Under pressure

A report on employability and The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award

August 2014
Young people today are growing up in a highly competitive environment, which is exemplified by the increasingly demanding requirements of employers.

It’s rare that a candidate is chosen just on the basis of their academic results, employers are looking for more, to understand what they’re like as people; do they work well as a team, show initiative, commit to a project? With more emphasis placed on work-ready attributes as part of the recruitment process, young people are experiencing a new pressure; how can they develop and demonstrate these skills to get them through the application stage and then articulate them at interview?

The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award (DofE) research explored young people’s views on their future beyond education and found the consensus amongst respondents was that good grades are not enough when entering the world of work, reflecting the shift we’ve seen with employers. The vast majority feel under pressure to prove that they will be an ‘all-rounder’ in the workplace. The transition from education to employment is difficult enough but with this added pressure, young people need to feel supported beyond their formal education to help prepare them for that first step onto the career ladder.

At the DofE, we work with hundreds of thousands of young people each year, encouraging the development of key life and employability skills. The breadth of the programme exposes young people to new environments, people and challenges; instilling transferrable skills such as self-management, team working, commitment, problem solving, communication and perseverance that businesses are crying out for.

Through doing their DofE, young people can answer this demand. Having a DofE Award is recognition of the non-academic skills a young person’s gained, allowing them to then demonstrate the value of these skills when applied to the work environment. Our research shows us that 83% of young people doing their DofE and expecting exam results this summer believe that achieving their Award will help them get a job.

Each year, we continue to grow the availability of the programme so that more individuals can build their confidence, realise their potential and demonstrate their employability. Last year was a record year, with 108,288 young people achieving their Bronze, Silver or Gold Awards and 240,796 starting an Award, both up by 10% on the previous year.

Our research demonstrates the significance placed on achieving a DofE Award by participants and businesses alike. We truly believe that through the Charity’s continued growth, we can positively shape the futures of even more young people.

Peter Westgarth, CEO,
The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award
Available to any young person aged between 14 and 24, the DofE encourages the development of key life and employability skills, such as confidence, commitment and team working, through participation at three progressive levels which, when successfully completed, lead to a Bronze, Silver or Gold Duke of Edinburgh’s Award. There are four sections of the programme 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 shared activity.

Young DofE participants design their own programme and select activities that are tailored to suit their personal circumstances, choices and local provision.

Every activity must be successfully completed and assessed and a young person will achieve their Duke of Edinburgh’s Award if they show persistence, commitment and personal development over the given period of time.

The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award (DofE) Charity was founded in 1956 by its Patron HRH The Duke of Edinburgh and is now widely acknowledged as the world’s leading achievement award for young people.

**DofE fast facts (2013-14 UK figures)**

- Over **300,000** young people are currently taking part in DofE programmes in the UK, at **12,735** DofE centres, supported by **902** partner organisations and around **50,000** adult volunteers from all walks of life.
- Last year, **240,796** young people started a DofE programme.
- **108,288** achieved a Bronze, Silver or Gold Duke of Edinburgh’s Award.
- In total, over **5.3 million** people have participated in DofE programmes in the UK and achieved over **2.3 million** Awards since 1956.
As exam results loom, 93% of young people are worried good grades won’t be enough to secure a job.

As many young people await exam results this month, a new report from The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award (DofE) highlights that achieving their grades is not their only worry, with many reported to feel under pressure and concerned about having the right skills to secure a job after education.

The DofE research reveals an overwhelming 93% of the DofE participants surveyed, who are expecting exam results this summer, reported feeling under pressure to demonstrate not just their academic achievements to potential employers, but also that they will be an ‘all-rounder’ in the workplace. They believe that as well as academic performance, employers now actively look for evidence of soft skills, such as commitment, team working and self-management, and are feeling under pressure to be able to demonstrate these skills as a result.

With the job market for entry level positions remaining highly competitive, young people are looking for ways to differentiate themselves from other candidates. 83% believed that completing their Duke of Edinburgh’s Award would make it easier for them to get a job. The majority of DofE participants surveyed felt that they would be able to describe to an employer how the skills they’ve gained will make them a great employee. Notably, when asked to apply their DofE experience to an interview setting, respondents said they had gained skills in self-management, problem solving, team working, communication, as well as having developed a positive approach to work.

Their view is echoed by Bronze and Gold Award holder, Tanglwst Melville, who believes her DofE Awards played a significant role in securing her job;

“I’m currently doing a degree in Fashion and, to date, I’ve worked for two big outdoor retailers. In my job interviews, they asked about my experience of doing the Award and what challenges I had to overcome. I was also asked what I thought teamwork was and where I thought my role was in a team. I was able to relate my DofE experience to these questions, giving me a strong basis for my answers. In addition to this, the wealth of knowledge I had gained through the Expedition section about the equipment helped me stand out from other applicants. I will be working again this summer and have a job secured for me when I go back to university in September.”

To achieve a Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, young people volunteer in their communities, learn a skill, get fit and plan and undertake an expedition, fulfilling over six to 18 months of challenging activity. Widely acknowledged as the world’s leading achievement award for young people, the benefits of the DofE continue to be felt by more and more young people each year, with new starters up by 10% in the last year and the number of Awards achieved totalling 108,288 last year, which is an increase of 9% on the previous year.

