



The Impact of The Duke  
of Edinburgh's Award  
on young people –  
Executive Summary

Research by The University  
of Northampton 2007-2009





# Foreword

How can a Charity like The Duke of Edinburgh's Award provide the sort of empirical evidence that some potential partner organisations and users of DofE programmes demand? How does an activity-based programme with over 50 years of experience of equipping young people for life's challenges convince the doubters, the sceptics and the non-believers? The straight answer is not easily. However, the Charity has embarked on a strategy of commissioning its own research as well as encouraging others to research into the DofE's impact with the aim of producing the necessary proof.

Some of our research has been on quite specific areas of operation, whereas this report is on a far more wide-ranging piece of research carried out over the last two years among a large swathe of DofE participants as well as those responsible for delivering it throughout the United Kingdom. The results are encouraging and fully support the anecdotal evidence that we've relied upon until now. Many of the recommendations for the management are of an equally broad nature and not especially surprising, but are useful in terms of focussing our attention and ensuring we do not become complacent. Just as DofE programmes set the participants challenges, we know that this sort of research is bound to give us challenges, but we are prepared and committed to improving what we do.

None of this would be possible without a considerable amount of effort, determination and some very generous support. Considerable thanks must go to the researchers, our friends at The Pears Foundation and of course all those who responded and contributed. It is thanks to you that we now have some very real proof of the considerable impact the DofE has on young people and those involved in delivering it. I sincerely hope that this report will not only positively assist our many advocates, but also be just the sort of inspiration needed to convince a few of those doubters to believe.

HRH The Earl of Wessex KG, KCVO  
Trustee, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award

## Acknowledgements

The DofE would like to thank The Pears Foundation for the generous support of this research project and the DofE's work to inspire, guide and support young people in their self-development and recognise their achievements.

The DofE would also like to thank all those participating in the research – the DofE's Regional and Country Directors and operational staff, DofE Managers and Leaders across the UK and young people doing their DofE programme, as well as those who have achieved an Award during the past 53 years. Each and every contribution was valuable and has guided this research.

This research should be considered alongside *The Duke of Edinburgh's Award: Making a difference with young people in custody* (Cardiff and Glyndŵr Universities, 2009).

## Research team

The research team from The Centre for Children and Youth at The University of Northampton was led by Professor Jackie Campbell. Her team included: Dr Victoria Bell, Sarah Cate Armstrong, Dr John Horton, Natasha Mansukhani, Professor Hugh Matthews and Professor Andy Pilkington.

The research team was supported and monitored by a steering group of DofE Directors, Sarah Lindsell, Stephanie Price and Philip Treleven, and the Policy Officer, Helen Longworth. The Pears Foundation was represented by Deputy Director, Amy Philip.

## Introduction

In 2007, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (the DofE), funded by The Pears Foundation, initiated in-depth research into the impact of the DofE on young people. The DofE had not undertaken systematic research into the effects of DofE programmes in its 50 years of developing young people, however, we knew from anecdotal evidence and experience that achieving a Duke of Edinburgh's Award has significant and lasting benefits for young people.

We knew that those with a Gold Award are much more likely to progress in their careers, hold senior positions and are sought after by employers. We knew Award holders developed a social consciousness, have self-confidence and positive self-esteem, enjoy teamwork, have an understanding of others' needs and are more likely to stay fit and healthy. It is such positive outcomes for young people that we sought to document.

The purpose of doing this research has been to improve the DofE for young people in the future; to influence the thoughts of leaders and policy makers to increase positive outcomes for young people through use of DofE programmes; and to seek further support for the DofE, therefore ensuring that more young people achieve and benefit from an Award.

The Centre for Children and Youth at The University of Northampton undertook this study between December 2007 and June 2009. This document contains a summary of their findings and has been prepared by the DofE. The full report is available by contacting our registered office at: The DofE, Gulliver House, Madeira Walk, WINDSOR, Berkshire SL4 1EU.



## A few words from our project supporter

After supporting the DofE for several years, we were pleased to fund this research project. The report provides a solid evidence base demonstrating the lasting benefits of the DofE for its participants. We hope that the findings and recommendations will assist this important organisation with its future strategy, leading to an even greater experience for the quarter of a million young people who every year rise to the challenge and opportunity it represents.

**Trevor Pears**, Executive Chair of The Pears Foundation

pears  
foundation

## The research

**Aims:** The research project considered the impact of the DofE on young people. It sought to identify, document and analyse the outcomes of participation in DofE programmes. It had a particular interest in understanding the impact of how young people mix with others with different life experiences and developing a model of distance travelled to support the DofE's long-term evaluation and monitoring.

