

Being Awards Aware - Recognising Wider Learning and Achievement through youth awards

By Jim Duffy, Awards Network



Whilst academic qualifications remain hugely important, employers tell us over and over that it's the right attitude and aptitude skills that young people bring to the workplace that are critically importantⁱ

✓ *Can't argue with that.*

'...gaining entry to university is not all about your qualifications, it's also about the wider context...'ⁱⁱ

✓ *Can't argue with that either.*

So future choices and opportunities are shaped and influenced not just by exam results, but by the totality of learning, skills, experiences and achievements that a young person brings to the table. Well, sometimes it doesn't feel that way. No matter how often it is said that skills gained through extra-curricular activities such as volunteering and youth work are important, there will be voices saying that 'it's formal subject qualifications that really matter'.

So, what then of the 'wider context'? In many instances, such voices are merely reflecting a lack of awareness of the spectrum of non-formal learning options available to young people within and beyond the school gates and a failure to recognise the real value and contribution of such opportunities to the development of skills for learning, life and work.

How do we ensure that such 'wider learning and achievements' are properly recognised and valued alongside formal education qualifications? Changes to policy and practice will certainly help and a number of strands of work are being pursued to assist this. Non-formal learning [youth awards](#)ⁱⁱⁱ also have a significant role to play. A HMIE [Review of Youth Awards in Scotland](#)^{iv} in 2015 recognised that:

- *Young people gain a wide range of skills such as confidence, interpersonal, team working, leadership and employability through participation in youth awards.*
- *Youth awards support young people in their learning and to progress to further and higher education, training and employment on leaving school.*

- *For some young people facing additional challenges participation in youth awards is life changing.*

It also noted that *'A lack of detailed knowledge and awareness of the full range of awards available, particularly in schools, is leading to missed opportunities.'*

The [Awards Network](#) – a forum of (currently) 28 youth award organisations and 5 Strategic Partners – is working to address this lack of awareness and to promote the participation and achievements of young people gained through youth work awards. Its Vision is that *Youth Awards are widely valued and recognised as critical evidence of every young person's learning and achievement.*

A Scottish Parliament debate on Year of Young People 2018^v secured a commitment from the Scottish Government to work towards wider achievement/youth awards being *'recognised to be as valuable as traditional qualifications, as a legacy for Scotland's Year of Young People.'*

Subsequently, Education Scotland was tasked with establishing a **National Working Group on Recognising Wider Learning and Achievement**, to identify and share good practice around capturing and recognising these experiences in line with government's Learner Journey Review^{vi}.

More youth awards are now on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), delivering recognition for non-formal learning that complements and supplements that from formal education. As examples, Youth Scotland's awards span from Hi5 at SCQF Level 2 to the Platinum Youth Achievement Award at SCQF Level 7 – recognising learning at the same level as an Advanced Higher; the Boys' Brigade's KGV Leadership Award also sits at SCQF Level 7; Sports Leaders Awards are credit-rated from SCQF Levels 4 to 6; the Lowland Reserve and Cadet Forces have mapped their programme awards to SQA qualifications at Levels 4, 5 and 6; the Young Enterprise Scotland Company Programme now delivers an SCQF Level 6 qualification.

Achievement of some non-levelled awards can deliver evidence to satisfy requirements of other awards that are credit rated, e.g. the John Muir Award providing evidence for achievement of SQA Personal Development Awards (SCQF Level 4) and Wellbeing Awards (SCQF Level 5); Girlguiding's Young Leader Qualification and the SQA Leadership Award (SCQF Level 5); the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Volunteering Awards (SCQF Levels 3-5).

Youth Awards are achieved in a variety of settings, but whether through school, youth work, other community settings and workplaces, they are equally valid as evidence of learning achievement. Being aware of activities young people are engaged in outside of school can enable schools to help pupils design a learner journey more appropriate to their skills and aspirations. Being aware of the transferable skills developed through youth work programmes can strengthen the support youth workers provide to young people on their learner journey. Being aware of the growing range of non-formal learning awards will help employers to recognise skills that young people offer beyond exam results.

The Awards Network's [Awards Aware Scheme](#) seeks to encourage awareness and understanding of youth awards and reflection on practice with respect to recognising the wider learning, skills and

achievements of young people. Being Awards Aware is a win-win for young people, educators and employers.

Being Awards Aware ensures that young people have wider opportunities to shape their learner journey and that educators and employers recognise the skills and achievements gained by young people through youth awards. Sign up to [Awards Aware](#) as a school/employer/educator, and demonstrate that you value the wider learning and achievements of our young people.

ⁱ See Tracy Black, CBI Scotland Director <https://youtu.be/uKKGPT-m-tE>

ⁱⁱ from 'A guarantee of fairness when applying to university in Scotland', Universities Scotland, 2019

ⁱⁱⁱ Amazing Things – a guide to youth awards in Scotland (4th ed.), Awards Network, Sept 2017

^{iv} A review of youth awards in Scotland - Helping young people to be successful, confident, effective and responsible citizens, Education Scotland, 2015

^v [Official Report](#) – Parliamentary Business, Scottish Parliament 12/12/2017

^{vi} The 15-24 Learner Journey Review, Scottish Government, May 2018