



YOUTH WITHOUT LIMITS

The impact of the DofE on young
people with additional needs

June 2021



Contents

4	Foreword
6	Why and how young people with additional needs do their DofE
10	Key findings
11	Confidence and independence
12	Positive attitude and willingness to give new things a go
12	Perseverance and resilience
15	Teamwork and communication
15	Being physically active
16	Longer term impact
17	Wider impact of the DofE
19	At a glance
20	Find out more



FOREWORD



Ruth Marvel

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, DofE

I'm extremely proud that the DofE is open to young people of all backgrounds, cultures and abilities. Across the UK, schools and other organisations are doing amazing work to enable young people with additional needs* to take part in our Award programme. Kindly supported by MariaMarina Foundation, the DofE is already available for young people with additional needs in more than 600 settings and we aim to expand this further in 2021.

We knew anecdotally that the DofE has a positive impact on young people with additional needs but we wanted to have a better understanding of their experiences. So, we commissioned Chrysalis Research to review our existing evidence, conduct a quantitative survey (377 current and former

students, 321 education professionals and 37 parents and carers) and also collect qualitative data (21 teachers and leaders, 42 current students, 24 former students and 18 parents or carers).

The research took place in Autumn term 2019 and Spring term 2020. Unfortunately, the analysis of the data was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic but we are delighted to now be able to publish it.

As you'll see, the DofE clearly helps young people with additional needs to thrive – our respondents note how they have grown in confidence and become more independent, for example. The Award also has a wider positive impact, on school staff, on the families of DofE participants and on the local community. As one DofE Leader says, "Our students have such a sense of achievement once they have completed the award. It is lovely to be part of it."**

I'd like to thank our network and all the teachers, parents, carers and students for taking part in our surveys. My thanks too to MariaMarina Foundation for providing funding for this important piece of research. You can find the full report here: dofe.org/additional-needs-impact-report.

It's our ambition to make the DofE even more accessible and relevant, giving more than one million young people over the next five years the chance to participate. We'd love to hear from you if your school or organisation would like to find out more about running the DofE for students with additional needs. It really can be life-changing.

* We use the term young people with 'additional needs' throughout this summary as we recognise that various terms are used across the UK, namely Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in England and Northern Ireland, Additional Support for Learning (ASL) in Scotland and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) in Wales.

** All the quotes from teachers, parents and students in this summary are verbatim.

Why and how young people with

ADDITIONAL NEEDS

do their DofE



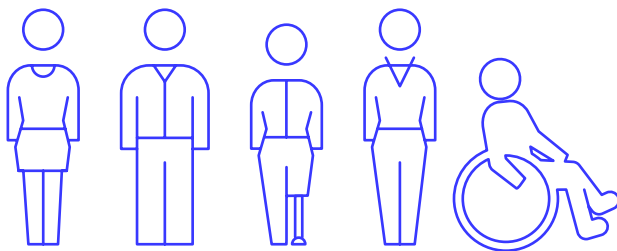
“

I wanted to challenge myself. I wanted to do something that'll make me go, 'Yeah, this is going to be hard'."

