

# My Lifewide Learning and Development

July 2012 - September 2013

Lifewider 1

## Purpose

In this reflective account I look back over the last twelve months and try to draw out the significant learning and personal development I have gained from experiences across and through my life. The account demonstrates my commitment to my own development within the framework of the Lifewide Development Award.

## Background

I am a member of Lifewide Education's team of volunteers and I have been helping to pilot the award since September 2012. During this period I have maintained a Personal Development Plan and a blog on my own website to keep a record of the more important learning experiences and what I gained from them. I also contributed to Lifewide Education's work on personal wellbeing and learning ecologies. A record of my experiences and my reflections on these experiences can be found at: <http://lifewider1.weebly.com/>

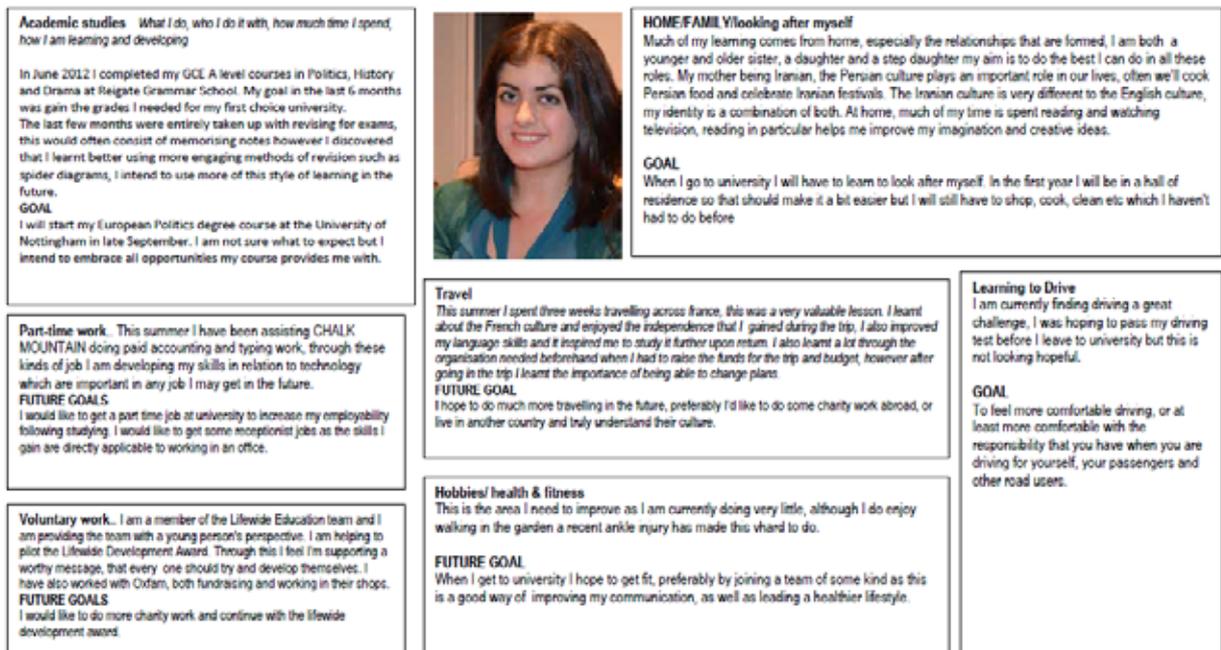
## Personal Development Plan

In August 2012 I produced a lifewide activity map which showed the different parts of my life in which I am able to learn and develop (Figure 1).

Figure 1

### Lifewide Activities Map - April to December 2012

*I am an 18 year old student about to make the transition from full time education to university, I am looking forward to going to university, this newfound independence will be a big change and will provide me with many new opportunities. It will be the main focus for my lifewide learning in the next six months.*



My personal development plan (Appendix 1) contained three overarching goals which seemed very important to me.

