

SUMEC: Building the Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert Programme into HE Staff Development

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Introduction and Background

This poster presentation will convey the findings from a Pilot study into the Staffordshire University Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert Coaching Programme (known as SUMEC).

This first of its kind staff development coaching programme supports staff towards applying for and obtaining Microsoft Innovative Educator (MIE) Expert status, whilst simultaneously enabling staff to focus on their own personal goals with using technology to enhance the experience of their learners at the university.

According to the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (2020) coaching and mentoring is an approach which can be used to help learners accelerate their careers, their development and successes. The Department for Education (2020) acknowledge the significance of coaching and mentoring within education and signpost the education sector to resources which encourage an ethos of coaching and mentoring in and amongst colleagues in educational establishments. Race (2020) highlights that purposeful coaching is a useful component in effective learning in Higher Education and reminds us that to be a principle fellow of the HEA an individual must demonstrate strategies for supporting and promoting others giving mentoring and coaching as explicit examples of such effective practice. Therefore, it is identifiable that programmes of CPD whereby coaching is the vehicle are desirable in education and specifically in HE CPD.

Similarly, digital skills and innovation in teaching is at the forefront of the HE agenda, with JISC (2021) reporting to have a 2030 vision that will see HE providers respond to student feedback which identifies that they appreciate online/digital learning, but that sometimes approaches are unengaging and more fatiguing. For HE staff to maximise on the positive aspects of digital learning, teaching and wider student experience, it is important staff seek to continually improve their digital capabilities to ensure students remain fully engaged and involved.

Therefore, it is arguably timely that the SUMEC pilot project combined coaching and digital skills into a single programme.

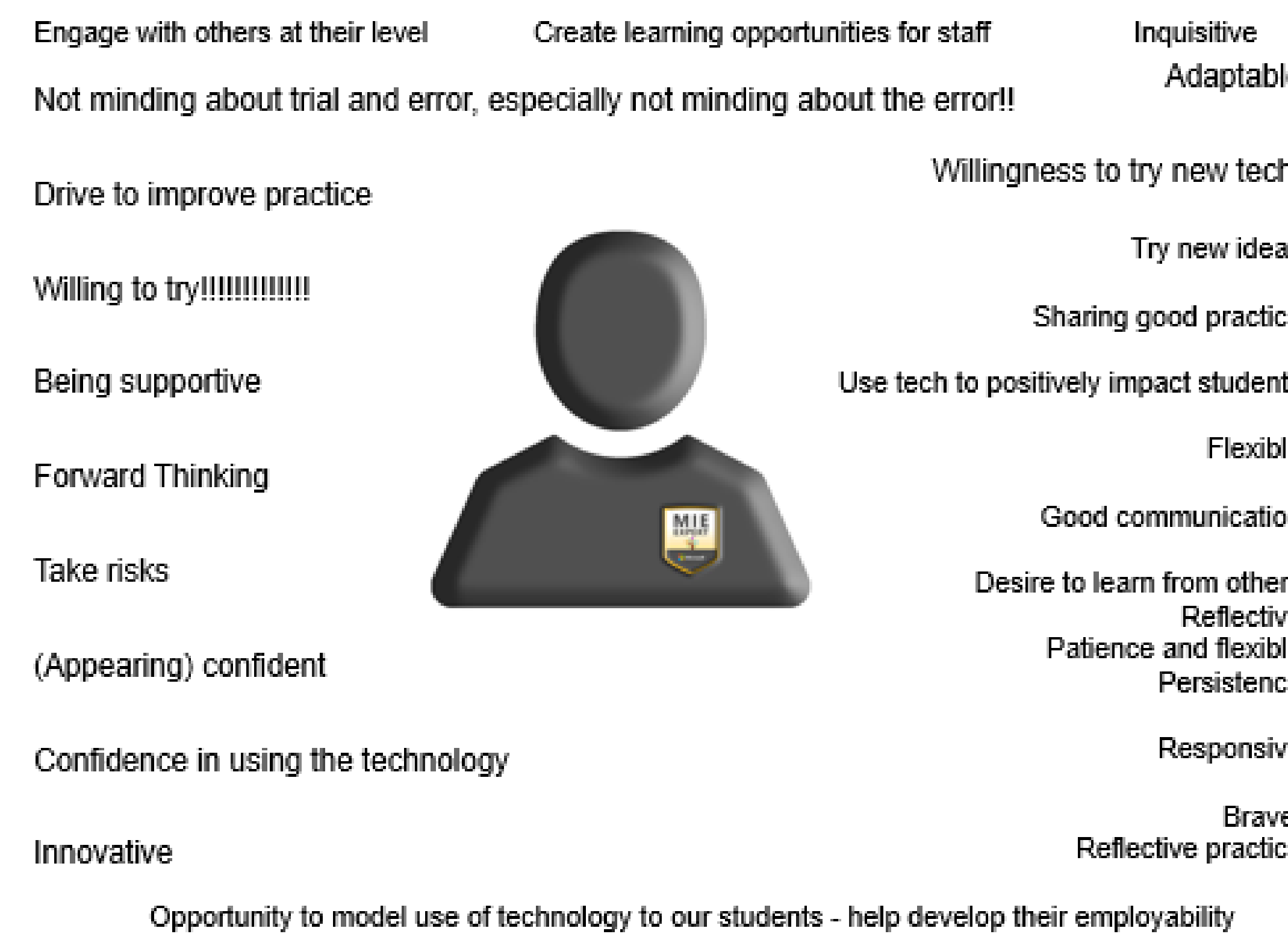
SUMEC Aims:

