

Operational Guidelines

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Foundation

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Relevant policies

1. Fundamental and Operational Principles and Code of Practice
2. Key Governing Documents, Terms of Reference
3. Code of Conduct

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Introduction to the ethos and principles of the Award by The Founder: His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh KG KT

“Since the Award is intended to be a flexible and individually tailored programme of practical leisure-time activities, it is obviously difficult to interpret the provisions unless the purposes for which it was designed are properly understood.

The most difficult period in the lives of young people are the years of transition between adolescent and adult. This is precisely the period which the Award is intended to cover. It is for this reason that the chosen age range is between 14 and 24, and it is for this reason that only activities commenced after receiving or accessing a Record Book should count towards qualifying for an Award.

It is inaccurate to refer to it as a "youth" programme. The participants are not children, neither are they adults, consequently it is appropriate to describe the Award as being for "young people".

The four Section framework is based on two considerations:

Experience suggests that adults occupy their leisure time in one or more of four different ways. They undertake some voluntary service to the community, such as involvement in a voluntary or charitable organisation; they take part in some form of physical recreation, such as a team game, tennis or kayaking; they pursue a personal interest or hobby, such as playing a musical instrument or photography; and they take part in some sort of expedition, even if it is only going on holiday to a foreign country.

Young people cannot make a choice between such activities unless they have a chance to try them out. The purpose of making the four Sections of the Award compulsory is to ensure that each participant is given the chance to gain some experience of each of the groups of opportunities.

One of the most important and valuable "side effects" of the Award is the contact which it makes possible between young people and adults, who are neither their teachers nor their parents. These adults share their enthusiasm for their subject with the participants and this gives them an important influence upon those they are helping. The selection of leaders, trainers, instructors and assessors is therefore extremely important.

The purpose of the three levels of achievement - Bronze, Silver and Gold - is to provide a progressively more adult challenge. Experience suggests that many young people look upon activities undertaken at school as "childish" and not worthy of their more "grown-up" status. The standard of performance demanded at each level of the Award is, therefore, intended to be a real challenge and to give a genuine sense of achievement. "Short cuts", of any sort, detract from that sense of achievement and satisfaction.

With the very wide choice of subjects available in the four Sections, it means that each individual participant is able to pursue their own unique programme. This places a particular responsibility on leaders, trainers and assessors to relate the purposes of the Award to the individual, both in helping participants to make realistic choices, and in assessing their progress within the syllabus against their efforts and capabilities.

The very flexibility of the Award means that its success depends on the understanding of its general principles. It is not an automatic, bureaucratic system capable of being checked and the conditions enforced. It can only work if the Award Operators have complete trust in the leaders, trainers, instructors and assessors to operate the Award in such a way as to achieve the purposes for which it was designed."

Operational Guidelines 2018

1. Purpose

1.1. The International Agreements set out in Figure 3 of The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Association's Memorandum of Understanding set out the Principles to which all Operators of the Award agree. The Code of Practice stipulates that all should manage the Award within the Operational Guidelines.

1.2. These Operational Guidelines are intended primarily for National Award Operators (NAOs) to help them maintain the overall ethos and principles of the Award worldwide as outlined by the Founder when endeavouring to deliver the Award in their country in a manner best suited to the prevailing circumstances. They seek to provide clarification and interpretation of, in particular, the Fundamental and Operating Principles thereby setting the parameters within which to operate. They should be read in conjunction with other material produced by the International Award Foundation, such as the International Handbook for Award Leaders.

2. Registration and Completion

2.1. Enrolment or registration in the Award commences by mutual agreement between the participant and the locally licensed Award Operator.

2.2. After the participant has completed the activities for each Section, an adult mentor should recognise and acknowledge the young person's achievements by completing the appropriate part of the Record Book.

3. Individual Challenge

3.1. This is fundamental to the Award. As far as possible each individual participant's challenge should be unique and take into account their initial capabilities. When starting their Award at each level, participants should be encouraged to set their own personal goals in each Section in partnership with an adult mentor or mentors. Progress in each of the Sections needs to be kept under review throughout a young person's participation. The essential point is that there should be mutual agreement about the suitability and practicality of a participant's chosen Award programme. The participant's choice of activities should reflect the intention of the Award which is to provide a varied and balanced framework for a young person to develop their sense of purpose, passion and place in the world.

4. Non-Competitive

4.1. The challenges to each individual participant will be different and there should be no sense of one participant's Award being better than another's. In doing the Award, a participant competes only with them self. Within individual Sections of the Award, participants may of course undertake competitive activities as stimuli to their personal development and enjoyment.

5. Voluntary

5.1. Participation in the Award should be entirely voluntary and all participants should be given as much freedom as possible in their choice of options in each of the four Sections.

