

# Micro-CPD in higher education: Enhancing engagement and well-being through bite-sized professional development

Sean A. Morrissey , Debra Willison and Nasreen Hassan Ashkanani

Organisational and Staff Development Unit, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK

## ABSTRACT

In response to growing pressures on academic staff and declining engagement in professional development, the University of Strathclyde introduced Micro-CPD – a flexible, bite-sized learning initiative designed to support teaching practice. This article explores the rationale, design, and impact of the programme, drawing on mixed-methods evaluation data from surveys and focus groups. Findings highlight the importance of relevance, timing, and format in fostering engagement, with Micro-CPD prompting meaningful, incremental changes in practice. The study offers insights for educational developers seeking to adapt CPD provision to meet the evolving needs of higher education staff, advocating for microlearning as a scalable, responsive model that supports continuous improvement and well-being.

## KEYWORDS

Micro-CPD; professional development; higher education; microlearning; teaching practice


## Introduction

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is widely recognised as being essential for all those who teach and support learning in higher education. It encompasses a range of structured and reflective processes through which educators enhance their professional practice, knowledge, and values. CPD not only supports individual growth but also underpins institutional goals related to teaching quality, student success, and innovation.

However, sustaining a meaningful commitment to CPD can be challenging. Academic staff are busier and working faster and harder than ever (Berg & Seeber, 2016, cited in Jayman et al., 2022), a reality compounded by increasingly complex and often inflexible workload models that do not always reflect the full scope of teaching responsibilities. Sobering trends in staff-to-student ratios (Hanna, 2023) and the persistent undervaluing of teaching in institutional reward structures can further exacerbate these pressures.

The broader context of higher education adds another layer of complexity. The sector is marked by growing job insecurity (Spence, 2019), with many teachers employed on zero-hours or hourly-paid contracts. Meanwhile, global disruptions – including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, political instability, and the rapid emergence of generative

**CONTACT** Sean A. Morrissey  [sean.morrissey@strath.ac.uk](mailto:sean.morrissey@strath.ac.uk)  Organisational and Staff Development Unit, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK

 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2026.2620542>.

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

AI – have intensified demands on staff, requiring them to undertake new tasks while navigating already stretched workloads (Morrissey, 2025).

In such a climate, taking time to invest in one's own development is often perceived as problematic. Wray and Kinman (2021) highlight 'heavy workloads' and 'inflexible schedules', which can act as significant barriers to engagement in CPD. Research at the University of Strathclyde (Savage & Morrissey, 2021) used Williams and Penman's (2011) concept of the 'exhaustion funnel' to theorise the link between professional burnout and a marked decline in participation in academic development activities during the period 2020–2022. As one participant in their survey of staff put it, they were – 'tired, burned out, and beginning to neglect my own professional development' (Savage & Morrissey, 2021).

In response, the Academic Development team at Strathclyde has sought to respond to what some have called the 'staff well-being crisis in higher education' (Jayman et al., 2022) recognising its implications for all: including students. This crisis – evident in exhaustion, stress, and poor mental health – has prompted revised approaches shaped by the framework of compassionate academic development (Morrissey, 2025). Building on work in compassionate pedagogy (Hamilton & Petty, 2023; Hao, 2011), this framework places care, responsiveness, and relational ethics at the centre of professional learning. 'Compassion', in this context, reflects a deliberate commitment to act in ways that support others (Waghid, 2014). It aims to surface the pressures faced by those who teach and support learning in HE and to mitigate suffering through approaches that are accessible, flexible, and responsive – principles aligned with the institution's founding mission as 'the place of useful learning'. One such initiative has been Micro-CPD, a weekly programme of short, online CPD inputs that was initiated in 2021.

### *Micro-CPD*

Strathclyde's Micro-CPD programme was inspired by a programme developed at the University of Birmingham's Higher Education Futures Institute (HEFi). Micro-CPD at Strathclyde offers staff weekly access to bite-sized learning opportunities, delivered by email, that address a wide-range of development needs in learning and teaching. The assumption is that no matter how busy one is, most staff can find 5–10 minutes in their working week to reflect on, and/or develop their practice.

