AGCAS Skills Award Case Studies:

THE WOLVERHAMPTON ENTERPRISE AND EMPLOYABILITY AWARD

(WEEA)

Background

The Wolverhampton Enterprise and Employability Award (WEEA) was originally established 2012 as an extracurricular activity, ran entirely by the Careers Centre. Since then, the WEEA has been written into the university's strategic plan as a target to embed in all university courses. At the time of writing (Dec 2017), this has largely been achieved.

Initially driven by concern that students did not always receive careers education through their course and that students did not always access the full extent of Careers Centre support, the extracurricular award was created to enable Careers Centre staff to work more closely with individual students and to assist them with the whole process of planning and researching career choices, building their employability, and enabling them to implement career goals.

The impetus to embed in all university courses came from senior management, who wanting to raise employability across the whole university, selected the award as a mechanism to do so. Given our large student numbers (approximately 22,000) and the relatively small Careers Centre team (approximately 10) it was only feasible for the award to be delivered through courses, with careers staff acting as consultants to the process of integration, rather than as delivery staff.

Structure

There are three levels to the WEEA. To complete Bronze, students complete an online quiz, to achieve Silver they must complete 3 tasks and to complete Gold they must complete 6 tasks. The tasks are: 60 hours of work experience, a work related study, a careers action plan, a skills analysis, a written application and a presentation. We are targeted to embed the silver award in courses.

The timescales are dictated by the academic staff we have liaised with. The WEEA has been embedded in modules according to where there is a good fit between WEEA and module content. Some courses embed the award in just one module, some over several and at different levels.

Recognition

Work is being undertaken to allow the award to appear on student HEARs.
Students receive a certificate awarded by the Careers Centre.

Size/Engagement

We focus on undergraduates at levels 4, 5 and 6, however the award is also open to level 3 students, first degree graduates and postgraduates.

As for how many students start the award each year: We do not collect this figure, however the dropout rate is practically 0 as the award is embedded in students' modules.

Last year 2016/17, 3555 students completed the award. This year is the first year where the award is embedded across all first degrees, so the number will increase.

Practically all first degree students will do the award at some point during their degree. The total number of students is 22,000 approx across all years, although this includes postgrads, foundation students and students studying at partner colleges whose courses do not embed the award.

Resourcing

There is the equivalent of 4 full time Career Development Consultant posts, with 1 consultant linked to each of the 4 university faculties. Their primary job is to facilitate the process of embedding the award, to advise academics and to check quality standards.

There is also a placement student who, as part of his/ her role, takes responsibility for award administration. This involves tracking student completion, issuing certificates and compiling statistical information for reporting purposes.

The award is the main priority of the Career Consultants, although careers work that doesn't contribute directly to the award (ie student appointments, workshops, conferences, careers information) is also undertaken.

Award administration was the main priority of the placement student however recently, due to staffing changes, this will become a split role with the staff member concerned also manning the Careers Centre reception desk.

Evaluation and Impact

We are currently constructing a strategy to evaluate the award across the whole university. This will involve surveys and focus groups with students, academics and employers.

We also receive anecdotal feedback from academics.

As for doing anything do evaluate the longer-term impact of the award:
This is something we are considering doing.

In respect to involving others in evaluation of the award and its impact (for example employers, academic staff):
The evaluation described above will include these groups.

Key Successes and Challenges

Successes:
Involving academic staff has enabled us to roll the award out across the university.

Where academic staff are enthusiastic about employability and the award, we have been able to form a good working relationship. Students have been able to see that we 'are on the same page' and have benefited from the joined together support we have been able to offer.

Some academics have reported that the inclusion of the award in courses gives employability teaching more prestige and this has raised students' perception of the importance of employability.

Challenges:
Gaining buy-in from academics, particularly on courses where there is no specified employability module and where academics believe that employability compromises the academic curriculum.

Gaining buy-in from academics teaching courses where employability already has a high profile and where there is already a good level of teaching and support on the matter, with some academics questioning the value that the award adds.

Finding good matches between content in academic programmes and award content. Award content has had to be adapted which has resulted in inconsistencies across university subjects, however this could also be regarded as a positive as award content has been targeted towards the needs of different subjects. Inconsistencies do however make it difficult to assess work against standard quality measures.

Ensuring that the award is embedded in all courses. This is particularly the case for joint courses or those that have a number of optional modules as individual students' particular combination of modules may result in them not completing the award at all, completing the award only partially or duplicating elements of the award.

Keeping track of students completing the award, especially for those doing joint courses or selecting from optional modules for the reason above.

Ensuring the quality standards of the award is difficult as academics have control of marking work and they sometimes have different opinions on what constitutes a good piece of work (although we *do* see a 10% sample and provide feedback based on this). Working the award into assessments has meant that work is often marked on aggregate, meaning that one piece of work of a high standard can negate poor pieces of work. Whereas we in the Careers Centre would prefer to pass a piece of work only if it is perfect, embedding in modules means that students can get the award if they pass the module in question and it is possible to pass a module at a grade of 40%.

Embedding the award in courses has meant that students are automatically 'signed up' to the award and, in some cases, complete it almost without realising. This means that they do not value their certificate once it is awarded to them.

Advice to others who want to set up an award:

For services wanting to roll out an award by delivering through courses:
- do this by constructing a framework of learning outcomes that academics can map to
- award the *course*, rather than individual students
- seek external accreditation for the award
- involve academics from different disciplines in the design of the award
- train academics so that there is a consensus over quality
- gather examples where the integration of the award has worked as a means to encourage other subject areas to follow suit

Future Developments (particularly for the next three years)

Our priority is to improve the quality and consistency of the award, and also to evaluate and measure impact.

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https://www.wlv.ac.uk/current-students/careers-enterprise-and-the-workplace/enterprise--employability-award/