DofE participant

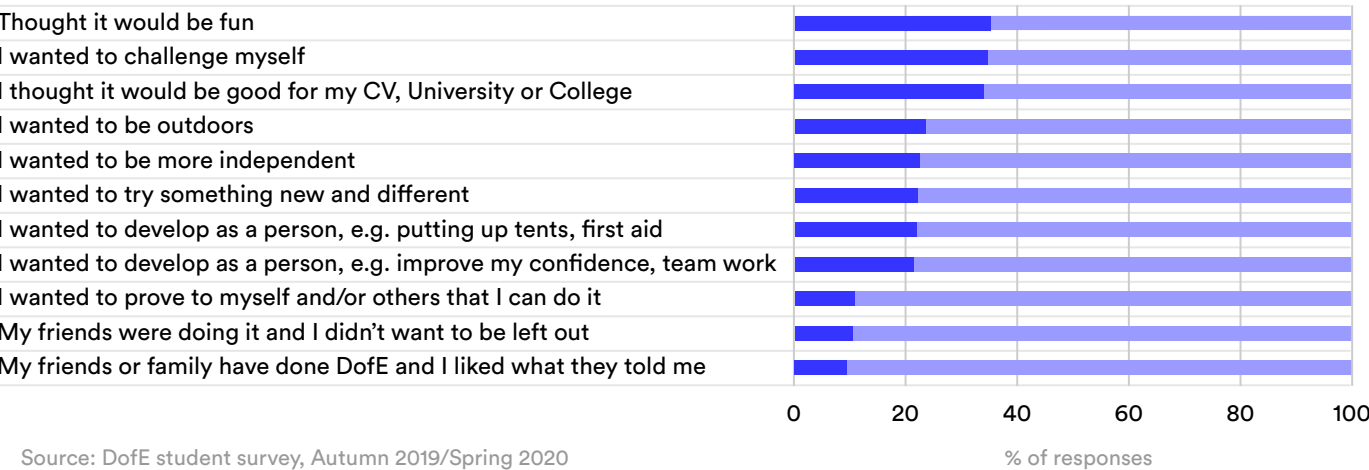
The DofE Award is achievable by any 14 to 24-year-old who chooses to take part, regardless of their ability, gender, background or location. This includes young people with language, communication, social or emotional difficulties, Autism, visual, hearing or physical impairments, Down's Syndrome and Cerebral Palsy.

Our research shows that students with additional needs get involved in the DofE for a broad range of reasons – the most common are that it will be fun, challenging and something that would be recognised by employers and other organisations (such as colleges). As one DofE participant puts it, "I wanted to challenge myself. I wanted to do something that'll make me go, 'Yeah, this is going to be hard'."



The DofE Award is achievable by **any 14 to 24-year-old** who chooses to take part, regardless of their ability, gender, background or location.

Why do students with additional needs get involved in the DofE?



Source: DofE student survey, Autumn 2019/Spring 2020

We work closely with a broad range of organisations who support young people with additional needs, including special schools and mainstream schools. With our support and the training we provide, they are able to make the DofE programme relevant and valuable to each student.

Our research shows that there are four fundamental elements that enable young people with additional needs to participate in the DofE.

1

The DofE programme design and features

The programme is flexible, inclusive and can be adapted to ensure any young person, no matter their need, is able to take part.

2

DofE providing training and support

This includes providing information about the guiding principles of the DofE, how to use the eDofE portal and how to adapt the programme, as well as teaching expedition skills.

3

Schools and other organisations working to deliver the DofE

Our research shows that, to facilitate the delivery of the expedition, the majority of schools provide kit and equipment, as well as additional staffing. Some use external providers to run their expedition.

4

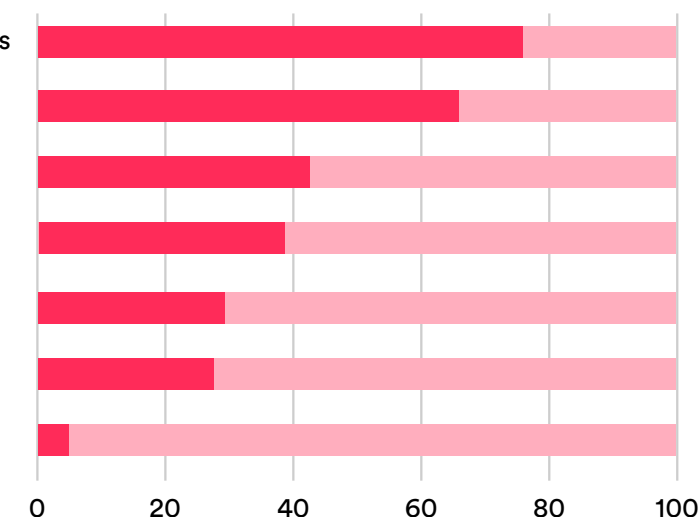
Additional Funding

With the support from a number of funders, we can provide additional funding to make the DofE accessible to young people with additional needs.