**The process:** Following a tendering process, The University of Northampton undertook the 18 month-long research which came to a conclusion in the summer of 2009. The research gathered the views of young people, delivery partners, supporters, employers and stakeholders. This was complemented by a literature review, online statistical surveys and video diaries. The process was guided and monitored by a steering group comprising The Pears Foundation, the DofE and The University of Northampton.

The data collected through the research process was analysed and the results, along with recommendations for the DofE to address, were given to the DofE and The Pears Foundation in July 2009.

*Some names have been changed in this document to protect anonymity.*

*“The DofE has never let me down, all the way through my programme I knew I was supported. With this research I think that the DofE has the opportunity to perfect what it does.”*

Paula, Gold Award holder,  
DofE Leader and  
DofE Ambassador



## Methodology

The study used six strands of data collection:

### 1. Desk-based review of existing evidence

A literature review was conducted of research into the DofE and similar programmes.

### 2. Online survey of DofE participants

Two surveys of young people were carried out to track changes in attitude, relationships with others and community engagement over time. 1,848 young people responded to the survey, with representation from across the UK.

Of those that gave the information:

- 37% were working towards Bronze, 27% Silver, 39% Gold.
- 36% were male, and 64% female.
- 93% were in full time education, of which 35% attended a comprehensive school, 15% attended an independent school, 13% attended a grammar school and 9% were in higher education.
- 10% were from a minority ethnic community, compared to 14% of young people who are doing their DofE overall, and 7.9% of the overall UK population.
- 9% had a disability, compared to 4-5% of this age range in the UK population.

### 3. Qualitative data collection with young people

Over 100 interviews and nineteen focus groups with young people doing their DofE took place across the UK. One group of young people also recorded video evidence of their DofE experiences.

### 4. Survey of DofE Leaders and Managers

383 delivery partners, covering Leaders and Managers, completed a questionnaire to collect perceptions of positive and negative factors for participation and delivery of DofE programmes.

### 5. Qualitative data collection from delivery partners and stakeholders

This strand used 54 interviews and focus groups to investigate in greater depth the perceptions of positive and negative factors of doing and running DofE programmes. In addition to delivery partners, stakeholders comprised corporate directors, local authority executives, funders and politicians.

### 6. Oral history interviews with past Gold Award holders

Gold Award holders from the past 50 years have given evidence on the lifelong benefits of doing their DofE. There were 25 interviews, with five Award holders interviewed from each decade.

The findings of the study were extensive, both qualitative and quantitative, and were thematically examined using specialist research software and statistical techniques.

*“We’re learning all the time as well aren’t we? And just building up our relationship with the kids as well which makes our other classes a lot easier... I think the kids then start looking up to us then, not as father figures I don’t think, but as, well, maybe, role models. So our classes then, we’ve got the easiest jobs in the world you know, honest to God.”*

(Teacher and DofE Leader)



## Findings

Overall, this large and wide-ranging evaluation of the impact of the DofE on participants has shown that it continues to be a successful personal development programme for young people. The results detailed in the full report, and in its accompanying statistical volumes and appendices, have shown that doing a DofE programme has the potential to support personal development in many ways and that participation in DofE programmes is widely recognised as benefiting young people.

There are, however, some areas identified which could be addressed to further enhance the quality and effectiveness of the programmes.

The key findings of the report are set out below, under the following headings:

- attitudes towards new experiences
- personal development
- community engagement
- physical and mental well-being
- employment skills and prospects.

### Attitudes towards new experiences

#### Summary

Doing their DofE gives young people practical skills and new experiences. It also gives them a spirit of adventure; the desire to seek out and engage with new and different activities. This gives them the opportunity to build skills that they may not otherwise develop.

The main personal development benefits for young people are:

- interpersonal skills to engage with new groups
- trying new activities, particularly expeditions and volunteering
- building confidence through taking part
- making new contacts and knowing more people, especially those who are different to themselves
- a sense of achievement.



#### Statistics

- 84% of young people and 97% of Leaders feel the DofE has given participants totally new experiences
- 81% of young people feel that doing their DofE has made them more adventurous, with which 92% of Leaders agree
- 74% of young people feel the DofE has allowed them to try activities they would have never tried before
- 69% of young people and 92% of Leaders feel that as a result of their DofE, participants have new interests/hobbies.

#### Case study

For her Gold programme, Jal recognised that in her school DofE group there were few opportunities to work with people from different backgrounds from herself. Therefore, she joined an open DofE centre to enable herself to build her experience and attitudes to new people. She expanded this spirit of adventure and working with new people for her Residential section. She went to the Lebanon to work with a church group, giving her the opportunity to meet with and work with those from a different culture.

### Personal development

#### Summary

The main personal development benefits for young people are in:

- realising their own capabilities
- overcoming challenge
- building resilience
- developing perseverance
- having fun
- the chance to do something new
- gaining independence
- achieving what seems impossible.

