



**YOUTH
WITHOUT
LIMITS**

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award

Evaluation Report

**Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)
Access Grant Funding**

August 2026

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Overview

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) is a youth development programme and is open to any young person aged 14-24. Participants build their own programmes, choosing physical and skills activities and a cause to volunteer for, followed by an expedition. The DofE is structured into three levels of Awards which increase in challenge and duration: Bronze, Silver and Gold.¹ The DofE aims to help young people build lifelong belief in themselves, supporting them to take on their own challenges, follow their passions and discover talents they never knew they had. The DofE is run right across the UK, in schools, colleges, hospitals, prisons and young offender institutions, as well as youth and sports clubs, and more.

In the financial year (FY) of 2025-26, £1.5 million of grant funding was provided by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to the DofE, with the overarching ambition to increase access to the DofE in England. This was specifically to target SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) schools, Alternative Provisions (APs) and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) (with 75% of the funding). These three types of settings are collectively referred to as Additional Needs and Alternative Provision (ANAP) throughout this report. The grant also aimed to fund DofE in mainstream schools in deprived areas (Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 1-5) (with 25% of the funding). All funded settings were new to delivering the DofE.

This project was a continuation of the previous grant awarded to the DofE between FY22/23 and FY24/25 and staff have built on learning from previous years. The grant also funded the early work of DofE's new DofE Sports Project which aims to increase access to inclusive, high-quality sports-based enrichment pathways for young people undertaking their DofE, by developing a new way of working with National Governing Bodies (NGBs) in the sports and physical activity sector.

1.2 Methodology

This process evaluation aimed to gather learning in three key areas of interest:

1. Implementation and reach;
2. Feedback and improvement;
3. Partnership and collaboration.

By taking a mixed-methods approach, it has combined quantitative and qualitative data, including project data, information from the final reports from schools, a key-informant interview, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with DofE Leaders, case studies from funded settings and young people's stories.

1.3 Key findings

1.3.1 Implementation and reach

Reaching new settings

- The data highlights that the grant funding was used to successfully target, reach and licence the intended settings. As planned, 75% of these organisations were ANAP settings, and the remaining 25% was allocated to mainstream schools in areas of high deprivation (IMD 1-5).
- Most new settings were in the early stages of delivery when reporting back to DofE in the final reports. The interview and FGD were therefore held in May 2026 to gather recent feedback.

¹ Each level takes a minimum of 6 to 18 months to complete, requires a progressive challenge and has minimum age requirements ([DofE basics](#)). A DofE Award comprises of four or five sections: Volunteering, Physical, Skills, Expedition and Residential (Gold only).

Increasing access to the DofE Award programme

- The DofE's target was 3,890 Award starts in the grant period, and it achieved 3,269 Award starts in this time in the new settings (reaching 84% of its target).² The learning collected from grants and onboarding staff, as well as from settings, suggests this was very likely due to having a short period in which to enrol young people and the smaller class sizes within ANAP settings.
- These Award starts were across ANAP (51.9%) and mainstream secondary schools in IMD 1-5 areas (48.1%). On average, mainstream settings enrolled more than double the number of participants compared to ANAP settings (data from 3,195 funded places).
- Most Award starts were Bronze (97%), followed by Silver (2%) and Gold (1%) (Sample N=3,269).
- Data from across the interview, FGD and final reports strongly suggests the funding was crucial in enabling these new settings to begin delivering DofE to young people.

Demographics of participants

- Data on the demographic breakdown of participants suggests the grant was successful in reaching a demographically diverse group of young people, across gender, ethnicity and additional needs.
- Data also indicates the grant was successful in targeting DofE in the most deprived areas. 37.5% of the participants resided in IMD 1-3 areas when starting their Award in the newly funded settings.³

Additional reach - Investing in DofE Leaders

- Evidence indicates that the funding has indirectly contributed positively to growing a network of adult leaders who can continue to deliver the DofE across the new settings.

Targeting and onboarding

- Data from the final reports and FGD indicated that DofE leaders were satisfied with their onboarding experience and felt ready and supported to begin delivering DofE.

Challenges and barriers

- Evidence suggests that the funding supported the new settings in overcoming the challenges and barriers previously facing them, opening a new avenue to allow them to set up DofE within their setting and start delivering the Award.

