The TEL technical mentoring Programme at Northumbria University and its impact in supporting staff on the Staff Digital Induction.

The TEL team is part of IT Services at Northumbria University. The team is managed by Lee Hall and comprises of 32 members of staff across four service areas.

Their main remit is to use technology solutions to improve the teaching, learning and assessment experience for both students and staff using innovative and creative approaches. This is guided by a strategic objective of 'Enhancing learning through the effective deployment of technology' (TEL Strategy, 20-21) underpinned by both the IT Strategy and the University Strategy 2018-2023.

The IT Strategy has thirty-two objectives in total, three of which have a Technology Enhanced Learning element to them:

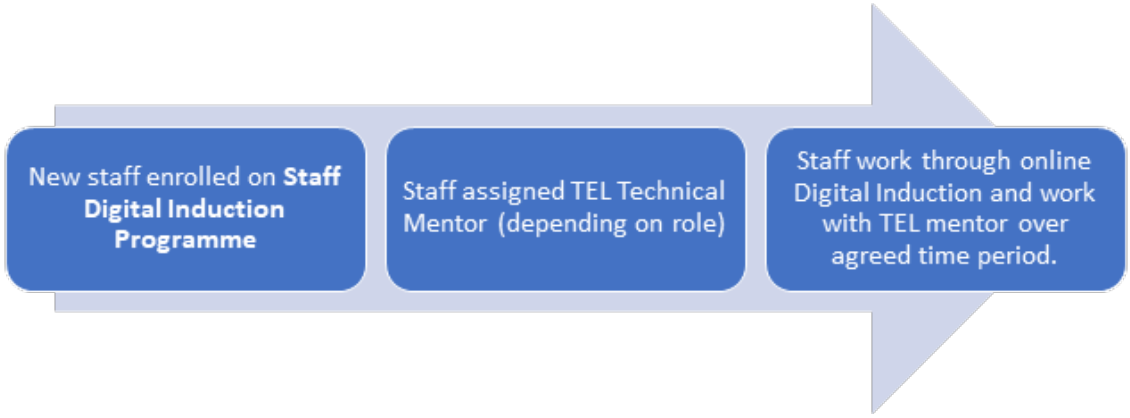
- IT Strategy ITO10 – Improve Staff Digital Fluency
- IT Strategy ITO14 – Staff Induction
- IT Strategy ITO15 – Talent Management

Common to these three IT Objectives is a new TEL Technical Mentoring Programme, which was developed in 2021 for TEL staff, who would on completion of the Programme, go on to mentor (and coach in part) new academic staff as part of their Staff Digital Induction and provide them with the skills and confidence needed to utilise digital & TEL technologies at Northumbria.

The mentoring programme is structured over a 12-week period and uses different learning activities, including 121 and group coaching, formative and summative assessments, roleplaying, observation, self-reflection, research, and problem-based learning activities (PBL).

The TEL Technical Mentoring Programme has been at the heart of the TEL Strategy and is transformational in the approach to TEL at Northumbria. It is key to supporting the University Business Objective for staff digital fluency and goes beyond the business-as-usual approach as the program me seeks to enhance the mentoring and coaching skills of TEL staff allowing them to offer a more enhanced and bespoke support experience for both academic and professional support staff which would in turn, have an impact on teaching and learning across the university.

New staff at Northumbria are first enrolled on the Staff Digital Induction Programme. This equips staff with all the digital skills needed to work at Northumbria and depending on their role, staff are also assigned a TEL mentor. The mentors are TEL staff who have completed the TEL Technical Mentoring Programme.



Prior to participating in the Mentoring Programme, most TEL Staff had little or no training in mentoring and coaching. However, due to their extensive experience in delivering face to face training and then moving to offering online 121 sessions, most TEL staff had already started to employ and utilise mentoring and coaching techniques.

TEL staff taking part in the TEL Technical Mentoring Programme also continued to support any staff who booked onto 121 online support sessions. These provided an ideal opportunity for TEL staff to start using newly acquired mentoring and coaching skills in readiness for the formal mentoring of those staff taking part in the Staff Digital Induction Programme.

These 121 sessions proved very popular having a NPS (Net promotor score) of 97 and an average session rating of 4.95 out of 5. (n=714) (TEL Support Feedback Form, 2022).

Feedback from academic staff supported in the 121 sessions reports staff being *'more confident'*, having a *'sense of empowerment'* and being able to use TEL for increased student engagement and satisfaction. Staff also reported that TEL staff *'listened to my/our needs'* and *'worked with us'* which suggests that TEL Staff supporting these sessions started to introduce mentoring approaches and techniques and adopt a more narrative and collaborative approach leading to more effective sessions leading to an impact on teaching and learning.

