

Practitioner Tutor / Flexible Learning Induction at TUS

Case study of the development process for the pilot induction session for
Practitioner Tutors in the Flexible Learning department TUS.

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1 Context

1.1 The REAP Project

The REAP project (funded under the 2018 HEA Innovation and Transformation call), is a UL/MIC/TUS higher education strategic institutional partnership to develop a best practice framework in the engagement and governance of external/practitioner tutors delivering blended/online professional education programmes, and the development of targeted upskilling to improve the quality of teaching by external tutors in online delivery methods.

1.2 The practitioner/external tutor

In the REAP context, the “practitioner/external tutor” is the experienced industry, professional services or public sector subject-matter expert who is contracted part-time by the HEI, to develop and/or deliver modules for flexible/online professional education programmes.

2 Purpose

As part of the REAP project analysis of current practices within TUS for engaging practitioner tutors, one of the gaps identified was the lack of a systemised induction process for tutors. The REAP project subsequently initiated the development of a pilot induction session and associated documentation.

This document describes the development process for the pilot induction session and the outcome and the objective is to serve as a record of the pilot TUS process and as a guide for flexible learning unit directors/managers initiating a similar process.

3 Scope

This document describes the overall process to plan and organise the TUS(LIT) Flexible Learning Department Induction training given to Flexible Learning Tutors. The document details the needs analysis, the development of the content and delivery of the Induction training.

4 Induction Training Needs Analysis

Informing the Needs Analysis were three sources that acted as drivers for the formation of an Induction Package, these are outlined below.

4.1 Feedback from key stakeholder staff in TUS

The REAP project analysis of current practices within TUS for engaging practitioner tutors was based on interviews with key stakeholder staff in TUS including: the Dean of Flexible Learning, the Flexible Learning Head of Department, and full-time and part-time Lecturing Staff and recently employed Practitioner/Industry Tutors now teaching on a sessional basis at TUS.

One of the areas identified for improvement was the development of induction training. As outlined in the *REAP Course Directors report v7 REAP – Sept 14, 2021*.

‘Induction of new practitioner tutors is not systemised across UL or TUS and there is strong feedback from interviewees supporting a standard process for induction of new tutors. In MIC, the induction given to practitioner tutors is the same as that given to any new starter, with a combination of information delivered by HR and professional services, and further pedagogical training also included’ (*Course Directors report v7 REAP – Sept 14, 2021*).

Proposed content for the induction is outlined in 4.4 below.

4.2 Benchmarking Analysis using the REAP-BLASST framework

In late April 2021, a Flexible Learning department review was undertaken with senior Flexible Learning staff and equivalent HR staff. The benchmarking review was based on the REAP-BLAAST framework – a version of the Australian BLASST framework (Harvey, 2014) – adapted and localised for the REAP partner institutes by the REAP project.

Recommendations noted that improvement was required across significant elements in the uptake of new Flexible Learning staff. The process required further meetings and discussions between senior staff in Flexible Learning and Human Resources April / May 2021.

The Audit undertaken identified a strong need to establish a base foundation for all staff to understand and utilise common area resources.

4.3 New Flexible Learning Employment Contract

In early 2021, a new employment contract identifying expectations and roles and responsibilities for all Flexible Learning Lecturers and Programme Leaders was drafted to establish clarity and ensure a degree of quality and consistency in the delivery of courses. To circulate the content of the new contract and provide all Flexible Learning lecturers with a baseline grounding, an induction session was agreed as they key would bring all teaching staff to a common level of understanding.

4.4 Induction Structure

Based on the needs analysis interviews and on the outcome of the internal REAP-BLASST framework review an induction session targeting the new and existing Flexible Learning tutors was required to be developed.

Specifically, the Staff Induction Package needed the following structure:

1. Welcome and how the Flexible Learning group operated;
2. IT + admin process for accessing the essential IT systems;
3. Overview of technical VLE and T+L training courses and resources;
4. HR guide to essential policies for a Flexible Learning tutor

From the HR Department, the following elements were available

Established HR Polices on

- Student management
- GDPR
- IT systems and protocols

- University practices – dress code, behaviour, onboarding elements (ID Card, Payroll, Car Parking etc)

These HR Department elements are available on the TUS Staff intranet – it was agreed that a specific subset of the elements would be made available to the Flexible Learning Tutors.