6. Age Range

6.1. As the Founder explains in his introduction, the Award is designed for the years of transition between adolescence and adulthood. The minimum age for enrolling at each level is 14 for Bronze, 15 for Silver and 16 for Gold. At Bronze level, discretion is allowed if a young person who is younger than 14 is part of a peer group where the majority are 14 or older and wishes to start their Bronze with their peers. Under such circumstances the participant must be older than 13.

6.2. Those young people who have completed their Bronze level under these circumstances may start their Silver level without a delay being imposed even though they are not yet 15. At Gold level no activities can be counted before a participant's 16th birthday to ensure it is more of an adult challenge.

6.3. However, all activities contributing to the Award should be completed before the participant's 25th birthday.

7. Minimum Participation Period

7.1. For direct entrants the minimum periods of participation for Bronze, Silver and Gold are 6, 12 and 18 months respectively. At least one Section (either Physical Recreation, Skills or Voluntary Service) must be undertaken for the minimum period of time indicated above. In which case, the minimum periods of participation for the other sections must be at least 3 months at Bronze, 6 months at Silver and 12 months at Gold.

7.2. Achievement of an Award at the previous level may be recognised. For instance, if an NAO wishes, it may allow a reduction in the minimum periods of participation in each of the Sections (Physical Recreation, Skills and Voluntary Service) of no more than 6 months. However, it is important that the individual participant's Award programme as a whole remains sufficiently varied and balanced to ensure that every individual can develop their sense of purpose, passion and place in the world.

7.3. Participants should complete all Sections of one level before progressing to another level. They should be encouraged to consider varying their choice of activity within one or all of the sections as they progress from one level to another. They should not be working on two or more levels at the same time.

7.4. These limits are designed to encourage participants to demonstrate commitment and persistence in achieving their Award, rather than trying to achieve it in a short intense burst of concentrated activities. The Award is a marathon, not a sprint, and participants' individual Award programmes should reflect this.

8. The Sections

8.1. At each level the mandatory Sections are Physical Recreation, Skills, Voluntary Service and Adventurous Journey. At Gold Level, there is the additional requirement of the Residential Project.

8.2. Participants should be encouraged to choose options in all Sections, which will help them to improve their abilities and generally make progress in their development. Activities chosen should be enjoyable, satisfying and enhance the confidence and competence of the participant. If a participant continues an activity at another level of Award, the challenge at the new Award level should increase accordingly. The activities undertaken should not be for personal financial gain.

8.3. Additionally, the Physical Recreation, Skills and Voluntary Service Sections require sustained and regular participation over the required period of time, rather than limited periods of continuous activity.

9. Voluntary Service

Aim: To learn how to give useful voluntary service to others

Ethos: This Section seeks to give participants a sense of compassion, to help them become better citizens as well as understanding that taking responsibility can strengthen and improve communities. Participants should undertake an activity by volunteering their time to others, whether that be people, the community, the environment or animals and should learn and benefit from undertaking their service

Action: To undertake practical, voluntary service with appropriate knowledge and understanding

10. Physical Recreation

Aim: To encourage participation in physical recreation and improvement of performance

Ethos: This Section seeks to encourage improvement in personal physical performance through training and perseverance in the chosen activity. Involvement in physical recreation should be an enjoyable experience, regardless of physical ability. Participation should lead to a sense of satisfaction and the adoption of healthier lifestyles

Action: To undertake active pursuits with a degree of physical exertion

11. Skills

Aim: To encourage the development of personal interests, creativity or practical skills

Ethos: This Section should stimulate new interests or develop and improve existing ones. The participant should be encouraged to interact with people who are knowledgeable in the activity, sharing enjoyment and developing social and life skills

Action: To undertake pursuits reflecting elements of creativity and/or practical skills

12. Adventurous Journey

Aim: To encourage a spirit of adventure and discovery whilst planning and undertaking a journey in a group

Ethos: This Section seeks to provide participants with a challenging and memorable achievement. The journey should be undertaken in a small group in an unfamiliar environment, requiring determination and perseverance, thus providing a sense of independence, self-sufficiency and discovery.

Action: To plan, prepare, undertake and complete the journey as part of a team

13. Gold Residential Project

Aim: To broaden experience through living and working with others in a residential setting

Ethos: This gives participants a shared, purposeful experience that broadens their outlook and horizons

Action: To live away from home with people who are or where the majority are not the usual companions of the participant, working together in a worthwhile activity that brings benefits to others and/or to the participants

14. Detailed Conditions

14.1. The detailed conditions for each Award are laid down in the International Handbook for Award Leaders or, where available, the Regional or National Award Handbook.