Removing financial barriers for Award places and expedition kit

- DofE leaders emphasised the importance of the removal of financial barriers to offer funded Participation Places and expedition equipment. The funding opened the ability to offer the DofE Awards as an opportunity.

Widening access to those facing financial barriers

- The feedback from across the evaluation also highlighted that by removing the financial barriers by funding Participation Places, DofE Leaders were also able to offer the Award to a diverse group of young people, particularly those who faced financial barriers. DofE Leaders reported that the funding was crucial in enabling them to offer the opportunity to young people living in households facing financial difficulties.

² Sample N=3,269. When a participant is enrolled onto DofE and starts their Award, for data collection and recording purposes this is defined as an 'Award start'.

³ This compares to 14.9% of general DofE participants (all other Award starts in the same period 2025-26 (Sample N=305,966), i.e. at organisations that were not funded through this project).

Providing a broader enrichment offer

- DofE Leaders in the newly funded settings reported being able to set up a much broader range of activities for young people, suggesting that the funding has allowed a broader and more interesting offer of enrichment throughout both the ANAP and mainstream schools.

Engaging young people

- Generally, DofE Leaders reported positive engagement and willingness from young people to take part in DofE. The FGD drew attention to two effective ways to support young people's engagement in the Award programme:
 1. Involving young people in the decision making, equipment and activity choices;
 2. Embedding the programme into the school day.

Resourcing

- Some of the new settings secured additional funding to strengthen their staffing capacity and capability to deliver the Award. By accessing resources beyond the original DCMS grant, they were able to invest in staff training, particularly to increase confidence in delivering expeditions. This has reportedly created a more supportive and nurturing Award experience for young people, as it is often delivered by staff they already know and trust. It has also helped schools build the internal capacity needed to continue delivering DofE beyond the grant funding period.

Timeframe of grant period

- DofE Leaders shared that their primary challenge had been setting up and delivering DofE within the grant period (FY 2025/26). It takes at least 6 months to start and complete a Bronze Award, between 6 months and a year to complete Silver and between 12-18 months for Gold.

Pursuing the DofE Sports Project

- As DofE staff began to pursue the Sports Project, a licensing-based approach with NGBs was initially explored. However, through direct engagement and feedback from organisations in the sports sector, it became clear that a formal licensing model was not viable. A decision was made to not progress with a licensing model, and instead to move towards a strategic partnership approach. Learning from engagement with sports organisations highlighted that a partnership approach would better position the DofE Award programme as a complimentary pathway to delivering enrichment, as well as building on and enhancing existing frameworks in the sports sector. Therefore, instead of delivering the DofE Award themselves, NGBs will sign-post young people to opportunities through affiliated clubs.
- It is intended that this will result in a stronger foundation for future collaboration, with several NGBs expressing interest in continued engagement under the revised model.

1.3.2 Inclusivity and access

- Data collected throughout the evaluation suggests that newly onboarded settings have embraced the flexibility and adaptability of the DofE programme and have tried to make it more suitable and inclusive for their settings and young people, many of whom have additional needs.
- To ensure their DofE delivery was inclusive and accessible to all young people, DofE leaders took a range of steps, the 4 most taken were:
 1. Providing equipment to allow young people to access a DofE activity (89%);
 2. Offering and/or planning DofE activities specific to the needs of your young people (including the expedition) (84%);
 3. Delivering one or more of your DofE sectional activity using your organisation's facilities and/or resources (79%);
 4. Utilising flexibilities already built into DofE programmes (66%).⁴

⁴ Data from 148 settings (final reports).

1.3.3 Impact

- The exploration of impact has focused on gathering the views of DofE Leaders on perceived impact, benefits and achievements through reports, interviews, the FGD, as well the collection of case studies.
- DofE Leaders shared what they felt proud about since their involvement with DofE. These achievements ranged from seeing the excitement among young people; being able to offer their pupils new activities and a chance to achieve an Award; and setting up their school/setting to continue delivering the DofE.
- Five key themes of the reported benefits achieved by young people taking part in DofE emerged from a thematic analysis:
 1. Resilience, confidence and self-belief;
 2. Independence and life skills;
 3. Access to new experiences;
 4. Higher engagement and motivation;
 5. Stronger teamwork and communication.
- DofE Leaders who participated in the FGD and interview reported with enthusiasm that they had witnessed increased resilience among young people participating in DofE.
- These themes are also prevalent in the case studies of Hope School and College and Park Community College.

