Careers and Employability for PhD students

Student Handbook

Careers and Employability for PhD students

Audit module

2026-2027

NATIONAL FORUM FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION
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Overview

Welcome to this *Careers and Employability module* for PhD students. This module is led by the Trinity Careers Service (TCS). It will support you with career planning, critical reflection and decision-making as well as supporting you to establish networks to help support your future career.

Map My Future

Trinity Careers Service have developed a careers framework which focuses on career development through life. There are six key themes, allowing you to reflect on where you are currently on your career journey and choose an area to focus on. The themes should help as you progress through this module. See our website for videos, resources and further information - https://www.tcd.ie/careers/map-my-future/

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1. Module Guide

Overview and Ethos

This *Careers and Employability module* is offered in a blended learning format which includes in person workshops, online videos and activities, and an online *Skills Audit* tool to help you to develop transferable skills that can be applied during and after your PhD. It has been designed in collaboration with a range of industry partners from different sectors and will build your readiness for future careers within or outside of academia.

The overall aim of the module is to foster critical reflection on your career development through a combination of shared and self-directed learning, and to enable you to develop the skills to create a community with students, employers and alumni to support you to fulfil your career potential.

The module consists of two streams: Careers and Skills. It is open to students in any year of a full-time or part-time PhD across all disciplines.

Key Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

- Critically reflect on, develop and articulate your skills in relation to your PhD and for the workplace.
- Create a career path that reflects your beliefs, values, interests and potential.
- Apply tools to proactively manage your own career.
- Develop the skills to create meaningful connections with other PhD students and employers/alumni.

Module Structure and Content

The Careers and Employability module comprises a suite of workshops in two streams (Careers and Skills) with students undertaking a combination of face-to-face and online sessions. Please view the *Module Timetable* to see a detailed breakdown of sessions and supporting activities per week. There is one in-person day on **14th January 2027** following which other module content is released at regular intervals on Blackboard, see *Module timetable* for details. While not mandatory, students on the Audit module are encouraged to attend the in-person sessions.



Pre-work for the Module

Completion of the *Skills Audit* and *Reflective Personal Development Plan (PDP)* is a requirement before you start this module. You will need to bring a print-out of your completed *Reflective PDP* to the in-person workshop, *Mapping Skills onto Career Options*. Take time to read the *Student Guide to Completing the Skills Audit and Reflective PDP* document to allow you to make the most of this tool.

You are also encouraged to listen to the audio recording *Why is this module important?* prior to attending the first workshop.

Module Streams

Careers Stream:

a) Designing your Career (online)
b) Navigating the Emotions of Planning and Managing your Career (online)

Skills Stream:

(a) Mapping Skills onto Career Options (face-to-face)
(b) Networking with Confidence (face-to-face)
(c) The Art and Craft of a great CV and Writing an Effective Cover Letter (online)
(d) Presenting your Best Self at Interview (online)
(e) Intercultural Competence and the Global Workplace (online)

Teaching and Learning Activities

A range of activities will support you to learn and reflect within the module, including the online *Skills Audit* and *Reflective PDP*, and options such as journal entries, podcasts and videos, webinars, and alumni mentoring. The wider Careers Service will also offer additional support e.g. CV/LinkedIn Clinics, Shortlist.Me video interviews, live practice interviews, one-to-one careers guidance appointments and access to labour market information and psychometric tools.

Time required

It is important to consider and plan for the time required to fully participate and benefit from the many resources and activities available to you on this module. The more time and thought you give to the module, the more you will benefit in terms of critical reflection, planning and decision-making for your future career. Please see your *Module Timetable* document for full details on the time commitment required.

As a guideline, it is suggested that you allocate 3 hours to the *Skills Audit* and *Reflective PDP*. The online sessions are approximately 30 minutes in length and you can pause, reflect and restart these at any stage.

The face-to-face sessions take place on Thursday, 14th January 2027. Each session requires pre and post work which is optional but hugely beneficial in terms of your overall development. It is also recommended that you regularly maintain and update your reflective journal on Blackboard – this will also assist you with your critical reflection on your learning from the module.

The supporting materials such as the webinars, podcasts and videos will assist you to apply and reflect on your learning. Attending careers service employer and alumni events will also assist you to develop a network which can support you going forward.