*“New activities, helping your community obviously and getting stuck in with things, obviously helping yourself, getting yourself somewhere, getting something out of it but helping others.”*  
(Male, Bronze participant)

*“[The Duke of Edinburgh's Award] is just so broad, it just covers so many different aspects of life... [it] gives people an opportunity to do activities which they never really [would] have got to.”*  
(Male, Gold participant)

*"To me it's about gaining new skills and meeting new people and facing challenges that you wouldn't normally meet in your everyday life."*

Female, Gold participant

For each aspect of personal development considered, those with the lowest starting points are likely to benefit the most from participation in a DofE programme.

#### Statistics

- 81% of young people and 92% of Leaders identified increased motivation
- 80% of young people and 93% of Leaders said the DofE gave participants the ability to reflect on learning and an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses
- 79% of young people and 94% of Leaders believe DofE participants develop independence
- 71% of young people feel that their DofE has developed their self-belief.

#### Case study

"We have examples of young people whose lives have been changed dramatically. I can give you one in particular who springs to mind – a boy who did an anti-social behaviour programme with snowboarding and he was referred to do his DofE as part of this.

"He was a persistent offender, meaning that at the time of his referral he had more than five offences within the previous six months and so he had a very high level of offending. He joined a group doing mechanics [...] He loved learning about the mechanics of the car and was very good at it. He responded very well to being told that he was very good at it and being given the opportunity to then help other people. So, then we gave him the opportunity to go into a different group, but as a peer educator [...] at the end he achieved his Bronze Award.

"He got himself a job, he is still – and this must be two years on I think – he is still holding down a full time job and is no longer offending at all." (DofE Leader)  
"He also gained a bit of confidence so he was able to work with people who didn't just push him away as soon as he misbehaved [...] He was behaving in a manner which any normal person would find pretty terrifying. [...] He started doing the programme and started to see the consequences of his actions and think about what he was doing."

*"I love seeing how they grow when they come here at 14 and then they leave at 18 or 19. Seeing how much they have changed in that time, which is a real buzz."*

DofE Co-ordinator,  
Open DofE centre

## Community engagement

### Summary

Young people reported that they enjoyed volunteering within their own community and volunteering was the second most popular response given as their best DofE activity. But, young people found it difficult to articulate how they were making a positive contribution. Delivery partners and stakeholders were more positive about the community impact that participants have.

The main benefits for young people and their communities are:

- doing something they are passionate about
- learning about others and how to get on with others
- making a difference
- giving insight
- becoming aware of the value in helping others and the nature of social responsibility
- developing social skills
- mixing with others.

### Statistics

- 90% of young people feel that doing their DofE has given them opportunities to help others
- 82% feel that doing their DofE has made them want to take part in volunteering/voluntary activities in the future
- 62% feel that doing their DofE has helped them make a positive difference to their local community
- 54% of young people but 82% of Leaders think that participants learn to work with people from different backgrounds to themselves.



### Case study

Using her musical skills, Lauren began volunteering in a residential home for older people for her Bronze programme. She found that this was the most challenging and the most rewarding activity in her programme. Engaging with older people was an entirely new experience for her. She found that she developed self-confidence and consideration for the people where she was volunteering. Lauren went on to discuss how the most rewarding thing was the older people's response to her music.

She said: "We played 'Pack up your Troubles' and 'Cock linnnet' and the old traditional songs that they knew and they were singing along [...] that was probably the most satisfaction I got out of the whole [programme]".

### Case study

Kellie stated that the most significant skills she gained from doing her Gold DofE programme was the ability to interact and communicate with a wide range of people, gained through doing her residential and volunteering, combined with overcoming the challenge of doing the expedition:

"I think for me in terms of sort of being able to speak to and interact with people from different walks of life that I wouldn't normally interact with, so for example when I was doing my residential I got to work with young children who had had a difficult upbringing and it taught me to appreciate people from different walks of life. When I was doing my community service I was working with another group of children and it was quite good in terms of developing me in that way[...]"

The Expedition section, that was something that I never thought I could do because although I'm quite sporty it involves quite a lot of sort of carrying a lot of heavy stuff and you know walking for ages and I suppose roughing it a bit and I didn't really think I could do that so I think its really sort of helped sort of, me learning that I can achieve something and persevere with something and I can actually do things that I never thought I could do."

## Physical and mental well-being

### Summary

Building self-esteem and friendships, alongside raising their fitness levels through regular active participation, were considered to be some of the main benefits of doing a DofE programme by participants.

Having fun was an important aspect for young people taking part in programmes, and this, combined with support from Leaders and their friendships, keeps them engaged with a DofE programme. Thus, the environment where they do their DofE is significant for encouraging completion of programmes.