- Enable staff to become leaders and advocates of Microsoft Technology to enhance teaching and learning by developing digital skills.
- Prepare staff for the changing digital landscape within HE by developing agility and confidence.
- Showcase and measure the innovation and quality of Microsoft facilitated teaching and learning at Staffordshire University.
- Facilitate accreditation, achievement and recognition of skills, namely via the MIE Expert status application, but not limited to this.

Implementation of the Programme

The pilot used a multiphase mixed methods design, this mixed methods approach involved the SUMEC Community of participants in multiple quantitative and qualitative phases of data collection. According to Mertens (2009) this can bring about knowledge exchange between researchers and participants and adequately fulfil the project aims. This is particularly the case as coaches and researchers for the pilot SUMEC programme we identified as 'Insider Researchers' according to Tiesner (2019) this provides an insightful and reflective approach for conducting research within a setting where the researcher is part of that cultural unit, whilst maintaining their own day-to-day role within that community. We were therefore able to coach staff and run the programme, whilst researching if the programme was fulfilling its aims by carrying out data collection tasks to seek qualitative and quantitative responses.

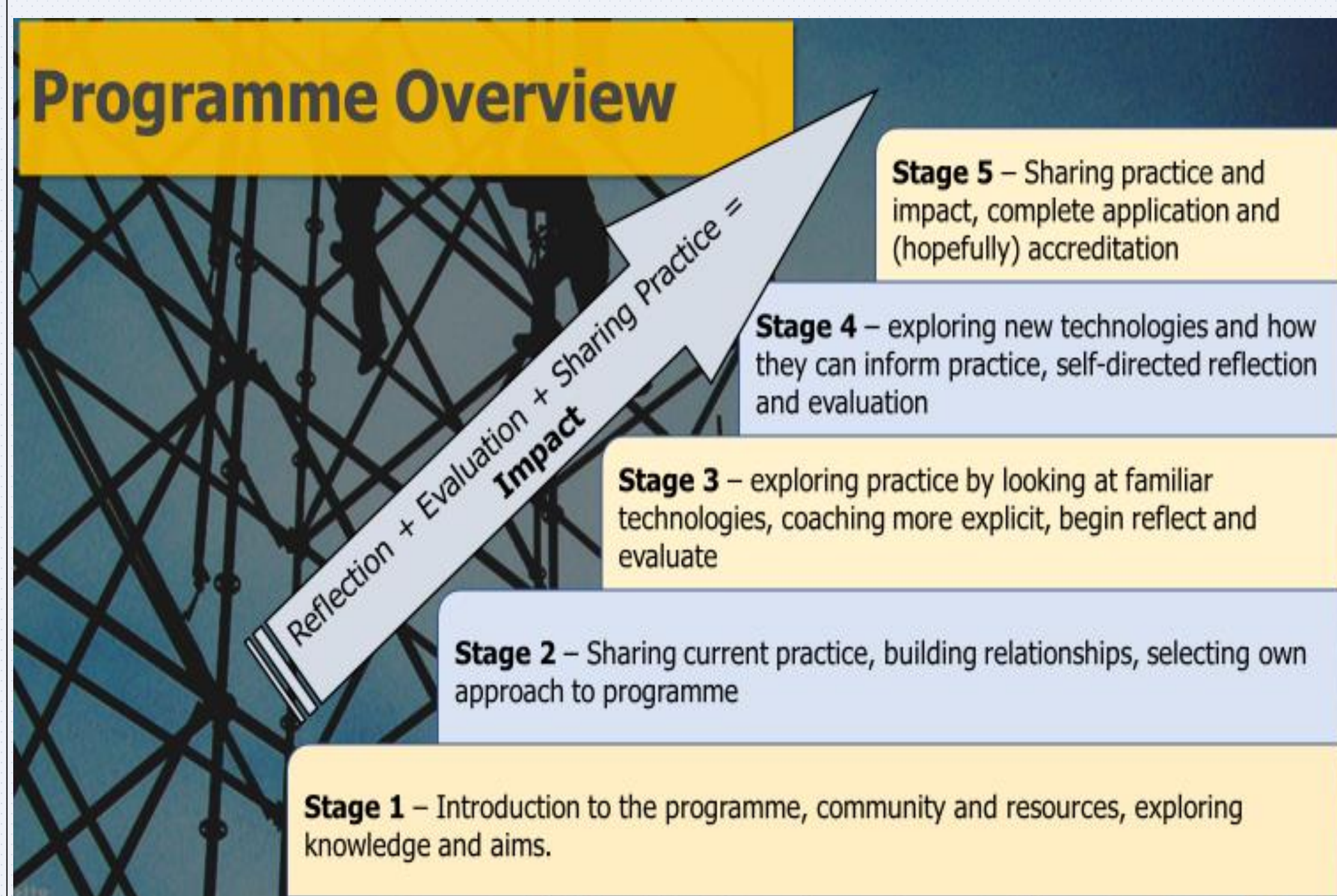
Participants included 15 self-elected colleagues across subject areas in the School of Life Sciences and Education at Staffordshire University. The community included a mix of academics and professional services within the School, including new and longer-serving members of staff, covering undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and consisting of a mixture of prior experience in blended, distance or technology enhanced learning.



