

# CHAPTER D1

## Extra-curricular awards : a Centre for Recording Achievement (CRA) perspective

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### SUMMARY

This chapter began life as a stimulus paper, commissioned by the Quality Assurance Agency to promote thinking and discussion about the way in which extra-curricular awards might be designed and quality assured. It takes as its focus the contribution that extra-curricular awards can make to support students' overall personal development by encouraging appreciation of and reflection on the value of learning as a lifewide activity which occurs within and specifically beyond the formal curriculum<sup>1</sup>.

### BIOGRAPHY



Rob Ward is Director of the Centre for Recording Achievement. CRA began as a Government funded two year project under the Enterprise in Higher Education (EHE) initiative. Very few EHE projects were sustained but nearly twenty two years later CRA is one of the most influential and active 'communities of practice' in the UK. Through Rob's energy, enthusiasm and commitment as Director, there is no doubt that CRA has provided leadership for the higher education sector in the recognition and recording of achievement in learning and personal development. His networking and community-based organisation has supported the UK-wide introduction of Personal Development Planning (PDP) and it has been a considerable beneficial force in enabling the HE sector to share understandings and practices in relation to e-portfolios. CRA has also been instrumental in influencing policy makers - firstly through the Dearing Review of Higher Education in 1997 when the idea of Progress Files and PDP was introduced, and more recently as a supporter and enabler of the piloting of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR).

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

The phrase 'extra-curricular awards' is used in this paper to refer to any award structure which recognises achievements or learning outside the formal curriculum. It therefore covers both extra and co-curricular award schemes.

The rationale for higher education institutions to develop such schemes varies widely. The view put forward in this paper does not negate the potential of such awards to support what has been termed 'sustainable employability': 'the ability not only to secure a first job but also to remain employable throughout life' (Watts 2006). However, it does remind us of alternative and well-recognised perspectives on the rationale for institutional - and student - engagement with such awards. Enhancing future employability is not the only reason for engaging with such wider opportunities for learning and development. For some, the principal objective is to enhance employability, while for others it is to support personal development, or to support civic or community engagement. Even when looking through the 'employability lens', Norton and Thomas note that when speaking about enhancing employability beyond the curriculum, we are in essence speaking about enhancing student experience: 'Recognised co-curricular activity, run in parallel to degree programmes, ...is also, crucially, an extremely effective way of enhancing the experience of students in higher education, whether they are undergraduate or postgraduate, from the UK or abroad, studying full-time or part-time.' (Norton & Thomas 2009a).

A further perspective is given by Quinlan, who emphasises social responsibility and engagement with wider society as part of the higher education experience:

'While promoting holistic student development is likely to help students gain transferable skills that will make them better employees, the discourse of employability alone is insufficient and threatens to undermine attention to students as people. Instead, a discourse that focuses on students' development of personal and social responsibility...reminds us of the much broader responsibility of universities to society.' (Quinlan 2011a).

Our perspective is also broadly in keeping with what Lore and Little have termed the 'Anglo-Saxon model of tertiary education', which is: 'characterised by a less well-developed system of vocational education and training and a higher education system which, in the main, provides a broad educational 'liberal' base with less emphasis on subject-specific, skills-related content; it is a system with a 'loose fit' between higher education and a graduate's subsequent area of work.' (Lore & Little 2010).

The views of Jackson and others are also relevant, that: 'focusing only on the value of life-wide learning from the perspective of employability does not honour the full value of the educational concept that goes to the heart of what it means to be a human being.' (Jackson & Law 2010a).



## LIFE-WIDE DEVELOPMENT: THE CONTEXT

Our starting point then is that, while a focus upon employability within extra-curricular awards may be increasingly necessary within the current context, it remains insufficient as a rationale for such provision, and for participation within such provision. A recent review of approaches to 'whole student development' highlighted two key factors in making this effective:

- going beyond knowledge and skills to include other aspects of being a person in society (such as emotion, spirituality, moral judgement, embodiment)
- an integrative view of learning and development that emphasises the connections and relationships between thinking, feeling and action, rather than separating cognitive dimensions of education from affective or moral dimensions (Quinlan 2011b).

