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### Reflections on flourishing people, spaces and places TEDxQMU

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#### Abstract

*Background:* As part of the launch of a new nursing strategic framework for the Division of Nursing at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, we decided to host a TEDx event with the theme of 'Flourishing People, Spaces and Places'. This theme is the core of the vision for nursing in the division which focuses on flourishing people, spaces and places as the bases for inspiring nurses. Launching the strategy with this key phrase as the central theme of the TEDx event allowed students, staff, practitioners and our community to see, sense and be challenged about what flourishing means. In addition it enabled these different stakeholders to engage with and become part of the nursing vision as we move forward. Making the launch of the strategy a TEDx event and not a nursing conference offered an exciting and fresh way of engaging with stakeholders. We also discovered that, to date, there had been no TED talks on flourishing. The nursing team considered the TEDx formula to be a creative and meaningful way to engage with our key stakeholders. As nurse academics we recognise the need to continue to find new ways to engage in creativity and to use creative learning strategies in our practice (McCormack et al., 2015). The TEDx ethos/formula, which differs from the normal conference package, offered us this opportunity.

This paper provides a reflective overview, using a variety of media, of our experiences of organising and delivering a TEDx event with the core theme of flourishing.

*Objectives of the TEDxQMU event:*

- To introduce the TEDx formula to a new audience and to deliver a new idea to students, staff and our community
- To allow our audience to be challenged on a personal and professional level by a diverse set of speakers on what flourishing meant to them
- To launch our strategy and vision for the future in an inclusive and creative way
- To explore, through engaging with different media, what flourishing meant to individuals and groups

*Conclusions:* This reflective paper has allowed us to share our experiences of a new and creative way of engaging with staff and colleagues across a university and our wider community, to not only share our strategy but to challenge and facilitate flourishing.

**Keywords:** Flourishing, creativity, communities of learning, facilitation, engagement, challenge

#### Introduction

As part of the launch of a new strategy in the Division of Nursing at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh (QMU), we decided to host a TEDx event with the theme of 'Flourishing People, Spaces and Places'. Hosting a TEDx event meant we could create the right sort of atmosphere, energy and positivity

not only for ourselves but also for students, colleagues from practice and the wider community. Our vision for our Division of Nursing is to create a culture that enables all persons to flourish and this is the philosophical basis of our nursing strategy. Hosting a TEDx event enabled the intent of this vision to be made public and 'lived' by participants.

In this paper, we reflect on the experiences of delivering and participating in a TEDx event to engage with our learning community and to launch our strategy and vision for the future. A formal reflective model is used and the paper follows the stages of this model in describing the event, our learning from this experience and the outcomes achieved. We have illustrated it with examples/evidence of flourishing gathered during the event. The TEDxQMU event enabled us to 'play' with different media to represent creativity and innovation. Twitter and Facebook became powerful media for spreading the word about the importance of flourishing so, throughout this paper, we draw on these different media as sources of evidence for illustrating key processes and as sources of evaluation data. The paper concludes with some suggestions from our experiences and how we might develop these ideas further.

### **Background**

TED is a not-for-profit global movement devoted to spreading ideas. It began in 1984 as a conference where 'Technology, Entertainment and Design' converged, but today it covers many topics – from science to business and global issues – in more than 100 languages. TEDx events are independently organised to help share ideas in communities around the world. These ideas are usually delivered in the form of short talks (less than 18 minutes), poetry or performances and are chosen to 'foster learning, inspiration and wonder – and provoke conversations that matter'. All talks are freely available on the TED.com website, and together represent the core values of TED:

*'Unlike other forms of professional conferences, TEDx encourages individuality and diversity from the speakers. A universal goal is to spark conversation, connection and community'* (TED.com, n.d.).