Race (2020) identifies that staying well and managing workload is an important part of a career in HE and being able to provide purposeful learning experiences relies on staff being well. Therefore, it would be in contrast to the aims of SUMEC if staff felt the programme was burdensome or did not feel they could retract from the community for other priorities. 12/12 completing participants agreed that they had achieved what they wanted from the programme and that it had supported their personal intended development. Their feedback identified that the design, structure, implementation and coaching approach of the programme was a success, with no recommendations given for the programme itself. According to Gregory and Salmon (2013) incremental innovation coupled with mentoring can be a low cost way of upskilling and enhancing digital or online learning in HE and this has resonated with the findings for the pilot of SUMEC. Feedback has identified that the benefits of SUMEC has enabled staff to fulfil their personal goals and improve their use of technologies for their learners, with the design of the SUMEC programmes explicitly being referred to as a vehicle for that. Therefore, the careful design and influence from Salmon (2013) is important. Feedback identified that the activities, pace, guest speakers and support from the programme were effectively organised, planned and delivered. 12/12 completing participants agreed that they felt they were part of the SUMEC Community that coaching contributed to personal development, growth and empowerment. When coaching was probed explicitly 12/12 identified that the coaching presence and non-hierarchical approach enabled confidence to build, was encouraging and enabled personalised/bespoke support. It was noteworthy that the soft skills of the coaches were identified as coming through via this approach such as warmth, empathy, positivity and were identified as needed when staff were taking risks and innovating in their practice. This is interesting as perhaps coaching is a skill in its own right. The DFE (2020) signpost to a coaching programme that states building rapport, listening to learners and supporting reflection are key components to being an effective coach. Whilst the coaches on this programme did not have previous explicit coaching training, the professional backgrounds perhaps lent themselves to embodying these skills. Therefore, for future upscaling of the SUMEC with an increase in coaches, they may require some form of training on the SUMEC Method of coaching. Out of the 11 that chose to apply for MIE Expert status it was unanimous that had they not have joined the programme, they would not have applied for MIE Expert status. Applying Race (2020) 'want' dimension highlights the need to join SUMEC beyond Microsoft accreditation included digital skills, community learning, timeliness and passions being motivations for joining the SUMEC programme. Feedback as unanimous that individual motivations were each fulfilled. According to Salmon *et al* (2019) scaffolding learning with explicit student, or in SUMECs case, learner-centredness, having communities that cross professional and disciplinary areas and starting the learning process with the end in mind i.e. future visions and missions, enables programmes of learning to create a flexible and agile method whereby each individual learner and the collectives outcomes in mind contribute to transformation of practice. Salmon *et al* (2019) identify that the 5-stage model, e-tivities and active online learning communities are well rehearsed approaches that work effectively for innovation in HE. The SUMEC pilot experience and findings echo this and future iterations will be able to explore the SUMEC method approach to coaching and CPD a little more thoroughly.

Underpinning Theoretical Framework

The programme structure itself has been based on the Salmon (2013) 5 Stage Model which helps to underpin building online communities of learning or practice in HE. As the SUMEC programme has a focus on HE staff, community, digital and would run entirely online the model resonated with the pilot projects intentions. Another model that resonates with the SUMEC programme is that of Race (2020) who proposed seven factors of successful learning in HE.



(Salmon 2013)



(Race 2020)

The coaching sessions ran fortnightly, and topics included (but weren't limited to): a technology buffet - where groups explored and presented on different Microsoft technologies; support with developing teaching resources; nurturing evidence and impact in support of the application. Monthly themes were based upon Keene and Kersznowski (2020) sail the seven cs with Microsoft education and included innovation with collaboration, communication, creativity and computational thinking. Finally, the programme ended with a SUMEC showcase of all the resources and experiences the community had, had, creating a reusable training resource in itself.

- + Caricature exercise at the start and end of each programme whereby staff identified skills or characteristics MIE Experts have and used these as the basis to reflect upon themselves and their own aspirations.
- + Self-assessments at the start and end of the programme
- + Mid-way and end-point evaluations so staff could feedback on the quality of the programme, leaving time for coaches to respond in real-time practice.
- + SUMEC showcase
- + Totalled how many applied and received Microsoft accreditation at the end of the programme and looked at this against the national backdrop of MIE experts in represented in HE.

Findings and Analysis

SUMEC Method (coaching)	Benefits of SUMEC	Limitations of SUMEC	MIE Expert accreditation
Presence	Personal development	Time 'Luxury Item'	11/11 that applied successfully received MIE Expert
Non-Hierarchical	Bespoke career, pedagogic goals fulfilled		14 in total at Staffordshire university. Most MIE Experts of any University in the UK, with 16.5%
Positive	Growth in confidence and competence using technologies		
Warm	Empowerment		11/14 would not have applied had it not been for SUMEC
Empathetic			
Well designed, structured, implemented programme			

Conclusion, the future of SUMEC?



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