Summary breakdown of student hours:

Activity	Hours
Skills audit & Reflective PDF	3
Day event: 2 x face-to-face sessions, overview and lunch	5.5
Online sessions (5)	10
Teaching & Learning activities including mentoring, events	61.5

2. Reflection Guide

The overall approach of the module is to foster *critical reflection* through a combination of shared and self-directed learning, and to develop the skills to create a community with other PhD students, employers and alumni to support you to fulfil your career potential.

Reflection is a type of thinking associated with deep thought aimed at better understanding. It includes a mixture of these elements:

- Making sense of experience - reflection is an important part of the learning experience. It is where we analyse experience, actively attempting to make sense of find meaning in it.
- Standing back - to gain perspective of an experience, issue or action. It is not easy to reflect when caught up in the midst of activity.
- Repetition - going over something several times.
- Deeper honesty - reflection strives after the “truth.” We can come to acknowledge things we find difficult to admit normally.
- Weighing up - reflection involves even handed judgement or evaluation.
- Clarity - reflection can bring clarity, become more aware of our hidden motivations, our thinking styles, and of how we appear to other people.

- Understanding - opening up to learning and understanding at a deeper level including gaining insight into concepts that are difficult to access by other means; develop a better understanding of what affects our own performance and progress.
- Making judgements & drawing conclusions.

Source: Cottrell, 2003

Reflective Writing

Reflective writing will help you to clarify, develop and demonstrate (to yourself as well as others) the connections between your prior knowledge and experience (theory and practice), your new learning, the rationale for your learning and future action, and identify what you have yet to learn. Reflecting on your successes is a basis for a successful career, while reflecting on mistakes or problems can help you avoid repeating them or help to find an appropriate solution. Bear in mind that reflective writing is explorative in nature; it includes description (What? When? Who?), and analysis (How? Why? What if?) and can also result in more questions than answers.

Open University Figures 2 and 3 provide words and phrases that you may find useful in your reflective writing https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=64108&section=3

A note on Reflection and Discomfort

It is useful to acknowledge that reflection can be uncomfortable as it reveals hitherto hidden 'truths' – feelings of disquiet/discomfort. These are not bad in themselves as they can be interpreted as calls, messages and opportunities to explore further. Suppression is not always the healthiest response, especially in the long term. It's also possible that these concerns may not be dissipated by active engagement with them, and that a period of open processing is required before the appearance of a creative insight. Any form of self-development is about carrying out a creative project on ourselves and this may be uncomfortable.

Source: CAPSL, TCD (2020)

Opportunities to use Reflection in the module

Module Sessions and Skills Audit

You are encouraged to engage with the many individual and group reflective tasks and activities before, during and after the module sessions. Your reflective work on interpreting the Skills Audit is also an essential component of your development on the module. The more time you devote to critically reflecting on the topics discussed, the more you will benefit in terms of your future career and direction.

Journal

It will be helpful to keep a record or journal on Blackboard that you can draw upon for your reflection at the end of the module. Memories fade quickly so it is good to have a record to look back on when the time comes to write up your reflections for assessment. Jot down anything of note or of interest that occurred, and your response, while they're still fresh in your mind. If you are finding it very difficult to get started with your reflective writing, it might help to frame your writing in response to questions that you can make up for yourself to answer or use the reflection models suggested below.

Different Models of Reflection

While some students will be confident and proficient in their critical reflection, others may appreciate a framework to guide their reflection. Below are a variety of reflection models to prompt questions to guide your reflections.

There is a useful guide to the role of reflection in learning at the Academic Practice website.

The **Trinity Reflection Tool** www.tcd.ie/students/reflection (use your Trinity username and password). This tool was developed for undergraduate (primarily) and postgraduate students. It is aimed at guiding students to reflect on their experiences outside the classroom, and to help capture and articulate their learning.

A Strengths-based Reflective Framework

Ghaye emphasised that it may be most useful to do more of what we're good at and less of what we're not so good at. He calls this 'amplifying strengths.'