The programme was launched in April 2021 and has seen strong engagement. It is hosted and promoted through internal platforms by the Organisational & Staff Development Unit (OSDU), which supports academic, personal, and leadership development. Micro-CPD sessions cover a wide range of topics relevant to learning and teaching enhancement, including assessment design; Inclusive teaching practices; digital pedagogy; and feedback strategies. Inputs are often video-based or resource-driven and are designed to reflect a notional engagement of around 10 minutes or less – albeit many inputs include further resources to extend staff learning.

Conceptually, Micro-CPD is informed by concepts around micro-learning. Micro-learning has emerged as an innovative, flexible approach to professional development (Buchem & Hamelmann, 2010; Hug, 2007). Traditional long-form learning methods, whether through in-person training sessions or full online courses, can often feel burdensome for busy professionals balancing multiple responsibilities (Buchem & Hamelmann, 2010; Savage & Morrissey, 2021). Instead, micro-learning provides 'measurable', 'short',

and 'simple' nuggets of content that are easier to engage with across short, fragmented periods of time (Hug, 2006; Taylor & Hung, 2022). This aligns with the findings of Bamber and Stefani (2016), who suggest that more informal, flexible learning methods can contribute significantly to professional growth and adaptation in contemporary educational contexts.

Micro-learning can be applied across various pedagogical approaches, making it highly adaptable to different learning needs (Hug, 2007). Rather than replacing traditional learning entirely, it complements more formal methods by offering digestible, just-in-time knowledge that fits the fast-paced, multitasking nature of modern work environments (Robes, 2009). This emphasis on adaptability aligns with Charmaz's (1996) view that knowledge is constructed through ongoing interactions.

In the context of Micro-CPD (Micro-Continuing Professional Development), this approach has been particularly transformative. In one study (Howard, 2021) Micro-CPD was found to support learning and teaching staff's development by offering convenient access, andragogical principles of flexibility and the promotion of self-regulated learning; albeit the same study acknowledged barriers to HE staff engagement in the form of constrained peer collaboration, misaligned faculty and organisational interests, and forced compliance (ibid.). In another example, Micro-CPD initiatives such as the TEL Tools Project (TEL Tools [TEL], 2025) use 'micro-lessons' to equip educators with targeted skills for using educational technologies, focusing on what, why, and how specific tools can enhance teaching practices. Supporting this, Dahiya and Bernard (2021) emphasise that microlearning formats, ranging from podcasts to bite-sized videos, have become essential for professionals navigating dynamic, high-demand environments, especially post-COVID-19.

Building on its flexible format, Micro-CPD also fosters self-directed and self-determined learning (heutagogy), empowering individuals to shape their learning journeys at a pace and depth that meet their unique needs (ibid.). This aligns closely with modern expectations of lifelong learning in professional sectors, where flexible, accessible, and relevant CPD opportunities are increasingly vital for workforce retention, adaptability, and well-being (Ali & Jaweed, 2023; Alsop, 2013).

Micro-CPD has become a hallmark of Academic Development at Strathclyde; a portfolio that includes formal, accredited CPD opportunities and non-credit-bearing CPD as outlined in Table 1.

Having relied on the agency of two Academic Developers initially, the Micro-CPD Programme now receives the support of a Digital Development Assistant. Topics are proposed and often authored by colleagues across Strathclyde's four Faculties and Professional Services Directorates including the Library, Disability and Wellbeing Services, Education Enhancement, the Centre for Sustainable Development. More recently, a handful of students have contributed to the programme by creating MicroCPD inputs, with support from Faculty staff. Student co-created MicroCPDs have addressed the following topics: 'What is Autism?'; 'Autism Support Resources for Staff'; 'What is ADHD?'; and 'Supporting Students with ADHD'.

**Table 1.** Other key academic development programmes at Strathclyde.

Programme	Details
PGCert Learning and Teaching in Higher Education	Three, 20-credit modules at SCQF <sup>a</sup> Level 11. Accredited by Advance HE to offer taught pathways to Associate Fellow and Fellow
Experiential Fellowships Programme	Offers a reflective route to Advance HE Fellowships at Associate (D1), Fellow (D2) and Senior Fellow (D3)
Strathclyde's Teaching Excellence Programme	A non-credit-bearing CPD programme consisting of workshops, masterclasses, and demonstrations of learning and teaching practices
Support for Curriculum Design	Workshops drawing on Strathclyde's BOLD curriculum design toolkit and supporting resources are delivered by the Academic Development team and colleagues in Strathclyde's Education Enhancement directorate
Information Hubs	Learning and teaching resources and practical guides are available 'on demand' via SharePoint.
Staff Peer Support Networks	The Academic Development team coordinates a programme of staff peer support networks known collectively as the Learning and Teaching Innovation Networks (LaTIN). The programme comprises: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Leadership in Learning and Teaching network</li> <li>● Programme Leaders network</li> <li>● Advance HE Senior Fellows network</li> <li>● Pedagogy and Publication Reading Group</li> <li>● Playful Learning network</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup>Scottish Qualification Framework.