For us, this new approach allowed us to build on and generate excitement about our new beginnings, and to encourage creative thinking about our new ways of working. Our team had recently collaboratively produced our new nursing strategy – a document that sets out our plans for the future. We want to have a focus that is contemporary, creative and visionary. The wider School of Health Sciences is committed to a culture that promotes everyone's flourishing and our new strategy shows how nursing intends to embrace this (Queen Margaret University, 2015). The TEDxQMU event gave us the opportunity to demonstrate visually the ethos, beliefs and values reflected in our strategic framework, as well as to share these with our wider community. In other words, to begin to demonstrate what flourishing meant to us as a team:

*Engage and belong,  
Be part of the tree growing;  
Branching out, rooted.*

(Haiku written by Kristina Mountain, Lecturer in Nursing, QMU)

A message from one of our TEDx speakers (Professor Angie Titchen) reflected the significance of the vision and strategic direction:

*'Brendan, I have been meaning to tell you – I think you and all your colleagues in the Division of Nursing have done a fabulous job on creating this inspiring vision. It was a joy to read. I wish you all well in making it a reality. In fact, I could see some of its reality already at the launch!!'* (Email from Angie Titchen, May 2015).

Flourishing can be defined as

*'...maximising individuals' achievement of their potential for growth and development as they change the circumstances and relations of their lives at individual, group, community and societal levels. People are helped to flourish (ie. grow, develop, thrive) during the change experience in addition to an intended outcome of wellbeing for the beneficiaries of the work. Flourishing is supported through contemporary facilitation strategies, connecting with beauty and nature and blending with ancient, indigenous and spiritual traditions (cf. Senge et al., 2005) and Dewing's (2008) active learning' (Titchen et al., 2011, p 2).*

This definition of flourishing is consistent with much of the literature on person-centredness and is a key component of our strategic direction. A person-centred culture enables effective practices based on the formation and fostering of healthful relationships between all team members and key stakeholders. It has explicit values of respect for self-determination, mutual respect and understanding. It empowers all staff to engage in continuous development and quality enhancement (Manley et al., 2008). The concept of 'person-centredness' has become established in approaches to the delivery of healthcare (Mead and Bower, 2000) and particularly within nursing (McCance et al., 2013). In the UK, person-centredness is embedded in many policy initiatives; in Scotland it forms the cornerstone of health strategy (for example, NHS Scotland, 2012). Creating different and complementary spaces for contrasting purposes is an important consideration in enabling human flourishing and creating a person-centred culture.

The reflective model of Rolfe et al. (2001) has been chosen to structure our reflection on the TEDxQMU. This model allows for description of parts of the event and analysis of the feedback from participants, illustrating some of our learning from this event. The model has three stages:

- 1. What?** What actually happened on the day – what was the TEDxQMU experience?
- 2. So what?** What did our participants gain from participating in the day?
- 3. Now what?** What have we learned and how can we move forward with this new knowledge?

### **What?**

The university agreed to support the event financially and to make available the help of its events team. By doing this, it allowed us to make it a free event, promoting inclusivity and equality. Making it free and inviting others to be our guests also demonstrated to them the importance we placed in sharing our beliefs about flourishing. By using the university facilities we provided a space both inside and outside for social interactions and contemplation; creating different and complementary spaces for different purposes is an important consideration in enabling human flourishing (McCormack and Titchen 2014; Titchen et al., 2011). Planning and delivering a TEDx event gave us breadth and challenge to be as innovative and creative as possible. It allowed for non-conventional speakers and contrasts, and the rule of 'no questions' enabled a non-threatening and explorative space for our audience.

### **The speakers**

The TEDxQMU programme was deliberately designed to deliver a diverse variety of speakers, and experiences to our audience. The rules of hosting a TEDx event also required us to show three videos from TED conferences that were consistent with the theme of our event (see Table 1).