Young people were asked if they had changed the way they felt about themselves by taking part in a DofE programme. The overwhelming answer to this was 'yes' and most felt that this change was gaining or building confidence.

The benefits of doing a DofE programme for well-being include:

- building confidence and self-esteem
- building and enhancing friendships and a sense of belonging
- learning about themselves and their capabilities
- improving team and communication skills
- improving resilience and the ability to overcome challenges
- getting fitter and healthier.

### Statistics

- 93% of participants and 93% of Leaders feel that doing their DofE has helped participants to develop teamwork skills
- 85% of young people and 98% of Leaders said the DofE inspired new activities and interests
- 84% of young people feel that the DofE has made them a more responsible person, 95% of Leaders also felt this
- 81% feel that doing their DofE has made them more adventurous
- 79% of young people and 94% of Leaders felt participants become more independent
- 74% of young people said they developed self-esteem

*"It's about citizenship. The young people don't see that; it's not written up in big bold lights, but the four sections shape them and give them opportunities to look at their morals, their values, their physical abilities, to meet with others and to socialise and all of those things I think impact on their ability to be positive young citizens."*

Stakeholder

*"You come here unfit to begin with and really struggle but eventually you just keep trying and it just gets easier for you and you start to enjoy yourself a lot more than you did to begin with because it's not as hard."*

Female, Silver participant

*"I'm more energetic and I feel more comfortable because I've done a lot of community work, I can go out into the community and join a group and wouldn't think twice about it"*  
Female, Silver participant

- 61% of young people and 86% of Leaders thought participants develop a positive outlook on the future
- 64% feel that as a result of the DofE they are better at sport or physical activity
- 61% feel that doing their DofE has allowed them to try a new sport or physical activity
- 69% feel that doing their DofE means they are less bored.

#### Case study

Katy is currently doing her Bronze programme. She identified the wide range of benefits that she has already experienced from her DofE, particularly socialising and using her programme to motivate her to do more activities. She identified the most rewarding aspect of her programme as becoming healthier and developing her understanding of other people.

The Volunteering section has had the most profound impact on her life. She is working with children with special needs and this, she has decided, is what she would like to do for a career. Doing her DofE programme has not only given her the opportunity to try this kind of work but also the confidence to pursue it further.

In conclusion, she stated: "To be honest I just recommend it to anyone out there who is looking for a chance to go out and increase their socialisation ... It will really help you when you move on in life, when you go to college and uni, you'll just understand that doing your DofE... will help you with talking to people and actually becoming more confident."

## Employment – skills and prospects

### Summary

Duke of Edinburgh's Awards are very beneficial in terms of supporting young people's employment prospects. Stakeholders and delivery partners think of this as one of the main benefits of the programme. The particular skills they cite are the ability to demonstrate commitment and transferrable skills, as well as the recognition it gets from employers.

Young people use their DofE Award on a CV or personal statement for university or job application. It also gives them something that they can discuss at interview and they can offer concrete examples of abilities such as leadership skills, team building and commitment.

DofE programmes support young people's employability by developing:

- organisational and life skills
- resilience and independence
- commitment
- practical skills
- teamwork, leadership, decision-making, problem-solving skills.

### Statistics

DofE programmes develop:

- responsibility, according to 95% of Leaders and 84% of young people
- the ability to stick at tasks until they're complete, according to 92% of Leaders and 84% young people
- organisational skills, according to 92% of Leaders and 75% of young people
- problem-solving skills, according to 87% of Leaders and 77% of young people
- decision-making skills, according to 95% of Leaders and 84% young people.

### Case study

Grant is aware that he has benefited from doing his DofE programme in many ways, not least because "it boosts your personal statement for university". He also recognises that there are personal benefits and those achieved by getting a young person involved in their local community. It is this element of doing his DofE that, arguably, he has benefited from the most.

He considered that the activity that he chose for his Volunteering section was one of the most enjoyable activities of his DofE programme. He states that his volunteering is the part of his DofE that has helped him to gain confidence in general. He chose to work with children with Down's Syndrome. By doing this, he has realised the benefits of volunteering both to himself and to others within his own community. He was aware of the valuable contribution that he made in working





with children with Down's Syndrome and children with disabilities as a volunteer. He carried on with his volunteering after achieving his Gold Award and revealed that the only reason that he stopped was because he moved to go to university.

He is currently doing physiotherapy at university and when he graduates he hopes to work with children and young people who have disabilities such as Down's Syndrome. This decision has been completely influenced by his volunteering experiences whilst doing his DofE.



*"I'm surprised that I could do it. I thought I would give up because I give up a lot... I haven't given up and so that's great."*

Female, Bronze participant

## DofE Leaders

### Summary

"The Leader is the best thing about DofE programmes," (Male, participant). Young people stated that their DofE Leaders are supportive, inspirational, engaging and cited the support they gain from their Leader as one of the most important things about their programme.

