INTRODUCTION TO THE PhD PROJECT
Communicating about teaching is essential to enhancing scholarship and practice. Informal conversation represents a key form of communication about teaching and a potential avenue for developing academic identity and practice. However, little is known about what influences it. This PhD investigates the influences, nature and outcomes of informal conversation through interviews with academics working for a research-intensive university. Interviews were based on a semi-structured interview schedule, and analysed using Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This study is focused on the influences of informal conversation about teaching.

THIS STUDY: EMERGENT INFLUENCES
Figure 1 displays what academics describe as facilitating and impeding informal conversation about teaching. The third (yellow) column shows the categories that emerged in the Grounded Theory analysis. Quotes that support the more significant categories are provided in the fourth (pale yellow) column. The first (red) and second (blue) columns are a way of organising the categories.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE PhD
Identify the relationships between these influences, the nature and outcomes of informal conversation with a view to supporting academic practice.

FIGURE 1: FACTORS INFLUENCING INFORMAL CONVERSATION ABOUT TEACHING

- **Time & Place**
  - People
  - Professional
  - Personal

- **Professional**
  - share values about teaching
  - newness, eg recent appointment
  - expertise/experience

- **Personal**
  - personality
  - shared interests (other than teaching)
  - relationship, eg friendship

- **Time**
  - no time, eg due to workload, research commitments
  - timing, eg key points during semester

- **Place**
  - neighbouring offices/corridor layout
  - in corridor at that moment

- **Leadership/Management**
  - deliberate; leader encourages or discourages
  - morning tea for entire department at set time

- **Serendipitous**
  - formal structure leads to informal conversation
  - response to events, eg negative feedback on student survey

- **Outcomes**
  - peer observation
  - mentoring
  - workshops
  - formal meeting, eg committee

- **Influences**
  - we have not had one formal meeting around teaching, ...
  - a lot of ex-union people ...

- **Nature of informal conversation**
  - “You're either talking about operationalising it, you're talking about evaluating it, or planning, and then to some degree delivering. That's usually done on a sort of one on one basis. The majority of these conversations happen with colleagues you're working closely with.” Chris

- **Outcomes**
  - “I've noticed much more contact of staff around the place ... Everything, at this point anyway has a fairly logical position to it. So that lends itself to like minded people and people who are teaching on similar courses being co-located and that helps a lot.” Marie

- **Influences**
  - “A lot of ex-union people ...” Liam