

## Bath Spa University Skills Awards Case Study

### Background

The Bath Spa Award was piloted in 2012-13 and has since been developed into an established flagship offer of the Careers and Employability service. It is designed to recognise extracurricular experiences and achievements, increase self-awareness and build confidence in relation to employability.

As a progression opportunity from the Bath Spa Award, we piloted a 'Leadership Award' in 2016/17. In recognition of the demand for candidates with leadership potential in the graduate labour market, the Leadership Award is designed to support students to further challenge themselves, develop an understanding of leadership styles, as well as recognise leadership qualities in themselves. After three successful years, it is now an established element of our employability award offer.

We introduced a new pathway in 2017/18, Bath Spa Award with Enterprise, as an alternative to the 'standard' Bath Spa Award for those with an interest in freelancing or starting a business. As many Bath Spa University students become self-employed upon graduation, this pathway was trialled to support students to engage in activities such as training, workshops, networking and pitching a business idea.

In 2018/19 we have piloted a new programme for first years, the 'Head Start Award'. The principles of the Head Start Award are based on an intensive 5 week programme previously delivered for a small group of students with widening participation (WP) characteristics, which aimed to support with developing employability, the transition into higher education and thus retention. With a significant proportion of Bath Spa University students coming from WP backgrounds, the Head Start Award is designed as a self-driven programme to allow a larger number of students to benefit. As the Bath Spa Award is open only to students in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> undergraduate year, or postgraduate taught students, we also wanted to provide 1<sup>st</sup> year students with a less intensive opportunity.

### Structure

Each of the Awards are designed to be completed within one academic year. A breakdown of each Award can be found below:

#### **Bath Spa Award**

The Bath Spa Award involves 7 sections, the following 6 of which can be completed in any order:

- **Get Thinking** – an online skills audit based on key skills that employers look for, identifying priority skills to focus on developing throughout the Bath Spa Award process.
- **Get Networking** – engaging in 2 face to face networking activities, evidence of online networking and a networking skills audit, assessed by reflections of learning gain from activities.
- **Get Informed** – attending 3 workshops or training opportunities related to career development.
- **Get Digital** – a digital skills audit and action plan in relation to developing digital skills.
- **Get Experience** – completing a minimum of 100 hours of extra-curricular experience from one or more experiences, including part-time/summer work, placements/internships/work experience, volunteering or on campus roles (e.g. Student Rep), assessed by reflections of skills/career development.
- **Get Advice** – a 20 minute appointment with the Careers Team.

The final stage is a **mock assessment centre**, based on typical activities graduate employers use to recruit: interview, group activity, presentation, in tray exercise. Colleagues from the Writing and Learning Centre and the Careers and Employability Team, as well as employer contacts, observe, score and provide brief written feedback for candidates. Assessment centres are held throughout the year to accommodate different student timetables and commitments.

### **Bath Spa Award with Enterprise**

The Bath Spa Award with Enterprise mirrors the above structure, with the only difference being:

- **Get Informed** – attending 2 workshops or training opportunities related to enterprise, freelancing of self-employment and entering a competition to pitch for funding for their business idea.

### **Leadership Award**

As a progression from Bath Spa Award, the Leadership Award follows a similar structure, with each section challenging participants to undertake more advanced activities and reflections with a focus on leadership.

- **Get Thinking** – completing a short online training session on Leadership styles and answering competency based questions on aspects of leadership (e.g. coordinating the work of others).
- **Get Networking** – enhanced networking online and engaging in an informational interview or company visit to reflect on leadership in a certain sector, assessed by reflections of learning gain.
- **Get Informed** – attending 2 workshops related to career development, including 1 on leadership.
- **Get Digital** – completing the work ready graduates course on leadership to understand the traits of leadership, followed by self-reflective questions on leadership and digital skills.
- **Get Experience** – completing a minimum of 20 hours of extra-curricular experience in which they demonstrate or develop leadership potential, assessed by self-reflection.
- **Get Advice** – a 20 minute appointment with the Careers Team.

