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**PTAS Project Report (for REGULAR PROJECT GRANTS)**

**Project Title: Evaluating and building upon the Edinburgh Award in Professional Development for Undergraduate Business School Students**

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**Innovation Project** (introduction and evaluation of an educational innovation, usually taking a practical approach)

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Project teams must submit a report within 4 months of the conclusion of their project. Copies of dissemination material (eg journals/newsletter articles, conference papers, posters) should be listed and attached (separate to the word count). The brief report will be published on the IAD web pages.

**Report (maximum 1500 words)**

**1) What did you do?**

Our main objective was to create a scalable and sustainable model of professional and career development support across our 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year undergraduate programmes using the Edinburgh Award framework.

There were two key elements to this endeavour:

- (i) The evaluation and enhancement of the current UG Award in Professional Development for pre-honours students
  - (ii) The development of recommendations for and implementation of an honours version of the Edinburgh Award focusing on “effective and responsible leadership.”
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(i) The evaluation and enhancement of the current UG Edinburgh Award in Professional Development for pre-honours students

A portion of the funding has been directed towards employing a part-time student intern who conducted evaluation and review of the impact of the pre-honours UG Edinburgh Award in Professional Development.

As part of the review process, the intern consulted with student and staff stakeholders for their feedback on the Award, evaluated the utility and impact of the online resources (VLE for the Coaching Leaders) and developed recommendations for how to enhance the Award to enable scalability and sustainability in the years to come.

The student intern also worked closely with the BizPALS network to enhance the use of peer-to-peer and group coaching activities, and produced a roll-out plan with key deliverables and milestones for academic year 20/21.

(ii) The development of recommendations and implementation of an Honours version of the Edinburgh Award focusing on “effective and responsible leadership.”

The remainder of the funding has been used to support the employment of a second part-time intern to develop recommendations for and implement an Honours version of the Edinburgh Award, with a focus on leadership skills.

The intern worked closely with colleagues from the Student Development Team, the Careers Service Employability Consultancy, and colleagues in the School of Social and Political Science to look at best practice Edinburgh Awards from across the University of Edinburgh. In parallel with this internal assessment, the intern also reviewed available literature on leadership and material about UG student professional development support at other peer institutions.

Following this internal and external benchmarking, the intern supported the development of a model for the new Honours version of the Edinburgh Award and produced a project plan detailing the structures, activities, events and resources needed for the implementation of the Award.

## **2) What did you find out?**

### **Edinburgh Award for Professional Development**

The success of the pre-honours Edinburgh Award for Professional Development has been largely attributed to our focus on relationships and community. As part of the Edinburgh Award for Professional Development, pre-honours students participated in group coaching facilitated by a team of coaching leaders - specially trained third and fourth year student volunteers recruited from the School's BizPALS (Peer Assisted Learning Support) network. Group coaching provided a safe space and invaluable support to students as they started to take ownership of their individual professional and career development journeys, helping facilitate self-awareness, goal setting, action and reflection, as demonstrated by the quote below:

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*"My second-year experience has been much more fulfilling and rewarding from participating in the Edinburgh Award for Professional Development. I would highly recommend it to any student because it helps to instill a growth mindset where you are making a commitment to yourself to actively improve on skills you have chosen.*

*The group coaching sessions are especially valuable in reinforcing the idea that we are not alone in our skills development journey as everyone is there to listen and support one another in finding ways to enhance their skills. It fosters a sense of community as we all have the same goal of aiming to increase our capabilities and are motivated by the knowledge that our peers are encouraging us from behind"* **(Victoria Pi, 2<sup>nd</sup> year student, participant in the Edinburgh Award for Professional Development)**

Building on the recommendations of our intern, we continued to invest in enhancing and growing the group coaching and, in 2019/20, we successfully trained 13 Coaching Leaders who supported 54 pre-honours Award participants.

### **Edinburgh Award for Effective and Responsible Leadership**

Building on the findings of our other intern, we decided to anchor the new honours Award in the model of 'self-leadership' as the foundation of effective and responsible leadership. The Award was piloted in 2019/20 with 34 students successfully completing the Award. Throughout their engagement with the Award, students were encouraged to identify their strengths; explore their values and aspirations; reflect on the impact they have on themselves and on others; develop personal autonomy and accountability; and understand how to sustain successful individual and group relationships.

The focus on relationships and community was further integrated in the design of the new Honours Edinburgh Award through the introduction of 1-to-1 mentoring with mentors from our Business School alumni community. The mentoring element of the honours Edinburgh Award has been a huge success so far, offering a bespoke learning experience as honours students transition from university to working life.