- 1 To develop the confidence and practical skills to live an independent life at university
- 2 To make myself more employable
- 3 To help other people

My PDP identified six aspects of myself I wanted to develop in respect of these goals:

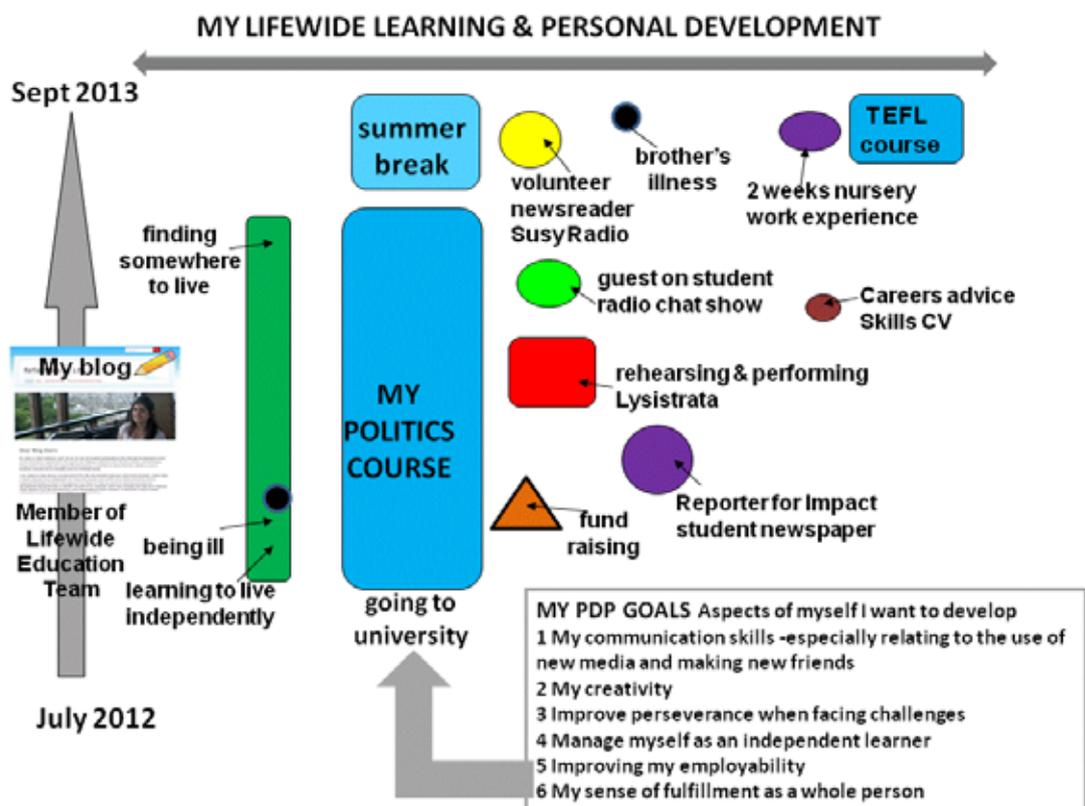
- 1 My communication skills - especially relating to the use of new media and making new friends
- 2 My creativity
- 3 Improve perseverance when facing challenges
- 4 Manage myself as an independent adult (ie look after and fend for myself when I go to university)
- 5 My employability
- 6 My sense of fulfilment as a whole person

These goals became the focus for my development over the next 14 months. I reviewed my plan in January 2013 and felt that the developmental goals were still relevant.

### **Experiences through which I have developed myself**

Figure 2 summarises the most important activities I was involved in which I believe have helped me develop over the twelve months and the next section describes how I think I have developed through these experiences.

