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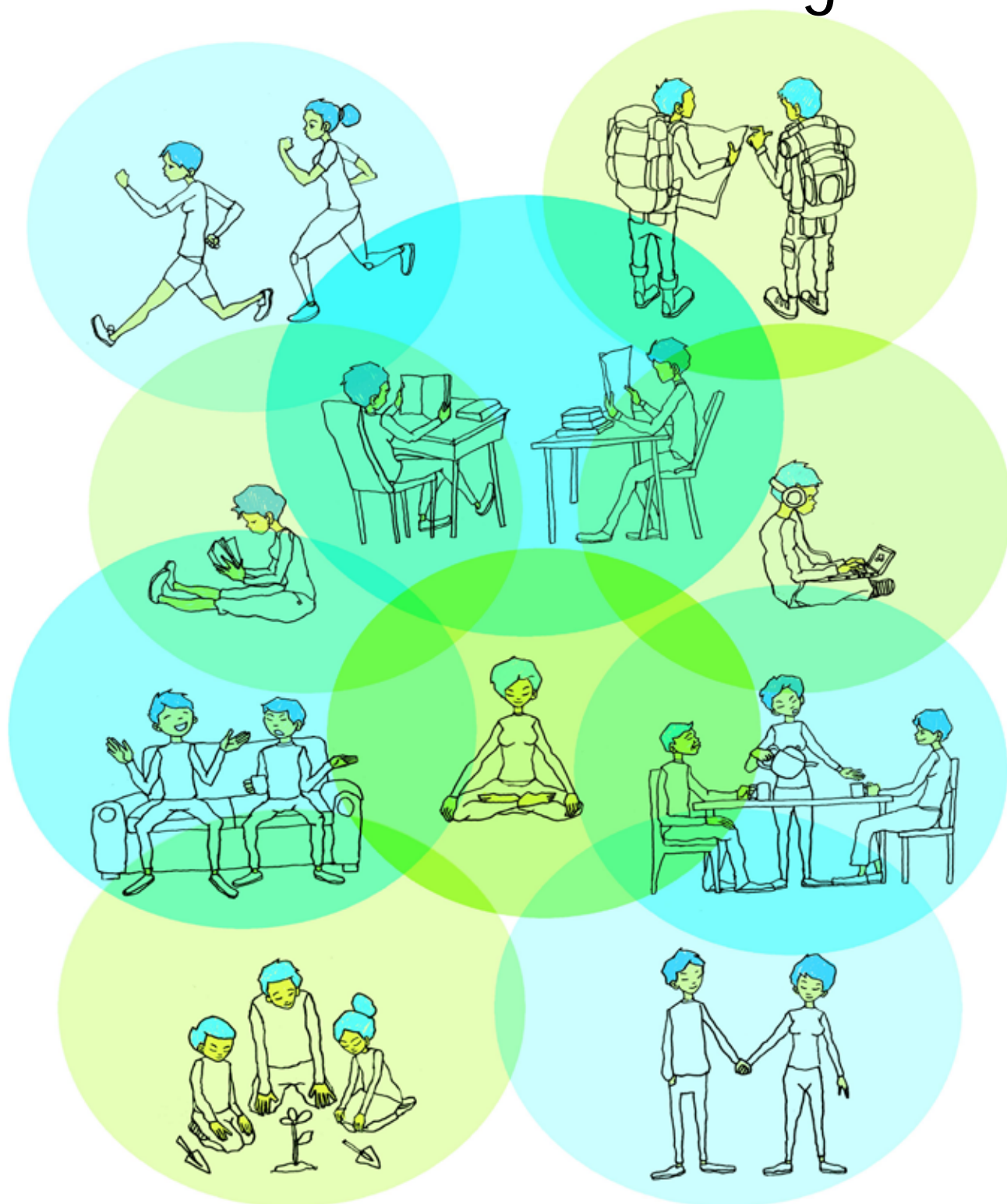
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CHAPTER B6

The St Andrews Award

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SUMMARY

The St Andrews Award recognises and celebrates students' development through extra-curricular and work related activities. Students are encouraged to stretch themselves and try new and interesting things they might not have considered. The focus is on doing all they can while at university to be well prepared for whatever path they follow after graduation. The Award is open to all undergraduate students and appears on their Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), which is their degree transcript. It provides an opportunity for students to focus on developing their skills and experience through activities they may already be involved in. The process for achieving the Award is based on reflection: students can determine what activities count towards achievement and which of the four strands individual activities count towards. The array of activities and work experiences is impressive and speaks to students' creativity and wide ranging interests.