<b>Table 1: The speakers and videos</b>	
<b>Professor Angie Titchen, Honorary Professor, University of Ulster</b>	<b>Running with wolves.</b> Angie's talk focused on how we can create the conditions for human flourishing. She passionately encouraged us to move out of our head and into our body and our heart in order to flourish
<b>Dee Sissons, Director of Nursing, Marie Curie UK</b>	<b>Can ducks fly?</b> Dee challenged us to see dying in a more natural way and to ensure we deliver person-centred care. She showed us that happiness is an important component and ended by getting the audience to their feet to dance <i>TEDxQMU2015 Dee Sissons @DeeSissons1 Apr 23 Lambeth, London @TEDxQMU2015 @mariecurieuk. See the evidence. Flourishing in action.  Go to TEDxQMU2015 on Facebook to see @ProfBrendan dancing</i>
<b>VIDEO: Ash Beckham</b>	<b>We're all hiding something. Let's find the courage to open up.</b> The first TED Talk video we showed. In this we challenged our audience to have difficult and brave conversations, to be authentic and to be ourselves <a href="http://tinyurl.com/tedtalks-ashbeckham">tinyurl.com/tedtalks-ashbeckham</a>
<b>Carol Fox, lawyer and feminist</b>	<b>Memoirs of a feminist mother - an inspirational journey.</b> Carol celebrated positive motherhood and changing attitudes to single parents
<b>Dr Andy Murray, GP, sports doctor and adventurer</b>	<b>Will our children live to 100? The future of health.</b> Andy arrived looking as if he'd come straight from the gym – full of enthusiasm, bouncing with energy. He smiled and talked about the importance of exercise to us all. He physically flourished! He challenged us as individuals and healthcare professionals to be the best we can be through exercise, and to be ambassadors for a more active way of living. Scotland's health is poor and he challenged us to help him change it. He demonstrated the power of belief in change and the effect of small changes
<b>Iddo Oberski, Senior Lecturer, Centre for Academic Practice, Queen Margaret University</b>	<b>Flourishing through mindfulness practice.</b> Iddo Involved the audience in an activity to demonstrate how to integrate contemplative practices into learning and teaching
<b>VIDEO: Guy Winch</b>	<b>Emotional hygiene.</b> The second video we chose to show was included because it demonstrated the power of human connection and relationships in shaping our thinking and being <a href="http://tinyurl.com/tedtalks-guywinch">tinyurl.com/tedtalks-guywinch</a>
<b>Professor June Andrews, Director of Dementia Services, Development Centre, University of Stirling</b>	<b>What the government thinks we are not ready to hear about hospitals.</b> In talking about flourishing in people living with dementia, June challenged us to consider how we could improve hospital settings and current practices to enable patients to flourish more
<b>David Duke, Founder and Chief Executive, Street Soccer (Scotland)</b>	<b>Football = Hope = Change.</b> His straight-from-the-heart talk struck a chord with our audience. He said 'being homeless was the best thing that ever happened to him', and made him realise he wanted to become a change maker. David's talk gained a standing ovation from the audience <a href="http://tinyurl.com/tedtalks-davidduke">tinyurl.com/tedtalks-davidduke</a>
<b>VIDEO: Daniele Quercia</b>	<b>Happy maps.</b> We chose this video because it challenged us to appreciate the environment and ask why we take the route we do (to work for example); the quickest route is not always the best route! <a href="http://tinyurl.com/tedtalks-danielequercia">tinyurl.com/tedtalks-danielequercia</a>
<b>Mike Stevenson, Managing Director, Thinktastic</b>	<b>Dour to doer: using the power of local creativity.</b> Dubbed Scotland's 'Champion of Ambition', Mike challenged us to go back to basics, think widely, try new ideas, get ideas from children and to celebrate that we are living in an exciting and creative time. His talk drew cheers from the audience and was praised for its mix of humour and inspiration. Mike declared that it's 'our purpose to inspire and empower people' <a href="http://tinyurl.com/tedtalks-mikestevenson">tinyurl.com/tedtalks-mikestevenson</a>
<b>Liz Lochhead, Scotland's Poet Laureate</b>	<b>Imagination as a place.</b> Liz addressed flourishing through poetry. Her talk focused on challenging us to 'get writing' and was illustrated with her own poems. It drew a lengthy standing ovation from our audience
<b>Clark Community Choir</b>	The final presentation of the day was from a local intergenerational choir and demonstrated the strength of a community with a common goal. Many people in our audience found their performance very moving and emotional. Between musical items, members of the choir stepped forward to describe what being in the choir meant to them and how it helped them to flourish. This was a really powerful end to the day <a href="http://www.clarkcommunitychoir.co.uk/about-us.html">www.clarkcommunitychoir.co.uk/about-us.html</a>

**Figure 1: Clark Community Choir**



Each speaker was introduced by a haiku – again, a refreshing and different approach (see Table 2).