Why do students with additional needs get involved in the DofE?

The vast majority of students with additional needs who took part in our survey described their DofE journeys as highly positive experiences – half (50%) of respondents said doing their DofE was “challenging” and 48% called it “enjoyable”. Almost nine in ten (89%) said they would recommend the DofE to other young people.

Help our students develop important personal life skills
Help students become more independent
Help our students achieve a recognised award
Offer our students a challenge
Offer our students same experiences as available to their peers in mainstream
Help our students develop employability skills
Others



Source: DofE staff survey, Autumn 2019/Spring 2020

% of responses

How do students with additional needs describe their DofE experience?

EXCITING
CHALLENGING
ENJOYABLE
FUN
TOO HARD
FRUSTRATING
TIRING
REWARDING

Source: DofE student survey, Autumn 2019/Spring 2020



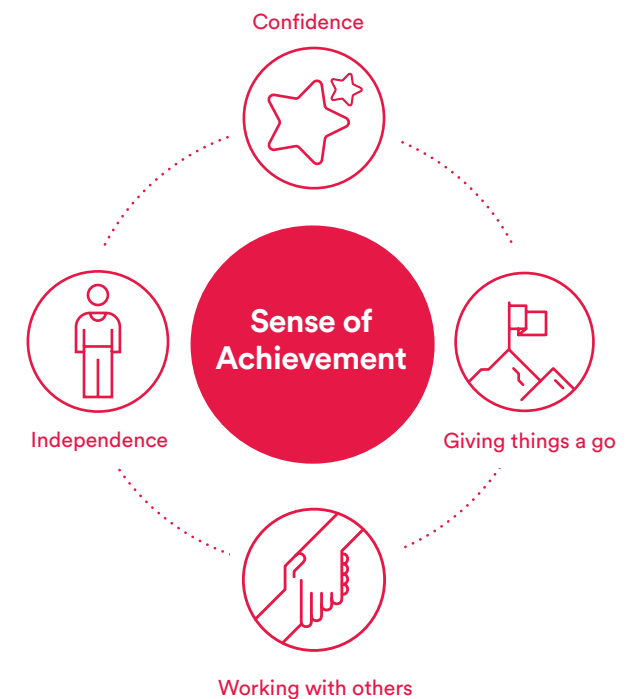
KEY FINDINGS



Confidence & Independence

The DofE helps young people with additional needs to boost their confidence and self-esteem, especially when they progress from Bronze to Silver and when they take part in their expedition. Almost three quarters (74%) of school staff have seen big improvements in their students' confidence as a result of the DofE.

Young people whose experiences of the outside world are often limited to their taxi journeys between home and school also became more independent thanks to the DofE. Many spoke with great pride about the practical skills they developed during their expedition and more than two thirds (69%) of school staff noted that their students' independence had improved a lot as they progressed through the Award levels.



74%

Almost three quarters (74%) of school staff have seen big improvements in their students' confidence.

Everyone who took part in our research noted multiple positive outcomes for young people with additional needs as a result of doing their DofE. Indeed, the scale of participants' progress and development was remarkably high, with school staff, parents and students seeing the greatest impact in the following areas:

"It got me out the house. It made me feel valued and that life was worth living. It gave me the confidence to pursue my dream of becoming a nurse."

DofE participant

"[Taking part in the DofE has] helped some of our most physically disabled students realise that they can push themselves and take part in activities that they thought was out of their reach. The confidence it has given some of them really shows."

DofE Manager

"It made us a lot better at working independently, because obviously, there were no teachers or adults with us. So, we had to make the decisions by ourselves, and figure out how to sort things."

DofE participant

"He became more independent and confident in his own ability. Even when it comes to making his own dinner... He's now more confident and he's a bit more outspoken... So, he'll give you his opinion more now."

DofE parent



Positive attitude and willingness to give new things a go

Changes to young people's outlook and attitude came through very strongly in the research. In fact, 'giving new things a go' was the top outcome of doing the DofE according to both school staff (77%) and students (46%).

