

BEST REWARD AND RECOGNITION STRATEGY

WINNER

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Judges described the Shared Success Award (SSA) recognition scheme, delivered by people leaders at the University of East London (UEL), as a ‘brilliant’ initiative. Designed to align reward with performance, development and institutional success, the bonus scheme offers up to £5,000 annually per member of staff, distributed across four performance-based pillars that were put in place to ensure rewards were meaningful, proportionate and tied directly to the nature and scale of the contribution.

Up to £1,000 is available under each of the three pillars: institutional achievement, team achievement and individual contribution. Up to £2,000 can be claimed for exceptional contribution, which celebrates ‘above-and-beyond’ impact.

Introduced in 2021/22, the scheme is reviewed annually and has grown in scope and investment thanks to the team’s dynamic implementation of feedback from staff. When employees reported that an initial one-size-fits-all approach of a flat payment to all eligible staff wasn’t motivating enough, the team shifted strategy, creating a tiered structure to recognise varying levels of performance. The amount is now directly linked to the performance rating a staff member receives in their



SHORTLISTED

- Whyte and Mackay x Benifex

end-of-year conversation, which stood out for judges. They praised UEL for its commitment to ensuring fairness for employees.

Staff feedback had sparked the idea of this award scheme to begin with. UEL’s leaders recognised the need to address an absence of a meaningful recognition culture, highlighted by Investor in People feedback and staff surveys. By creating and implementing its SSA strategy, leaders of UEL

proved that they had not only listened but would put in place impactful solutions, judges noted.

Thanks to the SSA strategy, the award scheme is embedded in the institution’s performance framework, and recognition has become part of how performance is planned, delivered and reviewed across the university. Objective setting, quarterly performance conversations and end-of-year performance reviews all play a role in determining the award level. The scheme is also linked to the university’s strategic plan, Vision 2028, ensuring that it actively supports the university’s

broader mission and long-term ambitions. This work has reinforced a culture where staff understand how their work contributes to the institution’s broader success, and they are rewarded for their contributions accordingly.

The results really impressed the judges. Since the SSA’s introduction, participation in the university’s employee engagement survey grew by 49 percentage points. Performance development review completion grew by 30%, from 66% pre-SSA to 96% in 2023/24, and leaders saw 98% staff participation in the SSA reward scheme.

Employees also reported a better understanding of the university’s future vision, with 81% having a good understanding of how their work contributed to Vision 2028. Added to these internal metrics, the university has celebrated a series of external successes over the past two years, including achieving University of the Year 2025 for Teaching Quality in *The Times* and *Sunday Times* guide, coming fourth in England for overall positivity in the National Student Survey 2025, and taking third place in London last year for teaching satisfaction, in the *Guardian’s University Guide*.

“The results are remarkable,” noted one judge. Another hailed the reward scheme’s outcomes as simply “phenomenal”.