The most commonly reported barrier to participating in a DofE programme by delivery partners was lack of Leaders or volunteers available to run a group. The second most popular answer was the lack of capacity or availability of somewhere for a young person to do their DofE. There are also a number of benefits to being a DofE Leader; particularly the opportunity to develop positive relationships with young people and the pride felt when participants achieve their goals.

### Statistics

- 91% of Leaders feel that their involvement has given them opportunities to help other people
- 76% of young people think their DofE Leaders are inspirational
- 75% of Leaders feel that improvements could be made to the delivery of DofE programmes
- 71% of Leaders think the DofE makes a difference to their community
- 60% of Leaders feel DofE programmes are difficult to run due to lack of volunteer staff.

### Case study

Last academic year (2007-2008), one school had 136 young people start Bronze programmes and 72 on Silver and Gold programmes. Of those who started in academic year 2006, 113 out of 123 Bronze and 70 out of 73 Silver participants achieved their Awards.

The school attributes this success rate to the system they have in place for students who take part. They must complete their Volunteering, Skills and Physical sections before they do either their practice or qualifying expeditions.

This places pressure on the teaching staff. However, this is alleviated by the leadership structure. There is a team of teachers at the school involved in running the programme. At the school there is one teacher responsible for each of the DofE levels, who then has support staff to help. Also, a number of teachers and other staff help out and assist on the expeditions.

This support system, together with the enthusiasm of the teachers and the method of delivery has proved to be successful for this school. As one teacher said of his involvement in the programme: "I really enjoyed it and I just think it is a great thing for young people to be involved with and also a great thing for me to be involved with because you do get to know them so much better. Just being outside and away from school as well I think is a big thing."

*"Doesn't matter if it's Gold, Silver or Bronze, [their DofE]'s something which takes them outside of the box and challenges them as an individual to play the team game, to get involved in the community, to do sporting things..."*

Employer

*“My experience of the DofE was shaped by probably two individuals... they have been two of the most influential people in my life.”*

Gold Award holder

## Impact snapshots

### Young people

- 93% feel that doing their DofE has helped them to develop teamwork skills
- 84% feel that it has helped them develop decision-making skills
- 84% feel that it has made them a more responsible person
- 82% feel that it has helped them to develop leadership skills
- 81% feel that it has made them more adventurous
- 80% feel that doing their DofE has helped them understand their own strengths and weaknesses better
- 76% feel that doing their DofE has helped them stick to tasks until they are finished
- 71% feel that since starting their programme they believe in themselves more
- 67% think their Award has helped them achieve their goals in life
- 60% feel that it has changed the way they see themselves
- 82% feel that doing DofE has made them want to take part in volunteering/voluntary activities in the future
- 87% want to do their DofE because it is attractive to employers
- 62% feel that doing their DofE has helped them make a positive difference to their local community
- 90% feel that doing their DofE has given them opportunities to help others
- 76% think their DofE Leaders are inspirational.

### Deliverers and stakeholders

Impact on young people:

- 95% think that doing their DofE helps young people develop decision-making skills
- 98% think it allows young people to do things they have never done before
- 95% think that doing their DofE helps young people become more responsible
- 94% think that doing their DofE helps young people develop motivational skills
- 93% think that the DofE develops teamwork skills in young people
- 93% think that doing their DofE helps young people develop leadership skills
- 92% think that doing their DofE improves young people's ability to organise themselves
- 92% think that doing their DofE helps young people learn perseverance
- 87% think that doing their DofE helps young people develop their problem solving skills
- 87% think that doing their DofE can change the way young people see their future
- 82% think that doing DofE helps young people learn about others with different backgrounds to themselves.

### What Leaders think about the DofE:

- 75% think that completion rates could be improved
- 73% think measures could be taken to widen participation in DofE programmes
- 70% feel that their involvement has helped them to make a positive difference to their local community
- 70% think that the DofE is open to everyone
- 60% feel DofE programmes are difficult to run due to lack of volunteer staff
- 50% feel supported by the DofE Charity
- 31% would like to be more involved in the development of the DofE Charity.



# Lessons for the Charity

## Young people

The vast majority of young people who were interviewed found nothing disappointing about doing their DofE. For those who choose to participate and continue with their DofE, the programme is effective. It should be noted that it was outside the scope of this research to engage with young people who, for whatever reason, did not continue to achieve a Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

The main reported disappointments concerned aspects of the expedition: the weather, getting lost and blisters. Other disappointments with their programmes included:

- the length of time to complete
- others dropping out
- the presentation of Awards locally
- the number of places available to do a DofE programme.