Peter Westgarth, Chief Executive of The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, concluded, “I am delighted that the value of a DofE Award is recognised by employers and that young Award holders understand the power of their DofE Award in conveying the hard work they have put in. DofE Award achievers are very special people. They have demonstrated exceptional commitment to their communities and to their own development. I’m not surprised employers want them on their team. The DofE Charity is growing to meet the unprecedented demand from young people who want to be able to show that they too can demonstrate that they are worthy of a DofE Award and the respect it brings.”

To find out more about the DofE and how it enables young people to succeed, please visit www.DofE.org/impact.
83% of DofE participants think that doing their DofE will help them get a job.

58% are confident they will get the grades they need...
...but nearly half are still worried about finding work.

93% feel under pressure to demonstrate they can be an ‘all-rounder’ in the workplace.

Skills participants said they gained through their DofE...

- Team working: 91%
- Communication: 75%
- Problem solving: 59%
- Self-management: 55%
- Positive approach to work: 55%

The Volunteering section came out top in helping participants prepare for the working world.

Participating in DofE activities has given nearly ¼ some ideas for their future career.

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Case studies

“I truly believe that my DofE Awards helped me gain a place at college and secure my job, where I prepare food in a local restaurant. Both my tutor and boss were impressed when they saw the DofE on my applications, with my boss only asking me about my Awards during my interview. The DofE is well respected and talking about your experience makes you more memorable to your interviewer.”

Emmaline O’Toole (18), Bronze, Silver and Gold Award holder

“I am currently awaiting my A level results and have applied for several jobs, including one with the Army. Participating in my DofE programme will really help me in whichever career I choose as it has taught me about my own strengths and weaknesses, how to be self-motivated and how to work with different people. The DofE has helped me to demonstrate to employers what I am capable of and has certainly made a big impact on my CV. The DofE has been such a big part of my teenage life; I don’t know what I would have done with myself or who I would have become without it.”

Kirsty Wright (18), Gold participant

“My aim is to attend university in two years’ time and hopefully I will have achieved my Gold Award by then too, which will boost my application. I think taking part in the DofE shows a different side to my academic life – proving I am an ‘all-rounder’.”

Eloise Doherty (16), Bronze and Silver Award holder

“The DofE appealed to me because I was eager to develop additional skills through independent learning. Taking part in my Bronze Award, I have grown in confidence and learnt to work as part of a team. While it has been tough at times, it has been a fantastic experience that has allowed me to take part in new activities that I may not have had the chance to do otherwise.”

Anupreet Singh (15), Bronze participant

“The DofE is recognised by many as an extremely hard programme to complete and a real achievement by those that do. To be able to say that you have completed a DofE Award will certainly give you an edge when applying for jobs or university. The skills you learn can open up new opportunities and make greater achievements possible.”

Nathan Burns (18) Gold participant
Leading energy and home services provider, **British Gas**, became a DofE Gold partner in 2006. Since 2007, British Gas has enabled its apprentices to participate in their Gold DofE programmes and, as a result, the business has seen how ‘soft skills’ directly benefit its young employees and customers.

**Susan Hooper**, Managing Director, British Gas Residential Services said: “We’re passionate about employing young people and providing the extra skills they need to help with the transition from the classroom to work. The DofE works as part of our training Academies, rated excellent by Ofsted, to ensure our apprentices offer the best service possible to customers. It teaches them problem-solving and team-working skills, whilst boosting their confidence as they learn a new career in engineering”.

**Amey**, one of the UK’s leading public and regulated services providers, has worked closely with the DofE for 12 years and across the company offers its apprentices the opportunity to achieve their Gold Award. Amey recently developed an innovative programme with the Charity that will identify underserved communities across the UK and grow local DofE provision to help improve the life chances and employability of young people.

**Mel Ewell**, Chief Executive Amey, said “Amey is proud to be working with The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award to help young people fulfil not only their professional potential but also their personal potential. As an organisation, Amey believes so strongly in the DofE that the company guarantees an interview to anyone with a Gold Award on their CV who meets 70% of the skills needed for the role.”

Speaking about how a DofE Award is recognised in business, **Peter Cheese**, Chief Executive of the **CIPD**, the professional body for HR and people development, said:

“The DofE Award is recognised by many employers, who understand the huge amount of work that individuals put in to achieving it.

“Employers tell us that there are certain skills they look for when recruiting, such as team working and resilience, both of which individuals demonstrate by achieving a DofE Award. It can help young candidates stand out to potential employers, particularly when applying for entry level positions”.

**Business entrepreneur, Deborah Meaden**, recently presented Gold Awards to Gold Award achievers at St James’s Palace.

Speaking about the value of a DofE Award, Deborah said, “I am a big fan of the DofE. As Award holders, young people are our hope for the future - they’ve shown that they’re committed, capable and confident and potential employers will know instantly what they’re made of”.

Under pressure – Employability Report
Methodology
In April 2014, we issued an online survey to DofE participants through an e-newsletter asking for voluntary responses from those awaiting exam results in the summer of 2014. Participants were asked to give their views and expectations anonymously of their future and career beyond education. There were 21 questions in total. Of the 961 responses, 816 indicated they were awaiting exam results this summer and their responses were chosen for analysis.

Acknowledgements
We would like to thank all of the DofE participants that completed the survey, as well as the participants that feature as case studies in this report.

Thank you to the CIPD and Deborah Meaden, as well as Amey and British Gas who have been dedicated supporters of The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award for a number of years, recognising the achievements of our Award holders and the life-changing benefits that the DofE has for young people.

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