## Materials and methods

Having maintained the Micro-CPD programme for several years, with significant staff resource implications, in 2024, members of the Academic Development Team applied for a SEDA evaluation grant. This grant allowed members of the team to undertake mixed-methods research including a staff survey and focus groups to thoroughly evaluate the programme's effectiveness and the developmental impact of the programme at the University of Strathclyde.

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Faculty of Science Ethics Committee at the University of Strathclyde. Prior to participation, all individuals received a detailed information sheet and data privacy notice outlining the purpose, procedures, and data handling protocols of the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants in accordance with institutional and ethical guidelines.

The overarching research objectives were to assess staff engagement, identify barriers and enablers to participation, and explore the broader professional development outcomes associated with micro-learning interventions. A combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods was chosen to provide both breadth and depth of insight into participant experiences.

The research design combined survey research and focus group discussions to achieve an indicative evaluation of the Micro-CPD programme. The survey offered quantifiable measures of engagement levels, perceived impact, and barriers, while the focus groups provided rich qualitative narratives that contextualised the survey findings.

The quantitative component consisted of an online survey distributed via email to approximately 3500 members of staff across academic, research, and professional services roles. This included 1354 Administration and Professional Services (APS) staff and 2001 Academic, Teaching, Research and Knowledge Exchange (ACA) staff, the same staff who receive Micro-CPD emails on a Monday. Additionally, direct messages were sent to approximately 280 colleagues participating in other Academic Development activities.

The survey instrument was developed collaboratively by the project team based on themes emerging from prior qualitative findings and key areas of engagement with Micro-CPD resources (Appendix A). Items were designed to capture frequency of engagement, perceived usefulness, and self-reported changes in teaching practice, using a mix of Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions. The draft survey was piloted with a small group of eight academic and professional services staff to test clarity, face validity, and completion time, leading to minor revisions in wording and layout before full distribution.

In total, 57 participants completed the survey. The majority identified as academic staff in teaching and scholarship roles (22) or professional services staff (21), followed by academic staff in research and teaching roles (12) and a smaller number working in knowledge exchange roles (2). While the sample offered insights from a broad cross-section of the university community, the authors acknowledge this represents a modest response rate

Nevertheless, on average around 200 colleagues access Micro-CPD posts by clicking the link in their emails each week. We therefore infer a much more reasonable response rate from the community of learning and teaching practitioners who *regularly* and *actively* engage with the programme. Other factors such as survey fatigue and time of year may have impacted survey response rates, which we acknowledge as a limitation of the current study.

The survey aimed to assess levels of engagement with the Micro-CPD programme, perceived usefulness, impact on professional practice, and barriers to participation. It included a combination of closed questions (e.g. Likert-scale items) to gather measurable data and open-ended questions to allow participants to elaborate on their experiences.

To complement the survey data and provide richer, contextualised understanding, a qualitative component was conducted through focus groups. Fourteen participants volunteered to participate, representing diverse roles across the Institution (Table 2). The focus groups were semi-structured, guided by a thematic framework developed from preliminary survey findings, allowing for flexibility in exploring emerging topics of relevance. Discussions focused on the perceived value of the Micro-CPD programme, the relevance of content, barriers to engagement, preferred learning formats, and suggestions for improvement. All participant names have been pseudonymised to ensure anonymity (Stalla-Bourdillon & Knight, 2016).