1.3.4 Feedback and improvement

Support from DofE

- Available evidence suggests that new settings were primarily satisfied with the support they received to get set up and start delivering the DofE Award programme.
- Training bursaries for DofE Leaders, followed by participant bursaries, were the most chosen areas where respondents felt that the DofE could better support their organisation through grant funding, supporting the earlier findings on resourcing.

What went well?

- DofE Leaders fed back that helpful and responsive communication from DofE staff was something that had worked well, including being there to answer questions and explain processes. Appreciation was also shown where the DofE had supported the settings to access wider funding.

What can be improved?

- DofE Leaders reported that they needed more time to set up their DofE Award and deliver the commitments of the grant.
- Other ideas for improvement included being clearer on eligible items for funding.

1.3.5 Sustainability

Continuing to deliver DofE

- Across the data sources that the process evaluation has drawn on, the prospect of sustainable delivery looks encouraging. Generally, the new settings shared that they intend to continue delivering DofE and have taken steps to do so.
- 92% of the respondents in the final reports answered “yes” to the question “Since receiving this funding, are you confident that your organisation will be able to continue delivering the DofE, beyond the grant funding period?”⁵
- Among those who answered no (8%), the main reasons given included ‘your organisation’s staff resourcing’ and ‘financial barriers or affordability of the DofE Award’.
- The FGD attendees outlined the steps they had taken to ensure the future of DofE in their setting and this discussion highlighted some promising findings. For example, DofE leaders reported

⁵ Data from 148 settings (final reports).



having embedded DofE into their alternative curriculum; establishing a local network; having sustainable equipment; and including DofE tasks into new job roles.

Partnership and collaboration (Sports Project activity)

- The project team reported that the strategic partnership approach within the sports sector (NGBs) was becoming increasingly effective as the project evolved from an initial licensing model to a more flexible, partnership-led approach informed by direct sector engagement.
- Challenges were reported to have been overcome through effective communication and adapting the strategic approach.

1.4 Conclusions

This process evaluation has detailed considerable learning, which is outlined in the report, leading to the following concluding points:

1. The grant successfully reached the targeted schools and expanded access to DofE.
2. The funding was essential in enabling participation and overcoming financial barriers.
3. Evidence suggests the programme successfully engaged young people who have additional needs and/or access education in an alternative setting, as well as young people who are living in deprived areas.
4. Early insights from DofE group leaders point to positive benefits among young people including building self-belief and resilience.
5. Strong foundations have been established for sustainable delivery.

By removing key barriers to participation and supporting settings to deliver DofE effectively, even in the early stages, taking part in DofE is reported to have brought positive benefits for participants.

This evaluation provides solid evidence that the DCMS funding has widened access, removed barriers, and created meaningful enrichment opportunities for young people who are unlikely to have accessed them otherwise.

1.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings and learning throughout the evaluation, the following recommendations are proposed for consideration by the DofE.:

1. Where possible, provide multi-year funding, enabling new settings to have more time to set up their delivery and young people to progress their Award and experience benefits within implementation periods.
2. Continue to increase access to DofE for young people in ANAP settings and mainstream schools in IMD 1-5 areas by raising awareness of the Award's flexibility and adaptability. Evidence from this evaluation, alongside existing research, can be used to demonstrate the benefits for young people and the potential for DofE to support the Government's enrichment agenda through a trusted delivery framework.
3. The DofE can do more to further support delivery by helping organisations build both staff and organisational capacity to deliver a nurturing DofE experience. This could be through enhanced training, qualification opportunities, resources, additional support and training to deliver expeditions for staff, as well as signposting settings to additional available funding.
4. The DofE can enhance the support package for new settings by further improving guidance and communication, for example, on eligible expenditure and reporting requirements and timescales. The DofE could also improve the experience for new settings by providing clearer advice on ways to maximise the opportunity for long-term sustainability to further enable organisations to continue to offer DofE.
5. The DofE could strengthen the potential for long-term sustainability by encouraging new settings to embed DofE within curriculum planning, integrate delivery responsibilities into staff roles, develop local delivery networks, and establish succession plans for trained leaders.