How will this support you in terms in terms of meeting your objectives?
I think it will help us to deliver an interactive and engaging staff training session with confidence.
The session will help me navigate BB Collaborate more effectively for heightened student engagement and hopefully increased satisfaction.
We are much more confident in using BB collaborate to host a large virtual event, which will allow us to deliver a more seamless experience due to better management of breakout rooms.
I will have more confidence using Panopto and giving students advice on how to navigate this.
Gave me complete confidence and sense of empowerment where there has been a lack of mentoring into a new role.
Christine was patient, supportive, understanding and flexible in working with me. She listened to my needs and she tailored the session accordingly.

Staff feedback from 121 sessions

The 121 sessions were also effective because of the close collaboration between TEL staff which ensured specific system or software knowledge was freely and easily shared allowing TEL staff to fully address any TEL related questions which occurred during the 121 sessions. New or less experienced TEL team members were also encouraged to shadow more experienced staff allowing them to gain a tacit knowledge of TEL systems as well as techniques for dealing with a diverse range staff in terms of digital literacy or cultural differences. (Swap, W. et al., 2001). Shadowing colleagues within the workplace also

develops a more supportive peer network (Pathiraja, F. & Outram, 2011) encouraging both collaborative and co-operative working.

The TEL Technical and Mentoring Programme was developed by the Head of TEL, Lee Hall and TEL Analyst, Graham Howard who worked in close collaboration with Northumbria University's Digital Literacy Board.

The Programme has several distinct outcomes including:

- Apply the coaching GROW Model to a variety of mentoring situations and contexts.
- Effectively select and apply the most appropriate mentoring tool for a variety of situations and contexts.
- Apply Gibb's reflective practice model to enhance learning through reflection.
- Successfully Mentor Academics throughout their Digital Induction providing a 'First Class Digital Mentoring' service.

The Programme is structured over 12 weeks and is deployed using the Blackboard VLE (Virtual learning environment) and used a series of structured coaching sessions covering established coaching models such as the GROW model and Johari Window. Thompson (2019) suggested that coaching could improve listening, questioning and rapport skills while Beltman (2012) reported several key benefits including creating a more collegial environment and encouraging reflection which is a key component in Gibbs reflective cycle for self-development.

Programme content also included both asynchronous and synchronous activities including 121 and group coaching sessions, peer coaching, pre-recorded videos, downloadable PowerPoints and documents, formative and summative assessments, roleplaying, observation, self-reflection and problem based learning (PBL) using real world problems to increase knowledge and understanding (HEA, 2018). The roleplaying activities strongly encouraged team participation and allow opportunities to employ various mentoring techniques in dealing with staff with several pre-designed scenarios.

Regular feedback was also provided from programme leads as well as peers which contributed towards creating 'a sense of community' and encouraged successful collaboration. (Schaefer et al, 2019)

To evidence attendees' development on the programme and its impact on academic staff, the Kirkpatrick model was used. This is an established evaluation model specifically designed for training programmes and consists of 4 levels; reaction, learning, behavior, and results and is an effective method for evaluating both short-term and long-term outcomes. (Yi, Z.-M, et al. 2020).

At the end of the programme an evaluation form was sent to all five attendees who completed the mentoring programme. This gathered both qualitative and quantitative data with the finished data been used to develop and enhance the 2nd iteration of the mentoring programme, ensuring the learning outcomes were met and provide an opportunity for attendees to share their thoughts on the programme. The evaluation form would evaluate both reaction and learning – levels 1 & 2 of the Kirkpatrick model.

After an appropriate amount of time had passed, a focus group was held with TEL staff who had completed the initial TEL Technical Mentoring Programme as well as several TEL staff on the 2nd iteration. The use of a focus group in capturing qualitative data can have several clear advantages including providing a relaxed environment for participants, the ability to collect data from several people at the same time and increased stimulation and motivation for participants (Robinson, 1999). The group were asked five questions with a primary goal of establishing what changes in behavior and practice, if any, occurred for TEL staff supporting staff as technical mentors and carrying out their 'business as usual' activities. The focus group would evaluate attendee behavior – levels 3 of the Kirkpatrick model.

Finally, to measure level 4 of the Kirkpatrick model - results and impact, a short questionnaire form was sent out to academics who had been mentored by TEL staff as part of their Staff Digital Induction. One academic was also interviewed with an expanded range of questions based on the questionnaire form.

The form had 9 respondents and would evaluate results and impact – level 4 of the Kirkpatrick model.

TEL Technical Mentoring End of Programme Evaluation form (pilot study)

Overall, the Programme received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the respondents (n=5).

Regarding course content and feedback, 100% of respondents (n=5) strongly agreed/agreed that the programme design and learning objectives were clear with content that was organised in a consistent way. Furthermore, tasks and assignments closely aligned with the role as a TEL technical mentor and provided feedback was timely and encouraged development.

All respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they were encouraged to develop reflective practitioner skills and could apply the coaching GROW model to a variety of mentoring situations and contexts.

80% of respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they could apply Gibbs reflective model to enhance their learning and develop effective reflective practitioner skills. Respondents also agreed that they could apply the GROW model to a variety of mentoring situations and contexts and felt confident in selecting the most appropriate coaching/ mentoring tool, i.e., Gibbs, GROW and Johari window.

100% of respondents agreed that participation and interaction were encouraged with activities that challenged and encouraged growth with both scheduled and ad hoc support sessions available to allow for self-reflection and examining the various coaching models and techniques introduced in the programme.

The final two questions in the form were open. Respondents all agreed that the mentoring programme developed their mentoring skills and knowledge thus allowing them to be more effective practitioners and employ more effective techniques when supporting staff.

Overall, feedback from the evaluation the form for the TEL mentoring programme was positive with respondents all reporting that they had developed reflective practitioner skills using the GIBBS model as well as the ability to apply the GROW model to a variety of mentoring situations and thereby encouraging academics to commit to an action plan.

Furthermore, respondents all agreed an increase in confidence and effectiveness when carrying out their role.

The feedback informed the design of the second iteration of the Programme with several adjustments made to assignments and content and a greater latitude from managers if extra time to complete various tasks and assignments.

TEL Technical Mentors focus group.

The focus group had three TEL staff who had completed the mentoring Programme and one staff member who was currently on the Programme. Five open questions were asked with the session lasting approximately one hour. At the time of the focus group, those staff who had completed the Programme had all been actively mentoring academic staff.

When asked if their approach has changed since completing the Mentoring Programme all respondents reported that prior to the taking part in the programme, they employed some basic mentoring techniques such as trying to establish a rapport however since completing the programme respondents reported that they asked more questions, did not give immediate answers but encouraged mentees to reach a conclusion themselves, asked more about feelings and tried to establish more of a rapport.

'I think I ask more question now and try not to lead with the answer but let them come to a conclusion'.
'I ask staff how they feel about things rather than just offer options.'
'I listen more and seek more clarification and provide options'.
'I try and not to lead but just have a conversation with them'.

Staff feedback TEL Technical Mentors focus group.

These comments would indicate a move away from a simple transmission model of support to a more subtle and conversational approach encouraging greater staff engagment.

Several coaching and mentoring tools were introduced in the TEL Technical Mentoring Programme, when asked, the focus group reported that they found the GROW model useful as well as elements of Gibbs and reflective practice. Staff also reported that they used techniques learnt in the mentoring programme in other aspects of their roles including reflecting more after meetings as well as listening more and letting people come to their own conclusions.

The data from the evaluation form and focus group would strongly suggest that attendees had a positive outcome after completing the programme resulting in behavioral changes in how they supported sessions, with staff now asking more questions and encouraging a more conversational and collaborative approach.

TEL staff who have completed the Technical Mentoring Programme work collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders across the University and beyond and actively use their mentoring and coaching knowledge and skills to build on and enhance the service given to provide an excellent customer experience.

As evidenced in the TEL Mentoring Programme focus group, TEL staff who completed the mentoring programme continue to use the skills and knowledge attained in the programme when supporting both academic and professional support staff in mentoring sessions, online 121 sessions and 'business as usual' work. A non-exhaustive list of these includes TEL department liaison roles, 121 online session and supporting colleagues in several partner institutions such as Dubai, Amsterdam, and China.

The liaison roles in particular, have encouraged greater collaboration between TEL and University faculties and departments with several TEL team members working closely with academics on several projects, including an International Peer Learning and Support forum in 2022, resulting is very positive feedback for the support and help given by TEL. Furthermore, several staff who completed the mentoring programme have presented at the 2022 ALT C conference in Manchester on themes related to the Staff Digital Induction Programme as well as the TEL Mentoring Programme and more recently, TEL staff have supported several events at the European Blackboard User's Conference 2022.

As of August 2022, there are eight TEL mentors who are actively mentoring or have mentored over ninety academic staff across different departments at Northumbria University.

All new Northumbria staff are initially sent an email which outlines two support pathways dependent upon their roles. The email also provides some context to what TEL is and what support is offered.

Both pathways offer asynchronous support with staff sent a link to the online Staff Digital Induction Programme. This contains comprehensive guidance and tutorials on all TEL technologies used at Northumbria.

Staff with teaching responsibilities are also offered synchronous support with an invitation to have a TEL technical mentor and are prompted to suggest a suitable time for an initial 45-minute induction session, either in person or online.

All staff at Northumbria, regardless of their role can also receive synchronous 121 online support sessions and face to face or online group training sessions.

Staff Digital Induction questionnaire and interview.

