

Foreword: Dr Audrey Sutton, Executive Director of Communities and Education, North Ayrshire Council

It is with the greatest of pleasure that I introduce you to this new Robert Gordon University journal, *Reflective Professional*.

Research, and reflective practice, is at the very heart of RGU, and defines the university in the minds of its staff, students and former students alike. And it is as a proud former student of RGU, both as a postgraduate and as a PhD student, that I reflect on the contribution that the learning, research and indeed nurture I enjoyed there has made to my subsequent work and personal life.

On reflecting on this personal legacy, the story would be that RGU first of all turned a medieval historian into an information professional, and subsequently, turned an information professional into a confident reflective practitioner, retaining the core values of the university but enabled and empowered to take my skills, knowledge and confidence and to follow my passions.

Would that it were that simple. A varied yet enriching career path ensued, involving librarianship, political research, educational research and local government, leading to the privilege I currently have of leading the Communities and Education Directorate at North Ayrshire Council. And of course it wasn't simple at all. But my time at RGU prepared me for it.

One of my first and most enduring memories of RGU was how welcoming the janitor was as I arrived for my postgraduate year. Still timid even after four years of university in Glasgow, Aberdeen felt quite far away. Not the best basis for a successful learning experience, but he provided me with a touchstone for those early weeks and beyond. Nurture comes in many forms, and I've never forgotten the power of creating the conditions for learning for our children and young people – and it has become my passion.

There's nothing like the experience of doing a PhD by research while working full-time and having a family to create a focus on what matters in one's learning. The opportunity to think in depth and at speed about the research proposal and its execution, supported and challenged by the best supervisor one could ever hope for, provided me with not just with information, but with techniques to turn it into knowledge, and this has defined my subsequent relationships with those who have in turn looked to me for supervision or support. The gentle yet firm coaching I experienced through her teaching has, I hope, influenced and shaped my own way of supporting and mentoring colleagues, aligning values and kindness with professional acumen and feeling privileged to be able to share this with others.

For many of us, RGU is woven through our lives. It has made us professionals, and it has given us the skills and insight to be reflective. Thank you for this opportunity to reflect on RGU from a personal perspective and I know that impact of the journal and its work on its contributors and readers will be powerful and empowering.