6. The DofE should continue to develop and test its partnership-led Sports Strategy by strengthening strategic relationships with NGBs and piloting partnership arrangements that better align with the needs and structures of the sports sector. This revised way of working should be monitored and continually improved.
7. The DofE should continue to strengthen evaluation and impact measurement by adapting the IMF to suit ANAP settings, as planned. This would enhance understanding of participant outcomes in these contexts. In addition, it can amplify young people's voices throughout evaluations and apply learning from current and previous grants into future programming.

We also suggest considering these recommendations in the context of wider government policy and programmes, including opportunities to scale this work to support the delivery of an enrichment premium, helping to remove barriers to positive activities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. There may also be opportunities for these learnings and this work to contribute to wider initiatives, including the PE and School Sports Partnerships Network and the Enrichment Expansion Programme.

2 Introduction

2.1 Overview of the grant

In the financial year (FY) of 2025-26, £1.5 million of grant funding was provided by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to the DofE, with the overarching ambition to increase access to the DofE in England. This was specifically to target SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) schools, Alternative Provisions (APs) and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) (with 75% of the funding). These three types of settings are collectively referred to as Additional Needs and Alternative Provision (ANAP) throughout this report. The grant also aimed to fund DofE in mainstream schools in deprived areas (IMD 1-5) (with 25% of the funding). All funded settings were new to delivering the DofE.

The grant also funded the early work of DofE's new Sports Strategy which set out to develop a new strategic partnership and licensing approach with National Governing Bodies (NGBs) for sport. The DofE Sports Project aims to increase access and awareness to inclusive, high-quality sports-based enrichment pathways for young people undertaking their DofE, particularly those facing barriers to participation, contributing to improved wellbeing, confidence and life skills.

This project was a continuation of the previous grant awarded to the DofE between FY 22/23 and FY 24/25 and staff have built on learning from previous years. A Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan including a logical framework analysis was agreed in partnership with DCMS in 2025. This document summarises the key findings of the evaluation completed throughout the grant period (April 2025-April 2026).

Grant Objectives: Access – Funding for Additional Needs & Alternative Provision (ANAP) Settings, Schools and the Sports Strategy.

The continuation of DCMS Grant funding (£1,500,000 for 2025-2026) had 2 strands of activity:

- a. Increase access to the DofE, through supporting new and non-delivering SEND schools, Alternative Provisions and where appropriate mainstream schools in deprived areas (IMD 1-5), to deliver the DofE in England.
- b. Fund year 1 of DofE's strategy to develop a new strategic partnership and licensing approach with National Governing Bodies for sport, which will enable funded sectional activity places for marginalised young people.

3 Methodology

3.1 Approach

To monitor and evaluate progress and learning, a MEL framework and plan were in place from the beginning of the grant.⁶ The plan focused on:

1. Collecting quantitative data to track progress against KPIs, gathering participant demographic information.
2. Conducting a process evaluation to capture key lessons.
3. Documenting a small number of stories from settings and participants.

Given grant timescales and delivery context (75% ANAP), the DofE's Impact Measurement Framework (IMF) framework was not used.⁷ Instead, a process evaluation approach was taken to examine whether the grant was delivered as intended and if it produced the expected results. Process evaluations focus on how implementation unfolds, what happened, whether it went to plan, and why. They help explain why results were or were not achieved, capture lessons learned, identify challenges faced by stakeholders, and inform recommendations for improving future project design and delivery.

This process evaluation aimed to gather learning in three key areas of interest:

1. Implementation and reach
2. Feedback and improvement
3. Partnership and collaboration

The below table summarises the evaluation questions.

Table 1: Evaluation questions

Theme	Area of investigation
Implementation and reach	• In areas where SEND/APs/PRUs chose not to deliver the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, were IMD 1-5 mainstream schools licensed instead? • What were the main challenges experienced by SEND, AP and mainstream schools located in IMD 1-5 settings who are new to delivering the DofE? • Were any barriers identified? What lessons were learned in terms of best practice in removing barriers? • How did the DofE target its intended settings in England? Was this a targeted or universal approach? • In areas where SEND/AP/PRUs chose not to deliver Duke of Edinburgh's Award, were IMD 1-5 mainstream schools licensed instead? • What evidence is there of impact among participants / young people? • Were there any differences between the type of institution (SEND, mainstream, AP etc). • What kind of ongoing support did the Duke of Edinburgh's Award provide to licensed organisations, and did it work as intended? • What was the learning from the bespoke support package provided by the DofE in practice? • What was the feedback from LOs? What can be learnt around quality and consistency?