**Figure 2** Summary of activities through which I have tried to develop myself



### Going to university and learning to live independently

I recognised that in going to university I was going to make a transition from being at home to living an independent life away from my family. Perhaps, the most important lesson I learnt in the first few months of going to university is the need to balance friends and the social aspect of life with study. Going to university is like starting a new life, whereas in my old life my family, in particular my mother was able to motivate me and remind me to complete homework since coming to University it is completely up to me to motivate myself. Only I can tell when it is ok to spend time with my friends and when I need to knuckle down and do some work. I have tried to balance both and in some instances have made the wrong decision, for example not spending enough time on a piece of work. However, as the weeks have progressed and I have come to grips with the requirements of each module knowing what has to be done is less of an issue, however motivating myself to study whilst my friends are out remains a challenge and one which I suspect will last the whole of my university life.

One of the greatest challenges I faced is loneliness. From the moment my family left me I decided to be proactive in going out and meeting people and as a result I have been very fortunate in that I have made lots of friends. But no matter how many friends you have there are bound to be times when you have nothing to do. At first, in these instances I tried to fill my time with work, however in the last two months I have discovered it is better to fill the time with something you love. The key to fighting loneliness is by giving yourself a purpose, for example if you throw yourself into writing a play then not only are you doing something productive but you are also distracting yourself from your negative and disempowering emotions.

Another challenge I faced was simply the art of looking after myself. In my first term I developed whooping cough and glandular fever and felt very ill with both. I think I probably wasn't looking after myself eating the right foods. When living by yourself you need to ensure that you are eating the right food and keeping tabs on your money. Learning to manage my finances has been a considerable challenge, I have been forced to budget which has meant I have been forced to be more responsible even when it comes to our weekly shop. I remember my mum saying to be once "You can't spend the same pound twice" I have learnt to prioritise what it's important to spend money on. Interestingly I found motivating myself to cook more of a challenge than motivating myself to study, I have to study if I want to get a degree however if I'm hungry I can simply get a take away. However, then I got ill. I realised that this is what happens if I don't look after myself, after struggling to get up to go to lectures and missing several seminars I realised that looking after myself is possibly the most important thing I have to do, if I'm not well how can I study? And if I can't study then I won't pass my degree. Furthermore being stuck in bed is not pleasant for anybody.

The most important lesson I have learnt since coming to University is to enjoy every second. University, like life, has its ups and downs but overall it has been an amazing experience, I have encountered many different kinds of people and experiences. Everyone I meet is completely different to me, this has shown me how we are all individual and how important your upbringing is in shaping you as a person. These people and the experiences I have had are shaping me as an individual and I feel that as a consequence I am becoming more mature, confident and more well rounded

### **European Politics course**

I chose politics because it was the subject I enjoyed the most at A level. There is no doubt that I have added considerably to my knowledge this year. But working towards my degree has challenged me academically, writing essays which are a higher standard than I was used to at A level and understanding what my lecturers want from me has been difficult. I am still trying to grasp what is expected of me and I guess that will continue until the end of my course. But with every piece of coursework I feel I am getting a better idea of the standard I should be working at. My learning has become much more social, often I will discuss work with my friends and may read several peoples coursework to look at different viewpoints. Through my course I have learnt more about forming collaborative relationships and communicating in small groups in order to create presentations on various topics. I also improved my public speaking skills as I gave presentations on a political topic and reflected on my performance.

### **Extra-curricular Activities**

Like many other students I signed up for many clubs and societies during freshers week but soon realised that it was futile trying to get involved in so many things. But I did get involved in fund raising for charities. The university organised something called a rag raid, where each Saturday a coachload of students would drive to a different city in England, where we would stand in the street fundraising for various charities. Whilst I got a great sense of fulfilment out of the rag raid it was very tough, sometimes people on the street

would be rude to us and other times the weather was dreadful. However, I persevered and made some good friends as a result.

During the Christmas holidays when I was recovering from my illness at home, I resolved to get more involved with opportunities that would help me develop as a communicator. I had by now realised that some of the best opportunities for developing my communication skills lay outside my course.