**Table 2.** Focus group participants.

Pseudonym	Job Title	Role
Emma	Learning Enhancement Adviser	Admin and Professional Services
James	Teaching Fellow	Academic Staff
Aisha	Knowledge Exchange Fellow	Academic Staff
Daniel	Teaching Fellow	Academic Staff
Priya	Teaching Fellow	Academic Staff
Ahmed	Senior Teaching Fellow	Academic Staff
Charlotte	Senior Programme Administrator	Admin and Professional Services Staff
Wei	Knowledge Exchange Fellow	Academic Staff
Nia	Teaching Fellow	Academic Staff
Sophia	Senior Lecturer	Academic Staff
Arjun	Reader	Academic Staff
Adanna	Department Manager	Admin and Professional Services Staff
Lily	Teaching Fellow	Academic Staff
Mia	Senior Programme Administrator	Admin and Professional Services

The focus group composition was intentionally diverse, including participants from both academic and professional services backgrounds, and spanning early-career staff to senior educators and administrators. This diversity enriched discussions by capturing a range of perspectives on Micro-CPD engagement and impact. However, such heterogeneity also introduced potential power dynamics between senior and junior colleagues, which could have influenced participants' willingness to share critical views openly. To mitigate these dynamics, the groups were structured to ensure a balance between roles and experience levels, and facilitators adopted an inclusive and non-hierarchical tone throughout. Participants were reminded of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation, and multiple opportunities for follow-up comments were provided to ensure quieter voices were heard. Importantly, while the project team included the Micro-CPD Programme Lead and a member of the University's Executive Team, all data collection was carried out by a Research Associate to further reduce the potential influence of hierarchical relationships.

While the overall sample was small, the breadth of perspectives across faculties, disciplines, and professional categories added interpretive depth. Nonetheless, the findings should be viewed as exploratory and indicative rather than representative. As in much qualitative research, the strength of the data lies in its capacity to generate insight rather than generalisation. The interpretive implications of a small, self-selected group are acknowledged; it is possible that those most engaged with professional development were more likely to participate, potentially leading to a positively skewed set of reflections.

The study followed an exploratory sequential design, where the survey findings helped inform the themes and focus areas for the subsequent focus group discussions. This approach enabled triangulation of data, enhancing the validity and robustness of the findings by cross-verifying themes across methods (Hartley & Sturm, 1997). Both sets of data were analysed thematically; survey open-ended responses and focus group transcripts were coded inductively to identify key patterns, while quantitative survey data were summarised using descriptive statistics to highlight trends and general perceptions.

In interpreting the findings, we recognise that the results are contextually bound to the institutional environment and the voluntary nature of participation, with an emphasis on transferability rather than generalisability. The insights drawn may inform similar professional development contexts, particularly those using microlearning or asynchronous formats, but should be applied with caution in institutions with different structures, cultures, or digital engagement practices. The findings are best understood as illustrative of potential impacts and challenges rather than universal outcomes. Future studies with larger and more systematically sampled populations could build on these initial insights to examine broader trends and explore their generalisability across diverse institutional contexts.

Overall, the research design was grounded in a pragmatic paradigm, recognising the value of both numerical breadth and narrative depth in understanding complex professional development experiences. This approach allowed the study to capture both what staff members thought about Micro-CPD as well as how and why it influenced their professional practice, offering valuable insights for programme refinement and broader application within the sector.

## Findings

The evaluation of the University of Strathclyde's Micro-CPD programme reveals a nuanced picture of its effectiveness, accessibility, and impact on professional practice. Drawing on both survey responses and focus group discussions, three interrelated themes emerged as central to understanding staff engagement and the programme's influence: relevance and applicability; meaningful impact on practice; timing, format and workload sensitivity. Together, these themes offer a substantial view of how Micro-CPD is experienced across diverse roles and departments, and where opportunities for enhancement lie.

Those who responded to the survey demonstrated regular and sustained participation in the programme, which may indicate a degree of confirmation bias. About 15.8% of respondents reported engaging with Micro-CPD 'most weeks', while 38.6% access the content 'weekly', suggesting that many staff actively integrate Micro-CPD into their routines. The primary method for accessing Micro-CPD content is overwhelmingly via 'weekly email notifications from STEP', with some participants additionally mentioning SharePoint, colleagues sharing content, or clicking through from institutional digital hubs. This indicates that email remains an effective channel for reaching most users, but supplementary pathways are also playing a role for some.

