An evaluation of the second phase pilot of the Adult Achievement Awards

Summary report

Prepared by Borge Consulting with Daniel Sellers

March 2018
“Completing and achieving the award really boosted my confidence. It followed on from a period of my being out of work & feeling low & lacking in self-confidence & self-esteem. It helped me to reconnect with my work experience, skills & employability.”

“Having reflected on my learning journey, I feel very positive about whatever I take on next whether it’s another course, a voluntary role or a job.”

“I’m now volunteering on a weekly basis.”

“This approach to learning … really works well for me. It was good to have a framework but also the freedom to choose the learning.”

“It is a great way for learners both achieving accreditation and developing their reflection techniques at the same time.”

“The feedback from the learners has been positive. They were enthusiastic and excited and were using the Adult Achievement Award as a tool to get back into learning. All three of the learners I have worked with are now engaged in further learning … another has taken on a volunteering role in a community centre.”
1 Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the adult learners, tutors/mentors, partner leads and others who assisted in the evaluation of the second phase pilot of the Adult Achievement Awards.

2 Introduction

Background

The Adult Achievement Awards (the Awards) were developed by Newbattle Abbey College, on behalf of Education Scotland and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership, as part of a strategy to support the accreditation of non-formal learning.

The Awards

The Awards are learner-centred, context-free and accessible to learners aged 16 and over. Learners are supported by a tutor/mentor to:

- review their learning in the recent past (up to one year) in a wide range of settings – in the community, at work, in a voluntary role, in college, in a mentoring role, or as part of a learning programme
- consider how they learn
- consider the skills developed through learning
- plan future learning
- record their learning
- produce evidence of their learning in a Reflective Journal.

The Awards are available at three levels of the SCQF, as shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCQF Level</th>
<th>Award Name</th>
<th>SCQF Credit Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Recognising and Building on an Achievement</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Understanding Achievement and Developing Your Potential</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Evaluating Achievement and Planning for Success</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An Award at SCQF level 2, aimed at extending access to accreditation to more learners, is currently in development.

Evaluation of the second phase pilot

A pilot programme, which ran from September 2015 to February 2016, was positively evaluated by Education Scotland\(^1\) as an opportunity for learners who are not involved in formal learning to have their learning recognised and credit-rated on the SCQF.

In November 2017, Borge Consulting, with associates Daniel Sellers and Susan Branigan, was commissioned to evaluate the second pilot phase and to work with

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\(^1\) [https://education.gov.scot/what-we-do/inspection-and-review/reports/reports-for-other-sectors/Adult%20learning](https://education.gov.scot/what-we-do/inspection-and-review/reports/reports-for-other-sectors/Adult%20learning)
Newbattle Abbey College to identify opportunities for business planning, including marketing, to secure the future management and national delivery of the Awards. The evaluation of the second phase pilot programme took place between December 2017 and March 2018.

This report is a summary of the findings of the evaluation – a more detailed report is available. Quotes in this report are provided in respondents’ own wording or phrasing, with some small changes made in places in order to clarify meaning.

2.1 Pilot organisations

The second phase pilot programme involved 16 organisations (or partnerships between organisations), approximately 60 tutors/mentors and approximately 400 learners from the following organisations:

- Angus Council
- Dumfries and Galloway Council
- Dundee Carers Centre
- Dundee City Council
- Dyslexia Scotland
- Glasgow Colleges and third sector partners
- Inverclyde Council
- Inverness College
- Isle of Man Council
- Lead Scotland
- Midlothian Council
- Phoenix Futures
- Scottish Cadets (Lothian and Borders Battlion ACF)
- Scottish Union Learning
- West Lothian College
- West Lothian Council

Learners achieved their Awards by reflecting on activities they were partaking in, or had completed already, including, for example:

- carrying out a volunteering role
- taking part in a learning or training programme
- developing essential skills such as writing, numeracy or computer skills
- developing social skills
- learning a specific skill such as driving
- completing a work placement.