At institutional level, the attention paid to 'graduate attributes' has demonstrated the potential to respond to such wider agendas. This is not a recent development: in the UK, the 'Graduateness' project led by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) initially promoted the development of institutional graduate skills frameworks, within some newer universities at least (HEQC 1996, 1997, Page 1998). More recently, the Scottish higher education sector's Enhancement Themes 'Graduates for the 21st Century' (2009-2011) and 'Developing and Supporting the Curriculum' (2011-2014) have placed an important emphasis on graduate attributes. The former theme took as its central focus questions concerned with the attributes of a graduate from Scottish higher education in the twenty-first century, and how the achievement of these attributes can best be supported.

In 2009, at the Enhancement Themes conference, Simon Barrie (University of Sydney) suggested that graduate attributes:

- (should) describe the important things students (should) learn during their time at university
- are the learning outcomes that are the hallmark of a university education
- shape the ways university graduates contribute to society - through their roles as citizens and workers
- are the qualities that prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future (present) (Barrie 2009).

Barrie also acknowledged, however, that 'there remains a "national gap" between the rhetoric of graduate attributes and the reality of the student learning experience'.

In other parts of the UK, many institutions are looking at ways to more explicitly support the skills development of their students, often within explicit 'whole person' frameworks<sup>ii</sup>.

As McCabe noted:

'graduate attributes in their fullest sense are much broader than just employability - graduate



attributes have relevance to all aspects of the student experience and therefore have a range of linked agendas, eg curriculum renewal, HEAR (Higher Education Achievement Report), work-related learning, PDP (Personal Development Planning) and ePortfolios.' (McCabe 2010).

We discuss such provision in the following section.

Furthermore, such agendas are not confined to the UK or to concerns with employability; the definition of graduate attributes has been a feature of the Australian higher education sector for some time. At the University of South Queensland the focus is on five graduate qualities and ten graduate skills; at the University of South Australia on seven graduate qualities; and at Curtin University on nine graduate attributes plus the 'triple-i' curriculum - 'three main aspects of the curriculum which we wish to emphasise':

- Industry (graduate employability)
- Indigenous Intercultural International (global citizenship)
- Interdisciplinary (rich educational choices)<sup>iii</sup>.

The 'triple-i' curriculum is seen as much more than a strategy to address graduate employability. In the US, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) views personal and social responsibility as one of the major groups of learning outcomes essential for the twenty-first century graduate. Here the focus upon General Education Competency outcomes provides a similar framework for graduate attributes, often with links to particular curriculum requirements and broader issues of 'civic engagement'. However, these are understood, typically, to be completed within the first two years (of a four year programme). Consequently, the interests of employers - and considerations of employability - are much less central to the debate, except in the case of certain professional groups (such as engineers), for whom there are separate accrediting bodies.

In 2012, a report from AAC&U confirmed that: 'diversity learning, service learning, and integrative learning, are part of a set of 'high-impact' practices that AAC&U has championed in recent years as part of an educational framework designed to achieve the aims and outcomes of a twenty-first-century education.' (O'Neill 2012).

Service learning, defined by Quinlan as 'a pedagogy that uses student community service as an instructional tool to achieve particular academic learning outcomes', was reported as having a significant influence on a number of aspects of student development, including:

- commitment to social activism and to changing the political system
- commitment to community service, to helping others, to understanding community problems and to volunteer work in the future
- perceptions of social and economic inequities
- inclination to attribute those inequities to the system rather than to individuals
- sense of social responsibility.



Some of the work cited above emphasises the formal curriculum and learning that can be subsumed within academic frameworks with (pre-specified) learning outcomes. Here we argue that such perspectives have implications for both the nature and complexity of learning, placing the student at the heart of the system and linking learning to both individual development and social engagement. Specifically, to be fully effective in the UK context, they necessitate:

- appropriate **contexts for learning**, particularly off-campus contexts where the learning environment is almost inevitably less controlled and therefore potentially richer.
- the explicit acknowledgement of an **affective component to learning**.
- the greater personalisation of learning, achieved through **the provision of structured opportunities for making sense of experience** in personal terms through critical reflection upon experience, often supported by a significant other.

As Brennan (2010), speaking about the Social and Organisational Mediation of University Learning (SOMUL) project, suggests:

‘perhaps one of the conclusions that the project has not emphasised enough to date is the difference between the student voices on what is learned and the voices of the universities and those who teach in them. It is not that academic content is unimportant to the students. It is that other more important things may be happening to them alongside their academic studies. These personal and social effects of university study may not just be of value to the individual students, they may be socially and economically important as well. Self-confidence, understanding of other people, being part of social networks and the like are relevant in the workplace and in all social settings where diverse people come together to construct a viable social life for themselves and others. In their focus on skills and employability, policy makers may be underselling the importance of universities to the creation and maintenance of a stable and fair social order.’