BIOGRAPHY

Bonnie Hacking is Enterprise & Employability Adviser at the University of St Andrews and a Director at Enterprise Educators UK. Before joining the university, she was Management Development Officer at Oxfordshire County Council and People Programmes Manager at the Unipart Group of Companies. Bonnie is passionate about people and loves inspiring them to achieve more than they think they can. In addition to the St Andrews Award, she's led several projects at St Andrews, aimed at developing students and their employability, including: Aiming University Learning @ Work (funded by the Scottish Funding Council); implementation of personal development planning; and been involved in developing and implementing graduate attributes. On the enterprise side, she inspires and motivates students and graduates to start their own ventures, providing skills training, coaching and encouragement to help them turn their good ideas into great ventures.

INTRODUCTION

The St Andrews Award www.st-andrews.ac.uk/award was developed to encourage students to engage widely and deeply with all St Andrews offers, in order to enhance their employability and provide a means to officially recognise learning and development through extra-curricular activity. A university-wide personal development planning (PDP) process gained traction for early years students, but was not embraced for honours level students, despite the benefits students highlighted they gained from the experience. Reflection was recognised as a key element of employability, in line with Harvey's (2005 cited in QAA 2007:24) definition,

> Employability is more than about developing attitudes, techniques or experience just to enable a student to get a job, or to progress within a current career. It is about learning and the emphasis is less on 'employ' and more on 'ability'. In essence, the emphasis is on developing critical, reflective abilities, with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner. Employment is a by-product of this enabling process.

The university wanted ongoing reflection to be a key part of the process for achieving the Award.

Award developers were keen to give students the opportunity to tailor their experience with the Award to help them achieve their personal career aspirations, regardless of whether that meant applying for graduate jobs in a particular sector, pursuing further studying, running their own business or something else. With limited success on embedding personal development planning and an increasing focus on employability across the sector, it was important to review skills and employability awards at other universities in determining how best to structure and run the St Andrews Award. The *Lifewide Learning Conference*, held at the University of Surrey in 2010, was an important opportunity to engage with colleagues at other institutions, share ideas and learn from their experience. At this conference, it was realised how important the lifewide learning available during a student's time at university is to their continuing, lifelong development. Through an embedded PDP process, the Award supports students in recognising how they are learning and developing from their experiences beyond the curriculum through their lifewide experiences (Jackson 2011 and this volume).

The St Andrews Award was designed to be flexible, so students can determine what activities count towards achievement and which strand individual activities count towards. The assessment process is based on personal development and reflection, enabling students to build up a narrative of experiences to demonstrate their achievements and success. Recruiters regularly indicate St Andrews students are strong candidates, however they often struggle to articulate their strengths and successes, based on the variety of experiences they've had, an important aspect of gaining employment, as substantiated by the QAA.

A common theme in the comments from graduate recruiters was the high degree of competition for posts and the need for students to be able to articulate their strengths, evidence their learning from experience as well as their achievements, and show that experience and achievement are broadly based. (Quality Assurance Agency 2007:8).

The St Andrews Award is designed to:

- Motivate students to engage in a range of challenging personal development activities during their time at university, maximising both the breadth and depth of experiences and skills gained
- Signpost to students what is distinctive about the St Andrews experience, enabling and motivating them to engage with what's on offer
- Offer an attractive range of choices to students and provide a helpful structuring framework
- Encourage students to think in advance about what they would like to gain from participation and reflect afterwards on what they have achieved and how they've developed themselves through their experiences, through an embedded personal development planning process
- Provide formal recognition of students' extra-curricular activities
- Be a university-wide programme, involving the Students Association, St Andrews Volunteering Service, Sports Centre and other units responsible for extra-curricular activities, providing a broad base to engage both students and staff across the university in supporting skill development and employability.

