

AGCAS Skills Award Case Studies:

BECKETT AWARD

Background

The Beckett Award was established by Leeds Beckett Students' Union in the 2015/16 academic year, with the aim to pilot the scheme. At this point there was no dedicated staff member overseeing the award and two students completed it in this first year. In the academic year 2016/17, a role was created, with the aim for half of the staff member's time dedicated to the Beckett Award. This is now seen as the pilot year as 18 individuals completed the award at various levels.

It was launched as a way of giving students recognition for their involvement in extracurricular activity, boosting their employability, and tracking the benefit of Students' Union activities on skill development.

Structure

Students create a portfolio that includes an activity log, tracking their hours of engagement with extracurricular activity, as well as reflective writing on how they have demonstrated and developed key competencies valued by employers.

The number of hours and competencies they must demonstrate varies (50, 80, and 110 hours, and 8, 10, and 12 competencies for Bronze, Silver, and Gold respectively). Students must also attend a verbal reflection session, which was with a member of the university's Careers team last year and will be with graduates or employers this year. This year we have three submission dates, in December, February, and March, to allow for students to choose the most convenient time.

Recognition

Last year, successful students were celebrated at the Union Awards. This is a night that presents a variety of awards for students engaged in the Students' Union. They are also given certificates signed by Students' Union staff, and the manager of the Careers Team at the university.

Size/Engagement

Originally, the award was only for students engaged in activities connected to the Students' Union, but we have now increased the scope of the scheme to include activities organised by the university and beyond. For example, Student Ambassadors, International Volunteering, Placements, Part-Time work, etc.

Last year, 37 students signed-up to the Beckett Award and of the 37 that signed-up, 18 completed the Beckett Award.

There are 26,000 students at Leeds Beckett, so this is only a small fraction. However, we aim to gradually grow the Award year by year, and recent work in increasing its scope should improve this. There is a fairly even split of stage and subject, but we do have a higher proportion of female and BME students.

Resourcing

There is a member of staff who coordinates the Beckett Award. However, staff members who oversee extracurricular activities, and individuals in the careers team, aid in promoting the award to the students they work with, along with the assessment of student submissions.

For the staff member overseeing the Beckett Award, it makes up half of their full time role. When other staff members support the assessment process, this will be a few hours of their time at several points throughout the academic year.

Evaluation and Impact

Feedback is gathered from students who submit to the award and are successful, as well as from those who signed-up but did not submit. This gives a sense of how effective the award is for those who complete it, determining the impact it has had on them. It also allows us to get a sense of the reasons why students are unable to complete the scheme, helping us to adapt and improve our offer of support throughout the process. Staff members who support the assessment of the award are asked to give feedback as well, so we can ensure that the scheme is meeting the aims we set, as well as adequately assessing student engagement with activities, and their successful reflection on skill development.

An aim this year is to create a page of endorsements from those who have completed the Beckett Award, particularly if they have graduated, with the hope that it has helped their employability and success in job applications. To do this, we will gather feedback from those who have completed it, using constructive criticism of the process to improve it for future candidates. Furthermore, the staff member who oversees the Beckett Award, also leads a Graduate Network. The aim of this is to provide practical support for the realities of graduate life, as well as keeping graduates involved in the Students' Union, and having them volunteer as mentors and at events to support students and other graduates. As part of this, we will use surveys and the contacts we make to determine the benefit the organisation has had more generally on them post-university, but also the Beckett Award.

Key Successes and Challenges

Successes

In the pilot year, the award was limited to extracurricular activities based in the Students' Union. While social media and other forms of online promotion was successful, the best way to get individuals engaged was through promoting at meetings or events they attended, or having staff members they engage with regularly promoting it or directly encouraging them. At the end of last year, we trialled incorporating the Beckett Award in a module. This module involved creating a portfolio, reflecting on skill development, so allowed for students to easily transfer work from one to another. Having a staff member to encourage them directly made submissions happen much quicker, probably as the work was occurring in an academic environment. We have now tried to embed the award in other modules. Additionally, we have now begun to include part-time jobs and other extra-curricular activities from across the university, promoting at their induction meetings. This has been successful and has increased sign-ups.

Challenges

Initially it was challenging to gain buy-in from university staff, mainly due to a use of PebblePad as the portfolio platform, as well as a focus on Students' Union activities. Now that students are able to use Word, and activities beyond the Students' Union, we have had much more buy-in, with our number of sign-ups being double what it was this time last year. It is often challenging to have students complete the award, as the scheme will always be dropped before extracurricular activity and part-time work. We accept this and support students who make this decision.

Advice to others

Start small, in terms of number of students and activities that will be recognised. This allows you to closely work with the students, seeing what works for them, as well as ensuring there isn't too much to consider and assess. Also, allow for freedom with how students can approach the award, as long as criteria is met, so you can discover which is the most appropriate method for those you work with. This helps create a best practice guide that can be used to expand it in future years.

Email contact: beckettaward@leedsbecketsu.co.uk

Website: <https://www.leedsbecketsu.co.uk/beckettaward>