

HOW HUMAN SKILLS ARE BUILT: INSIGHTS FROM NATIONAL OPERATORS

METHODOLOGY

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award operates across more than 130 countries, delivered through schools, youth organisations, and community partners. In April 2026, the Foundation convened two 75-minute online consultation sessions with senior practitioners, including National Directors from across the Award's global network, to examine how the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is influencing the skill development of young people participating in the Award. Discussions generated practitioner-led qualitative insights that inform the findings presented in this report.

30
COUNTRIES

42
PRACTITIONERS

5
CONTINENTS

The story that emerged from practitioners across 30 countries and 5 continents is not about skills in the abstract. It is about a specific internal shift that the Award reliably produces, and that no algorithm can replicate: a shift from “I cannot do this” to “I can”. In an age where Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping what young people need to know, self-belief may be the most consequential capability we can help them build.

THE CONSULTATIONS GATHERED THE FOLLOWING INPUT:

OBSERVED CHANGES What young people are experiencing	HOW HUMAN SKILLS DEVELOP The mechanisms that drive personal growth	
<p>Technology dependence Outsourcing basic tasks and thinking to devices; offline confidence and tolerance eroding</p> <p>AI replacing reflection Using AI to complete reflections, bypassing genuine self-discovery</p> <p>Rising isolation Loneliness, social anxiety, and mental health pressures, compounded by today's 'polycrisis'</p>	<p>Experiential learning Real-world doing – with others, outside the classroom, across every section of the Award</p> <p>Agency Transformation through young people setting their own goals, making decisions, and owning their progress</p> <p>Trusted relationships Trusted adults guide and inspire the journey, building confidence and self-belief</p>	<p>Authentic reflection Moving from 'what I did' to 'how I felt and what I learned': metacognition in practice</p> <p>Own goal setting & perseverance Set a goal → break it down → persevere → see the result → believe in yourself</p> <p>Belonging & community Discovering what you are good at and finding a place to belong builds trust in yourself and others</p>

FROM THE FIELD :

"Volunteering is a space for signification transformation, even more so now in this world of social media and individualised attention."

Emma Brown – New Zealand

"There are young people impacted by the Award who are now actively championing it so thousands more can take part."

Twaambo Chikoye - Zambia

"We frame the Award as, 'how is this connected to interest in my future?' Finding your purpose makes your service more intentional."

Laura Briscoe - Canada