STRUCTURE

The St Andrews Award recognises and celebrates students' development through extra-curricular and work-related activities. The Award consists of four strands: *contributing to university life; giving to others; working for your future; and extending your horizons*. For each strand, students must undertake a range of activities which enable them to provide evidence of their achievements and personal development.

Objectives of the Award

As a result of achieving the St Andrews Award students will be able to:
- Demonstrate commitment, responsibility and sustained effort over time, for a range of extra-curricular and work related activities
- Give evidence of the scale of contribution they've made or impact they've had
- Demonstrate the breadth and depth of skills and experience they've gained, using relevant examples from Award activities
- Talk about how they've been personally challenged culturally, socially, geographically or physically by achieving the Award.

Process for Achieving the Award

The process for achieving the Award is intended to be stretching, but achievable over about two years. It gives students the flexibility to set their own learning aims and objectives, determine what

activities count towards achievement, which of the four strands individual activities count towards, which order and when to complete each of the four strands. The required reflective reports have been structured like academic assignments, a format students are familiar with. To achieve the Award, students must:

1. Enhance personal development by getting involved in activities relating to the four strands of the Award: *contributing to university life; giving to others; working for your future; extending your horizons*
2. Attend a workshop, an *Introduction to the St Andrews Award* (either in person or online), then submit their 'Personal Aims and Objectives'
3. Keep *Log Books* of activities, which are formally verified
4. Submit evidence and reflections for each strand in a *Reflective Summary Report for a Strand*, which is assessed using the *Assessment Guidelines*
5. Submit a *Final Reflective Summary Report* looking back over the whole of their time on the Award (assessed using the *Guidelines*) and attend an interview.

After successful completion of all these elements, students will receive the St Andrews Award. If all the strands are not completed, students will not achieve the Award, but individual strands that have been achieved will appear on their Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR).

One of the questions most often asked by students is how long should it take to complete the Award? In establishing the four strands, it was anticipated *contributing to university life* and *giving to others* are most likely to be undertaken during the academic year, alongside studying, while *working for your future* and *extending your horizons* lend themselves to summertime. Students are encouraged to complete one strand each academic year, commencing in their second year (of a four year Scottish degree) and one each summer. This approximately two year timescale gives plenty of opportunity to immerse themselves in a number of activities, reflect on how they are developing and identify other opportunities to build their skills. A longer term approach enables students to develop their reflective skills as they progress through the Award, underlining the lifewide and lifelong aspect of their development. With the bulk of the activity completed by the time they enter their final year, they can focus on writing the *Final Reflective Summary Report*, looking back over the whole of their time on the Award and prepare for the *final interview*.

Strands and range of activities

The strands of the Award represent key areas important for student's development and highlight some of the distinctive aspects of the lifewide student experience in St Andrews. When describing the strands to students, an indication is given of the kinds of activities one might expect to see being included in each strand. However, the decision to allow students to determine what activities will contribute best to their own personal aims and objectives has resulted in an impressive and creative array of experiences being included.

Contributing to university life

This strand gives students a chance to get involved in activities within the University or capitalise on activities they

are already involved in. Here are the suggestions given for what might be considered:

- Holding a position of responsibility in a university club or society (of which there are more than 125)
  Contributing to the Athletics Union or Sports Centre
- Playing an active part as a post holder on a Hall Committee
- Taking part in university music or drama activities.

