University of East Anglia

UEA Skills Award Proposal: Summary

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1. Overview and Context

1.1 Award overview

The UEA skills award provides an opportunity for students to undertake a broad range of activities and experiences with view to developing a set of attributes that equip them for life and work after UEA. Registered students will gain recognition for their activities by the University and employers, and will receive feedback on written applications and interview performance.

Activities and attributes
Activities will fall within four categories: Academic, Work-related, Career Management, and Campus and Personal. Ten attributes have been identified within which students can demonstrate their development. These reflect attributes identified in numerous reports (for example CBI and NUS)[1] and aim to be reflective of the needs of business and graduate employers, yet also wide enough to incorporate elements such as citizenship and cultural awareness that reflect the UEA experience.

Award levels
Three award levels are proposed: bronze, silver and gold - to cater for differing levels of commitment, with a minimum number of hours required for each category of activity. In silver and gold levels, additional activities can be completed from any category. The bronze level is intended to be 'light-touch' and within reach of the majority of UEA students. Registrants can begin at bronze level and then advance to higher levels if they wish.

1.2 Context

Skills awards are now well established in universities as a way of encouraging and incentivising students to gain additional experience before they graduate, and in the process help them develop attributes desirable to themselves, employers and society.

Over three quarters of UK Higher Education institutions currently have an award programme, with some of these running for nearly ten years. Awards can meet a number of different institutional aims, including enhancing the student experience, strengthening links with employers and developing student employability and graduate attributes (QAA 2013)[2].

Why the need to introduce an award programme at UEA? There are a number of ways an award can confer a benefit to us, including:

- Strengthening our offer to prospective and current students and our commitment to extra-curricular opportunity and graduate employability
- Creating additional opportunities to build partnerships with employers in relation to award development, employability skills and provision of opportunities to students
- Enabling us to be more candid with our students about the kind of attributes they will be required to possess when they graduate and the pathways to achieving them
- Providing an opportunity for UEA students to gain a more formal recognition of their extra-curricular activities that will also be included on their HEAR

[1] For example: *CBI/EDI Education and Skills Survey* 2010, 2011 and 2012 and *Working towards your future: making the most of your time in education*, NUS 2011.

[2] QAA 2013. *Recognising Achievement Beyond the Curriculum: a toolkit for enhancing strategy and practice*. Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

1.3 Why should UEA students undertake the award?

Most students are already undertaking experiences additional to their academic work. However, by registering on the award, students will gain:

- a formal recognition by the University of their activities in the form of a certificate
- a clearer sense of their development (both academic and non-academic) by reflecting as they progress through their course
- greater awareness of the attributes employers value and a framework to chart development in these attributes
- something to list on a CV that gives a clear indication of attainment relating to their employability and helps to separate them from the competition
- better awareness of the range of UEA activities available to take part in
- knowledge that graduate employers (who have endorsed the award) will value the experiences they are undertaking and the attributes they are developing
- an increased likelihood of obtaining a graduate level position on leaving university (surveys being carried out at other HEIs with established skills awards are finding a positive correlation between skills award completion and graduate level outcomes)

The following additional benefits are also being investigated:

- The chance to access opportunities provided by employers that are only for award students (for instance, there have already been offers of work experience for award registrants from employers and voluntary organisations)
- The chance to present to and receive feedback from employers (silver and gold levels)
- Free photo taken professionally for their LinkedIn or online profile
- Payment for membership of a professional association/ networking organisation of their choice
- Bespoke or specialist training opportunities

2. Award structure

The diagrams on the following pages (4 - 7) give an overview of:

- Award levels and a suggested minimum number of hours for activities
- Categories of activity included within the award and examples
- Award attributes and their elements
- The schematic skills award structure

2.1 Award levels, activities and attributes

Award levels		Total	Academic	Work-related	Career management	Campus & personal	Supplementary (from any category)
Bronze	**Activities**	**6**	**1**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**-**
	Hours	*50*	*10*	*30*	*5*	*5*	*-*
Silver	**Activities**	**9**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**1**
	Hours	*100*	*15*	*50*	*10*	*15*	*10*
Gold	**Activities**	**12**	**2**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**2**
	Hours	*150*	*20*	*80*	*15*	*25*	*10*

Award activities

Academic activities

Examples…

Team project
Presentation
Skills module
Peer mentoring/ assessment
Work-based learning
External visit
Portfolio
Reflective work

Work-related activities

Examples…

UEA Springboard internship
Vacation work experience
Part-time job
UEA Summer internship
Volunteering
Erasmus placement
Starting a new business

Career management activities

Examples…

Interview workshop
Other skills workshops
Careers Fair
Career mentoring
Employer event
Employer training
Careers guidance