⁶ This included a logical framework analysis.

⁷ The IMF is currently in place for DofE participants in mainstream schools and settings. A pilot is currently underway to develop impact measurement in SEND settings including a storytelling tool, with the proof of concept taking place in Scotland.

	• What worked well in implementation and reach? • What worked less well in implementation and reach? • What adaptations were made to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award program to accommodate the needs of diverse groups of young people, including those with SEND? Did it have the desired effect? • To what extent are the Licensed Organisations likely to continue delivering the Duke of Edinburgh's Award after the funding period ends, and why? • Sports Strategy activity: How has the new strategic partnership model with NGBs, introduced through the Sports Strategy, evolved in practice? • To what extent have NGBs shown enthusiasm for becoming licensed, and what mechanisms were put in place to support this shift? How was the licensing framework established, and what distinguished the new approach from previous arrangements? • Additionally, what were the key challenges encountered during implementation, and what lessons have been learned that could inform future phases of the strategy?
Feedback and improvement	• What did schools, organisations, young people, and other stakeholders feel about the project? • How was feedback from stakeholders used to make adjustments and improvements to the project implementation? • What lessons were learned during the project that can inform future initiatives to expand access to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award?
Partnership and collaboration (Sports Work)	• How effective was the strategic partnership approach with the NGBs sector? • How did the collaboration between the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the identified organisations function? • What were the communication channels used, and how effective were they in coordinating activities between the different stakeholders/partners? • Were there any conflicts or issues among partners and stakeholders and how were they resolved?

3.2 Methods

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, to maximise the opportunity to provide a picture of how the grant has worked and why. This included project data, information from the final reports from schools, a key-informant interview, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with DofE Leaders, and case studies of settings including young people's stories. A summary of the methods, data collection, sampling approach, analysis and ethical considerations is included in the table below. The key themes emerging in the analysis were triangulated across the different data sets, and conclusions were summarised into this report.

Table 2: Details on evaluation methodology

Method	Data collection details	Sampling technique	Analysis	Ethical considerations
Quantitative data collection on settings licensed and participant demographics.	The data on numbers on settings licensed, Award starts, completions, and participants demographics is	Census approach - the data was collected and recorded for all participants. Data sample:	The data related to this grant was collated into Excel, summarised and	Data was stored in line with UK law and GDPR. Data was anonymised before analysis.

	collected routinely by the DofE when participants start their Award. This was collected from the grant beginning in April 2025 onwards. DofE Leaders in settings and young people upload this into a central database.	- 3,269 participant Award starts in the new settings (3,195 of these were using a funded place). - 149 new settings.	analysed using Pivot tables. Analysis took place in June 2026.	Some data input is non-mandatory. Participants consent to the data collection, storage and use as part of the sign-up process.
Final reporting by DofE Leaders in new settings (quantitative and qualitative)	A final report template was prepared and sent to all new settings for completion by their DofE Leader. The reporting window was 7th January to 23rd March 2026. The reporting template included questions designed to gain insights on the settings progress on onboarding and delivery of the grant, as well as their views on how they were working towards inclusion and access, impact and sustainability.	Census approach – all new settings completed a final report. Final reports were received from 148 out of 149 settings by the end of March 2026 (1 setting had terminated their licence during the reporting window and did not submit their final report).	Quantitative and qualitative thematic analysis was completed in Excel.	Settings were required to complete the final reports, as per their grant agreements. On some questions, settings were offered the options to opt to 'prefer not to say' and 'no impact yet'. Data was anonymised before summarising the findings into this report.
A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with 11 DofE Leaders in ANAP settings (qualitative with some quantitative questions).	May 2026. 11 DofE Leaders who were FGD participants 2 DofE facilitators and 1 technical support.	Self-selection. All ANAP settings were invited to two optional sessions.	Qualitative thematic analysis in Excel. Menti summaries of word clouds and key inputs.	The FGD was planned with ample notice and was held online between 4-5pm (after school). Informed consent for use of data in evaluation gained. Data was anonymised before summarising the