<b>Table 2: The introductory haiku</b>	
<b>Angie Titchen</b>	<i>Wild woman dancing Critical and creative Transformational changes</i>
<b>Dee Sissons</b>	<i>Passion from the North Wisdom flowing from the East Care and vision abundant</i>
<b>Carol Fox</b>	<i>Equal laws for all Determined feminist acts Committed mother</i>
<b>Dr Andy Murray</b>	<i>Adventurer runs Visioning the yet to be Doctor of fitness</i>
<b>Iddo Oberski</b>	<i>Mindfulness present Celebrating humanness Learning to flourish</i>
<b>Professor June Andrews</b>	<i>Dementia transformed Flourishing people with love Global care impact</i>
<b>David Duke</b>	<i>Change maker in action Footballing transformation Street Soccer Scotland</i>
<b>Mike Stevenson</b>	<i>Thinktastic thinking Hothousing innovation Realised talents</i>
<b>Liz Lochhead</b>	<i>Poet of the people The Scottish voice in rhythm Poet Laureate</i>
<b>Clark Community Choir</b>	<i>Poet of the people The Scottish voice in rhythm Poet Laureate</i>

### **The Competition**

In preparation for the day and to start thinking about flourishing, we ran an online competition to engage our audience. We encouraged people to express creatively (photo, poetry, art creation) what flourishing meant to them. We had six entries.

#### **Entry 1**

**'Flourishing - It's not about me it's about you'**

**Ailsa Espie, Division of Nursing, QMU, 2015**

*So what does flourishing mean for me?  
Some time to stop and think and see  
'What's that honey? I'm trying to work  
'Yes of course I can take you, we've no time to shirk'*

*Flourishing, flourishing what does it mean?  
A place to be and space for the keen.  
'Is that the phone? I'll be right there  
Now tell me about it, of course you can share'*

*Growing, thriving, creating something new  
Feeding the soul, the spiritual you  
'You have a question? Of course I've got time  
Sit down and tell me what you need for your climb'*

*Goodness, growth, and resilience that's true  
Time to be together, just time for us two  
The infinite capacity to live with sheer joy  
Scope to help others with no hidden ploy*

*To be with others, to want the best  
To see the individual, despite the unrest  
We're equal partners, of course, but what can I do?  
How can I help you be the best you?*

*What about me, what do I need?  
A please and a thank you and some time to read  
True gifts of kindness with no price to pay  
A world where everyone is valued today.*

#### **Entry 2**

**'The Seed'**

**Stephanie Mclean, QMU Student Nurse 2015**

*From strong foundations you will show.  
Oh! Little seed! See how you grow!  
Through season and challenge, slow and steady.  
Oh! Little seed! You will soon be ready!  
Through knowledge and learning, and all that nourish.  
Oh! Little seed! See how you flourish!*

**Entry 3**

***#flourishingthroughmusic***

***Barbara Cowie, Advanced Practice Nurse/Nurse Continence Adviser, West Park Healthcare, Toronto, Canada***



**Entry 4**

**'Flourishing Student Nurses'**

**Photography by Mark Gilliam, Head of the Division of Media, Communication and Performing Arts, QMU**



**Entry 5**

**'Flourishing'**

**Maureen Temple, external entrant, 2015**

*To flourish is to grow with knowledge  
With the seed being planted in the mind,  
And nourished with learning and understanding  
Opportunities begin to unwind.*

*So growing strong with the learning  
The world doesn't seem so small,  
And the doors of life open easier  
As your steps up the ladder grow tall.*

*And as you climb, your hopes and dreams,  
Start to materialise into full flower.  
With aims and goals, the world's your oyster  
All enriched by the learning tower.*



**Entry 6**  
**Professor Jan Dewing, Division of Nursing, QMU**



This competition created a sense of community through the TEDxQMU website, Facebook page and Twitter feeds. All these aspects are essential for a successful TEDx event. Although this inevitably led to more work in the preparation for the event, it was well worth the effort and people commented on how they liked this engagement and sense of anticipation. This worked well and allowed a shared space not just for information sharing but also for the sharing of creative ideas.

