

The Employability Excellence Awards

Background

Since 2014 the University of Southampton's Careers and Employability Service has hosted an annual awards ceremony to celebrate the achievement of students that have taken part in its work experience programmes. The ceremony takes place in either September or October and was originally known as the 'Excel Southampton Internship Awards' because it was introduced originally to recognise the talent and reward the accomplishment of our Excel Internship students and participating employability partners.

In September 2016 the awards ceremony was expanded to incorporate all of our work experience programmes; the Volunteering Bank, the Business Innovation Programme, the Year in Employment Placement Programme, the Excel Southampton Internship Programme and our Career Mentoring programme.

Structure

There are 15 different awards up for grabs. This includes four student skills awards, five student achievement awards, five employability partner awards and one overall student award; *'the president and vice-chancellor's award for outstanding achievement.'* To be nominated, students or employability partners needed to have taken part in one of the work experience programmes or hosted a student within the previous academic year.

All nominations are then shortlisted by the working group of the Employability Excellence Awards. The shortlisted students/partners are then sent to external judges, who then meet three weeks prior to the event to choose a winner for each award. Finally, the student winners are sent to the Vice-Chancellor to choose an overall winner for the outstanding achievement award.

Recognition

The awards ceremony itself is a prestigious event with 200-300 attendees wearing formal attire. It takes place offsite usually at a local hotel or conference venue. Formal, professionally designed invitations are sent out and guests are asked to RSVP. A professionally produced awards brochure is also created and given out on the night. There is a drinks reception upon arrival and networking and canapes at the end. We involve guest speakers including external speakers, student speakers and a Vice President of the University. Winners are invited onto the stage where they are presented with a high quality engraved crystal award, a certificate and a cash prize. Group and individual photographs are taken and published on social media and the University intranet.

Size/Engagement

In 2016/17 there were 802 placed work experience opportunities and out of these, 778 were unique students. All faculties were represented with 18% from Business, Law & Art, 35% from Engineering, 1% from Health Sciences, 13% from Humanities, 1% from Medicine, 10% from Natural & Environment Sciences and 22% from Social, Human & Mathematical Sciences.

Resourcing

The working group for the Employability Excellence Awards usually consists of between five and seven members of the Careers and Employability team. Planning begins six months before the event and each member will have different tasks of administrative duties prior to the event. This includes aspects such as ordering the transport, catering, flowers and

awards for the night, researching and obtaining guest speakers, creating the programme and marketing materials and all helping to coordinate the logistics on the evening.

Evaluation and Impact

We have a several case studies which showcase the impact of students achieving one of the awards. An example includes a previous student, who attended the University between 2011 and 2015, Georgina Abraham. Georgina won two awards at the 2015 Excel Southampton ceremony. These were 'Creativity' and 'Best Student Contribution to a Small to Medium-Sized Employer,' which was awarded for her internship with a start-up company called 'Taragenyx,' where she increased the company's antibacterial technology drug-elution rate by 400%. Subsequently, in 2016, Georgina then went on to win the NUE (National Undergraduate Employability) Award for Best Student Contribution to a Small to Medium-Sized Employer.

Key Successes and Challenges

Engagement from our industry partners has been very successful. We obtain a corporate sponsor and also successfully involve employers in the judging of the awards and networking at the actual event. Challenges are running the awards at what is our busiest time of the year. Other challenges are encouraging the students to attend. We provide transport where possible, however we still struggle to encourage all eligible students to attend. Costs are always a challenge and every year it's difficult to balance the desire to make the event impressive while spending within our budget.

Future Developments

Our main developments for the Employability Excellence Awards are to create further awareness of the ceremony so students and employers realise the further benefits of taking part in one of our work experience programmes. This will be implemented by including award information on induction packs and allowing students and employability partners to nominate all year round, rather than capturing them from after the Easter holidays.