Campus and personal activities

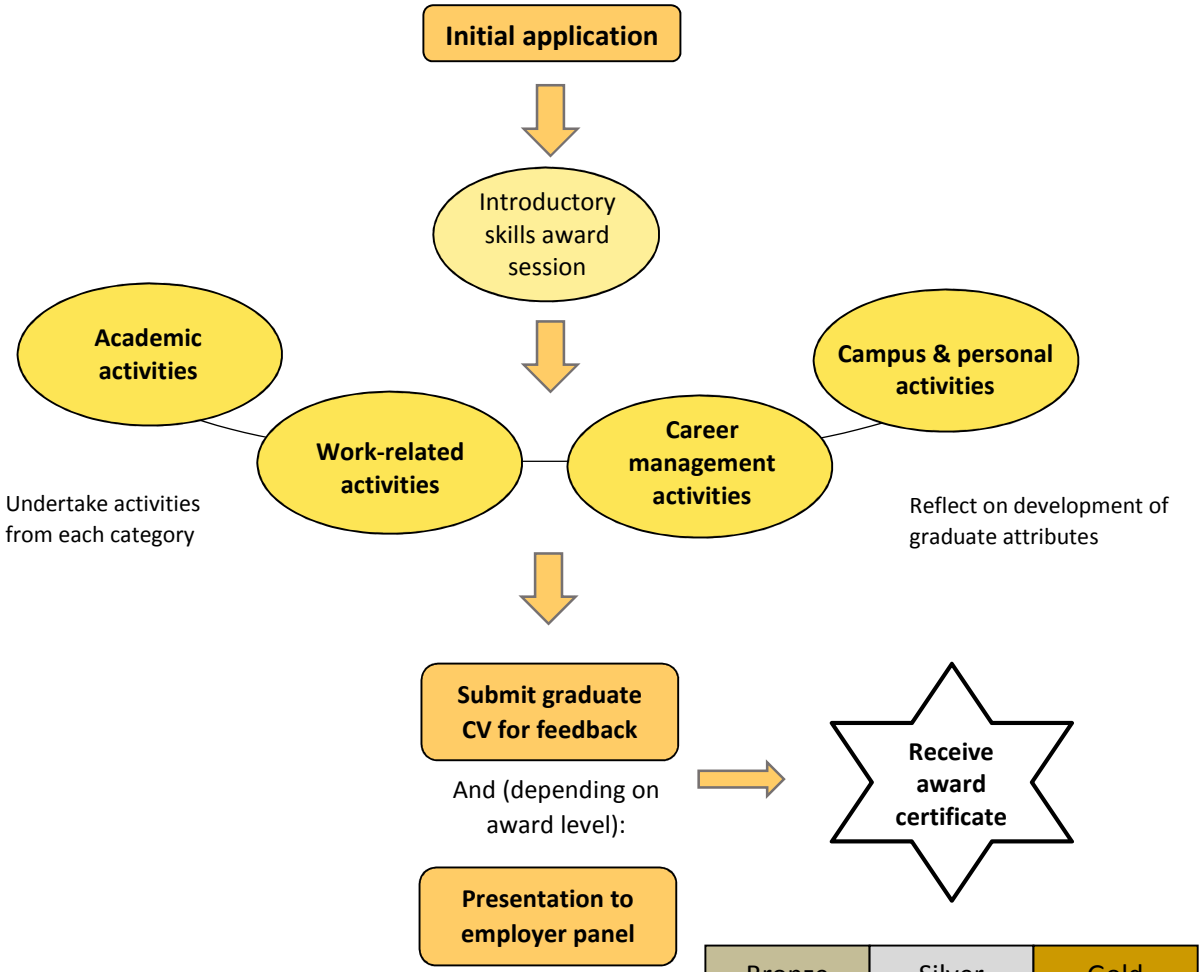
Examples…

SU society activity
Elected SU role
Student media
Senior resident
School responsibilities
Caring for a relative
Competitive sports

Award attributes

Team working and leadership
Communication
Self-management
Applied numeracy and IT
Career awareness
Problem-solving
Commercial and customer awareness
Innovation and enterprise
Making a difference
Cultural awareness

2.2 UEA Skills Award – Schematic Structure



Bronze	Silver	Gold
6 activities	9 activities	12 activities

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2.3 Attributes and example activities

Teamworking and leadership

- Co-operating and collaborating with others
- Taking other viewpoints
- Working to shared aims
- Contributing to discussions
- Taking the lead when required
- Motivating team members
- Delegating and assigning responsibility

Example activities

- Academic team project
- Team based competition
- Voluntary work
- Work experience
- Part-time work
- Society/ Student Union activity
- Team sports
- Playing in a band/ singing in a choir