### So what?

Taking time to come together and to consider flourishing in many forms, to think about ourselves and what makes us as individuals flourish and how we empower those around us to flourish was incredibly powerful. As expected, different speakers connected with different individuals in the audience and each guest took away individual messages and challenges. Deciding to run a TEDx event rather than a traditional conference was a risk and a movement away from the norm. Many people had not heard of the TED movement and we found ourselves saying on many occasions, 'this is not just another conference, this is different'. It was an exciting and yet challenging event to organise – the strict rules of TEDx initially were an irritation and seemed at times to constrain our creativity. On reflection, the rules actually forced us to think more creatively, work in different ways, and to find solutions to problems in order to create a successful event. The newness of the idea to the university provided more challenges and the scale of the IT infrastructure required was a steep learning curve. 'Having to' meet the guidelines of running a Facebook page, Twitter feed and website at first seemed too much and a bit over the top for one-day event, but slowly the significance of how this worked for us and helped to make this a different event became evident.

Our theme of flourishing also at first seemed a challenge – what did it mean? What were we trying to say? Why was it so vague? We had initially submitted a title to TED of 'Nursing and person-centred care', which was rejected, as it did not fit the TED philosophy. On reflection, it now seems obvious that if the theme is broader and more encompassing of the wider community then the impact will be more significant.

### Participatory evaluation

People experienced different emotions throughout the day, from laughter to tears, standing ovations and spontaneous clapping mid-presentation... most people left feeling inspired, with a sense of happiness and wellbeing, and determined to flourish and empower others to flourish.

Figure 2: Informal feedback and evaluation on Twitter



**Ross McCulloch** @ThirdSectorLab · Apr 17  
@TEDxQMU2015 I'm delivering a social media workshop to QMU staff today. I'll make sure they're following the #TEDxQMU2015 hashtag!

**Ann Rae** @AnnRae · Apr 15  
@TEDxQMU2015 really looking forward to Flourishing on Friday. Think #ff twitter will be busy that day #TEDxQMU2015 @Thinktastic @cawdickson

Theresa Shaw and 1 other retweeted  
**TEDxQMU2015** @TEDxQMU2015 · Apr 15  
WOW! 270 followers! FANTASTIC! We really appreciate all ur support for our #TEDxQMU2015 event! Don't forget to LIKE us on Facebook!TEDxQMU

**Ellen Taylor** @ellenjtaylor · Apr 17  
@dementiacentre Student Nurses here to help 😊 thank you! Hope your enjoying the event #TEDxQMU2015

Ann Rae retweeted  
**Ellen Taylor** @ellenjtaylor · Apr 17  
Dee Sissons- "in Nursing you have to educate your heart as well as your mind" so true #TEDxQMU2015

Fiona Dagge-Bell and 3 others retweeted  
**Evelyn Rodger** @EvelynFleckDoNM · Apr 17  
The importance of the nurses gift of 'being present' for every patient is underestimated @NHSBorders @TEDxQMU2015 #TEDxQMU2015

On the day we had a pinboard and asked people to add their own answers to 'What does flourishing mean to you?' The results were put together in the following Wordle (Figure 3). It illustrates the diversity of reactions and emotions that people felt on the day and the range of individual definitions of flourishing. The diversity of answers was expected and yet a confirmation for us that the day had delivered to our audience what we had hoped it would.



### What did participants learn from the experience?

The official evaluation gathered online by the TED organisation was very positive and demonstrates that we achieved our goals for our audience (see Box 1).