Such a view is reinforced by Jackson (2011), who relates this specifically to lifewide learning:

‘Lifewide education explicitly recognises that people learn and develop through their lifewide experiences and promotes and values these forms of learning. By reframing our perception of what counts as learning and development, and developing the means of recognizing and valuing the learning and development gained in a learner's lifewide experiences, formal education could enable learners to develop a deeper appreciation of how, what, when and why they are learning in the different parts of their lives. Heightened self-awareness is likely to help them become more effective at learning through their own experiences and this should be an essential outcome of any educational system that prepares people for the challenges of a complex ever changing world.’

Such a focus emphasises values, sense of self, identity and purpose, active pedagogy, peer support, new experiences and contexts for learning, and the opportunities for reflection on such experiences. Support for and recognition of achievement beyond the curriculum has the potential to embrace such key characteristics, and contribute to an appreciation of lifewide - and lifelong - learning. This then brings us to discuss the particular context provided by the development and expansion of extra-curricular awards in UK higher education.



## LIFEWIDE DEVELOPMENT: SUPPORT THROUGH EXTRA-CURRICULAR AWARD SYSTEMS?

Extra-curricular awards (in all their forms) occupy space between the formal curriculum and an individual's personal life away from the university. Inevitably, given the demands of institutional accreditation and the voluntary nature of such awards, it is a bounded space, delimited in essence by the creation of rubrics for recognition and accreditation, and what the individual is prepared to share of their experience outside the curriculum.

Such awards, according to recent survey evidence, are increasing in number. The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) Skills Award Task Group concluded that:

'previous research indicated that over 50 universities were already offering some form of skills award, with a number of other institutions in the development stage. AGCAS predict that by 2015 nearly all universities in the UK will have developed some form of award.' (AGCAS 2011).

Similar results were also noted in work for the Burgess Implementation Steering Group with 62 responses (from 44 institutions), and in the 2009 study for the 1994 Group (Norton & Thomas 2009b). Such evidence testifies to a renewed and reinvigorated consideration of institutional recognition of lifewide learning. Award schemes are also characterised by diversity; while all involve students in a range of activities beyond their academic studies, some are based upon time spent, some on 'points' obtained, some on the award of additional credit. In some institutions, the emphasis is upon engagement by the many; in other contexts the schemes are seen as highlighting the special achievements of the few. They are often, but not always, underpinned by an emphasis on reflection, to enable students to articulate their skills and experiences effectively. In other words, such awards draw on the founding principles of personal development planning (PDP) as 'a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development.' (QAA 2009).

However, while award schemes often reflect institutional diversity (and resources), there is growing institutional interest in recognising the learning and achievement that can be demonstrated through such provision. Most recently, this has been highlighted through the evolving mechanism of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), now recommended for implementation across the UK higher education sector (Universities UK 2012). In the context of extra-curricular awards, Section 6.1 of the HEAR is particularly relevant because it is intended to provide a 'richer picture' of student achievement through recording verified additional achievement under one of three headings:

- measured or assessed performance in non-academic contexts accredited by, or with external accreditation recognised by, the university (for example, extra-curricular awards).
- additional recognised activities undertaken by students which demonstrate achievement, but for which no recognition is provided in terms of academic credit (such as fulfilling roles



as course representatives or students' union officers).

- university, professional and departmental prizes.

The final report of the Burgess Steering Group placed the emphasis on the production of a summary document which would be issued on completion and award of the final qualification (Universities UK 2007).

However, the processes of the HEAR trial (2008-12) have served to generate another set of more integrative and interesting possibilities, with an emerging emphasis on a view of the HEAR as first and foremost a resource for students (QAA 2009). The journey of development has taken some (though not all) higher education institutions within the trial group beyond the stage of simply producing a richer final document to providing a context for engagement with broader institutional issues, including how to recognise lifewide learning. In different contexts these have included the following:

- Engagement with renewed interest in more holistic and integrative approaches to the student experience and outcomes, evidenced in an emergent (re)focussing upon graduate attributes (and curriculum reform).
- Discussions with students and students' union officers about the nature of lifewide learning and achievement, and how the outcomes of co-curricular opportunities (including students' union-led training and learning opportunities) and extra-curricular activities determined by students might be documented within the HEAR. These discussions cast students in the role of 'co-creators' as opposed to 'consumers'.
- Renewed consideration of the relationship between institutionally managed and learner-managed information - the latter as held in e-portfolio systems, for example. This has been a particular feature of HEAR trial work in areas where portfolios may contain assessed or presentational work, for example, graphic design.
- The potential of the 'evolving HEAR' - evolving through the student lifecycle - to provide a context for reviewing and planning processes which are central to PDP.