Improvements suggested by young people included:

- more effective information and publicity for young people and their parents
- widening accessibility of the programme
- using presentations by peers doing their DofE or Duke of Edinburgh's Award holder testimonies
- introducing peer mentors
- providing more international opportunities
- speeding up the processing of Duke of Edinburgh's Awards
- promoting the DofE more widely in the workplace.

## Delivery partners

As might be expected, the disappointments of delivery partners focussed mainly on issues relating to the administration and delivery of DofE programmes. The three key areas were:

- lack of capacity to enable widening participation
- the complexities of, and barriers to, running a group
- non-completion of DofE programmes by young people.

Whilst most thought that it is an effective programme and were in broad agreement with young people, the delivery partners also suggested improvements including:

- improving assistance or encouragement from higher up the system
- improving communication
- targeted advertising and increasing publicity aimed at encouraging volunteers to get involved so that existing groups can expand (e.g. target Award holders, parents, employers)
- targeting hard to reach young people
- supporting young people who move between delivery partners during their DofE programme
- building capacity to increase the availability of the DofE
- recruiting and training Gold Award holders with a structured young Leaders programme
- improving the retention of volunteers by recognising their contribution
- developing the Expedition section by:
  - getting rid of the 'purpose' of the expedition
  - improving the expedition training pack
  - reducing the cost
  - being more flexible with more emphasis on exploration
  - learning skills such as team-building rather than physical challenge so as to be more inclusive of multi-faith groups and those with learning and physical disabilities.

Communication in a devolved organisation such as the DofE is a difficult process but improvements in communication would give significant benefits and address some of the perceived administrative problems. The research suggested that communication may well be linked to perceptions of support as a significant minority felt unsupported by the Charity.

## Stakeholders

Like delivery partners, all the stakeholders reinforced the need for improved communication at all levels. They suggested that past participants should be encouraged to become Leaders and the DofE should increase and widen participation.

*"At the end of it you've got something to show for all the time and effort that you've put into it, you've got an Award and it just shows how you've stuck at it and you've gained something realistic and you can see it in paper."*

Male, Gold participant

*"It's nice to give something back, I got a lot out of doing it myself, I know it sounds corny but it's nice to see other people get the same opportunity I did."*

DofE Leader

*"There is nothing I personally know of that is credible with as much status in terms of an informal accreditation in this country, possibly the world, that has such longevity and such calibre and standing."*  
DofE Manager

## Recommendations

This section summarises the recommendations of the research team for consideration by the DofE Charity.

**1 Widen young people's participation in DofE programmes:** The research has shown clearly that those young people who are likely to benefit the most from participation in a DofE programme are those with the lowest starting point, for whatever area of potential gain is examined. However, the profile of current participants is skewed towards those who already have relatively high levels of each of those attributes.

Although there are undoubtedly severe challenges in extending the appeal and availability of DofE programmes to those who have traditionally not participated, this would seem to be the area of greatest untapped potential and the area where the DofE's impact is likely to be the greatest.

**2 Increase capacity of DofE providers:** The research has suggested that there are barriers to participation, the most significant being the availability of places in a local group. Successful centres are over subscribed. If participation is to be increased, there is the inevitable challenge of increasing the numbers of Leaders and volunteers and of providing an adequate support system for groups to enable them to run sustainably.



*"[It] really does make you feel like you could take on whatever it is you are planning to take on."*  
(Male, Gold participant)

**3 Recruit leaders from more diverse backgrounds:** Young people reported that their Leaders were a very important part of their DofE experience and many said how much they were inspired by their Leaders. But Leaders are from a limited demographic profile and their ages were skewed towards older age groups. Targeted recruitment of younger Leaders and those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds would help to attract young people from similar backgrounds as well as providing positive role models.

**4 Increase support for delivery partners:** Delivery partners described the complexities and difficulties that they encounter when running a group and many reported that they would like more support from the DofE. They suggested building networks of Leaders within regions to share experiences and resources. This may also give additional roles to experienced Leaders.

**5 Recognise volunteers:** The delivery of DofE programmes relies on the goodwill of many thousands of volunteers. The delivery partners involved in the research strongly identified the need for improved volunteer recruitment. Whilst retention rates remain comparatively high for volunteers in the DofE, there was acknowledgement for this to be improved further, particularly the role that support and appreciation plays in this.

Due to the devolved structure of the management of DofE programmes, currently there is no central database of volunteers and no detailed information on the volunteer profile. Improved management systems would enable better communication, support and recognition of volunteers.