#### Box 1: Formal feedback from TED online evaluation

F••••@qmu.ac.uk Apr 22, 2015 – 1:28pm *Heartwarming, practical, engaging and thought-provoking. Everyone has it within themselves to make changes which can benefit themselves as well as many others*

D••••@mariecurie.org.uk Apr 22, 2015 – 1:17pm *THIS WAS ONE OF THE MOST THOUGHT PROVOKING DAYS I have ever attended*

a••••@ulster.ac.uk Apr 22, 2015 – 1:07pm *Because people visibly flourished during the day as they listened to and identified with the inspirational talks*

m••••@thinktastic.co.uk Apr 22, 2015 – 12:55 pm *Great topic, great thoughts and ideas generated, well organised and finished with a flourish and a great atmosphere*

1••••@qmu.ac.uk Apr 22, 2015 – 12:54pm *I found the whole day very inspirational and I feel the speakers were all very passionate about what they were talking about. I left the day feeling motivated*

A••••@nes.scot.nhs.uk Apr 22, 2015 – 12:51pm *So innovative and contemporary way to get across strong messages through people experiences. The range and expertise of speakers was wonderful. I was delighted to have the opportunity to attend and once the videos are live I will be promoting widely*

d••••@gmail.com Apr 22, 2015 – 12:26pm *Be part of the discussions that are forming a better world for us all*

j••••@qmu.ac.uk Apr 22, 2015 – 12:25pm *Flourishing People, Spaces and Places presented a world class vision for QMU and others*

••••@qmu.ac.uk Apr 22, 2015 – 12:23 pm *Given that we are bombarded on a daily basis with negative images and information, being in such a positive and invigorating environment was pure joy!*

t••••@uws.ac.uk Apr 22, 2015 – 12:23pm *This was a fantastic and inspiring event. I have never sat in a lecture theatre all day and not switched off once! I loved the variety of speakers and deliveries and came away already flourishing*

h••••@uwclub.net Apr 22, 2015 – 2:27pm *It's was inspiring, different, emotional and captivating! I loved it*

s••••@qmu.ac.uk Apr 22, 2015 – 1:35pm *I am a big fan of TED talks, first opportunity to attend a live TED event, experienced a 'visceral' buzz, just what I needed. As the day progressed, it became increasingly apparent how much thought had been put into this event. A TEDx designed to challenge and, perhaps, contest assumptions about learning, teaching and so forth. I applaud the nursing team for their creative REvisioning!*

Interestingly, an unpredicted positive effect was that the student helpers loved it and felt part of something important. We also realised they do not often get the chance to attend and participate in normal conferences so this is to be actively encouraged in the future. But as a way of learning it was new and, to many, revolutionary. We plan to involve students in the planning and organisation of TEDxQMU in the future too. One student tweeted: *'Proud to be a QMU student nurse today'*.

Figure 5: TEDxQMU student helpers



### Now what?

In this section, we present our learning from the experience and how we plan to develop in the future. We plan to further engage to share our strategy and 'live it' on a daily basis rather than it existing as a static document. As noted by Angie Titchen's earlier comments, the strategy document is a dynamic and creative product and we aim continuously to capture that creativity in our ongoing work. We have begun to live and work with and by our new shared values, beliefs and the strategy we have built from these. We have seen the beginnings of changes in the way we work and communicate, and the outside world is seeing this too. One person asked in their evaluation: 'What's that to do with nursing?' Our answer is 'everything'. Helping each other, our colleagues, students, patients and their families to flourish is at the heart of our daily business. We created a day to reflect and celebrate this and the ripples of the energy created continue to touch and challenge people as they send in their feedback.



Next year we plan to widen the participation of TEDx to the whole School of Health Sciences, to collaborate with other disciplines and facilitate others and to promote TEDxQMU as a part of the educational experience we can offer to students and colleagues.

### Conclusion

In this paper, we have reflected on our experiences of the recent TEDx event hosted by QMU. The programme was deliberately diverse and challenged the audience to think about their own ability to flourish and to empower others to be their best. TEDx allowed a fresh approach to conference planning and delivery and the theme of 'Flourishing People, Places and Spaces' allowed us to engage and work with a wide community, and to showcase our strategy. The event allowed a space for participants to feel challenged yet not pressurised to deliver. We do however acknowledge that following a more creative and unconventional pathway to delivering an event and launching a nursing strategy does mean more organisational work and was a risk. We think it was a risk well worth taking, and plan to develop this further in the future. We continue to get positive feedback from the wider healthcare community and from students.

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### Note

All photographs included in this paper were taken as a part of the TEDx event and with the permission of the participants.

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