Feedback from the pilot suggests that participation in the Edinburgh Award for Effective and Responsible Leadership has positively impacted students' career readiness, as well as their overall experience at the Business School. By extension, the Award has also helped create a sense of community among our alumni mentors.

We are grateful for the funding that supported the employment of our interns. Their findings and recommendations have allowed us to lay the foundation for our model of career and professional development support; and we are delighted to report that both of them are still working with us to drive the day-to-day running, expansion and continuous improvement of our Edinburgh Awards.

### **3) How did you disseminate your findings?**

The projects have been featured in numerous talks within the University, at both School and College wide level, and Learning and Teaching conferences. Our findings and recommendations have additionally been shared with other Award Leaders within the University of Edinburgh Award community of practice.

Outwith the University of Edinburgh, our findings and examples of best practice have been presented to the AGCAS Skills Award Task Group and to their network of career and professional development staff from other Higher Education institutions.

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Information about the project was also recently included in a special feature in the Business School's Aluminate Magazine circulated among the School's alumni networks. The article can be accessed [here](#).

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#### 4) What have been the benefits to student learning?

In relation to the benefits of participating in the UG Edinburgh Awards, students reported:

- Increased self-awareness
- Careers advice and tools to get started with their career planning
- Feeling more confident to get out of their comfort zone and engage in opportunities not just in relation to the Award, but more generally across the Business School (including positive impact on participation in curricular activities)
- Developing new skills and feeling more confident in existing ones
- Feeling part of a supportive community of students from which participants gained motivation and a sense of belonging to the Business School
- Through Group Coaching: a safe space where students talk openly about perceived gaps in their development and explore strategies for improvement
- Through Mentoring: advice on transitioning from university life to the working world from someone who went through similar experiences while studying at the Business School; first-hand information about work experience opportunities, and the reality of working in certain industries; and access to professional networks through their mentors;

To date, feedback from participating second year students has been very positive, as shown in the appended video clips and the statements below:

Video testimonials: <https://www.development.business-school.ed.ac.uk/undergraduate/edinburgh-award>

*"Before I started this award, I really had no idea about what life after university may look like and had not thought about how to prepare for it. Beginning the process of developing important skills has felt very gratifying and has really opened up a whole new world to me that is now not nearly as daunting. I feel far more equipped with all the knowledge I have gained from several of the skills sessions I attended, plus my own work on my chosen skills. [...] I now feel a lot more connected to both the Business School and its staff and the Careers team. I am definitely a lot more confident to reach out to a member of staff for help or advice and I now know that there are people available for questions specifically when it comes to my career after university."* **(2<sup>nd</sup> year student, participant in the Edinburgh Award for Professional Development)**

*"I learned a lot of things that I would otherwise not have learned in a classroom/lecture environment and gained a lot of real-world knowledge with regards to a professional working environment"* **(3<sup>rd</sup> year student, participant in the Edinburgh Award for Effective and Responsible Leadership)**

*"I have had extremely positive mentoring experience. I regard my mentor as a critical friend, as they always challenged me but also would always look out for me, by keeping me on track and*



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**accountable.” (4<sup>th</sup> year student, participant in the Edinburgh Award for Effective and Responsible Leadership)**

*“I reached out to so many more people than I normally would have for advice and guidance and by the end of the Award, I felt like I was part of a community that I did not even know existed, and that motivated me. So, in a way, this was also about self-leadership for me, pushing my boundaries and stepping out of my comfort zone to achieve success.”* **(4<sup>th</sup> year student, participant in the Edinburgh Award for Effective and Responsible Leadership)**

Longer term, data from the National Student Survey (NSS) and HESA Destination of Leavers of Higher Education Statistics (DHLE Survey) will enable us to draw conclusions as to the connection between our work in the school on supporting career and professional development, and our graduates' confidence when entering the labour market.

We are also currently working with our Partnerships Development team to ascertain connections between participants in the Edinburgh Award and those who go on to become engaged alumni who give back – in time, or otherwise – to the school.

#### **5) How could these benefits be extended to other parts of the university?**

This project could be adapted to other parts of the university to benefit other schools in their approach to supporting students' confidence, skills development and employability.

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#### **Financial statement (please delete as appropriate):**

##### **Either**

This project has utilised the funding awarded to it by the PTAS adjudication committee and the Principal Investigator or School Administrator appropriate can provide financial statements showing the funding usage as and when required by the UoE Development Trusts who may require it for auditing purposes.

**Please send an electronic PDF copy of this report to:**

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