### *Relevance and applicability*

Relevance was the most consistent determinant of engagement across both data sets 40/57 people (69%). Staff were far more likely to engage with Micro-CPD content when it aligned closely with their professional responsibilities. This is followed by time availability 23 out of 57 people (40%) as the second most important factor, the accessibility of the content 26 out of 57 people (45%), particularly its short and engaging format, encouragement from colleagues 29 people (50%). Institutional incentives were ranked 5 (least important) as a factor by 31 people out of 57 (53%) but still featured as a motivator. These findings suggest that participants are motivated by both practical considerations and peer influence, and they value concise, relevant content that fits easily into their schedules.

Participants generally expressed that they found CPD useful, but engagement was often contingent on whether the content aligned with their immediate professional needs. As one survey participant put it:

If it's relevant to me, I'll always go through it.

Emma (Learning Enhancement Adviser), one of the focus group participants, noted she only engaged with the content when it was relevant:

I click through and look at the topic, and then if the topic's not something that I'm interested in, I won't take it further.

However, James (Teaching Fellow) highlighted that although he found most topics useful, the short nature of the content made it easier to engage with even when the topics were not immediately relevant:

I think most of the topics are useful, but especially because it's so short, even if the topic is not directly relevant, it still helps you broaden your views.

### *Meaningful impacts on practice*

The data reveals a largely positive view of the Micro-CPD programme, with most participants indicating that it contributes meaningfully to their professional development, though often in incremental ways. When asked whether Micro-CPD posts act as a springboard for further training and development, responses leaned heavily towards ‘moderate agreement’ (rating 2), with a smaller group selecting ‘transformational’ (rating 3). Similarly, when asked whether Micro-CPD introduced them to new knowledge or approaches, most participants selected ‘quite a bit’ (2), with several identifying ‘a lot’ (3), particularly those who noted applying specific content in their roles.

Participants detailed a wide range of benefits from Micro-CPD content, especially in areas like inclusive and accessible teaching, feedback methods, digital accessibility, EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion), neurodiversity, and AI in education. Many respondents highlighted how these topics provided not only technical insight but also sparked deeper reflection on their pedagogy and student needs. As one participant shared:

I regularly use gifs in my slides and quizzes . . . I have also read some of the inclusivity content which is thought-provoking . . .

Despite its brevity, Micro-CPD was seen as a catalyst for incremental but meaningful change. Survey respondents described how sessions prompted reflection, introduced new ideas, and led to subtle shifts in practice. One participant described being introduced to *‘fresh ideas and new approaches to deal with emerging challenges’* and shared that they *‘keep these as a library’*. Some survey respondents used free text comments to praise the programme’s effectiveness and range; one participant noted *‘I love the range of Micro-CPD’s offered’*, adding that the content is *‘engaging overall’*. Another shared, *‘I think this is a good initiative and I believe it should remain’*.

Academic staff, particularly those in teaching and scholarship roles, reported integrating Micro-CPD insights into their classroom practice. For example, one survey respondent noted, *‘I have modified many of my active approaches to teaching and learning’*, while another shared, *‘The Digital Accessibility [input] has helped me ensure [an MSc course I teach] is as accessible as possible’*.

Focus group participants echoed this, with one describing how a Micro-CPD on active learning led them to flip parts of their lectures, using pre-class videos and in-class discussions. Another reflected on an input on inclusive teaching, saying, *‘It made me think about how few voices I was hearing in my classroom . . .’*

Nia (Teaching Fellow), for instance, described how her approach to lectures shifted after engaging with a session on active learning:

After the Micro-CPD on active learning, I completely changed the way I deliver lectures. I started flipping parts of my sessions—giving them a short video to watch before class and using the session to discuss case studies.

James (Teaching Fellow) reflected on changes to assessment, noting how the CPD encouraged a more formative and student-aware approach:

One of the sessions focused on designing formative assessments that promote reflection . . . Now, I ask students to write weekly reflections about what they struggled with and how they overcame it.

Emma (Learning Enhancement Adviser) emphasised how Micro-CPD content on inclusive practices helped her re-evaluate participation dynamics in her classroom:

The Micro-CPD on inclusive teaching made me think about how few voices I was hearing in my classroom ... It helped me redesign a group activity to be more equitable.

For Mia (Senior Programmes Administrator), the biggest change came from rethinking pace and purpose in lesson planning:

Before, I used to rush to cover content. But one of the Micro-CPD modules emphasised that deep learning requires slowing down. Now I prioritise fewer topics but with more depth.