5 Design of the Induction Training seminar

Based on the draft content from 4.4, the next stage of the Induction session design focused on determining:

- Who was involved in contributing to the content development and delivery
- What content needed to be addressed
- Logistics of session delivery

Outcomes are described below:

5.1 Stakeholders

The following stakeholders contributed to the content design and agreed method of delivery:

1. Flexible Learning Department TUS – HOD, Education Technologist, Lecturer / Developer
2. Human Resource Department TUS – HOD, Training Officer
3. Teaching & Learning Department TUS – HOD
4. REAP Partnership – Project Leader UL , + as above, Education Technologist TUS, Lecturer TUS

5.2 Content

As outlined the content would be: Welcome and how the Flexible Learning group operated;

- IT + admin process for accessing the essential IT systems;
- Overview of technical VLE and T+L training courses and resources, Teaching and Learning Professional Development;
- HR guide to essential policies for a Flexible Learning tutor

5.3 Delivery Logistics

Ideally the session would be delivered face-to-face to allow Flexible Learning fulltime staff and part-time to meet. In addition, the session would be “live” online and a recorded version was to be available. This changed to fully online because of COVID restrictions. This method, determined by Flexible Learning key stakeholders, provided equitable, open access to all Flexible Learning staff and, by recording and disseminating this seminar, provided an ongoing tool for those not present or whom later joined TUS staff.

5.4 Final Schedule

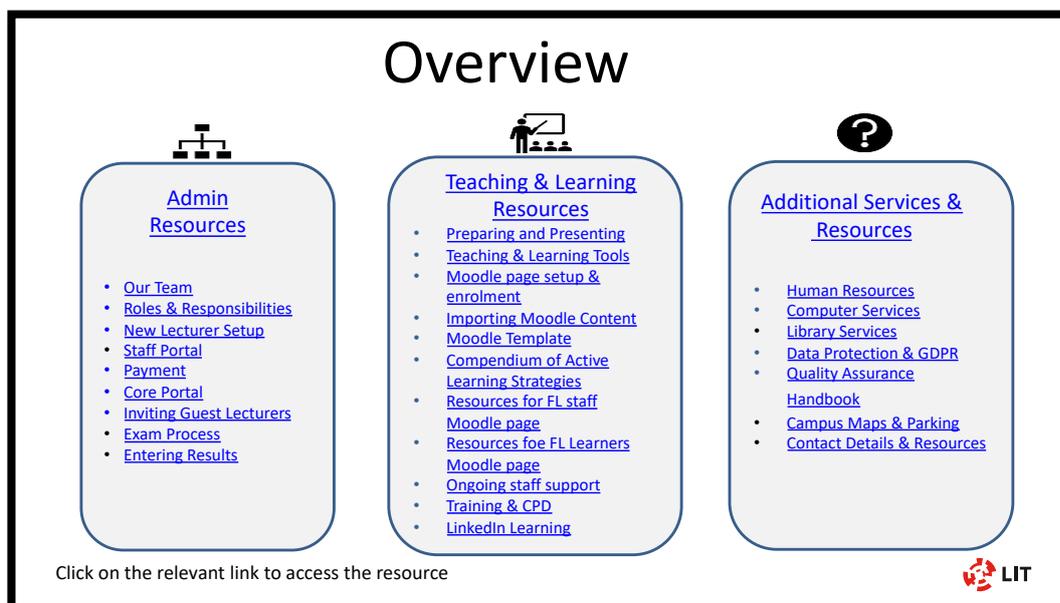
1. Introduction – Phil Hennessy HOD Flexible Learning
2. Welcome (online video) – Seamus Hoyne Dean of Flexible Learning
3. Admin Resources, Phil Hennessey, HOD Flexible Learning
4. Teaching & Learning Resources, Education Technologist – Clara Keevey
5. Additional Services & Resources – Phil Hennessy, HOD Flexible Learning
6. Q&A – Phil Hennessey, Clara Keevey

6 Induction Seminar delivery

Induction seminar was held on 8th of September, 6.30pm to 8.00pm (online).

The Key Slide below demonstrates the running order of the seminar. Again, the key stakeholders within the Flexible Learning Department determined that Administrative practices resources and T&L practices and online tools needed to be identified. Further policy documents, such as Data protection and GDPR also need to be highlighted.

Given that most staff were already familiar with the policies, it was prudent that staff needed to be made aware that an easy, accessible guide was now available to take them to all policies that pertained to their contracts and delivery. No drill down into the documents was required. For new staff, this was pointed out for them to explore post Induction.



