AGCAS Skills Award Case Studies:

THE SWANSEA EMPLOYABILITY AWARD

Background

The [Swansea Employability Award](), SEA was set up in 2011.

The Pro Vice Chancellor for employability wanted an employability course for all 14,000 students to be able to participate in. The Careers team were tasked with designing the course, setting it up and running it. This was at a time when the employability statistics for the university were a fair bit worse than they are now.

The strategy was for the award to be student driven and mostly on line; a student could start at any time during their studies and must finish my May 31st of their final year so that it could be included on their HEAR.

Structure

The structure of the award was such that students would do a mix of online questionnaires, have a Careers meeting, complete a CV and a cover letter writing a reflective account on what they had learnt about themselves; what skills they might have or might have developed in the form of an online e-portfolio.

On completion of a module a student sends an email to the administrator for their work to be assessed.
At the start of the SEA award there were three modules; Know Yourself, Experience one and Experience two.

The award is open to students on any course of study at any level, although at present there is no HEAR for PhD students for it to be recorded.

The award has attracted sponsorship from PwC, Dwr Cymru and Admiral to date.
In the first year around 150 students signed up with around 22 completing all three modules and as such achieving the Gold level of the award

In 2013 a few departments decided to embed to 'Know Yourself' module into the year one curriculum. This took the form of students having an introductory lecture followed by PC labs to support the online activities and one to one Careers Guidance sessions given by the Careers Advisors in the team. Special sessions were planned into the curriculum for these one to ones.

The following year a few more departments wanted to embed the SEA award and before long we were hitting the capacity of the Careers team. To manage with increased numbers we moved from a one to one session to group sessions of 10 – 15 per group.

In the summer of 2015 the Careers team decided to add a fourth module which would allow students to achieve a Platinum level of the award. This module was called 'Plan and Make it Happen' introducing elements including; decision making, employability mindset, SWOT analysis and Action Planning

In the summer of 2016 two students were employed over the summer to carry out a full review of the SEA award. There were a number of recommendations which included the addition of an element on Cultural Competence which was jointly developed by the Careers team and the College of Human and Health Sciences; it also led to the sponsorship of the award by Admiral.

Resourcing

Initially there was only one full time member of staff to deliver introductory talks, run PC labs, assess student work and administer data. As time progressed the Careers advisors time became fully utilised. The embedding of the award required strong input and involvement from academic members of staff in each department and in once case a department has taken on the full running of the award themselves. As the numbers attending the PC labs grew; PhD demonstrators and student employability representatives were employed to support the students whilst on task.

By 2016 the student interactions with a Careers Advisor had grown from around 5% to over 30% as a result.

Challenges and Advice

It all sounds like a linear progression with everything going very well, however, in the early years with low numbers there was some discussion about whether or not to continue. It wasn't until one department wanted to embed it that the benefits became apparent across the university. The PVC for employability is highly supportive as it the head of the Employability Academy. The Schools and Colleges each have an Employability Director who attends meetings with the Academy on a regular basis and several of them decided that the SEA award was a good way of getting employability into the curriculum.

The award is open to all students which is quite a risk given that it is conceivable that the numbers taking it up might have been much higher to start with, however, with the full support of the PVC anything is possible.

Size/Engagement

The latest numbers completing one module are shown for the past four years in the graph below:
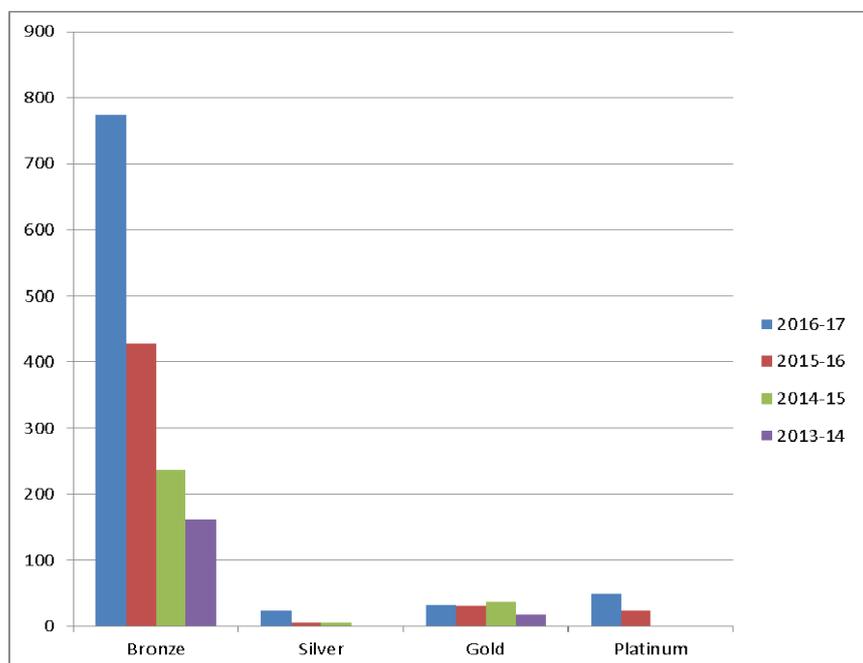
Recently the DHLE data for a cohort of students taking the Know Yourself module embedded into year one in 2013-14 were available with the following results (Graduated 2016):
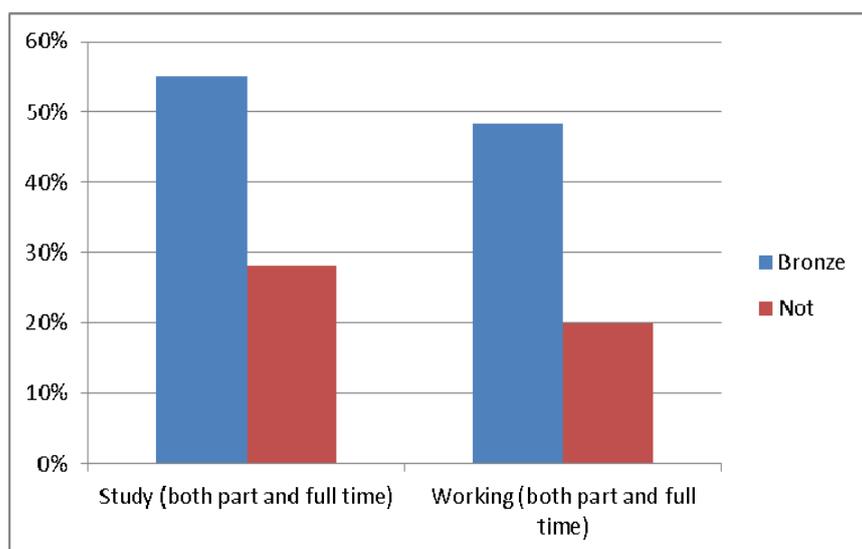
This shows that a graduate is roughly twice as likely to be in work and or study if they completed the Know Yourself module of the SEA award.

Email contact: sea@swansea.ac.uk

Website: https://myuni.swansea.ac.uk/employability/swansea-employability-award-overview/