3 Impact on organisations and learners

Lead individuals from 8 of the 16 pilot organisations (referred to as partner leads for the purposes of this evaluation) responded to the survey.

Tutors/mentors from 10 of the 16 organisations provided responses.

Between them, responses from partner leads and tutors/mentors represent 12 of the 16 organisations involved in the pilot. These responses represent:
• 5 local authorities
• 4 third sector organisations
• 3 colleges

Learners and tutors/mentors responded to surveys tailored to find out their views on the Awards:

25 out of approximately 60 tutors/mentors² responded. These 25 tutors/mentors supported 145 learners out of an approximate 400. The learners they supported achieved Awards at the following levels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award level</th>
<th>Number of learners supported by tutors/mentors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCQF level 6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCQF level 4</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCQF level 3</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22 learners responded to the survey:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Award level</th>
<th>Number of learners who responded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCQF level 6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCQF level 4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCQF level 3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three learners did not note the level of their Award.

Overall impact of the Awards

Learners, tutors/mentors and partner leads rated the Awards as positive.

21 out of 22 of learners said that doing the Award was a positive experience for them. One said:

“Completing and achieving the award really boosted my confidence. It followed on from a period of my being out of work & feeling low & lacking in self-confidence & self-esteem. It helped me to reconnect with my work experience, skills & employability.”

25 out of 25 tutors/mentors said that doing the Awards was a positive experience for the learners they worked with. One said:

“All of the learners I have worked with have gained from this process. The award has pushed them to identify that they have gained skills and improved themselves.”

All partner leads who responded said that the Awards strengthened the learning offer of their organisations. One said:

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² Not all respondents identified themselves as tutors/mentors. Job titles included, for example, adult learning worker, lecturer, family learning coordinator, employment adviser and team manager. However, all respondents worked directly with learners and supported learning and assessment. For the purposes of this evaluation, we refer to these respondents as tutors/mentors.
“The [Awards] give more choice to our learners. It can also be delivered and assessed in a flexible manner which suits many of our learners who in the main have been disengaged from education. [Awards] allow them the opportunity to achieve a recognized award and for many this may be the first award they have ever received.”

Funding permitting, partner leads hope to continue to deliver the Awards in the future.

**Impacts for learners**

Learners stated that the Awards had impacted on them positively in several ways, and were able to provide examples of ways they felt the Awards had led to:

- feeling ready to undertake further learning
- feeling ready to take on a volunteering role
- feeling ready to enter employment again or for the first time
- increased self-confidence and self-esteem
- increased community involvement
- increased essential skills, including job search skills

Learners also provided examples of ways in which the Awards had provided them with:

- intrinsic enjoyment, satisfaction and reward from the learning experience
- self-actualisation, and sense of more that could be achieved
- a desire to encourage others into learning

Learners were able to encourage others to understand the benefits of undertaking the Awards.

Tutors/mentors identified multiple impacts for their learners, with the most commonly reported being:

- increased confidence in what learners felt they could achieve
- increased confidence about improving skills such as reading, writing, using numbers and using computers, and
- increased will to undertake further learning

Tutors/mentors identified examples of other concrete impacts that mirror those identified by learners. In addition, they identified impacts that are interpreted as:

- self-awareness through reflection and self-evaluation
- positive mindset
- personal resilience

### 4 Evidence of contribution to policy initiatives

There are clear impacts on a range of national policies and initiatives, in particular around the promotion of:
• **Adult learning:**

“Doing the Adult Achievement Award has been a great learning experience. It’s gave me confidence to further my education and know that I can do anything if I put my mind to it.”

• **Employment and employability:**

“Completing and achieving the award really boosted my confidence. It followed on from a period of my being out of work & feeling low & lacking in self-confidence & self-esteem. It helped me to reconnect with my work experience, skills & employability.”

• **Adult Literacies in Scotland 2020: strategic guidance and Welcoming Our Learners: Scotland’s ESOL strategy 2015–2020:**

“The learners were keen to improve their confidence in literacy to enable them to move on to work/study or help their children with schoolwork.”