While the report of the Burgess Steering Group indicated that the relationship between the HEAR and PDP should be complementary, for some charged with implementation of the HEAR, the relationship might better be described as 'integrative'. As Jackson noted, 'lifewide learning provides a rich personal learning environment within which to practise PDP'. (Jackson & Law 2010b).

PDP processes therefore have the potential to support such wider learning and achievement within extra-curricular contexts in a number of ways. These include:

- providing a context for planning and objective setting, through which learners learn to see a wider set of contexts as environments for learning, and to plan for further experiences that enhance their personal qualities and extend their range of experience.
- offering explicit attention to a wider definition of development (personal, educational and career) and structured and supported reflection, through which learners are encouraged to



recognise and relate their achievements across a range of contexts, including extra-curricular contexts; the emphasis here is upon what might be termed a 'telescopic' view of reflection, making connections between and across experiences and achievements.

- recording and revisiting achievements, through which learners learn to recognise and articulate the skills they have gained and the significance of the experiences they have participated in, so as to be able to present these appropriately to others; the emphasis here upon a 'microscopic' view of reflection, recognising the value of specific experiences to provide detailed evidence of achievements and competencies of the kind sought by graduate employers, including the ability to modify behaviour in the moment (itself related to 'reflection in action').
- developing a record of learning/experience/achievement, as associated with most awards, through which learners are able to substantiate their achievements to themselves and others.

As Jackson again notes:

'PDP practice with its strong focus on self-regulation, forward thinking, planning and reflective thinking, is an essential underpinning to supporting 'learning through experience' and making informal learning explicit.' (Jackson & Law 2010c).

## SO WHERE ARE WE UP TO?

As work carried out for the Burgess Implementation Steering Group and for the AGCAS Skills Awards Task Group has demonstrated, there has been considerable growth of extra-curricular awards in recent years. The benefits of awards to the student are explicitly intended to go beyond their immediate higher education experience and academic studies, and some recognise what might be termed 'civic engagement'. Awards are often intended to assist students to articulate and evidence their achievements in ways which contribute to what we might term 'immediate employability'.

In the longer term, they have the potential to demonstrate that learning is a lifelong and lifewide activity, and that higher education continues to be about more than getting a degree and a 'graduate job'. Engagement with such opportunities, through active participation in less controlled contexts, can help to prepare graduates for a lifetime of uncertainty, change, challenge and emergent or self-created opportunity. The opportunity now exists to develop, for the benefit of all higher education providers, guidance on the ways in which awards can best be implemented to achieve this purpose of making students better at taking responsibility for their own personal and professional development, and making the most of their higher education experience.



## CONTACTS

Centre for Recording Achievement can be found at [www.recordingachievement.org](http://www.recordingachievement.org)

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## END NOTES

<sup>i</sup> As Norman Jackson indicates, the origin of explicit thinking about 'life-wide learning' can be seen in the educational philosophy and writings of John Dewey and Eduard Lindeman in the 1920s and 1930s (Jackson, N J (2012) *The Lifewide Learning, Education and Personal Development e-book, Chapter A1- Lifewide Learning: History of an idea*, available at:

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The term itself is at least 25 years old, but the idea of the 'lifespan life space' perspective on career development, emphasising life-wide and lifelong perspectives, predates this (Super, D E (1980) A Life-Span, Life- Space Approach to Career Development, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, vol 16, pp 282-298, available at: [http://news.uofthenet.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/super\\_life-span\\_life-space\\_approach.pdf](http://news.uofthenet.info/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/super_life-span_life-space_approach.pdf) (accessed 29 October 2012)).

<sup>ii</sup> See, for example, [www.skills.cam.ac.uk](http://www.skills.cam.ac.uk) and <https://leedsforlife.leeds.ac.uk/about.aspx>.

<sup>iii</sup> See [http://otl.curtin.edu.au/learning\\_teaching/graduate\\_capabilities.cfm](http://otl.curtin.edu.au/learning_teaching/graduate_capabilities.cfm).