However, the impact was not uniformly transformational. Many rated the programme as moderately influential, with some – especially staff from Administrative and Professional Services (a job family that includes Technicians and Learning Technologists) – noting limited relevance between the Micro-CPD topics and their roles. This is unsurprising given the stated focus of the programme is to provide CPD to those who teach, and/or support learning. Nevertheless, over half of survey respondents reported applying Micro-CPD knowledge in practice; suggesting that even small interventions can accumulate into significant professional development.

The programme's strength lies in its ability to offer 'just-in-time' learning – timely, relevant prompts that spark reflection and action. By maintaining this flexibility while expanding its scope and support structures, Micro-CPD can continue to drive meaningful change across the institution.

### ***Format and workload sensitivity***

The timing and format of Micro-CPD delivery significantly influenced engagement. The programme's hallmark – short learning prompts delivered weekly via email – was widely appreciated for its brevity and accessibility. Most survey respondents accessed content directly through email notifications, with some also using the repository of all Micro-CPD inputs on SharePoint or receiving content directly from colleagues. The concise format was seen as a strength, allowing staff to engage without significant time investment. Several respondents expressed appreciation for its accessibility and format, with one stating: *'they are extremely accessible and effective'*, and another noting, *'I like that it is short'*.

Yet format preferences varied. While many valued the 'little and often' approach, others preferred immersive learning experiences:

Little and often doesn't work for me – I'm a binger. Give me a two-day intensive workshop with hands-on work and I'll be there.

Workload sensitivity emerged as another barrier. Time constraints were frequently cited as a reason for disengagement, particularly during peak academic periods when Micro-CPD emails simply added to *'cluttered inboxes'*.

### *Participants' suggestions for improvement*

In keeping with the Academic Development team's commitment to continuous improvement, both the survey and focus groups asked participants how they would improve the programme. Several suggestions were made with a view to improving the relevance of the Micro-CPD programme and increasing engagement. One common suggestion was the introduction of departmental champions or advocates who could promote CPD engagement within their departments. Nia (Teaching Fellow), one of the focus group participants, proposed:

Maybe if there's a champion in each department . . . that would be helpful.

Priya (Teaching Fellow) agreed, saying:

If there was a departmental champion reinforcing [Micro-CPD] content, it might help, currently it's [...] easily ignored.

Additionally, participants like Daniel (Teaching Fellow) suggested that clearer signposting to demonstrate the ways in which Micro-CPD content could support career progression and – for instance – participants writing Advance HE Fellowship applications could encourage greater engagement with the programme. He stated:

*Progression routes should be clearer so people can see how Micro-CPD fits into their development.*

This feedback suggests that linking CPD more explicitly to career advancement could increase its perceived value and drive greater participation.

Finally, participants emphasised the need for content that is practical and immediately applicable. Adanna (Department Manager) noted:

*I think it would be helpful if the content could focus on practical and time-saving tools that are easy to implement.*

Given the literature noted above that highlights a crisis of well-being in learning and teaching in higher education, the authors noted the possibility that both the content of Micro-CPD posts and the format of the programme could coalesce to support staff by providing accessible CPD opportunities that focussed on disseminating evidence-informed strategies and approaches to enhance colleagues' day-to-day work efficiency.

## **Discussion**

The evaluation of Strathclyde's Micro-CPD programme offers valuable insights for academic development practitioners across the UK and internationally who are seeking to evolve their approaches to professional learning. The findings demonstrate that micro-learning – when designed with relevance, flexibility, and institutional support – can foster meaningful engagement and incremental improvements in practice. While the programme's brevity and accessibility were widely praised, its impact appears to be shaped by how well it aligns with participants' roles, workloads, and career development pathways. These insights suggest that Micro-CPD, or elements of its design, can be effectively adapted to support the changing needs of staff in diverse higher education contexts.

First and foremost, relevance emerged as the most critical factor influencing engagement. Academic staff were more likely to apply Micro-CPD content when it directly supported their teaching practice, while professional services staff often found the material less applicable. This highlights the importance of tailoring CPD content to reflect the diversity of roles within an institution.

In response to these findings, the Academic Development team at Strathclyde is redoubling its commitment to co-create CPD content with representatives of Professional Services Directorates. The team is also in the process of initiating a Researcher Development Micro-CPD programme that will run fortnightly, in parallel with a reduced Learning and Teaching CPD offering.

