

## AGCAS Skills Award Case Studies:

### ABERDEEN STAR AWARD

#### Background

- Established in 2007, the STAR (Students Taking Active Roles) Award at the University of Aberdeen provides a framework to recognise and reward students' development of their skills and attributes through participation in sports clubs, societies and volunteering activities.
- The underpinning rationale for the Award is to enhance the student experience and to address the University's strong commitment to develop students' employability.

#### Structure

- The Award runs between October and March and involves participation in at least 3 employability workshops, maintaining a reflective record and skills audit, and completing a competency-based assessment (which includes an interview for Silver and Gold Award students). The assessment is based on students evidencing their development of 5 Aberdeen Graduate Attributes, including communication skills, teamwork, working on their own initiative, and being aware of their strengths & weaknesses.
- Students register for the STAR Award under an approved role, which is categorised at either a Bronze, Silver or Gold Award level. The levels are assigned to reflect the depth of skill development within the role, rather than the number of hours spent in the role. All roles are approved by the Award's Steering Group, which consists of Careers Service, Students' Association, employers and academic staff.

#### Recognition

- Successful completion of the STAR Award entitles students to have the achievement recorded on their Enhanced Degree Transcript. Awardees also receive a bespoke STAR certificate.
- There are additional prizes, including the Outstanding Bronze/Silver/Gold STAR Student Prize (for students who excelled in assessment) and the Student Engagement in Employability Prize (for the student who participated in the most employability workshops).
- STAR Award students can enter the STAR Award Employability Scholarship Competition, sponsored by the Enterprise Holdings Foundation. They submit a creative piece showcasing the STAR Award and how it benefitted them. The prize includes a scholarship, an additional certificate and entry on their Enhanced Degree Transcript.

#### Size/Engagement

- The Careers Service has grown the Award from an initial pilot of 22 students in 2007/8, to 217 students completing the Award in 2016/17 (64 Bronze, 88 Silver, and 65 Gold). As Figure 1 shows, completion rates of the Award have steadily grown over the years.

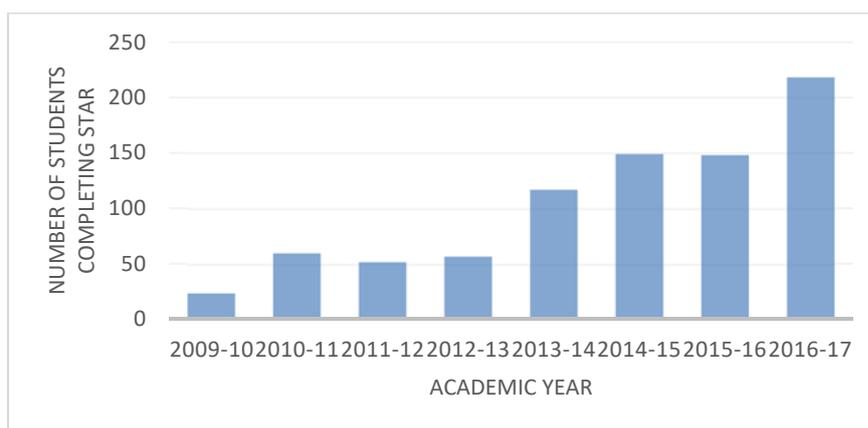


Figure 1. Number of STAR Awardees since the Award inception

## Resourcing

- A full time (1.0 FTE) Co-Curricular Project Officer coordinates and administers the STAR Award. The key duties of the role include:
  - Co-ordinating, promoting and administering the STAR Award to all students within the University and to increase participation levels.
  - Devising the innovative employer-led programme of employability skills workshops.
  - Responding to stakeholder enquiries from students, employers, alumni and staff.
  - Managing the Award assessment administration process, including but not limited to issuing certificates, co-ordinating the Steering Group, update web pages, and presenting at internal meetings/external conferences.

## Evaluation and Impact

- Student feedback has also been sought, including after each workshop, and via an online SNAP survey at the end of the Award. Feedback from other stakeholders, such as employers, academics and other University staff is also fed in to the Award development process.

## Key Successes and Challenges

- Strong working partnerships with employers to design, deliver and evaluate the Award. This has led to exclusive student opportunities (e.g. fast-track to video interview stage for graduate employment).
- Close working relationship with the Students' Association has helped with the marketing of the Award, with the vast majority of students coming from student's societies and sports clubs.
- Balancing increasing demand, capacity, yet still maintain the quality of the Award is challenging for the Careers Service.

## Future Developments

- Making STAR accessible to a wider range of students including distance learners, widening participation students and mature students.
- Streamlining the assessment process and offering a more diverse range of workshops.
- Implementing greater use of digital technologies, such as webinars. We also hope to use the upcoming TargetConnect Skills Award Module to help streamline the administration of the Award.

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