

AGCAS Skills Award Case Studies:

THE NOTTINGHAM ADVANTAGE AWARD

Background

The Nottingham Advantage Award is the University of Nottingham's employability Award. 10 credit modules give formal recognition to extra and co-curricular activities, each providing students with skills training, resources for further study and an assessment process through which student's evidence and articulate their learning. Students achieve the Award on completion of any 30 credits. Modules are delivered by a mixture of academic schools, professional services departments and employers.

Launched in 2008 with 5 modules and approximately 60 students, the Nottingham Advantage Award was designed to support graduate employability by enabling students to capture, reflect upon and articulate the skills they develop through a range of activities alongside their degree.

Size

Any registered student may take the Award, including Foundation students and Postgraduates, though the vast majority of participants are undergraduates. 1700 students started the Award this year and currently we have around 4000 students registered to take part (from an UG population of 23,000), plus a further 2100 students at the China Campus (from an UG population of 5,500) and 700 at the Malaysia Campus (from an UG population of 3,400).

Students may take any combination of modules in any order, but are limited to a maximum of 20 credits per year. In 2017/18 we will be offering over 200 modules across the three campuses, with some tri-campus modules.

Recognition

This year 400 students completed the Award in the UK and their names will be listed in the Graduation Handbook in the year they graduate. However, even if a student does not finish the whole Award, any modules they do complete will appear on their transcript. We invite all completers to a Celebration Event in June to collect their Award certificates. This event is primarily about the students, but is also attended by employers, module conveners and senior University staff; we also invite a couple of Award alumni to speak about the impact the Award has had on them.

Students who have completed at least two modules may apply for one of our employer sponsored prizes, such as The Experian Leadership Award. Shortlisted students are invited to an interview, following which, the highly commended and winning students are chosen. These prizes are also given out at the Celebration Event.

Resourcing

Three full time members of staff support the development, administration and operational delivery of the Award in the UK and there are about 80 module conveners. Academic oversight is given by the Academic Director and a Steering Group consisting of academics from across the University and senior staff from the Careers and Employability Service.

Evaluation and Impact

Students give feedback to the convener at the end of each module and we send out annual surveys to continuing students, final year students and alumni who have participated in the Award. We also hold focus

groups with students and get feedback from employers on specific issues, such as the Celebration Event, which was reinvented this year as a result.

The Award had an academic review last year which was very positive, but had a few recommendations for the future.

Key Successes and Challenges

The Award now connects to a range of broader university initiatives supporting teaching and learning, community engagement and citizenship, internationalisation and sustainability, having progressed from a small scale initiative to a large scale development model, which will help to enhance the overall student experience.

The key successes are:

- Increasing the number of students on the Award in the UK by 25% in 2016-17 and the growth of the Award in China and Malaysia campuses as well.
- The involvement of over 100 employer in modules.
- The positive feedback from students:

“I gained a lot of different experiences whilst doing the Award, and learnt to develop and talk about skills I didn't even know I already had”

“The second thing I gained from the Award is something that my current employers place a huge amount of emphasis on; the idea that it's not just what you do, it's how you do it”

“The Award is a great way to challenge yourself and gear up for a challenging international career”

The main challenges are:

- Engaging students early enough so they can complete the Award. We targeted first years in January this year, which has been positive.
- Heavy administrative burden due to lack of a proper system to support the work. All results are recorded on spreadsheets and manually added one by one to students' My Career (myinterfase.com) accounts.

Future Developments

We are looking to improve our offer for Postgraduate students, with some 20 credit PG modules starting in 2017-18 and a summer PG module planned to allow PGTs to complete the Award in a year.

We would like to develop more online modules in the next few years.

We will be moving to the same administration system as other academic modules use when the University moves to Campus Solutions. This will make it easier for students to choose modules and reduce the administrative burden.

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