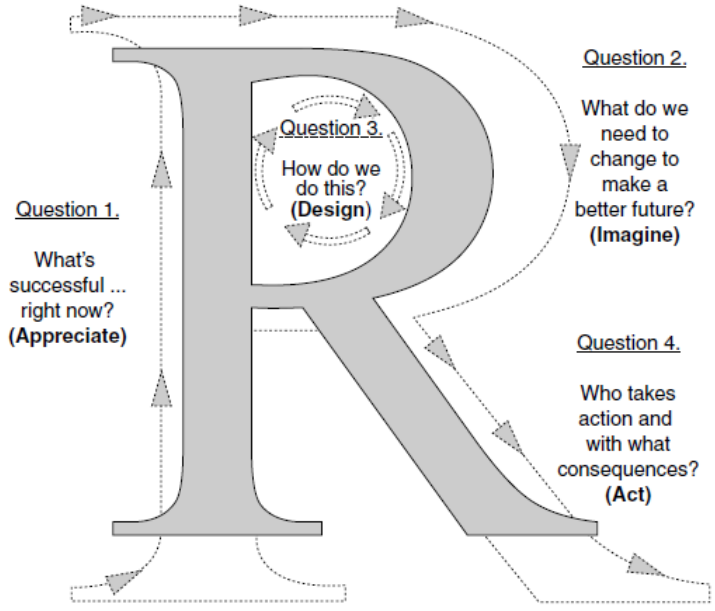


FIGURE 1.3 A strengths-based reflective framework (Ghaye *et al.* 2008)

Gibbs Reflection Cycle

A cyclical model of reflection which leads you through six stages when exploring an experience: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan.

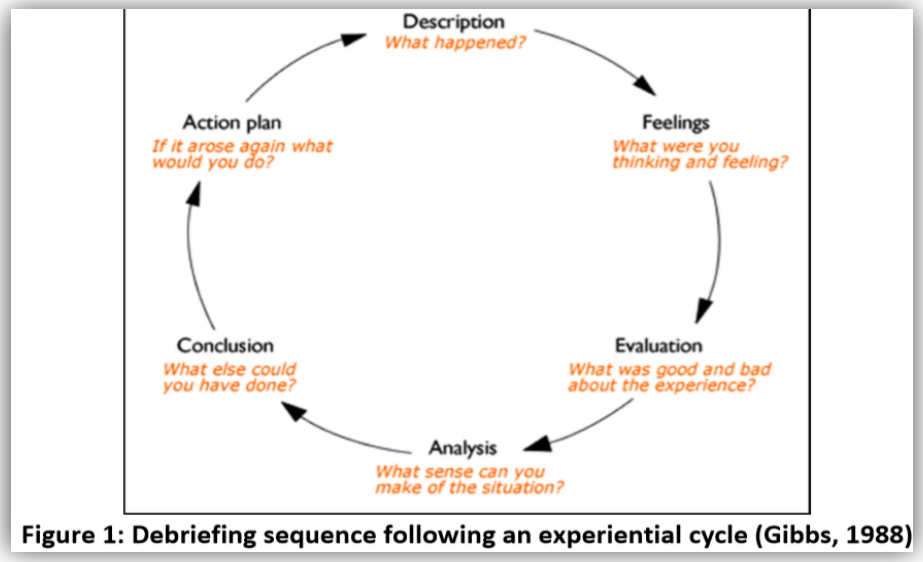


Figure 1: Debriefing sequence following an experiential cycle (Gibbs, 1988)

