

## **AGCAS Skills Award Case Studies:**

### **THE EDINBURGH AWARD**

#### **Background**

The Edinburgh Award was established in 2011/12 to allow the University of Edinburgh to further encourage, support and more formally recognise student achievement and learning from outside the formal curriculum.

#### **Structure**

The Award embodies a developmental process that supports our students in learning to excel, increasing their positive impact and their personal and professional growth in whatever circumstance or role they find themselves, now and in the future. As a result, instead of having a set standard for students to achieve, the Award encourages, facilitates and rewards an approach of:

- identifying what it means to excel, both personally and for the student's current role/circumstance;
- working purposefully and strategically towards this, translating and applying learning and abilities between situations; and
- maximising the positive impact on the student's surrounding context (people/organisation).

The Edinburgh Award has multiple versions, each running alongside a particular co- or extra-curricular activity. Each version of the Award is run by a local Award Leader – an existing member of University or Students' Association staff relevant to that activity. This creates an experience for students which is genuinely tailored to their interests and draws on relevant staff expertise. The Edinburgh Award is also currently supported centrally by one full time member of staff, the Edinburgh Award Coordinator.

While each version of the Edinburgh Award is tailored, the focus for all students is working towards excellence, applying learning between contexts and maximising their impact. In addition, every version of the Award has a direct and consistent link with the University's Graduate Attributes Framework.

#### **Recognition**

Any student receiving an Edinburgh Award will receive a certificate of recognition and their achievement is also captured on the HEAR (Higher Education Achievement Report).

#### **Size/Engagement**

The Edinburgh Award is open to all students, all year groups. Around 60% of students who start the Edinburgh Award each year complete it. The number of students completing it has grown incrementally from 128 in the pilot of 2011/12 to over 900 awards being given in 2016/17.

There around 33,000 students at the University of Edinburgh so around 4.5% of students currently engage with the Award and 2.5% complete the Edinburgh Award.

Students completing the Edinburgh Award tend to reflect the student body as a whole in terms of distribution across School, College and level of study.

#### **Resourcing**

One full time member of staff works on the Edinburgh Award, this constitutes the majority of the role.

## **Evaluation and Impact**

The Edinburgh Award is evaluated annually through surveys and one-to-one interviews with students and staff. Qualitative and quantitative evaluation data consistently highlight the Award's success and the value placed on it by students and staff. Some of the key findings are summarised below.

### **Students**

- Student evaluation indicates a shift in students' outlook during their time on the Award. At the outset, motivations often focus on CV enhancement and formal recognition. However, by the end the focus has moved to instead valuing the developmental process they have been through and the development of their skills and confidence. This includes those students who did not initially feel they needed the sort of development and support offered by the Award.

### **Staff**

- Staff value the Award's role in helping build local communities, fostering a positive relationship with students whom staff would not usually interact with and they report that as a result of the Award students are more engaged with their own learning and development, better able to recognise the wider context of their learning and better able to channel their strengths into their activity.

## **Key Successes and Challenges**

The structure we have where staff across the University of Edinburgh run versions of the Award to ensure they are locally relevant means that we have been able to grow the Edinburgh Award with limited resource. This approach works well for our institution because of its devolved nature, it would have been impossible for us to create one Award that worked across the whole University.

We have consistently received high approval ratings from students with 97% of students who completed the Award in 2016 saying they would recommend the Award to a friend.

The main challenges for us are around scale, while our design has meant a certain amount of growth has been possible there is still a limitation given that there is some resource required to administer and run each version.

For anyone considering setting up an Award I would advise that you ensure as much as possible that your design is sustainable and is suited to your institution.

## **Future Developments**

We intend to further increase the versions of the Award using online peer assessment software to evaluate student reflections and to explore the possibility of using MyCareerHub to manage the administrative side of the Award.

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