

# Innovation Case Study

## Horizon Award

### Verity Kingsmill: Skill Development Certificate Project Coordinator

## CONTEXT

The Flinders University Horizon Professional Development Award empowers students to access a range of experiences, participate fully in the University community and understand and experience the value of enhancing their employability. The Horizon Award is focussed on improving graduate employment outcomes and raises the profile of Flinders University students and their achievements with industry, employers, and professional associations. The Horizon Professional Development Award is structured to be student centred and designed to enhance the student experience. It has been developed to improve experiences for students and expand opportunities for them to achieve positive employment outcomes.

The main goals for the Award are to continue to assist in the ongoing career development, employability, and transition to employment of Flinders students. This is achieved through a bespoke professional development model creating personalised professional development for each student, and the capacity for students to create their own, individually tailored professional development experience.

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“This award has been instrumental in motivating me to increase my employability and competitiveness, and to develop my professional brand.” *(Student, Masters of Social Work)*

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## RATIONALE

With an ever changing workspace there is an ever increasing need to deliver more topical professional develop sessions, better enabling our students to be equipped for the skills that are needed to be successful in this changing workspace, especially in the increasingly competitive graduate market.

Flinders University’s underlying ethos of being student centred combined with our values of integrity, courage, innovation, and excellence, is mirrored in the Horizon Award, by:

- focussing on student success
- empowering students as partners
- providing meaningful feedback, and
- celebrating student achievement.

Differentiating students in a competitive graduate market is core to students successfully gaining employment. As well as academic abilities, employers prioritise graduates able to make a real contribution from day one. Therefore, creating opportunities for students to develop the core skills needed across industries, while also formally recognising their commitment to their development, is a key contributor for successful transition into the graduate workplace.

## DESCRIPTION

Providing a tangible program that rewards and recognises individuals' achievements, provides an attractive and proactive way for students to engage in university life and personalise their professional development, whatever their circumstances. This directly contributes to their lifelong employability and opportunity for success in gaining, maintaining and transitioning in their chosen occupations. This easily enables the engagement of a wide and diverse student population, including catering for students with varying levels of prior professional experience.

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“My participation has really broadened my horizon on the basic qualities and attributes that promote good working relationship, productivity, efficiency and effectiveness as an employee.”(Student, *Masters of Gerontology*)

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Students map their own professional development, with every initiative having either a broad or targeted skill development focus. Students earn points for different activities, and different activities earn different point values. In turn, students work towards Silver, Gold and Platinum levels of the Award. Students self-enroll in the Award and can participate in activities as quickly or as slowly as they wish. There is no time restriction on earning points, as long as they are currently enrolled; they can modify involvement depending on the flexibility in academic load, as well as work, family, and life commitments.

The Horizon Award encourages Activities, programs, initiatives, and opportunities that are organic and respond to changing and developing industry needs. Collaboration on program development, and expansion and inclusion of broader internal and external initiatives is considered by the Award, with initiatives being designed, delivered, and modified for current and future workspaces. In the past these projects have taken the form of mentoring programs, leadership programs and innovation and enterprise initiatives. Some examples of programs & activities included in the Horizon Award include:

- Volunteering initiatives
  - Internal volunteering & leadership programs piloted and/or implemented in collaboration with other service areas (e.g., student association leadership programs, access units mentoring programs, student wellbeing cultural program.

- Future skills workshops
  - Lunch time experiential workshops identifying key skills for the current & further workspace. eg: working in cross generational teams, building resilience & GRIT, decision making in the workplace, cultural intelligence, teams in a global workspace, work planning professional setting.

The only compulsory component of the Award is the “Transition to Employment Capstone”, with varying requirements to be completed or undertaken at each level of the Award achieved. Current programs, and new programs for inclusion, are continually reviewed and developed to ensure consistency in achieving a high level of quality, and opportunities for engagement and connection with community.

In addition to developing professional skills, and professional identity, the Horizon Award contributes to:

- An enhanced university experience and as an optional component of our learning environment, encouraging student independence, resilience, resourcefulness and confidence
- Extra-curricular activities through institutionally endorsed and supported programs can contribute to student engagement by assisting students to integrate into the university and its communities.
- Valuable skills, attributes and talents developed through participation in non-credit based activities, in addition to the formal curriculum.

The Horizon Award rewards and recognises students’ achievement and commitment to their own professional development. Reward and recognition has a proven positive impact on students’ building self-efficacy. Improved self-efficacy has a direct correlation to student retention and success (*Journal of College Student Development*, Vol 50, 1, 209, p19-34)

## IMPACT

- 1266 students enrolled
  - student enrolments are currently from word of mouth promotion only
  - 52.16% Increased student enrolment from end of pilot (*June 2016, 789 students enrolled*) to current (*January 2017, 1266 students enrolled*)
    - 28% international students
    - 72% domestic students (24% low SES)
    - 70% undergraduate students
      - 25% first year students
    - 30% postgraduate students

**Tags:** Employability, Career Development Learning, Leadership, Flinders