The activities I have undertaken while at university have provided me with opportunities to develop several of my PDP goals simultaneously. I saw my most important goal as developing myself as a communicator in a range of different contexts, including using new media and making new friends. I set this goal because I am attracted to the idea of eventually working in the media industry. As the year unfolded I embraced many opportunities in the hope of fulfilling this goal. However, what I was not expecting was that my goal would itself evolve as a result of different experiences.

### *Use of new media*

I did not have a lot of experience of using social media and other media technology but throughout the year my experience grew as I used facebook to communicate with my friendship group and family members. I also used facebook as a way to communicate with



my classmates, arranging times for my tutor or study group to meet up and sending each other important files. I also learnt how to use various university websites like moodle and Nottingham intranet.

The Lifewide Award encouraged me to set up my own website using weebly to record my experiences and reflections on my journey of self-development. I had never set up and maintained a website before so this was a valuable experience.

My website <http://lifewider1.weebly.com/>



Interestingly, I started with written blogs but later decided to record my thoughts as audio files. This use of social media has not just helped with my communication but also with my creativity, as I have used my website to express my own ideas I am using it in a creative way. It was my website and experience in creating websites that meant

I was able to get an interview at Susy for a job as social media executive which then led to

my job as a news reader.

## Reporter for Student Newspaper



I enrolled as a campus reporter on 'Impact' the student newspaper to gain some experience of working. In particular I wanted to try to develop a journalistic style. As a member of the editorial team I had to write a piece each week. I had some basic training in how to interview and then covered the university elections interviewing candidates and following them on the campaign trail writing articles for publication. I had to work to very tight deadlines and this discipline

has helped me to become more focused in my course work. At times I found this very difficult, especially as I was trying to balance my newspaper role with my academic work, however through perseverance I was able to continue both jobs. Next year, however I will think very hard about what I sign up for and how my time is best spent. As looking back I was trying to do too much around exam time.

## Performing in Lysistrata



Halfway through the year I had the opportunity to join a production of "Lysistrata" which was a collaboration between the university theatre group and a professional director. Through the play I learnt to work and communicate with people from different backgrounds to me and also people who are both older than me and with a greater level of acting experience. The production involved a lot of improvisation and the trick was to use communication to develop a deeper understanding of each other, to help us combine our different visions to create the production. This was very much a creative challenge, as we had to visualise a play and the characters in our heads and then communicate our ideas to each other before we would be able to compromise and create a joint vision. Not only did I have to be creative in creating my own ideas but I had to think creatively in how our ideas could intertwine. The experience was



particularly fulfilling as I felt like I was entertaining hundreds of people, It was especially fulfilling when the audience clapped because you knew they were enjoying the performance.



*'In what is a genuine ensemble piece, there are suitably bold and spirited performances from everyone, though names that might be mentioned are Ali Blacher (Myrrhine), Philip Damms (Kinesias), Toby Stevens (man in drag Lampito), Yalda Tomlinson (Magistrate) and Ruth Wogan (Director of the classroom play). Lysistrata herself is played by Emma McDonald with admirable clarity and conviction. Hers is a superb voice for the set-piece speeches; and she looks wonderful.'*

Here is a link to the Lysistrata website:

<http://www.lakesidearts.org.uk/Drama/ViewEvent.html?e=2193&c=4&d=0>

### University Radio experience



It was through the play that I was first introduced to the university's radio station as a couple of us who were involved were given the opportunity to advertise the play on a news show. After enjoying my role as guest on the radio show I talked to my friend about other ways I might get involved in radio and she recommended that I guest on her show, and so one opportunity led to another. This showed me how important my

networking with friends was in giving me the opportunities to try new experiences.

### Working in Local Radio

<http://www.susyradio.com/>

#### Susy Radio



#### Welcome

#### SUSY RADIO IS NOW ON UK RADIO PLAYER

Susy Radio is now available on UK Radio Player, in common with many BBC, Commercial and Community Radio Stations. It means we can be heard live online by many more people and also more easily. Just click our new button below to listen live now!