The final stage is a presentation, in which students reflect upon the topic of leadership. Senior leaders from across the university, including the Vice Chancellor, are invited to observe and feedback on presentations.

### **Head Start Award**

The Head Start Award has a focus on settling in and making the most of first year of university by finding out about support, activities and opportunities available, gaining new experiences, increasing self-awareness and starting to understand future options.

- **All About Me** – questions prompting self-reflection on skills and values.
- **What's Out There** – a step-by-step process to start researching future options.
- **Learn Something New** – participating in 2 activities to learn about career-related topics (can include workshops, drop ins, appointments, events).
- **Try Something New** – 20 hours of new activities (can include part-time work, joining/starting a club/society, volunteering, work experience, starting a project, campaigning, being a student rep etc.).
- **Careers Check In** – a 20 minute appointment with a member of the Careers Team.
- **My Next Steps** – setting 2 goals for continuing to develop during university.

### **Recognition**

All Awards are recognised with a certificate, presented at the Annual Celebration event.

### **Size/Engagement**

As a small institution (approximately 9000 students), we currently operate relatively small Award programmes.

With the Bath Spa Award, we generally find a 50% drop out rate, with 100-150 students registering and 40-80 students completing each academic year.

The Leadership Award averages 8-12 students completing each academic year. We generally find retention and completion rates are higher, with students having a stronger understanding of the commitment involved from having completed the Bath Spa Award.

In the 2 years of piloting the Bath Spa Award with Enterprise, only 2 students have completed. It is unlikely that this pathway will continue into future years, with Enterprise support being available elsewhere.

In the first year of the Head Start Award, we had 24 students register and had 71% completing.

## **Resourcing**

Two Careers Consultants share the responsibility of coordinating the Award programmes as a project alongside their information, advice and guidance responsibilities (estimated 0.2 FTE each). Administrative support is usually provided primarily in the lead up to assessment centre events.

## **Evaluation and Impact**

We survey students at the end of the Award programme which provides qualitative and quantitative data. We also collect a small number of case studies to understand how students have benefitted from the Awards which also provides inspirational quotations for future cohorts.

For the Head Start Award, we also trialled asking a few basic questions during the 'check in' appointment, which helped us get a sense of how students heard about the Award and why they chose to take part.

## **Key Successes and Challenges**

### **Successes**

- Since its pilot, the Bath Spa Award has grown steadily. We have adapted to allow for more capacity, but still retain a focus on the quality of experience.
- It has become an established element of the service, raising our profile as a service in the university among students and colleagues.
- It provides students with reason to engage in the service and take ownership of their own development.
- The more recent developments of the Head Start Award and Leadership Award have proved successful.
- Collaboration with colleagues across the department, Writing and Learning Centre and support from the Senior Management Team has been positive.

### **Challenges**

- The Enterprise pathway proved less popular and is therefore likely to be removed.
- We have recently moved from CareerHub to TargetConnect – the transition period has been a challenge but we are hoping to implement the Awards on TargetConnect in the coming months.
- Resource – the responsibility of the Award is shared between two Careers Consultants alongside other duties, which can be challenging at peak times!
- Drop out rate – we would ideally like to convert more students from registration to completion.

Our advice to other Award practitioners would be to not lose sight of the purpose of the Award – we have always focused on ensuring students will benefit from participating in the programme – we feel a significant increase in numbers would mean we would have to “cut corners” which might then impact on the perceived value of the Award as well as the learning gain.

## **Future Developments**

- We will be evaluating the pilot Head Start Award year but hopefully this will continue into future years.
- We will be looking to implement the Awards on the TargetConnect new Pathways system which we hope will help with the delivery of the Award programmes.

**Email contact** – [theaward@bathspa.ac.uk](mailto:theaward@bathspa.ac.uk)