When I first started thinking about this strand [contributing to university life], and how it could aid my personal development, I did honestly not expect it to further my skills much. Rather, I thought it would simply be an opportunity to put my existing skills to good use. Little did I know, the activities undertaken in this strand allowed me to develop entirely new abilities and furthermore strengthen my existing ones in ways I would never have imagined. (Second year student of Medicine)

Giving to others

This strand is exactly what it says - making a difference to someone else. Following are the suggestions given for possible activities:

- Volunteering with a charitable organisation
- Being a personal helper to a student with a disability
- Taking up a position of responsibility organising charity events   or fundraising activities
- Anything else demonstrating how you've made a significant   difference to someone else.

As a facilitator, I developed extensively my verbal communication skills, especially in terms of moderating discussions and encouraging sharing of personal experiences and beliefs. Most importantly, the experience increased my confidence in my ability to relate to people and encourage change without being obnoxious. During the sessions, I realised that often individuals hide or flaunt specific behaviours and beliefs giving a distorted version of that person's commitment to the environmental cause. Hence, in a way, being a facilitator gave me a deeper understanding of human behaviour. It taught me about humility and respect in real and practical terms. I liked the role of facilitator so much that I am now considering jobs somewhat related to it which I did not seriously consider before, such as environmental consultancy'. (Third year Physics student)

The activities submitted for *contributing to university life* and *giving to others* are what one would expect and very much in-line with the suggested activities, although the number and range of societies and volunteering undertaken is broad.

Working for your future

This strand is exactly what it says - exploring the world of work and it is the only strand with a requirement for a <u>minimum</u> amount of time to be invested - 70 hours or two working weeks. The opportunities suggested are:

- Undertaking work experience or an internship
- Doing an ordinary job and demonstrating contribution, responsibility or investigation whilst doing it
- Undertaking a placement within an academic school or unit in the university
- Running your own business or entrepreneurial venture

Experiences submitted for *working for your future* range from well-known internship programmes with graduate employers, to the university's Summer Internship and Undergraduate Research Internship Programmes, to volunteering with organisations related to an individual's career aspirations and many more.

From my final verifier's comment stating I was a joy to work with in the lab, to the degree that I was allowed to carry out the various analyses, I conclude that I did successfully shadow the technicians and lend a hand. Additionally, while I discovered that there isn't much difference between university labs and professional chemistry labs, besides the scale, I also know that the main skills I will need to hone in order to have a successful career are confidence, initiative, patience, keeping calm and staying alert. (Third year student of Chemistry with Medicinal Chemistry)

Extending your horizons

This strand is about doing something that REALLY challenges the individual - personally, culturally, socially, geographically or physically.

More than any other strand, e*xtending your horizons* demands that individuals really think about what would challenge them the most and give them a chance to really develop themselves. Students are encouraged to think about what they would find really daunting? What would push them out of their comfort zone? What would their friends be really surprised about them doing? What have they always wondered about trying, but haven't had the confidence to give it a go?

They are asked not to be afraid to stretch themselves and try something new! Unlike other strands, there isn't a tidy list of possibilities to point students to. Instead, a list of examples is provided, based on what students have achieved and submitted for this strand:

- Learning a new language
- Learning a new skill - fire juggling; playing an instrument; computer skills; painting with oils
- Taking the GRE exam in order to study for a Masters degree in the US
- Charities Race 2 [different place in Europe each year] (organised by the Students Association Charities Campaign)
- Running a marathon

- Making a film documentary in Tibet
- Competing in the Ironman UK Challenge
- Getting certified to teach yoga

Students are encouraged not to let this list limit their thinking! There is awareness some students would probably read through the list and think 'but that's not challenging' about a few things. Perhaps some of the things listed wouldn't challenge an individual, because they can already do them. So they are asked to really think about what WOULD challenge them as a possibility for this strand.

> The most significant thing I learnt about myself in this process was that if you have an opportunity to do things that you feel you might want to do, then do it, even if it is out of your comfort zone. I may never be able to do half the things I did in Africa again. However, I took the opportunities as they came and enjoyed every moment of it. I completed this big challenge for myself and have never been so glad of doing something for myself as much as I am of doing this. Also out of this, I have decided that I want to do a veterinary nursing course after university, to assist animals in need. This trip to Africa has helped me decide on my future. (Final year Zoology student)

REFLECTIVE PROCESS

> There is a strong relationship between PDP and student employability, and this relationship is central to the development of learners' ability to identify, articulate and evidence their learning and overall development. (Higher Education Academy, 2006)

Giving evidence of what has been learned and using that to demonstrate achievement is fundamental to the St Andrews Award. It is a reflective process, which is intentionally personal development planning (PDP), without calling it PDP.