Community Radio for Rehill, Rejells, Hells, Gathels, Clowey and the surrounding villages. Established 1996

#### Local News for Sussex and Surrey

- BBC Sussex News**
  - UKIP growing up, says Nigel Farage
  - VIDEO: Library visitors get 'Me-My'
  - Warning of three-person 'P' 'over'
  - Farage vows to keep the lights on
  - Munt looks to settle at Crawley
- BBC Surrey News**
  - 'We want Urban back' Farage

When I returned home for the summer break I decided to look for experience in local radio, I called up lots of radio stations but no one was able to offer me any work experience. At this point my perseverance was tested as I could see no improvement therefore I lost motivation and thought about giving up. Instead of giving up I

decided it would be better if I changed tactics. I decided I was better of looking for a way I

could fulfil a need within radio. My stepfather had spotted an advert for someone with media interests and skills for a local radio station. I decided my best option was to utilise my knowledge of social media, which stemmed from my use of social networking sites and my personal website. I ended up applying for a job at Susy radio as a social media executive. However, when I arrived for my interview I was informed that the role had already been filled. But I seemed to get on well with the presenter who interviewed me and when I told her about my work on the university newspaper and my interest in politics she told me that there was an opening within the news team as a news broadcaster. So after expressing an interest in the position I was offered the job. I actually bit her hand off! After a week of training, which was mainly observing how it was done, I took over as a news reporter, preparing a four minute bulletin and reading it on air at 6pm and 7pm.

Working as a reporter has been a very steep learning curve. I observed news being read one day and the next I was reading it! I feel that one of my greatest assets in this field is my voice which because of past experience and coaching gained through drama and Lambda I can control and I am able to modulate, which makes it more interesting for the listener. Written communication has also been very important to the role, but in a different style to what I have used before, as I had to write a script that is short, gets straight to the point and is factually correct. I do however sometimes struggle with the pronunciation of names which I hope will improve with experience.

You can hear a couple of my broadcasts on my blog.

Also through working at Susy I have met Geoff who has shown me how important a mentor can be in providing opportunities. Geoff has helped me improve in many aspects of my performance on the radio, he has both offered me advice and helped me to analyse my own performance, helping me spot where I have done well and where there is room for improvement. Geoff plays a similar too role to the role my director played in Lysistrata, he tries to improve my performance without taking away my creative freedom. Once again communication is vital as we try to combine our visions to create the show. From a practical point of view, having this experience in radio has greatly improved my employability as I have effectively started training for radio work through this job.

## **TEFL Course**

In July I started an on-line TEFL course (120 hrs), which will qualify me as a English as a second language teacher. This course has not enabled me to be very creative, which means that can be tedious at times. At the time of writing I am about two thirds of the way through the course. I have had to persevere with it as its been quite challenging for me, especially as I have struggled with the content at times which makes me feel like I have hit a wall. However, recently I have been making good progress with the course. The TEFL course has offered me little in terms of improving my communication and there is very little creativity involved. It has however enabled me to develop knowledge of my own language and how I would teach it to other people. However, it is a very impressive qualification to have on my CV and once I have completed it not only will I be able to use it to travel, but it provides me with a method of earning at the same time.

## NURSERY WORK EXPERIENCE

For two weeks in the summer I worked at a nursery, I had intended to work as an English teacher abroad and I had hoped to gain experience with children. The experience was far more emotional than I was expecting, I formed a friendship with the children (who were around 1 or just under) and learnt how to communicate with them, which was very different from the conversations I am used to having with my peers. I also got a great sense of fulfilment out of spending time with the children, every day it felt like they were learning something new and I really enjoyed being a part of that. However, It did make me question the whole nursery system for young children, I wondered if they were getting the attention they needed at such a young age.

## Reflections On My Development

I called my blog reflections on life so it's appropriate to conclude this statement of how I developed myself over the year with a reflective commentary.