Communication

- Effective speaking and presentations
- Making a good impression
- Writing coherently and persuasively
- Understanding email and online etiquette
- Seeking clarification when unclear
- Sensitivity to others
- Assertiveness and negotiation
- Tactfulness and diplomacy
- Giving feedback and encouragement
- Confidence to network effectively
- Using social media effectively to build networks of contacts

Example activities

- Giving presentations
- Academic and report writing
- Writing for Concrete or other publications
- Designing a website
- Attending conferences or networking events and gaining contacts
- Building a network of professional contacts
- Many others…

Self-management

- Taking responsibilities and ownership of actions
- Considers implications of actions
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Resilience
- Time management
- Setting priorities and Juggling competing demands
- Setting goals and meeting deadlines
- Improvement of performance through reflective learning

Example activities

Self-management can be evidenced from most activities Examples include:

- Work experience and employment
- Positions of responsibility
- Completing a training course where evidence of reflection and development can be shown
- Caring for children or family members

Applied numeracy and IT

- Performing routine calculations (e.g.making estimates, calculating %, applying formulae)
- Using office software and systems
- Using spreadsheets and other databases
- Analysing and interpreting data
- Using statistical or modelling software
- Developing websites, platforms or systems

Example activities

- Academic modules
- Projects involving data collection and analysis
- Using MS Office or Apple software in a work environment
- Using design or publishing software
- ECDL – European Computer Driving Licence
- Using an office IT system in a workplace
- Creating/ maintaining a database

Career awareness

- Reflecting on and articulating qualities, strengths and skills
- Researching and evaluating career options
- Networking and speaking to alumni and employers
- Researching sectors, employers and opportunities
- Creating strong CVs, applications and online profiles for the purposes of securing employment
- Performing well in selection tests and at interview

Example activities

- Attending careers and employer events
- Careers guidance sessions
- Engaging with a career mentor
- Doing a work placement as part of a course
- Attending career skills workshops including CV and interview training
- Work experience

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Problem-solving

- Analysing facts and circumstances
- Breaking down an issue into component parts
- Considering new angles
- Overcoming set-backs
- Creativity in generating solutions

Example activities

- Course projects, problem-based learning
- Solving problems in a workplace with tangible results
- Participating in a hackathon
- Reaching final stage of a competition
- Many others…

Commercial and customer awareness

- Appreciation of business bottom lines
- Experience of liaising with managers in a workplace
- Knowledge of main competitors within a sector
- Understanding and prioritising customer needs

Example activities

- Work experience
- Employment experience in retail or catering
- Workplace scenarios as part of course
- Attending employer open days
- Attending business and industry conferences

Innovation and enterprise

- Has taken an idea through to its practical application
- Has the confidence to introduce and establish something new
- Looks for innovative solutions to problems
- Understanding what is required to launch a business or venture

Example activities

- Taking a novel approach to a piece of coursework
- Starting a new business or venture
- Competing in enterprise competitions
- Building a portfolio of freelance

Making a difference

- Compassion and kindness to others
- Committed to improving life on campus
- Dedication to improving lives of others – friends, family or community off campus
- Lobbying for positive change

Example activities

- Voluntary work
- Caring for friends, family or vulnerable people
- Being a Senior Resident on campus
- Work for a charity to further a particular cause
- Activities to improve environmental sustainability or well-being on or off campus

Cultural awareness

- Awareness of one's own cultural beliefs, norms and attitudes
- Awareness of other people's cultural beliefs, norms and attitudes
- Experience living in another culture
- Mixing with peers from different cultures
- Ability to mix well with people from different backgrounds and with different preferences

Example activities

- Involvement in international student societies and on-campus activities
- International travel beyond vacations
- Living or working abroad
- Erasmus placements or year

2.4 Reflective component

Once a student has completed an activity as part of the skills award, they will be required to complete a brief reflective exercise, listing their main tasks or responsibilities, writing a short statement that can be used later on a CV (ideally auto-populated into their CV profile) and considering which attributes they have developed.

EXAMPLE ACTIVITY FORM

Student details	Will already be in MyCareerCentral
Name of activity	
Category	(Academic, work-related, career management, student and personal)
Host	(UEA course, employer, Student Union, self, other)
Date (from/ to)	

List your main responsibilities and/ or tasks undertaken in this activity.

Write a short statement (min 100 words) that might be used in a CV or application, summarising your experience and skills/ attributes gained overall from this activity. You can use the acronym CARL to frame your statement: C=Context, A=action (what you did), R=Results, L=Learning.

Select which attributes you feel you have developed during this activity:

Team-working and leadership	☐	Problem-solving	☐
Communication	☐	Commercial and customer awareness	☐
Self-management	☐	Innovation and enterprise	☐
Applied numeracy and IT	☐	Making a difference	☐
Career awareness	☐	Cultural awareness	☐

Students will click on an attribute to reveal its elements and select the ones they feel they have used and developed. See the example below.