Approx. 80 Flexible learning staff were invited. Approx. 80% of this staff work full-time or part-time at TUS.

Forty-three (43) staff attended the online session on September 8.

The final seminar went for approx. 1 hour and 30 minutes was Q&A.

7 Feedback and follow-up from Induction Seminar

In the following days, the session was followed up with some brief discussions amongst key stakeholders who attended the session.

7.1 Feedback

Feedback and follow-up comments are listed below.

The interviewees were asked the following questions and the key responses are listed below included

- 'How did you feel the Induction session went?'
- 'What specific items were new to you?'
- 'What key point was made or resource made available to you, that you now found to be useful'

Target Interviewee	Feedback
Presenter (HOD- Flexible Learning Dept)	Went well with many questions about the delivery of the modules and the use of applications.
Staff – full time (a long term member of the core Business Department staff who teaches one course in the Flexible Learning Department)	The contract itself gives clear expectations of what is required in Flexible Learning and the seminar reinforced that sort of thing. For instance, what online protocols should we now be using. I thought we had to use MS. Teams.
Staff - part time (solely works within Flexible Learning Dept)	Much to know. The session went a good way to showing us what is involved. The delivery template would be useful.
Industry Practitioner (full time self-employed Practitioner teaching several modules in Flexible Learning Dept)	Connecting with other staff together is very helpful. All the policies that need to be reviewed made me aware just what is involved in teaching.

7.2 Next Steps

- The Induction has been recorded and accessible to all Flexible Office staff
- The Induction seminar will be reviewed by the HOD and the delivery team by Dec 2021, and offered again for new contracted staff in January 2022

Appendix 1: Details on HR aspect of Induction

Development of HR aspect of Flexible Learning Tutor Induction

- It was agreed between the Flexible Learning and HR Departments that Flexible Learning Tutors should be aware of specific HR policies and documentation relevant to their work, and that this documentation was currently not clearly accessible.
- Based on this identified need, the HR Department created a specific site on the HR staff portal dedicated to Flexible Learning tutor, where a set of relevant policies and other documentation was hosted.
- During the Flexible Learning Induction evening, the Flexible Learning tutors were informed of the dedicated Flexible Learning HR section on the staff portal, and were advised that they should familiarise themselves with these relevant HR policies and documentation.

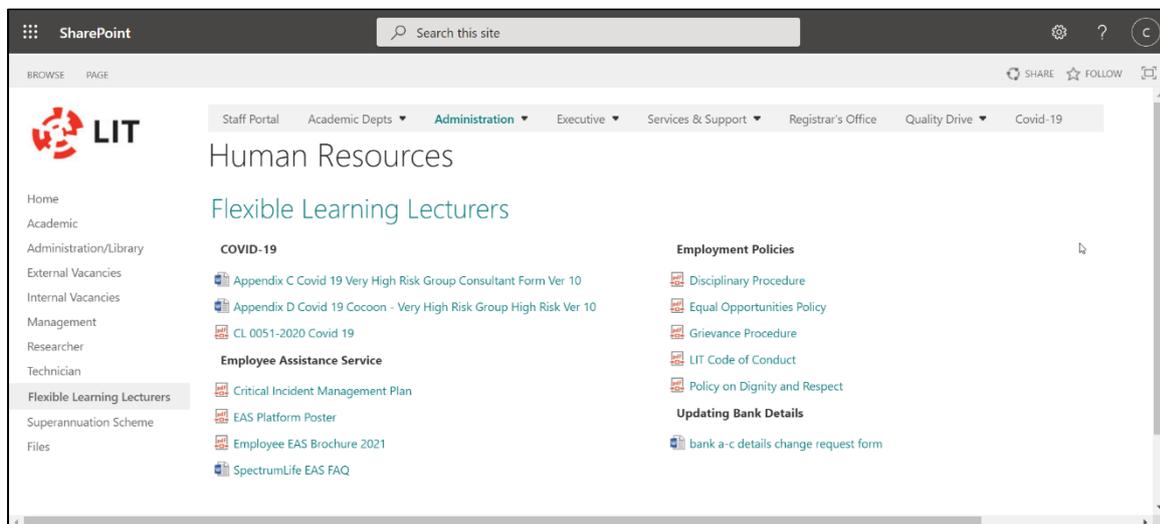


Figure 1: HR Staff Portal with dedicated area for Flexible Learning Tutors