> Before doing any of the strands, I had not given significant consideration to the skills that I would develop. My goal was just to complete the award so that I could write it on my CV. But after doing this award, I realise that I can achieve more things if I give some consideration to what I am about to do. This way I will actively seek opportunities to successfully finish my objectives. This way I can achieve more out of the experience. Another by-product of undertaking this award is that I feel more competent in writing reflections. Prior to this award, I was terrible at writing reflection and expressing myself. But because of this award, I had to write reflection for everything. So because of this increased practice I feel more confident and competent in writing reflections. Reflections are very important for my future career, as because of them I will be able to think about my job and see how I can improve it. (Final year student of Medicine)

PDP is embedded in the reflective elements which must be submitted to demonstrate achievement, in order to receive the St Andrews Award, which is administered through the university's VLE, Moodle. As part of the introductory workshop, students are given time to consider what they want to get out of the Award and what their strengths and development areas are. These thoughts are submitted as their Personal Aims and Objectives to get started on the Award.

Log Books are used to capture all the valuable experiences students have on the Award, as they happen. Students need to keep a separate Log Book for each activity. It is used to note down what they are doing and learning as they go. On the first page, the individual is instructed to write a short plan of what they will be doing for that activity and how they will know they've been successful. Subsequent pages are structured to encourage reflection on what has been done, achieved or learned and keep track of good examples to use in their Reflective Reports. There are enough pages to keep a weekly record of reflections over a semester. The back page of the Log Book is used for summarising what was done and achieved and for obtaining a signature to verify the activity. By student request, hard copy Log Books are available and are used most frequently, though it is also available online.

For each strand of the Award, students need to write and submit a Reflective Summary Report for a Strand, exploring what they have achieved and learned from the experience, based on entries in their verified Log Books. In this report, students are asked to provide: a clear statement of how they anticipated those particular activities would enhance their skills and experience when they started working on this strand; a description and critical evaluation of their success in meeting those aims; and an appendix listing the Verified Activities they are submitting for consideration in this strand. This report has a word limit of 500 - 1000 words.

Once they've successfully completed all four of the individual strands, they need to submit a Final Reflective Summary Report, looking back over the whole of their time on the Award. In their Final Report, they are asked to provide: a clear statement of their personal learning aims for the Award, placing these within an appropriate background context such as their personal interests, prior experiences, career aspirations or other drive for specific skills development; a description and critical evaluation of their success in meeting those aims - how each strand contributed and progress was achieved; and evidence of acquiring understanding of personal development and reflection and how those contribute to employability. This Final Report has a word limit of 1500 - 2000 words.

For both Reflective Summary and Final Reports, assessors look for clearly structured reports which convince them students used their Award activities as an opportunity to develop themselves, demonstrating commitment, responsibility, and sustained effort over time, resulting in making a contribution or having an impact and personal challenge.

The final reflective element is the Final Interview, giving students a chance to practise describing and discussing their skills and achievements in relation to their experience with the Award. The interview lasts approximately 20 minutes and gives students an opportunity to expand on what they covered in their Final Reflective Summary Report, particularly the skills they developed and good examples of their success. Students are encouraged to prepare for the interview by reviewing all of the documentation submitted.