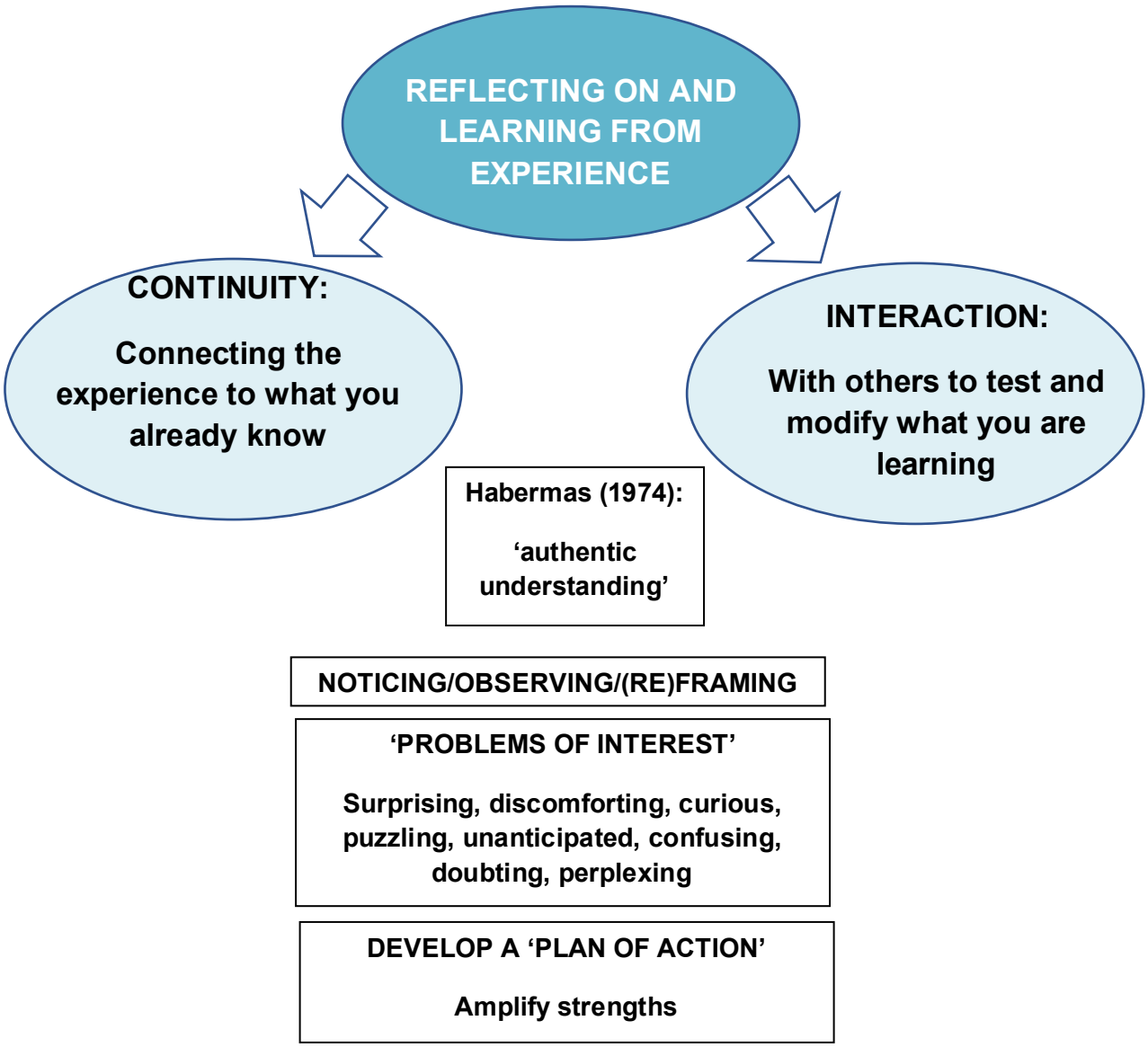
Depths of reflection (Moon, 2004; Hatton & Smith, 1995)

A model which explores different depths of reflection, with an emphasis in this module on Levels 3 and 4.

Reflection Depth	Explanation
1. Descriptive writing	There is no discussion beyond description of events i.e. the writing does not show evidence of reflection.
2. Descriptive reflection	Evidence of deeper consideration in relatively descriptive language, but alternative viewpoints are not apparent.
3. Dialogic reflection	Exploring the role of the 'self' in events, the reflection is analytical or integrative, linking factors and perspectives.
4. Critical reflection	Aware that events may be seen in different contexts, the impact of learning on future practice is also considered.

Dewey & Habermas

Dewey (1933)



Examples of good and poor practice in critical reflection:

Aspect	Strong critical reflection	Room for improvement
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 both in focusing on one's personal role, such as the assumptions brought to a situation or actions taken or omitted, and in taking responsibility for the consequences of these.	Finds ways of reflecting blame on to other people or the context itself for the way events unfolded; alternatively, 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 and 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.

Aspect	Strong critical reflection	Room for improvement
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 (extrapolated conclusions)	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 of a process or rambling free association. The lessons learned are not drawn out clearly as conclusions or recommendations.
Audience (if reflection is to be shared)	If this is to be used in academic, work or public contexts, the writing up of reflection demonstrates a sound understanding of ethical considerations and stylistic or academic conventions that may apply, and any issues of confidentiality will have been addressed appropriately.	The reflection is submitted or made public without all due care being taken to ensure that confidentiality and other data protection issues are addressed; no thought is given to how to make the reflection manageable for others to read.

(Adapted from Cottrell, 2013)
Source: https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=64108&section=3.2

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