AGCAS Skills Award Case Studies:

THE GOLD AWARD

Goldsmiths, University of London

Background

- The Gold Award was 'soft' launched in 2009/10.
- Drivers: For several years, Goldsmiths has worked to help students to develop beyond the confines of their academic ability and to develop general, transferable and employability skills through Personal Development Planning (PDP), which was initially offered through personal tutoring. However, student engagement was low and academics felt overstretched. With endorsement from the Students' Union, the Gold Award scheme was developed incorporating PDP practice away from academic departments
- In 2014, the programme was transferred to Goldsmiths Careers Service and a full time dedicated role for a Gold Award Coordinator established.

Structure

To achieve the Award, students need to complete six elements between October and June:

1. **Personal Development Record (PDR)**

Students submit the PDR three times in the year (November, January and April). This is the main document in which they record their skills/attributes, reflect on their development throughout year and set goals for improvement.

2**. Co-curricular Activities (40 hours)**

The Co-curricular activities they choose are entirely down to them. We encourage students to try out something new that will help them to develop their strengths in a new area. They can do several activities to count towards the minimum 40 hours (e.g. volunteering, part-time job, taking part in a society, running their own business, setting up an exhibition).

3. **Workshops (4)**

The Gold Award workshop programme supports students in their personal and professional development. They need to attend a minimum 4 workshops of their choice (e.g. How to Think and Write Reflectively; Understand Your Learning Style: How to Be a More Effective Learner; What Makes a Good Leader?).

4. **Creative Element**

Students are asked to reflect on their development throughout the year in a creative visual way. This can include scrapbook, video, blog, shoebox, piece of creative writing, poem, painting, poster, collection of photos, story board, cartoon or piece of music. They also submit a 150 words description of their art work explaining their choice and what the piece represents. We collect all Creative elements and the final Gold Award Ceremony we do an exhibition of these art work pieces.

5. **LinkedIn Profile**

Students complete a LinkedIn account to start building their professional network.

6. **Reflective Video**

At the end of the scheme, students submit a 3-minute video reflecting on their experience, progression and skills development during the programme. They receive written feedback on it.

- In addition to these elements, students need to attend minimum:

1x CV check & coaching session; 1x Careers Consultant appointment to discuss their career ideas/planning

- Each of the students taking part in the Award gets a Gold Award Buddy. This is a student who is doing the Award at the same time. This provides peer to peer support and encourages cross-departmental

communication. Often, students stay in touch even beyond the Gold Award scheme, adding value to their student experience.

Recognition

- Gold Award Achievers receive a certificate at the final Gold Award Ceremony in June
- Since 2014/15, the Award is recorded on students' HEAR (all UG and PG taught students can record it)

Size/Engagement

- Since 2017/18, the Award is open to all Goldsmiths students from Foundation to PhD level (both full- and part-time)
- The engagement numbers vary, in the past four years we had between 25 to 77 students completing the programme

Platform/ IT system

- TARGETconnect, specifically the Placement module function

Reporting

- Annual Gold Award Report
- TARGETconnect generated reports
- Excel spreadsheets

Resourcing

- The Award is led by a full-time Gold Award Coordinator who manages all of the day-to-day activity and engages with staff and students
- Careers Consultants support the workshop delivery of the Award
- In 2017/18, a Gold Award Ambassador role was created (initially for three months). As of 2018/19, a Gold Award Ambassador will be supporting the Award from October to June (up to 10 hours per week). This is a paid role. The Gold Award Ambassador focuses on providing peer support to students who are taking part in the Award and provides information. The Ambassador also helps with administration, organisation of group gettogethers and other related Award events including the final Gold Award Ceremony. As of 2018/19, students taking up this role will be able to record it on their HEAR.

Evaluation and Impact

- Online survey at the end of the year (via TARGETconnect)
- Longer term impact hasn't been evaluated yet and this is something we want to focus on going forwards especially in respect to Careers Registration Data and long-term Graduate Outcomes

What students said about the Award:
'Before I started I thought that this would be something which would give me the language in which to articulate my skills on my CV, yet after completing the Gold Award year, I have taken home something much more precious, I have taken home the lifelong skill of reflection'

'This is the reason why I strongly suggest doing the Gold Award: it enables students to challenge themselves and their capabilities and make themselves step out of their comfort zone'

Key Successes and Challenges

Successes:
- Opening the scheme to all students from Foundation to PhD level
- Setting up the Gold Award Buddy system and encouraging students to meet up regularly
- Introducing the Creative Element in 2015/16 has proved to be a success. Students value an alternative form of reflection (in addition to written and verbal forms) and it encourages them to do something different and explore their creativity which is among the top three skills for employment by 2020 (see Global Challenge Insight Report *Future of Jobs: Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution* published in 2016). The Creative Element is unique to Goldsmiths representing its students and the creative culture. The final exhibition has become popular and an enjoyable part of the final Award Ceremony:
- Collaborating with colleagues at other HE institutions for practice-based research on creativity
- Cooperating with employers, especially during 2017/18 The FDM Group delivering an employer led workshop on Resilience and a presentation for women interested to get into business and tech industry
- Mentoring has proved to be crucial to the scheme. It was introduced in 2014/15 but due to increased number of students on the programme we were not able to run it during 2017/18. Our experience has shown that re-introducing it in some way would enhance the programme and help with retention rates.

Challenges:
- Technology and lack of suitable systems supporting the programme management. TARGETconnect doesn't currently offer an award module and therefore, the Gold Award is managed via a placements module which is not fit for purpose. Students are not able to visually see their progression
- Due to challenges with technology admin responsibilities increased considerably
- Student retention. Especially during 2017/18, the drop-out rate was quite high (it is believed that improved technology together with creating the new support role of the Gold Award Ambassador and re-introduction of mentoring would improve it)
- Staff time. More staff involved with the programme would be ideal allowing the Coordinator to be more focused on strategy, planning, potential research and expansion of the scheme

Future Developments:
- Scaling up: target for 2018/19 is 300 students providing the technology improves
- Expand online learning materials and offer webinars
- Re-introducing mentoring
- More cross-departmental collaboration (e.g. with Library on workshops) so that the Award is owned by the whole College

Advice to others setting up an Award:
- Be clear on the purpose of your Award: What is its intension and what do you want students to achieve?
- Create a bespoke skills award structure that reflects your university student cohort needs
- Collaborate with departments across the university and explore opportunities for wider workshop delivery and getting academics on board
- Network with other HE colleagues who coordinate award schemes and use the AGCAS Skills Award TG as a platform for exchanging ideas and participate in events

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