This is particularly important as young people with additional needs often grow up in a highly protected environment with little opportunity to step out of their comfort zone and learn how to deal with unpredictable situations.

Positivity was an important outcome for many of the parents who took part in our survey, with more than four in five mentioning it. Furthermore, many respondents noted that having a more positive attitude and a greater willingness to give things a go has a knock-on effect on young people's confidence, resilience and perseverance.



Perseverance and resilience

Our research shows that the DofE helps students with additional needs to manage difficulties and frustrations when things get tough. More than half (59%) of school staff said they have seen the positive impact of the DofE on perseverance and resilience and many respondents noted that this increases as students progress from Bronze to Silver to Gold.

Importantly, those involved in the delivery of the DofE help young people with additional needs to reflect on their DofE experiences and achievements so they can apply them to other areas of their lives.



“

It's been amazing watching my son grow as a person, and grow in confidence. It's made his outlook on life more positive and he copes with his Tourette's better day-to-day."

DofE parent

"One of my students was going to give up when doing his Bronze Award, but he carried on and is now doing his Gold. His ability to believe in his own abilities has improved greatly and he is more confident at just giving things a go."

DofE Manager

"[We teach them to] capture their success and get them to hold on to it and use it as a jump off point when they find something challenging in the future... It's incremental but the change is there, and it comes from them doing their DofE."

DofE Leaders

"Don't give up when things don't go my way, I have become more resilient and learnt to be more responsible and mature."

DofE participant

“

I got outside more and took part in a physical activity.”

DofE participant



Teamwork and communication

80% of students with additional needs said that doing the DofE has improved their ability to work with others either ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’. One of the reasons the DofE programme has such a positive impact on teamwork is that young people are faced with real-life challenges, such as the group expedition, rather than artificial scenarios.

Working in a team also helps to improve students’ communication skills. Two thirds (66%) of young people who took part in our survey said that the way they communicate with others has improved either ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’ as a result of doing their DofE.

There was also evidence that DofE team projects help young people to develop empathy and become more caring and tolerant towards others. In mainstream schools, where students with additional needs and their peers complete their DofE together, teamwork also encourages inclusion.



Being physically active

The DofE aims to improve young people’s engagement with physical activity. 95% of teachers in our survey noticed a positive impact on their students’ physical fitness and, during our interviews, many young people spoke about the changes they have made in this area of their lives.

“Doing my DofE has made me become more physically active as I have been doing a lot more walking than I usually would.”

DofE participant

“It was amazing to see the students all take on roles within the group. The dynamics developed over the year and they found their natural roles as leaders, motivators etc.”

Senior school leader

“She’s been able to integrate more. I suppose with Asperger’s this is always going to be a challenge but certainly you could see a definite improvement in confidence and just being able to communicate better and understand more.”

DofE parent

LONGER TERM IMPACT

As well as the short term impact of the DofE on students with additional needs, we have identified three key themes related to its longer term impact.



Development and achievement while still at school

Senior school leaders in particular noted that DofE participants tend to have a more mature attitude to their learning and that their improved confidence and other soft skills have a positive effect on their engagement, attendance and achievement at school.

Transition into the next phase of education or employment

The DofE gives students with additional needs the opportunity to get out of the often sheltered environments of home and school and gain new experiences and life skills. It is a highly-regarded Award that they can talk about with passion and that helps them to stand out from other candidates.

Identity and quality of life in adulthood

Doing the DofE enriches the future lives of students with additional needs in many ways, from providing crucial skills, such as cooking, to encouraging an appreciation of the natural world. Many young people also form friendships during their DofE journey and gain a passion for volunteering – this continues for many years and helps them to feel valued.

WIDER + IMPACT OF THE D^{OF}E

As well as having a significant impact on young people with additional needs, our research shows that the DofE brings benefits to their schools, their families and even entire communities. 88% of teachers and leaders noted that delivering the DofE has a broad impact in their settings.

School staff and volunteers who deliver the DofE reported the effects on their personal and professional development, including gaining a more positive mindset, improving their organisational skills and learning how to better understand their students' abilities.