“Learner has gone on to do further classes in English ... She is now seeking a childcare course to do in order for her to go into employment.”

5 **Challenges and opportunities**

5.1 **Challenges and opportunities relating to the Awards**

Tutors/mentors and partner leads identified some challenges in relation to the Awards themselves, in relation to:

- their accessibility, including for dyslexic learners, and their useability in general
- future funding
- communicating the context-free concept of the Awards to learners.

They proposed opportunities for developing the Awards and how they are delivered. Suggestions related to:

- making adjustments to the language to make questions clearer and less repetitive
- developing guidance for delivery
- improving the accessibility and useability of the materials.

5.2 **Opportunities for future promotion and expansion of the Awards**

Tutors/mentors, partner leads and stakeholders identified opportunities for the future promotion and expansion of the Awards, as follows:

- reducing the costs of the Awards, especially for smaller organisations
- opportunities for local expansion, for example through the various services of a local authority, through local networks of learning providers, or across a sector
• better marketing and more press attention, including using learners who have achieved an Award to promote the opportunities

• the Awards should join the Awards Network to raise their profile

• the SCQF level 2 Award could provide a range of opportunities, including for learners with learning disabilities.

• Newbattle Abbey College could devolve workload by appointing a trusted training provider in a local authority area who could be called upon to deliver training for tutors/mentors and organisations in that area

• Newbattle Abbey College could devolve responsibility for verification to local organisations, possibly within an established network such as a network of colleges

• colleges could partner with smaller organisations, for example in the third sector, and take on responsibility for assessment, thus reducing the need for additional funding

• taking advantage of European colleagues’ interest in the SCQF Partnership and how Scotland recognises and accredits non-formal learning without compromising on quality. Newbattle Abbey College could potentially apply for funding from Erasmus Plus. The ‘window’ for applications is now small because of Brexit, though the UK government has said it will honour funding awarded for 2018/19.

6 Conclusions

1. The second phase pilot of the Awards was an overall success, with positive outcomes for learners at all levels of the Awards and for learning providers and organisations in all sectors.

2. There is real value in the person-centred, context-free, nature of the Awards and in the opportunities for progress available within the framework, though these attributes can be difficult to communicate clearly to individuals more used to ‘traditional’ qualifications.

3. There are clear impacts for learners:

   a) specifically, in the areas of increased interest in further learning, volunteering and seeking employment, more engagement in their community, and improved essential skills.

   b) and generally, through: increased confidence, self-awareness, positive outlook and personal resilience, satisfaction of achievement, self-actualisation, and a willingness to support others to similarly achieve

4. There is evidence of ways in which the Awards can align with current policy initiatives, for example by raising the profile of adult learning,
promoting skills and employability, and contributing to health and wellbeing.

5. Funding is an issue for several organisations, especially small ones, in relation to their plans for future delivery of the Awards.

6. Some of the learning materials require further refinement to meet the needs of the diverse range of learners.

7. The Awards Network presents an opportunity for promoting the Awards and for establishing parity of esteem for these Awards alongside others available for young people.

8. Opportunities exist for further developing and promoting the Awards, and through new partnerships that can be developed across the UK and internationally.

7 Recommendations

1. Publicise the findings of this report through the National Strategic Forum for Adult Learning and their networks, and to organisations, colleges and other learning providers (including those who are not currently delivering the Awards). Resources exist that can be used to promote the impact of the Awards, including:

   o case studies produced as part of this evaluation
   o learner testimony videos created during the evaluation of the first phase pilot of the Awards
   o learner testimonies (including videoed testimonies) produced by individual organisations and learning providers.

2. Promote the unique nature of the Awards to assist understanding by potential delivery organisations (in all sectors), and potential learners.

3. Identify funding for staff and resources to support the programme on an ongoing basis.

4. Make an application to the Awards Network for associate membership of the network.

5. Plan to take advantage of the opportunities for further development and promotion of the Awards, as set out in the separate business planning framework and marketing plan.