Plans are also in place to better align the content of the Micro-CPD programme with the Academic Calendar to ensure relevance throughout the year. For example, delivering CPD on effective feedback practices when colleagues are preparing curricula or inputs on using data to enhance learning and teaching later in the semester, when module evaluations are being undertaken.

The evaluation also revealed that Micro-CPD can lead to meaningful, if incremental, changes in practice. Participants described how short CPD prompts inspired reflection, introduced new strategies, and led to tangible shifts in teaching and assessment. This suggests that microlearning is particularly effective when it focuses on practical, actionable content. Academic developers considering implementing microlearning may wish to consider prioritising CPD that offers real-world applications, such as inclusive teaching strategies, time-saving tools, and student engagement techniques.

Timing and format also played a significant role in shaping engagement. The short, weekly format of Micro-CPD was appreciated, by-and-large, but preferences varied regarding delivery and the depth of content. Additionally, while microlearning is effective for many, given the depth and complexity of learning and teaching practices, Micro-CPD inputs should be complemented by more immersive development opportunities that leverage the value of informal discussions, mentoring, professional dialogues, and practice sharing, alongside formal academic-credit-bearing provision and pathways to professional recognition. While it is clear to the Academic Development team that we offer a rich and diverse programme to support the professionalism of learning and teaching practice at Strathclyde, the findings suggest opportunities exist to enhance communication about our development programmes and the linkages between them. Encouraging reflective follow-up – through journaling, peer discussion, or follow-on activities – may help staff consolidate learning and apply it more effectively.

While Micro-CPD offers a pragmatic response to current pressures, the authors wish to acknowledge the fact that it does not directly address the structural conditions that shape academic work and which prompted the implementation of this innovative approach to CPD provision at Strathclyde. Heavy workloads, fragmented contracts, and limited recognition of teaching within many institutional reward systems remain systemic challenges that constrain professional growth and staff well-being. For higher education to thrive, academic work itself must evolve towards models that prioritise sustainability, collaboration, and care. Micro-CPD should therefore be understood not as a substitute for such transformation, but as a complementary strategy that supports staff within existing constraints.

In summary, Strathclyde's Micro-CPD initiative demonstrates that small, well-targeted interventions can have a positive impact on professional learning. For institutions seeking to modernise CPD provision, microlearning offers a scalable and adaptable model – one that respects staff time, supports diverse roles, and fosters a culture of continuous improvement. By prioritising relevance, flexibility, and institutional support, academic development practitioners can design CPD programmes that are not only effective but also transformative.

## Acknowledgments

This research was made possible through the generous support of a SEDA Small Grant 2024. The authors are grateful to SEDA for enabling this work and for fostering opportunities for professional growth and inquiry. We would also like to thank the assigned mentors, Kay Sanderson and Alice Lau, who supported us as part of the grant programme.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

The work was supported by the Staff and Educational Development Association.

## Notes on contributors

*Sean A. Morrissey* is an academic developer at the University of Strathclyde, leading strategic initiatives that enhance learning and teaching. His work spans curriculum design, CPD, and collaborative networks, guided by a commitment to compassionate academic development and the transformative potential of education to build capacity and support institutional change.

*Debra Willison* is an Honorary Professor at the University of Strathclyde. She has held an academic post for almost 40 years and her current interests lie in education for sustainability, employability skills, personal development and the use of technology to invigorate the learner journey and enhance the student experience.

*Nasreen Hassan Ashkanani* is a PhD researcher in entrepreneurship at the Hunter Centre for Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Strategy, University of Strathclyde. Her research examines gendered marginalisation and entrepreneurship, has received competitive research funding from the Saudi Wirth Institute and holds an MBA from Strathclyde Business School.

## ORCID

Sean A. Morrissey  <http://orcid.org/0009-0003-5271-4582>

## AI statement

The authors used generative AI (ChatGPT 5) for language editing only.

