

The Birmingham Personal Skills Award (PSA)

Sarah Jeffries, Programme Manager, University of Birmingham



Overview

The Personal Skills Award (PSA) is an optional accredited programme for undergraduate students. It has been designed to enable students to:

Develop

Recognise

Reflect

on their abilities, to ensure they can articulate their employability effectively to employers.

Structure

PSA (Modular)

- Three 10 credit modules over a minimum of two years.
- Compulsory module designed to foster professional practice within the work environment.
- Modules are assessed, and adhere to Academic Protocols (e.g. numerical marks, second marked, mitigations etc.)

PSA (Activity)

- Recognition of student involvement in extra-curricular activities.
- Over 100 activities allocated 'points' using a measurement tool: the 'Points Matrix'.
- Completion of an 'Employability Workshop'; and
- Completion of a competency-based application form using reflective techniques.

PSA (Advanced)

- Achieved criteria of PSA (Modular) or PSA (Advanced).
- Additional involvement in employability enhancing extra-curricular activities.
- Attendance at employer-led workshops to **understand employer expectations**.
- Completion of work or voluntary experience.
- Completion of a comprehensive competency-based application form.
- Successfully pass employer-led panel interview.

History

In 2004 the University of Birmingham developed an academically accredited employability award, the PSA. Students could undertake three assessed 10 credit Level 1 modules, over a minimum of two years.

The PSA was consistently at capacity, with over 300 students undertaking modules every year. The decision was taken to expand inline with the findings of the **Burgess Report** :

"Employers want students to be able to reflect, identify and articulate their own achievements"

In addition to that of our Institution's own **Learning and Teaching Strategy** to:

"Encourage and facilitate employer engagement in our curriculum and in student's extra-curricular lives".

Aims and Objectives

The revised PSA was launched in October 2009 with the new PSA (Activity) and PSA (Advanced) pathways; it meets the following objectives:

- Full institutional support.
- Academically robust: the new programme was approved through University's formal academic accreditation process.
- Formal learning outcomes and assessment methodologies to recognise different learning styles.



- Engaging the 'Activity Providers' of extra-curricular activities on campus into the operational elements of the PSA.
- Established a three year growth strategy from 700 (09/10) to 2000 (11/12). This will be achieved primarily through the PSA (Activity) pathway.
- Support and engagement from employers.
- Evaluation of success through an Impact Study.

Successes

Student Numbers

In the pilot year (09/10) of the new PSA there are over **700** students participating.

Award Winner!

The PSA received the 'Graduate Development Preparation in Higher Education Award' from the **Association of Graduate Recruiters**.

Evaluation

The PSA utilises a variety of internal and external evaluation methods:

Internal

- Student feedback (all pathways);
- Module Tutor and Activity Provider's feedback;
- Employer's feedback;
- External Examiner and Board of Examiners feedback; and
- Academic quality audit.

External:

A three stage Impact Study is currently being conducted by an external research team, to assess the impact of the PSA on our students' employability.

Employer Engagement

In 2009/10 the PSA has been endorsed by:

- PricewaterhouseCoopers;
- South Birmingham Primary Care Trust; and
- Volunteering England.