Current mentees were invited to complete a Staff Digital Induction questionnaire. This was completed by nine respondents and has five closed and two open questions. All the respondents were current academics at Northumbria University with teaching responsibilities. The NPS (Net Promotor Score) among mentees was 89. One respondent also agreed to be interviewed which allowed for several extra areas to be explored.

Since starting the induction programme 88% staff (n=9) agreed that they have used more TEL technologies in their teaching, with 100% strongly agreeing/agreeing that their teaching and learning has been enhanced by TEL technologies.

Several of questionnaire comments would strongly suggest that academic staff felt their use of TEL technologies and being part of the Staff Digital Induction had helped their teaching practice, with staff using ‘innovative techniques’ and agreeing that a ‘wide range of strategies’ and a wider ‘variety of software’ helped them engage students.

Used TEL technologies for greater student engagement.
'Large group teaching is difficult, and I have struggled in the past to identify innovative techniques to keep them engaged whilst not expecting them to contribute by speaking in front of the whole class. TEL technologies have helped a great deal with this.'
'The variety of software and the various activities that can be created through the use of said software definitely helps students engage with the course.'
'Yes, it should have a great impact on students in terms of understanding their course content and different tools used to communicate and engaged with staff.'
Were more aware of accessibility issues.
'The accessibility instructions for various platforms help me to feel confident in how students of various learning needs can engage with course content.'
'It definitely helps to support different methods of teaching and allowing for a more inclusive teaching environment.'
Help new members of staff with their teaching role.
'As one who struggles with Technology, this has been absolutely fantastic for helping me to start my role here, which required teaching immediately.'
'Any issues which I come across using staff BB as a new staff member, my TEL mentor has addressed very well.'
Increasing staff confidence
'I have used some approaches that were new to me, particularly around the use of tests. It has increased my confidence and skills in the use of BBd Ultra.'
'He has really helped me feel more comfortable using the various IT software.'
'Enrolling in a sandbox module, gives me more confidence in supporting and scheduling my module activities.'

Help staff work with overseas partners.
'It helped a lot recently when I was doing the block teaching with a Chinese partner University'.

Academic Staff feedback from questionnaire.

Emily (2019) reported that that technical training alone was not sufficient to encourage staff to engage with TEL rather, creating an environment where staff could develop their confidence and could experiment was more likely to succeed. This is encouraging as feedback for staff who are being mentored, as well as those that have had 121 sessions frequently report an increase in confidence. The importance of staff confidence was also repeated in a report by Jisc (Shaping the digital future of FE and skills) in 2020 which had several recommendations including providing 'coaching support for tutors who do not feel confident' in dealing with new technology as well as supporting staff to participate in a CPD (Continued Professional Development) programme that would build confidence in online teaching.

Several staff also stated that being part of the Staff Digital Induction helped them create more accessible materials and a 'more inclusive teaching environment'. With over 17% of home students having a disability of some kind (Support for disabled students in higher education in England, 2021), ensuring teaching materials are accessible is essential for creating an equitable student experience for all students. TEL also provide staff with support in the use of Blackboard ALLY and regularly arrange accessibility training sessions which ensure staff are competent in creating accessible friendly materials.

One staff member also felt the Staff Digital Induction Programme also helped with teaching a Northumbria Chinese partner institution. The impact and support TEL provides with partners institutions is also evidence from data on the online 121 sessions that are offered daily with many of those supported working with partners in both China and Qatar.

The number of respondents from the Staff Digital Induction questionnaire was small, however, staff who completed the TEL Technical Mentoring Programme continued to support staff in online 121 sessions. Qualitative data from these sessions was positive and would suggest that staff utilised skills and knowledge gained in the mentoring programme, leading to more positive sessions for staff.

The data from the Staff Digital Induction questionnaire and 121 feedback from would also suggest that both mentoring, and 121 sessions have moved away from a purely instructional session where knowledge is transferred to more organic, conversational session with staff stating that their mentors were *'good listeners'* and *'encouraged informal discussion',* all of which can encourage engagement and participation (Tews 2015). Several comments acknowledge that *'individual needs'* were met which demonstrates a more bespoke collaborative learning experience for both parties where individual values and diversity are acknowledged and inform the approach taken.

In taking part in the Technical Mentoring Programme TEL staff are being equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to move beyond a traditional didactic approach to teaching where the learner is passive and forms a more a collaborative relationship with academic and professional support staff. Data from the online questionnaires would also indicate that TEL support sessions are becoming more collaborate in nature and encourage empowerment and problem solving, and are an evolution from the *'sage on the stage'* behaviorist approach to a more constructivist (Vygotsky, 1986) student-centered learning approach where staff are presented with choices and play a more active part in their learning.

Furthermore, feedback would suggest that the Staff Digital Induction programme has increased staff confidence with TEL technologies which has led to greater student engagement and a more equitable relationship between new staff and TEL staff.

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