

# **AGCAS Skills Award Case Studies:**

## **ncl+ AWARD and ncl+ ADVANCED AWARDS**

### **NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY**

#### **Background**

The ncl+ Award launched in 2014/15, building on the existing 'ncl+' brand (encouraging and recognising extra-curricular activity at Newcastle). It aimed to formally recognise students who undertake extra-curricular activities alongside their studies, and to highlight to students, academic staff and employers, the employability skills developed through these activities. In 2016/17 students from all four Newcastle campuses (Newcastle, London, Malaysia and Singapore) successfully completed the ncl+ Award.

In 2015/16 the 'ncl+ Advanced Award' was launched, with employer input and a more specialised focus. In 2016/17 we offered four ncl+ Advanced Awards: with the NSPCC (Project Management); with Santander (Communication); with the Institute of Leadership and Management (Leadership); and an Advanced Award in Research for students undertaking summer research projects.

#### **Structure**

For the ncl+ Award students must: complete a minimum of 50 hours' of extra-curricular activity in one year (September-March); attend two compulsory workshops; submit an activity log to account for their 50 hours' of activity and pass an assessment – either written answers to competency questions, or by attending a practical interview workshop led by employers.

Students undertaking an Advanced Award usually should have completed a standard ncl+ Award or be doing so concurrently with the Advanced Award. The structure of the Advanced Awards usually includes three compulsory workshops delivered by Newcastle staff in partnership with an employer, and an assessment centre, written or presentation activity (or a combination).

#### **Recognition**

Students gain an Award certificate; are invited to a celebration event; have the ncl+ Award/Advanced Award added to their HEAR; and can gain an ncl+ Award/Advanced Award 'Open Badge' to add to their Linked In profile.

#### **Size/Engagement**

All undergraduate and postgraduate students are eligible to gain the ncl+ Award and Advanced Awards.

In 2016/17 523 students successfully completed the ncl+ Award (from around 1,000 who registered for the Award during term 1). 374 of these were undergraduates, 149 were postgraduates (from both taught and research programmes). 15 students completed the ncl+ Advanced Award in Communication (Santander); 13 students completed the ncl+ Advanced Award in Project Management (NSPCC) and 16 students completed the ncl+ Advanced Award in Leadership (ILM). There are currently around 140 students registered for the Advanced Award in Research, which is assessed in the autumn.

We have a total of around 27,000 students at Newcastle.

#### **Resourcing**

Development and delivery of the ncl+ Award is led by a Working Group with six members, three from the Careers Service: one Assistant Director (who chairs the group) one curriculum developer, one clerical

assistant (secretary) and three from the Students' Union: the Employability and Skills Coordinator, the Volunteering Manager and the Activities Officer (elected role). Workshops are delivered by Working Group members and other Careers Service colleagues. There is no dedicated FTE resource attached to the ncl+ Award, or formal Award Manager/Coordinator position.

## **Evaluation and Impact**

We use Survey Monkey to send an evaluation to all students who have registered for the Award each year – this explores reasons for not completing the ncl+ Award as well as the satisfaction levels of students who have completed the Award and suggested future developments.

## **Successes**

- Building on our existing 'ncl+' brand and running the project jointly with the Careers Service and Students' Union has helped with institutional buy-in and appeal to students.
- Simplifying the systems used (for example, students register for the ncl+ Award via Newcastle's ePortfolio system which also sends out emails which are pre-set at the start of the year) has helped to refine the Award and make it more scalable.
- Partnering with employers has made our suite of ncl+ Advanced Awards attractive to students and offered an incentive for students to complete the ncl+ Award in order to progress to these.
- The employer-led interview workshop option for assessment (launched in 2016/17) has been popular and received very positive feedback from employers and students.

## **Challenges and Advice**

- Administration continues to be a challenge as numbers increase. As we have been unable to find a single system to track registration, workshop attendance and assessment submission we use ePortfolio (for registration and attendance) and Blackboard (for assessment submission and marking). This requires manual downloads and lots of cross-checking, and forms the main barrier to further upscaling the Awards.
- Whilst participation in the ncl+ Awards continues to grow, it is difficult to judge the impact of the Award – are we engaging students already committed to extra-curricular activities and developing their employability, or reaching those who would not otherwise engage? This is an area we plan to further explore.

## **Future Developments**

We would like to explore methods to evaluate the longer-term impact of the ncl+ Awards, as well as exploring using more online resources (blended learning) to deliver some aspects of the Awards.

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