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My PDP identified six aspects of myself I wanted to develop in respect of these goals:

- 1 My communication skills - especially relating to the use of new media and making new friends
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- 5 My employability
- 6 My sense of fulfilment as a whole person

Looking back I can see how lots of different activities helped me achieve my developmental goals. I have put considerable time into my extracurricular activities. The table below provides an indication of the ways in which each of the activities I undertook contributed to my development. All were necessary to give me the sense of personal fulfilment I was looking for and all have directly or indirectly contributed to my increased confidence. Some of them have been helpful to other people - and I voluntarily gave my time to several organisations.

Although I have not had a job during the year I feel my voluntary work has enabled me to develop and demonstrate a number of skills that I think employers are looking for - like communication skills, managing myself and my time, working with other people and meeting deadlines, and I can certainly demonstrate that I have got involved in things.

I could not have imagined at the start of the year that I would be where I am now. Looking back I can see that I sought out opportunities to develop my communication skills and that

what I have done is enabling me to experience the world of journalism and broadcasting that is totally new to me. In the process I have used a range of media to communicate, and I have made many new friends in the process so I have been true to my original goal.

Over the course of the year I have learned a great deal about myself, It is through my work with Susy radio that I have realised my passion for broadcasting which has changed the direction I pursue. I have also come to the realisation that Drama, whilst still a love of mine, is no longer the most important aspect of my life, instead my priorities are gaining a good degree and continuing to explore the idea of a career in broadcasting. Working on the radio has undoubtedly improved my communication with an audience; it has also enabled me to be creative. By this I mean I have to think laterally about what my audience want before creating and reading a script. For me, being creative is thinking laterally for problem solving. Not only have I received this insight into myself but I have learnt a lot about other people, whether they are my friends or colleagues. I realise how many people are different to me, but in this way using their strengths can fill areas that I am less confident in and verse versa. This applies to both in studying with fellow undergraduates or working on an external project with them.

My next step in my personal development plan to improve myself as a communicator will be more focused. I now know that presenting on radio seems to come naturally to me and I enjoy doing it so I am looking at the possibility of presenting a programme which discusses the news and presents opinions, so my main focus will be on refining my interviewing and presenting techniques and continuing to network.

My challenge in the coming year is to look after myself - this year I am sharing a flat, manage my time effectively and maintain balance between the social activities I enjoy and the university work I must do. I know that ultimately I will need to show I have worked hard in my studies and gained a good degree.

Summary of how I achieved my developmental goals. The columns represent the most important developmental activities I undertook during the year

	Looking after myself	Politics course	Fund raising	Impact newspaper	Lysistrata	Uni Radio	Susy Radio	Nursery work experience	TEFL
1 My communication skills - especially relating to the use of new media and making new friends		Yes, Writing, Debating Presenting	Yes, Talking to public, Teamwork	Written comm. journalistic style. Interviews	Performance, oral, action	I discovered how much I enjoyed this form of communication	Very important, written journalistic style- presenting broadcasts	With children	
2 My creativity		Finding solutions to problems	Persuading people		Creating a character		Shaping the news	Finding a way to keep them entertained	
3 Improve perseverance when facing challenges		Self motivation sustaining study		Meeting deadlines				Form relationships	Yes, can be boring and tiring, no immediate benefit
5 My employability		Getting a degree		Teamwork Working to tight deadlines	Teamwork, dealing with feedback		Definitely experience and make connections and possible insights	Time management and commitment	Yes
4 Manage myself as an independent adult (ie look after and fend for myself when I go to university)	Important to stay healthy Shopping Cleaning Cooking	Study skills, managing time, balancing work and friends	Time management		Time management		Time management	Yes	Time management and commitment
6 My sense of fulfilment as a whole person	Important to my self esteem and who I am			Very satisfying to see my articles published	Public performance, achievement in entertaining people	Enjoyment	Public performance, enjoyment is important,		Achievement when finished module