EXAMPLE ATTRIBUTE FORM

Team-working and leadership

Indicate which elements within team-working and leadership you have developed, listing additional elements if needed:

- Co-operating and collaborating with others ☐
- Taking other viewpoints ☐
- Working to shared aims ☐
- Contributing to discussions ☐
- Taking the lead when required ☐
- Motivating team members ☐
- Delegating and assigning responsibility ☐
- Other (please add)

3. Award administration

The skills award will be administered by the Careers Service. Successful ongoing award administration will be achieved through two essential components:

1. CareerHub software (MyCareerCentral portal for students) to facilitate:
   - Registering on the award
   - Booking to attend careers and other events
   - Using workflow functionality to allow students to progress through the award having completed activities or once other conditions have been met
   - Administering validation of award activities
   - Student portfolio building: allowing students to record and reflect on their activities
   - Administering all forms related to the skills award
   - Communicating to award registrants, activity providers and other stakeholders

Work has already begun on CareerHub to create skills award pages and the basic functionality is already in place to handle award administration.

2. Skills Award Officer (1.0FTE) based in the Careers Service Careers Team
   - Appointed in October 2014
   - Responsible for managing the ongoing administration, maintenance and development of the UEA skills award.

4. Stakeholder involvement

The main skills award stakeholders include Careers Service, academic staff, employers and Student Services. Careers Service responsibilities in running the award are detailed in section 3.

4.1 Academic staff

Promotion of skills awards to students by academic staff is viewed as critical in universities where significant numbers participate in their award programmes. This will be important at UEA if we are to engage students who are less naturally proactive in their career development, where the encouragement and support of an adviser or lecturer is most influential.

We hope that as employability as a concept becomes more established at UEA, academic staff may view a skills award as a useful and recognised way of assisting students in supplementing their academic experience. The incorporation of academic activities into the skills award recognises the important overlap in skills development between curricular and extra-curricular experience. Academic involvement with the skills award is likely therefore to include:

- Feeding into discussions at Faculty/ School level on the kinds of academic activities that will be included as part of the award
- Representation on group(s) overseeing the development of the award
- Membership of forums or other bodies involving employers where employability and skills awards are considered
- Encouraging students and advisees to consider their extra-curricular development and recommending the skills award

4.1.1 UEA skills award and academic activities

Academic activities can and should be able to count towards the skills award. There is a need however to focus on those activities that can demonstrate development within skills award attributes and extend beyond core academic attributes such as critical reasoning, research and analysis.

Skills award activities are therefore likely to include one or more of the following:

- Students undertake experiential learning with an emphasis on trial and error
- Students interact and present in groups
- Students interact with others external to UEA
- Students think and act beyond their immediate academic subject or apply their discipline in a novel way, perhaps using unconventional methods or settings
- Students solve a problem or address an issue of relevance in a workplace
- Students undertake written work with a context such as a business report or journalistic piece with a specific objective or audience
- Students engage in structured peer assisted learning and giving feedback
- Students consider a range of practical applications and career paths related to their subject

Methods of assessment may also indicate suitability for the skills award. Examples might include:

- Practical report
- Presentation
- Team exercise or project
- Running an event
- Field course
- Portfolio
- Reflective work
- Peer mentoring

In October/ November 2014, Careers Service will be liaising with School Employability Directors and other staff to begin compiling academic activities that are likely to be included within the skills award.

4.1.2 Validation of UEA academic award activities

Each time a student completes an academic activity and submits it as part of the award it will need to be validated to ensure it meets the requirements of quantity (hours) and quality. Validation of academic activities will be carried out via SITS where possible. We are looking to streamline this process as much as possible using CareerHub and liaising with LTS, although there may be some contact required with academic staff in Schools.

4.2 Employers

The involvement of graduate employers of differing size and sector in the ongoing development of the award is important to ensure the experiences students undertake at UEA are preparing them adequately for the graduate workplace. The award also creates an opportunity to bring more employers onto campus as collaborators and partners, with wider benefits to the University. Employer involvement with the skills award is anticipated to include:

- Membership of a University skills award steering group to oversee ongoing development of the programme
- Attending an annual event to celebrate achievements of award registrants and providing employer endorsement of the Award
- Attending an award panel, alongside academic staff and Careers Service staff assessing award registrants on their CV, applications or presentation skills
- Sponsorship of award events or related initiatives
- Providing an activity as part of the award programme, for instance work shadowing, visit to a company premises, or work experience

4.3 Union of UEA Students and Student Services

As a significant provider of student extra-curricular experience and opportunities, the Union of UEA Students will be an important partner in establishing and promoting the skills award. We are in discussion with the Union and will be collaborating closely over the next phase of the award development. We will also be liaising with the Dean of Students Office.