledge.
- ✗ Is preoccupied mainly with describing situations, content or events. May include critical analysis but this does not seem to be used in a way that really develops an understanding of the core emerging issues.

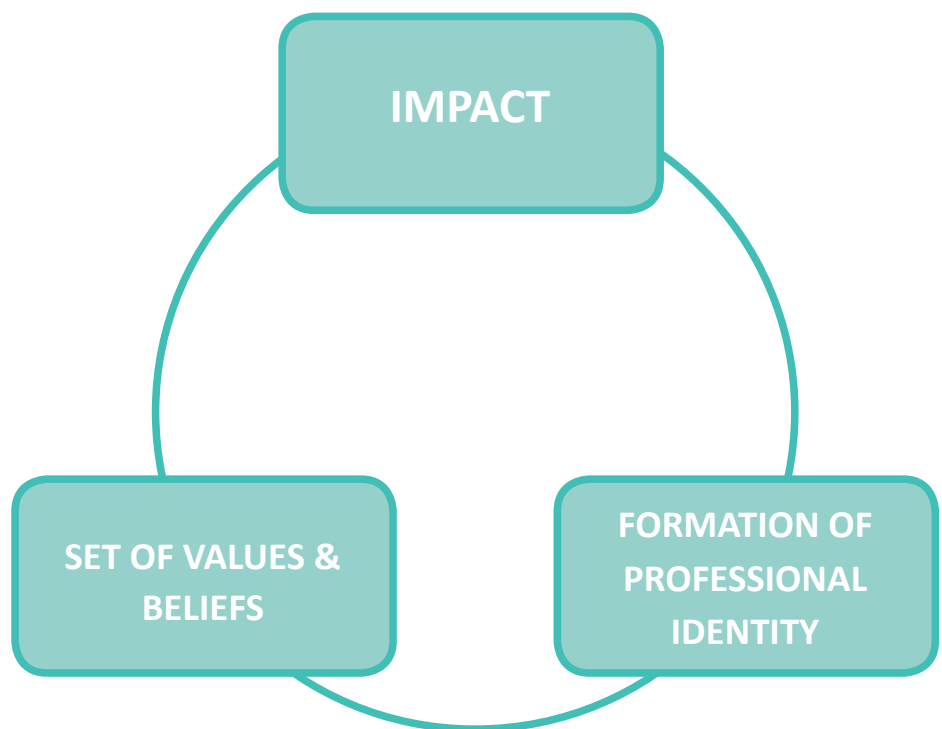
Insight

- ✓ The reflection takes the person forward in their understanding, such that they can make more sense of their situation, work or study, manage better within it, do things differently, apply understanding to new contexts etc.
- ✗ The reflection gives little indication that the person has moved forward in their understanding of the context or issue, or self-knowledge.

End points

- ✓ The process of reflection may take the person in many different directions. However, by the end, they have stood back, drawn out the key messages of what they have learnt and summarised these as conclusions or recommendations.
- ✗ The reflection reads more as a description

Beyond reflection – medical electives impact



Useful links

[University of Portsmouth - Reflective writing: a basic introduction](#)

[Reflection in/and Writing: Pedagogy and Practice in Medical Education](#)

[General Medical Council - Outcomes for Graduates](#)

[General Medical Council - The reflective practitioner - guidance for doctors and medical students](#)

References

The Open University (2019). Examples of good and poor critical reflection. [online] OpenLearn. Available at: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=64108§ion=3.2>