**6 Increase structured training and support programmes for Leaders and volunteers:** Delivery partners voiced concerns that although training is becoming more widely available through the DofE's training programme, there are not enough courses available at convenient

times. Increased access to training would give the DofE an opportunity to mix with more of their volunteers and their achievements would be formally recognised. Regional training events would also allow volunteers to build networks with others in their area. It was also recognised that there may need to be positive incentives for training by, for example, reimbursing expenses to volunteers. A Leader's Award, or similar, was also suggested by young people, delivery partners and stakeholders.

**7 Encourage Gold Award holders to become future DofE Leaders:** It is evident from many aspects of this research (with young people, delivery partners, past Award holders) that a significant number of those who gain an Award are interested in continuing their affiliation with the DofE. However, there do not seem to be any structured routes for their continued involvement and this pool of motivated and experienced young adults are not routinely encouraged to become Leaders. There are therefore opportunities to develop a programme for Gold Award holders to encourage them to 'give something back' to the DofE.

**8 Review the Expedition section:** The Expedition section is cited by young people as both the best and the worst part of the DofE experience. Some reasons for it being their worst experience relate to the physical and mental difficulties encountered which, when overcome, led to it being the best experience. However, they also reported elements such as the financial cost and perceived irrelevance of elements of the administration, planning and execution required. Given the high public profile of the expeditions, consideration should be given to reviewing all elements of the Expedition section to ensure that it is fit for purpose and will be attractive and accessible to the widest range of young people.

**9 Greater recognition of incremental achievement:** It is apparent that, for some young people, getting involved with a full DofE programme is not always possible or is a lengthy process. There is a mechanism for

recognising partial completion using sectional certificates which are issued on successful completion of one section of a young person's DofE programme. However, these are not universally used and are not recognised in DofE reports. By only recognising completion of full DofE Awards in the annual statistics, the DofE organisation is counting those who do not complete their DofE as failures, rather than celebrating achievements in sectional certificates. Increasing success rates was cited as one of the improvements that delivery partners would like to see and recognising sectional certificates as part of the process may go towards this.

**10 Induction for young people new to the DofE:** It was reported that young people often begin their DofE programme not quite sure what they are embarking on. It was suggested that an induction programme, which could include their parent/carer, could be an effective way of discussing expectations and concerns. This induction may help identify those who are committed to the programme and reduce the number who may drop out at an early stage. In addition, it was suggested that a form of foundation award, or series of taster sessions, could give young people an idea of what doing their DofE programme would be like and help with recruitment of under-represented young people.

**11 Improve communication, administration and support:** The different phases of the research, and the operational issues associated with conducting the research project, have consistently revealed the difficulties of a devolved structure of management of the DofE. The findings point to a lack of awareness of the opportunities available, recent changes and improvements that may have been implemented. This is due to the time it takes for information to filter down to the 'grass roots' level. A structured mechanism for increasing communication from the DofE Charity to the Leader and young person would also increase delivery partners' sense of involvement, worth and recognition.



*"The reason why I do this course and want to finish it is that it might give me a chance when I'm released."*  
(DofE participant)

*“You can enrol as many as you want; go into a school, throw a lot of application forms out, a lot of glossy brochures and everything else, draw them in. But if you haven't got the adults ... and the infrastructure to ensure you can take them all the way through, you promised them something you can't deliver which isn't fair.”*

DofE Development Officer

Good communication and administrative systems are particularly needed to identify and support young people identified as being vulnerable, or when young people need to move to another delivery organisation, e.g. when they are leaving school or moving house. A system of transferring information and flagging support needs to a new organisation is necessary to help young people continue and complete their DofE programme.

Good administrative systems are also required to track DofE participants through their programmes, and particularly to identify those who have dropped out. Currently there seems to be little information on participants who do not complete their DofE programmes. Better intelligence is needed on the reasons why young people discontinue in order to implement improvements, to increase retention and to maximise the benefits for young people.

## **12** Wider appreciation of DofE benefits:

Young people and delivery partners both stated that more publicity is required to increase awareness and appreciation of the breadth of opportunities that the DofE offers. It is apparent that the expedition remains the section of the DofE that people most associate the DofE with. Promotion of the wider benefits of participation in DofE programmes, such as social responsibility, community involvement and a sense of belonging, may increase understanding of the different elements of the programme.



*“Their lifestyles have been drink, drugs, stealing, fighting... the concept of doing something for somebody else is totally alien to some of them. That's the kind of barriers we have to break down here, but that's no different to kids on the out really, in the outside world.”*

(Prison Officer and DofE Leader)

The research has shown clearly that friendship and meeting new people are the most important aspects of involvement in the DofE for young people. However, these social attributes are not recognised in the aims of the programmes, as defined by the DofE's guiding principles. Incorporation of these unintended outcomes in the aims of the programme, and targeted publicity about these benefits could also increase the popularity to those not currently interested in involvement.

