

Understanding micro-credentials and small qualifications in Scotland

Case study: 'Enhancing your Teaching' short course

University of Aberdeen

At the University of Aberdeen, we have introduced a staff-facing short course to enable individuals who teach or support learning to engage in bite-sized professional learning to help upskill their teaching practice.

'Enhancing your Teaching' is managed by the Centre for Academic Development, delivered in August and repeated in September. The timing is designed to facilitate the sharing of effective teaching practice and ideas ahead of the new academic year. The short course is an online standalone, flexibly delivered, non-credit bearing 4-week course with structured content, with difficulty equivalent to SCQF Level 11.

'Enhancing your Teaching' was launched in summer 2021 and weekly topics included interactivity in online synchronous learning, online assessments, the flipped classroom, and academic integrity. Teaching was delivered synchronously online, with participants provided with a session synopsis to help them to prepare for each topic. Breakout rooms were also used to promote active learning through discussion, case studies or a practical task. Sessions were designed to enable exchange of pedagogy and practice, but also to create an effective online learning community.

Participants welcomed the opportunity to interact with colleagues from other academic schools, to share knowledge and expertise, as highlighted in this comment regarding the best course aspects: 'The sharing of ideas with my peers and as a 'newbie' meeting new colleagues'.

This model of digital learning was repeated in summer 2022 with 'Enhancing your Teaching for 2022-23'. Weekly topics covered active learning, authentic assessments, inclusive learning environments, and engaging students with feedback.

A digital certificate of completion, which defines and validates the learning, is issued to staff who successfully participate in all four sessions of the short course; 38 certificates were awarded in 2021 and 34 certificates were awarded in 2022.

Engaging staff in their own short course learning has had several advantages, including promoting the potential benefits of micro-credentials and short courses in professional learning. The areas for short course and micro-credential learning are boundless, affording a novel opportunity for staff to offer their own short course learning to upskill and reskill others.



Impact

The impact of the short course on staff development and their teaching practice is illustrated through the following feedback:

‘Very practical (especially for part-time staff!) as 1 hour per week for 4 weeks. Inclusive and welcoming. Interactive. Well presented. Very positive. Focus on some specific practical skills and ideas (which are realistic for us to use when we are managing a lot of demands!), backed up by theory.’

‘As well as learning a lot from it, I found it very enjoyable connecting with people to discuss these topics for 1 hour per week over 4 weeks – it was manageable at a time when things can often feel overwhelming! Thank you to all involved! I highly recommend it!’

Our short course has been appraised using a developmental evaluation approach and we have been keen to understand how the course can continue to develop and grow to sustain our initial positive impact. Our evaluation has, therefore, focused on gathering emergent learning from individuals who have completed the course and exploring how this evidence can be used to inform further short course and micro-credential development.

Key evaluation questions we have asked participants have helped us understand the reach of this course across our 12 academic schools and Qatar campus. In addition, our six-question questionnaire has also revealed what participants value in the course and their ideas for future teaching-focused micro-credential and short course content. In future iterations, we will continue to focus our content to align with the University of Aberdeen’s Five Principles for the Delivery of Education.

Our experiences and learning from designing, delivering and evaluating ‘Enhancing your Teaching’ have been shared with our academic colleagues in the School of Psychology. The short course concept has now been adopted and implemented to design a zero-credit, curriculum-based short course, ‘Student Resilience: Moving from Surviving to Thriving’. This novel elective course was launched in the academic year 2022–23 for first-year undergraduates.

More information

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Find out more

This case study is one of a series published as part of the ‘Understanding micro-credentials and small qualifications in Scotland’ project from the Resilient Learning Communities Enhancement Theme.

Following from the establishment of the Scottish Tertiary Education Micro-credentials Network and the production of the Scottish Tertiary Education Micro-credentials Glossary in 2021–22, the project continues to explore micro-credential practice in Scotland in 2022–23 and the development of a good practice guide.

You can find further case studies and resources on the [project website](#).



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