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University of Edinburgh Preferred Practice on Recognising and Rewarding Student

The way we reward students who support the work of the University should align with Strategy 2030, Our Values and People Strategy. This requires fairness, transparency and efficiency. This guidance has been developed via the Student Lifecycle Management Group and is intended to improve the process of recognising and rewarding students who support the work of the University, by providing a standard reference point for consistent and fair practice.

Context

Students support the work of the University through paid employment, (e.g. working as student ambassadors, tutors or helpdesk staff), through volunteering (e.g. participating in student panels or focus groups) and through student leadership roles in the Students' Association and Sports Union, (e.g. Sabbatical Officers, Elected and Programme Representatives or student group office bearers).

Almost 1000 student volunteers support sport at Edinburgh and there are over 1300 student representatives working with EUSA. This guidance recognises that both organisation have their own processes to support student employees and volunteers. Therefore it does not cover these organisations, but reflects relevant interconnections.

Both the University and the students derive multiple benefit from collaboration. It enables co-creation of the student experience, brings authentic student voices, and utilises the creativity, intellect and energy of our talented student body. It provides personal and professional development for students, and enables them to shape their student experience, and that of future students. It makes the University a better place for all of us.

There are legal frameworks to consider - these are clear in the context of employment, e.g. paying the national minimum wage and ensuring the right to work in the UK. There are important EDI issues to consider, e.g. those who don't have the capacity to volunteer, or those who may have restrictions on voluntary or paid employment. There is an opportunity cost for students involved in voluntary activities, whether that is time studying, with family or in work. In addition the nature of the relationship maybe altered by the provision of a reward, e.g. it may be seen as inappropriate to pay a student for a task that requires open and honest views. Therefore using a variety of ways of engaging students in the work of the University, and with specific projects and initiatives, is important to respond to the diversity of the student body.

Means of Recognition and Reward

Paid Employment

Situations in which there is an expectation that students will attend (recognising this may include remote attendance) at an established time, complete agreed tasks, follow instructions and have work allocated to them, equates to employment. In these situations, **employment and payment should be made in line with University HR policies**. Common areas of student employment include staffing help desks, working in catering, ambassadorial and outreach roles, supporting events, tutoring.

It is possible to pay students for short pieces of work via ad hoc payments¹, and through part-time and guaranteed hours contracts. A guide to employing students is available from the Careers Service [Recruitment Guide for Hiring Students | The University of Edinburgh](#)

¹ Ad hoc payments:

- Can be used for casual work up to 2 consecutive months' duration. Right to work checks must be carried out prior to the work being carried out.
- Payment is made via an Ad-hoc Payment Form for casual workers (Form HR100), submitted in P&M via a Service Request. Sections 1-4 of Form HR100 is completed by the casual worker and returned to the Department to complete and submit.



Un-Paid Contributions

Volunteers

Where students are invited to opt-in to an activity, where there may be an expectation of engagement but no obligation, and where lack of participation would not derail a project or process, students may be better considered as volunteers. Examples of activity includes participation in a focus group, contributing to a short-life task group, reviewing a website.

It is possible to reward volunteers for their input through gifts in kind, e.g. vouchers, tickets to events, and to cover reasonable expenses such as travel to another campus. These should be **reasonable in relation to the volunteer's contribution**.

This must be a **genuine gift, not recompense for work performed**, or it may then be seen as taxable earnings. This is particularly relevant for international students. Current UKVI guidance is clear that volunteers can receive reimbursement for travel or subsistence expenses, but must not receive payment in kind. Voluntary work can be done by student visa holders but counts towards the 20 hour per week limit. Visit visa holders (visiting students) cannot do voluntary work at all.

The University has a contracted voucher supplier for both physical and e-vouchers who can provide vouchers for Amazon, M&S, Tesco, Love2Shop, Asos, John Lewis. Book tokens can be ordered via Blackwell through the People & Money portal. There is debate about which gifts and vouchers are appropriate, with ethical concerns about some companies and the utility and buying power of others. **The choice of voucher should take into account appropriateness to the task, providing the greatest flexibility and spending power for the students as possible.**

Where students have stood for and hold elected roles, such as Programme Reps, their voluntary contribution to the work of the University could be recognised via appropriate gifts, e.g. a thank you voucher at the end of their term of office, catering at meetings, a celebratory event. These should be token gestures of thanks and not recompense for work.

Sustained and Specialist Contribution

Honorariums are an established means of rewarding someone for the expertise that they provide, sometimes described as a 'voluntary fee for a voluntary service'. These can be paid to an employee or a volunteer. This is useful where student expertise is required but where employment would be inappropriate, e.g. a student member of an IPR panel. It *may* be appropriate where a student's ongoing but sporadic contribution is required for a sustained activity, e.g. ad hoc input to a project over an entire academic year, and where regular employment is not necessary or appropriate.

Recognition and Added Value

In addition to rewarding our student, **there is value in recognising and celebrating their contribution**. This can be achieved through a variety of means: a reception or lunch to say thank you, an electronic or physical "high-five board" or nomination for internal or external awards. Consideration should be given to actively supporting student development, e.g., offering a mentor or buddy, providing access to curated development resources, encouraging students to sign up to a relevant Edinburgh Award or digital badge, providing a reference or Linked In endorsement.

Student contributions will not always fall neatly into the above categories and the distinction between each of these areas may blur. Keeping in mind a desire to be fair, transparent and efficient, while legally compliant, is foremost. The following scenarios provide an illustration of how different reward and recognition mechanisms could be used:

A University wide student experience project:

- Uses the Student Panel to get input to a short survey and incentivises responses via a prize draw
- Gathers student views at a 2 hour workshop and provides coffee, biscuits and a £20 gift voucher
- Runs a full day workshop and employs 2 PhD students to facilitate it, provides coffee and lunch to participants and gives a UoE branded memory stick as a thank you



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- Employs a team of students on GHC to work alongside the project team to take notes at meetings, critique materials, and encourages them to sign up for the Edinburgh Award (Work Experience)
- Runs a Thank You reception for all students who have contributed to the project over the academic year

A School:

- Employs 10 students via Ad Hoc payments to signpost delegates during a 2-day conference
- Employs a student on a GHC to staff an enquiry desk over the lunch period, encourages them to sign up for the Edinburgh Award (Work Experience) and provides an endorsement on Linked In
- Seeks user input to the design of a website via a half day workshop, provides refreshments and a £30 thank you gift voucher
- Invites students to feedback on a new website and incentivises responses via a prize draw
- Asks for programme reps to join a task and finish group running during a semester and provides the 2 volunteers with a £50 thank you voucher at the end of the project
- Helps Academic Services recruit a student member for an IPR panel who receives a £500 honorarium
- Holds a thank you lunch for all Programme Reps at the end of the academic year

Resource Implications: co-creation and the student voice are of growing importance, and many units across the University are seeking to engage students in their work. Expecting appropriate reward for student contribution may have additional financial resource implications which need to be considered at a department

Useful Resources

- [Recruitment Guide for Hiring Students | The University of Edinburgh](#)
- [Edinburgh Award](#)
- [The AGCAS Work Experience Standard](#)

Consultation and Dissemination: This guidance was developed as part of the work of the Student Life Cycle Management Group in Summer 2023, with input from HR, Edinburgh University Students Association, Edinburgh University Sports Union, Student Immigration Service and members of the Student Life Cycle Management Group representing Colleges and Professional Services. It will be reviewed in Summer 2024.

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