> With regards to my future, I am convinced that the habit of writing down my experiences and thoughts, as well as the ability to think reflectively will be invaluable. They can be applied in

many aspects of life which entail processes of learning and making sense of experiences. (Final year student of International Relations and Management)

VERIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT

The Award appears on the HEAR of graduates in Section 6.1 Additional Achievements, therefore the University needs to be confident of the quality of students' experience during the Award and their evidence of what they have gained from it, in order to decide whether it is worthy of the University's endorsement. However, those responsible for the Award wanted to make this a straightforward process, which wouldn't be too resource intensive. In order to verify their activities, students must have the person responsible for the activity make some comments on the back page of their Log Book and sign it. Interestingly, students involved in developing the Award wanted there to be two signatures for verification of society and sports club activities. For other activities and work experience, only one signature is required. Verification of activities is like obtaining a reference and we encourage students to consider asking for a reference in addition to requesting verification of their Log Book, particularly for work experience and volunteering outside the university. The verification of Log Books is checked at the Final Interview.

To assess achievement of Award participants when reviewing Reflective Summary Reports for a Strand and Final Reflective Summary Reports, the guidelines in Table 1 are used and feedback is given.

Table 1 Guidelines for assessors giving feedback on student submissions for the Award

Description	Achievement
Goes beyond expectations. Demonstrates significant responsibility and/or time commitment over several months, resulting in an excellent contribution or impact. Strong evidence of skill development and personal challenge.	Outstanding
Meets expectations. Demonstrates responsibility and/or time commitment over several months, resulting in recognisable contribution or impact. Evidence of skill development and personal growth.	Successful
While there is some evidence of meeting expectations, there are also some aspects which are incomplete or below expectations. Level of responsibility or time commitment do not demonstrate sustained effort. Minimal evidence of skill development and personal growth.	Marginal Fail
Expectations not met. Level of responsibility or time commitment are minimal. No evidence of skill development and personal growth.	Unacceptable Fail

If a report is given a Marginal or Unacceptable Fail, the feedback will explain the deficiencies and invite students to resubmit. There have only been a few fails and these were either because the student hadn't met the requirements for the assignment or hadn't done enough to demonstrate 'sustained commitment over time'. On resubmission, all students were successful.

In retrospect, I appreciate just how much working on the St Andrews Award has helped me in my job search and application process in my final year. Over the past months, I have extensively drawn on the stories, explanations and insights I gained from the log book entries and reflective

summary reports for each strand in drafting cover letters and participating in various recruitment processes. I have attended a great number of networking events, assessment centre days, and interviews on the phone, in person or via video. On almost all occasions, I was positively surprised to see how beneficial the St Andrews Award has turned out to be throughout the process. (Final year International Relations and Management student).

CONCLUSION

Since the St Andrews Award launched in 2009, more than 400 students have embarked on the Award. Feedback from students indicates they value the flexibility of the Award, so they can tailor it to their own interests and aspirations. The structured process of reflection contributes positively to their experience, development and importantly, their employability. The quotes used throughout this chapter are taken directly from the Reflective Reports submitted by students as part of the Award and give ample evidence of how the St Andrews Award has met its objectives, enabling participants to demonstrate the breadth and depth of skills and experience they've gained and give evidence of the scale of contribution they've made or impact they've had on the society, organisation, individual or the university more generally. Their comments also demonstrate how PDP has been successfully embedded into the St Andrews Award, contributing to the lifewide learning of students, even though they might not recognise their experience in those terms.

This award has helped me see how reflection of yourself helps contribute to employability. It wasn't until I sat back and thought about what skills I needed for the work I want to go into and which of these skills I needed to improve on before I realised how much I had to do. Being able to work as a team, have initiative and having the confidence to speak to total strangers is an essential part of working with animals as education is a major part of the business side of animal work. Doing the strands allowed me to pay attention to particular skills I have mentioned and work on them, as well as taking part in activities I wouldn't have done before due to not having the confidence. This award has really motivated me to gain skills needed for employment in the animal industry. (Final year student of Zoology)

Overall, pursuing the St Andrews has been one of the most enriching experiences of my life so far. Looking back to when I first started the Award, I did not ever dream of partaking in such a wide variety of events and activities which I have now had the privilege to have been a part of. By making you complete the differing strands, the Award really helps you to make the most of the plentiful opportunities that university life and the wider world has to offer young adults like myself. (Final year Art History and International Relations student)

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