## Appendix 1 My PDP

<b>IMPORTANT PERSONAL GOALS</b> In the context of your whole life where are the challenges and opportunities? What are you trying to achieve? 1 To develop the confidence and practical skills to live an independent life at university (addressed in 1-6 below) 2 To make myself more employable (addressed in 1, 2, 3, 4 below and item 5) 3 To help other people			
In respect of these personal goals, <b>WHAT ASPECTS OF YOURSELF DO YOU WANT TO DEVELOP?</b>	<b>WHY? is this important to you?</b>	<b>Recent activities/experiences where you have been able to develop and utilise this aspect of yourself to achieve something</b>	<b>Additional activities in the next 6 months where you can develop, apply and demonstrate development of these aspects of yourself</b>
<b>1 My communication skills - especially relating to the use of new media and making new friends</b>	In the workplace communication is vital in leadership and in working as a team member, it also means I can have good discussions with my peers	I have always been interested in public speaking and in my final year at school I gained my LAMDA Gold medal. The course has boosted my confidence in public speaking Through my Blog I am learning about communication through new media, I also learnt this through the audio diary I kept on my French trip.	There will be many opportunities to improve my communication skills at University, whether this be through clubs and societies or through my course or any work or volunteering I do.  I will continue to work on my blog and develop my digital literacy skills
<b>2 My creativity</b>	Being creative will help me come up with positive solutions to any problems I may face at university, this skill also makes me more employable	My A level Drama was a very creative subject, I faced many challenges and had to solve them, outside as well as during performances Creating my Blog is very process, and a process which I have not been through before	I will continue to work on my blog, I also intend to join a Drama society at university The need for creativity may pop up unexpectedly, for example cooking at university and in any other activity I might encounter.
<b>3 Improve perseverance when facing challenges</b>	This is vital in all my goals, continuing to work towards my goals even if it is challenging at times	Gold D of E I undertook in my final year at school, was a massive challenge that required a lot of perseverance Revision for A levels was also a challenge although I was persevering against boredom and weariness rather than the physical strain of D of E	I will continue to push myself in all that I do. My immediate challenge is to pass my driving test - with one month to go I have a long way to go.
<b>4 Manage myself as an independent adult</b>	Once again this is vital in every goal, I need to learn to balance studying with extra curriculum activities and looking after myself, this will help me become a well- rounded individual and help me make the most of my time at university	In July 2012 I spent three weeks in France with a friend. This was my first experience of travelling independently. I had to plan the trip, look after myself and cope with unexpected things. In was my first taste of independence.  The lifewide award is helping be become more aware of how I am managing myself as it shows awareness of how I am learning and developing as a person	Once I leave home to go to university I will have to learn to juggle many different things, look after myself and manage my studies, my social life and any other activities I engage in..  Continuing with the lifewide award and learning to manage my time at university will help me.
<b>5 Improving my employability</b>	In the short term I am hoping to get a job at university. In the long term I hope to ensure I am able to get a better job once leaving university.	Over the summer I have helped my stepfather with his company accounts.	Before I go to University I will create my first CV and my intention is to look for paid employment while at university. I anticipate that I will develop and demonstrate my employability skills through searching for gaining and holding down a job.
<b>6 My sense of fulfillment as a whole person</b>	I feel it is important to feel confident and happy within yourself in order to grasp opportunities or to solve challenges.	Upon my return from France I learned more about the kind of person I'd like to become. The independence I gained made me feel more capable and confident about dealing with challenges.	I feel happiest with the person I am when I have helped others, this could just be lending a hand to a friend or it could be voluntary work, such as donating or working to Oxfam. I also feel confident in being an all rounder when I have a skill, for example Drama. I have given a lot of time to Drama, performing in plays or reading plays to develop my understanding of the theatre, I am also helping to pilot the Lifewide Development Award giving the organisers feedback on the methods and tools they are using.