## **13** Increase opportunities for young people to reflect on their personal and community development:

It has been shown that some young people doing DofE programmes are unaware of how their participation in their programme impacts on themselves and others. This is particularly true for aspects of community involvement.

It is suggested that, as the participant progresses through their DofE programme or completes a section, there should be structured reflective time for the young person with their Leader. In addition to making the participants more aware of their personal development, and their potential positive impact on others, it enhances their ability to articulate their achievements when, for instance, filling in personal statements, writing CVs and at interview.

This could also have a positive impact on how young people view their future employment. Reflection on community aspects of DofE involvement could also help to encourage more activities which have a tangible impact on local communities and social interactions between young people from different backgrounds and cultures. Increased visibility in the community might also help to increase recruitment of young people and volunteers from under-represented groups to the DofE.

Although the delivery partners and other stakeholders recognise the community benefits of the DofE, these are not built into the aims of the programmes, as defined by the guiding principles.

## Next steps

The findings of this research have independently ratified the positive impact on young people that the DofE has through its programmes.

The study has provided sound evidence with which to influence thought leaders and policy makers to increase positive outcomes for young people through use of DofE programmes as well as to seek further support for the DofE. This will ensure that more young people benefit from participating in a DofE programme and achieving an Award.

This said, the recommendations and the findings in the study have also given clear guidelines to improve the DofE for young people in the future. The DofE now seeks to implement the recommendations of the research to ensure that the research is used to maximum effect in a strategic and sustainable way.



## Conclusion

To conclude, this briefing document has summarised the findings and recommendations of an 18 month study into the impact of the DofE on young people.

This research has evidenced that the DofE works. It improves young people's:

- leadership and communication skills
- resilience and independence
- teamwork and compassion.

The DofE improves the way young people see their future, their self-esteem, confidence and self-worth as well as their attitude to new experiences. Therefore, the Charity needs to make it available for more young people and to continue to engage hard to reach groups who will benefit most in terms of personal development. Increasing participation also means that the DofE has to consider how it supports and engages delivery partners and recruits volunteers.

The jewels of the DofE are its Leaders. They are inspiring, supportive and engaging. However, the DofE needs to recognise, support and train them more effectively. In particular, it should consider how young people can become Leaders once they have achieved a Gold Award.

Because the DofE has such a positive impact on young people, the research argues that the DofE must improve its communication. This is not only internally within the Charity, its network and with stakeholders but more crucially to promote the benefits of the DofE for young people externally with policy makers and key influencers to improve outcomes for more young people.

The challenge is to now build on the great successes of the past and inspire the staff and volunteers of the DofE to be the custodians of future change, knowing that young people and the DofE network can only gain from that change.



*"I'm applying for different courses and jobs. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award gets probably the best reaction. It has good status and currency amongst employers."*  
Male, Gold participant

*“I’m applying for different courses and jobs. The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award gets probably the best reaction. It has a good status and currency amongst employers.”*



## The Dof E Charity

Youth charity The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award supports over 275,000 people aged 14-24 every year, including 30,000 who are excluded and vulnerable. Our ethos is to enable every young person of every background to take part in our programmes and succeed, regardless of any barriers.

## Our mission

To inspire, guide and support young people in their self-development and recognise their achievements.

## Dof E programmes

Anyone aged between 14 and 24 can do a programme at one of the three progressive levels which, when successfully completed, lead to a Bronze, Silver or Gold Duke of Edinburgh’s Award. There are four sections at Bronze and Silver level and five at Gold:

- **Volunteering:** undertaking service to individuals or the community.
- **Physical:** improving in an area of sport, dance or fitness activities.
- **Skills:** developing practical and social skills and personal interests.
- **Expedition:** planning, training for and completion of an adventurous journey in the UK or abroad.
- At Gold level, participants must do an additional fifth **Residential** section, which involves staying and working away from home doing a shared activity.

## Achieving a Duke of Edinburgh’s Award

Young people will achieve a Duke of Edinburgh’s Award if they show persistence, commitment and personal development over a period of time. Every activity must be successfully completed and assessed. The result is the world’s leading achievement award for young people, recognised by employers and universities alike.

## Where is it run?

DofE programmes are delivered under licence by over 400 partners (Operating Authorities) who offer it in over 11,000 DofE groups run in centres such as youth clubs, voluntary organisations, schools, colleges, Young Offender Institutions and businesses, which are run and supported by over 50,000 adult volunteers.

## Principles of all Dof E programmes

- Non-competitive
- Achievable by all
- Voluntary
- Personal development
- Personalised
- Balanced
- Progressive
- Achievement focussed
- Demand commitment
- Enjoyable

We help instil a sense of adventure and have a lasting impact on young people’s behaviour, skills and life chances.



## Further information

For further details about delivery of DofE programmes contact:  
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