## References

- Ali, M. M., & Jaweed, M. A. (2023). Continuing education and lifelong learning trends. *International Journal of Research in Management Studies*, 7(8), 1–9.
- Alsop, A. (2013). *Continuing professional development in health and social care: Strategies for lifelong learning*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Bamber, V., & Stefani, L. (2016). Taking up the challenge of evidencing value in educational development: From theory to practice. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 21(3), 242–254. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2015.1100112>
- Berg, M., & Seeber, B. K. (2016). *The slow professor: Challenging the culture of speed in the academy*. University of Toronto Press.
- Buchem, I., & Hamelmann, H. (2010). Microlearning: A strategy for ongoing professional development. *eLearning Papers*, 21(7), 1–15.
- Charmaz, K. (1996). The search for meanings - grounded theory. In J. A. Smith, R. Harre, & L. van Langenhove (Eds.), *Rethinking methods in psychology* (pp. 27–49). Sage.
- Dahiya, S., & Bernard, A. (2021). Microlearning: The future of CPD/CME. *Journal of European CME*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/21614083.2021.2014048>
- Hamilton, L. G., & Petty, L. G. (2023). Compassionate pedagogy for neurodiversity in higher education: A conceptual analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1093290>
- Hanna, L. (2023). We need to talk about staff retention in the sector. *Hepi blog*. 28 November 2023 <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2023/11/28/we-need-to-talk-about-staff-retention-in-the-sector/#:~:text=Some%2015%2C000%20UK%20academics%20have,colleges%20that%20deliver%20higher%20education>
- Hao, R. N. (2011). Critical compassionate pedagogy and the teacher's role in first-generation student success. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 2011(127), 91–98. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tl.460>
- Hartley, R. I., & Sturm, P. (1997). Triangulation. *Computer Vision and Image Understanding*, 68(2), 146–157. <https://doi.org/10.1006/cviu.1997.0547>
- Howard, N.-J. (2021). Barriers and drivers in online micro-course professional development: Navigating issues of teacher identity and agency. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 105, 103397. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103397>
- Hug, T. (2006). Microlearning: A new pedagogical challenge (introductory note). In T. Hug, M. Lindner, & P. A. Bruck (Eds.), *Microlearning: Emerging concepts, practices and technologies after e-Learning: Proceedings of microlearning conference, 2005: Learning & working in new media* (pp. 8–11). Innsbruck University Press.
- Hug, T. (2007). *Didactics of microlearning: Concepts, discourses and examples*. Waxmann Verlag.
- Jayman, M., Glazzard, J., & Rose, A. (2022). Tipping point: The staff wellbeing crisis in higher education. *Frontiers in Education*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.929335>
- Morrissey, S. (2025). What designing accessible academic development provision taught me about compassionate education. In A. Syska, C. Buckley, G. Sedghi, & N. Grayson (Eds.), *Transformative practice in higher education: Innovative approaches to teaching and learning, 1st edition* (pp. 47–54). Routledge.
- Robes, J. (2009). Microlearning und microtraining: Flexible Kurzformate in der Weiterbildung. In A. Hohenstein & K. Wilbers (Eds.), *Handbuch e-Learning. Expertenwissen aus wissenschaft und praxis - strategien, instrumente, fallstudien* (pp. 1–20). Fachverlag Deutscher Wirtschaftsdienst.
- Savage, K., & Morrissey, S. (2021). Keeping well, teaching well: Supporting staff wellbeing. *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 22(22). <https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.vi22.768>
- Spence, C. (2019). Judgement' versus 'metrics' in higher education management. *Higher Education*, 77(5), 761–775. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0300-z>
- Stalla-Bourdillon, S., & Knight, A. (2016). Anonymous data v. personal data-false debate: An EU perspective on anonymization, pseudonymization and personal data. *Wisconsin: International Law Journal*, 34(2), 284–322.

- Taylor, A.-D., & Hung, W. (2022). The effects of microlearning: A scoping review. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 70(2), 363–395. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-022-10084-1>
- TEL Tools. (2025). TEL tools. <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/project/tel-tools-pedagogical-resources-for-technology-enhanced-teaching-and-learning/>
- Waghid, Y. (2014). *Pedagogy out of bounds: Untamed variations of democratic education*. Sense Publishers.
- Williams, M. G., & Penman, D. (2011). *Mindfulness: The eight-week meditation programme for a frantic world*. Hachette Digital.
- Wray, S., & Kinman, G. (2021). Supporting staff wellbeing in higher education, *education support*. Retrieved February 16, 2024, from. <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/x4jdvxpl/es-supporting-staff-wellbeing-in-he-report.pdf>