

Title: The Edinburgh Award – institutionally supporting student reflection and development

What was done:

The Edinburgh Award is a new scheme for the University of Edinburgh to provide recognition for students' involvement in co- and extra-curricular activities, and to help students gain the most from these opportunities.

In 2011/12, the University instigated an institutional enhancement project to develop and test an Edinburgh Award that is distinctive to the institution, allowing it to more formally recognise student achievement and learning from outside the formal curriculum. The Award seeks to build on, and enhance, the University's work in developing and fostering students' employability and a set of Edinburgh Graduate Attributes, making them an explicit, recognised and supported dimension of the academic and non-academic experience of students at the University of Edinburgh.

The Edinburgh Award aims to help our students learn to excel, increase their impact and stand out from the crowd in whatever circumstance or role they find themselves, now and in the future. Students are guided through a structured and supported process of self-reflection and capacity development, drawing on their experiences beyond their formal degree. The scheme is open to students of all degree levels and attracts and involves some of our most engaged and able students from a purposefully diverse range of academic and non-academic settings.

The Award is delivered by staff across the University – a centralised set of principles and guidelines are interpreted locally to produce tailored versions of the Award into which students can opt. Students can opt into and receive multiple Awards.

All locally tailored versions of the Award are run by relevant academic and non-academic units, and are attached to a particular student activity or type of activity, e.g. being a volunteer or being part of a department's peer-assisted learning scheme. Students' Award experiences are structured around this activity, increasing the perceived relevance and sense of community built through the Award.

The Award is going through an intensive expansion programme and is becoming an established part of the University's provision. Staff and student evaluation takes place each year and results have been consistently positive, e.g. 97% feeling they are better off having completed the Award and 98.8% would recommend the Award to a friend.

Links to:

- Design and development of a doctoral supplement to cover broader activities, training and experiences with a particular focus on employability & mobility

Motivation and aims:

Across the HE sector, the development of additional/skills/employability awards to validate and/or credit student achievement in non-academic areas has increased over recent years. Within the UK, this is partly in response to the sector-wide introduction of HEARs (Higher Education Achievement Report) which emerged as result of the Burgess Report¹. Concurrently, employability and graduate attributes have become of increasingly critical importance to the University of Edinburgh; as such

¹ <http://www.hear.ac.uk/assets/documents/hear/institution-resources/HEAR-Bringing-it-all-together.pdf>

the institution was keen to be able to recognise student achievement in these areas.

The University sought a design for the Edinburgh Award that:

- was scalable to all students who wish to take it;
- required significant resource only at set-up and then needs only routine development and support. This means that it had to become embedded with core activities for those involved in supporting it;
- builds on developments around the work currently being done enabling students to reflect on their graduate attributes; and
- engages a range of facilitators in its promotion and support. Those involved in supporting the Award can come from any part of the University's learning community, including experienced students.

Lessons learnt:

- **Balancing resource & quality** – investment in careful initial planning has allowed the Award to align easily with existing activities, providing a mechanism to significantly enhance the student experience whilst minimising any additional demands on limited staff resource.
- **Drawing on good practice while maintaining institutional distinctiveness** – there is a vast array of good practice relating to additional awards across the sector. This has provided an invaluable resource on which to draw, but each award carries with it some of the distinctiveness and identity of its institution. It is vital to ensure the final product feels appropriate to and aligns with the overall institutional approach.

Scalability and transferability:

The Edinburgh Award has been purposefully designed for expansion across the University of Edinburgh – this is already taking place. After significant initial investment of staff time to design and pilot, the Award is now run centrally at a day-to-day level by a single staff member and a second staff member involved part-time for accreditation and strategic oversight activities. The range of activities recognised through the Award is constantly increasing and being kept purposefully diverse – accessible to and used by students of all levels (undergraduate, taught postgraduate and doctoral students). To date, doctoral candidates have completed the Award through activities open to all students; a number of versions designed specifically for the activities of doctoral candidates are being explored for future implementation.

While theoretically transferable to another university, the Edinburgh Award is bespoke to the particular structure, ethos, culture and values of the University of Edinburgh. To be successful, any additional award scheme must reflect its parent institution.

Further information:

www.ed.ac.uk/EdinburghAward

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