Furthermore, being involved in the DofE led to greater job satisfaction, a sense of self-worth and higher morale for many respondents to our staff survey. It also helps to grow trusted relationships that teachers have with their students, colleagues, students' parents and the wider community.

School staff noted that having such a positive impact on their students' lives through the DofE programme boosted their own mental wellbeing. In addition, many said that their physical fitness had improved as a result of DofE activities and the expedition.

“[DofE] encouraged me to continue to develop my own skills knowledge and experience, to continue to persevere and try new things outside of my comfort zone.”

DofE Leader

“...DofE has changed me...You leave the group with a smile knowing you have tried in some way to support that young person in their life's journey.”

DofE volunteer

“My own mental wellbeing has improved as a result of weekly DOE. I see students who struggle in a curricular setting, shine.”

DofE Leader



“

It has raised expectations, among students, staff and the local community, of what our students are capable of.”

DofE teacher

“When you’re starting the journey of that special needs child, as a parent, it can be very daunting... So, whenever somebody, who isn’t a family and has nothing to do with your child, actually has the passion, puts their energy into it, into supporting your child to succeed, then you know that it’s not all that doom and gloom.”

DofE teacher

“My daughter loved the entire experience and was very proud to have achieved something that her siblings have completed as well. As she has special needs there are not many opportunities for her to feel that she is the same as they are.”

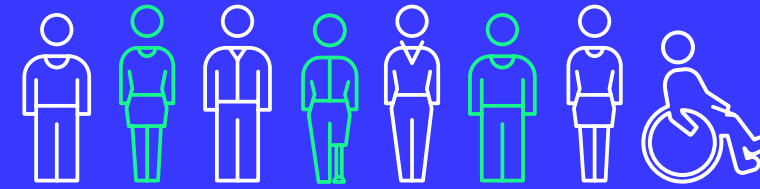
DofE parent

In many cases, particularly where the DofE is delivered at scale to students with additional needs, it can have a positive effect on the whole school, including in the development of the school curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Staff in mainstream schools credited the DofE with helping them to create more inclusive environments.

Many parents and carers who took part in our research told us that seeing their child doing their DofE filled them with joy, pride and hope for their future. The Award can have a positive influence on family dynamics (especially if siblings are in mainstream education) and prompt parents to be less protective.

We also received comments from families about how grateful they are that school staff and volunteers care so deeply about their children and invest so much time and energy in the DofE.

AT A GLANCE



The DofE is open to **any young person** aged 14 to 24, regardless of their ability, gender, background or location



Participants complete four sections

Volunteering, Physical, Skills and Expedition, plus Residential at Gold.

“

I know more about what I am capable of achieving”

DofE participant

“[When doing their DofE, our students know that they] are working towards something that’s really important’.” DofE Leader

“DofE was the highlight of secondary school [for our son].” DofE parent

600+

settings currently deliver the DofE to students with additional needs – training and support is provided by the charity.



The **top three reasons** why students with additional needs get involved with the DofE are for fun, to challenge themselves and to boost their CV or college/university application.



More than **two thirds** of school staff have seen big improvements in their students’ confidence and independence as a result of the DofE.

80% of young people with additional needs said that doing the DofE has **improved their teamwork skills**.

89% of young people who took part in our survey **would recommend the DofE** to others.

88% of teachers and Leaders noted that delivering the **DofE has a broad impact** (e.g. on professional development and wellbeing).

95% of school staff rated the DofE training as **“good” or “very good”**.

FIND OUT MORE

Our full report into the impact of the DofE on young people with additional needs is available here: dofe.org/additional-needs-impact-report. It contains more detailed information, including DofE participant case studies and insights into how schools have raised funds to support the delivery of the DofE.

If you're interested in running the DofE in your school or organisation, please get in touch with your local office (find them at dofe.org/offices). We'd be happy to discuss how the DofE programme works and how it could help to boost your students' confidence, resilience, teamwork and other skills as well as have a wider impact on your community.



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