				findings into this report. We recognise there will be a bias in self-selection; however, we tried to mitigate this by asking open questions (not leading questions); including a variety of questions spanning learning and challenges, including opportunities for sharing sensitive topics in other forums; triangulating findings across data sources to look for consistency and anomalies in the arising themes. The achievements of settings and DofE Leaders were celebrated. To recognise participants time, participants took part in quizzes and two winners won DofE 70th anniversary bucket hats which were sent in the post.
Key-informant interview with a DofE Leader in a mainstream school who delivered DofE within the alternative education provision part of the school	May 2026. 1 DofE Leader.	Self-selection. All mainstream settings were invited to take part. The planned FGD was adapted to be a key-informant interview instead of an FGD due to low-uptake.	Qualitative thematic analysis in Excel. Menti summaries of word clouds and key inputs.	As above. Informed consent for use of data in evaluation gained. DofE 70th anniversary bucket hats were sent to recognise their input.

(qualitative with some quantitative questions).				
Case studies and young people's stories (qualitative).	July 2026.	Self-selection and snowballing. Hope School was identified by DofE Operations Staff. Park Community School was identified via the key informant interview with their DofE Leader (above).	Case study information was provided by the settings and written up by the Researcher. Themes emerging from these stories were triangulated with the other data sources to identify conclusions.	As above. Informed consent for use of data in evaluation gained. DofE 70 th anniversary bucket hats were sent to recognise their input.

3.3 Research team and quality control

The evaluation was conducted by a Researcher in the DofE Impact and Evaluation team, with support from the Grants team and specialists in the Data and Impact team. Measures were taken to reduce bias and maintain objectivity. The report presents data in an independent and evidence-based way, highlighting primary insights. Hypotheses emerging from available data have been triangulated with all sources of evidence collected throughout the evaluation to ensure consistency in analysis, ensuring that a balanced and honest narrative is presented throughout this report. The following measures were also taken to ensure quality control:

- There were several iterations of data collection tools and some piloting of data collection tools to test questions internally.
- Staff working on the evaluation have extensive experience in research and have recently completed various training in data analysis.
- There was thorough verification of data compilation analysis at all stages, including cross-checking with grant records and further checks before finalisation of figures. To ensure the evaluation met quality standards, the research and analysis was subject to cross-team review and verification by internal DofE colleagues.
- The grant (including the evaluation) has been overseen by an internal Project Sponsor and the DofE has regularly reported to DCMS via regular meetings and quarterly project boards.
- An internal risk register central to the grant project management has fed into wider organisational learning.
- The DofE is currently exploring opportunities to work with peer reviewers and critical friends to provide external supervision of research and evaluation projects and outputs.

4 Findings

4.1 Implementation and reach

4.1.1 Reaching new settings

Data gathered throughout the evaluation period confirms that the DofE grants team worked in close collaboration with the onboarding/operations team and **successfully met its target of reaching 148 new settings or Licenced Organisations (LOs)**. By the end of March 2026, the DofE had licensed and funded a total of 149 new settings (111 ANAP settings and 38 IMD 1-5 Mainstream schools), as illustrated

in the table below. The targeting was also successful in reaching 75% ANAP settings and 25% mainstream schools (in IMD 1-5 areas), as agreed with DCMS.

Table 3: Newly licensed and funded settings by the DCMS funded Access Grant (1 Apr '25 – 31 Mar '26)

Setting type	Number of licenced orgs	Percentage of licenced orgs (%)
Alternative Provision (AP)	31	20.8
Pupil Referral Unit (PRU)	8	5.4
SEND school setting	72	48.3
Mainstream school in a IMD 1-5 area	38	25.5
Total	149	100%

Source: Collated grant data (149 settings)

The table below shows the number of new organisations licenced per month during the project, illustrating that the majority of the new organisations were licensed in Autumn and Winter 2025.

Table 4: Number of new organisations licenced per month during the project

	May	Jun / Jul / Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
New Licences	10	10	33	22	51	23

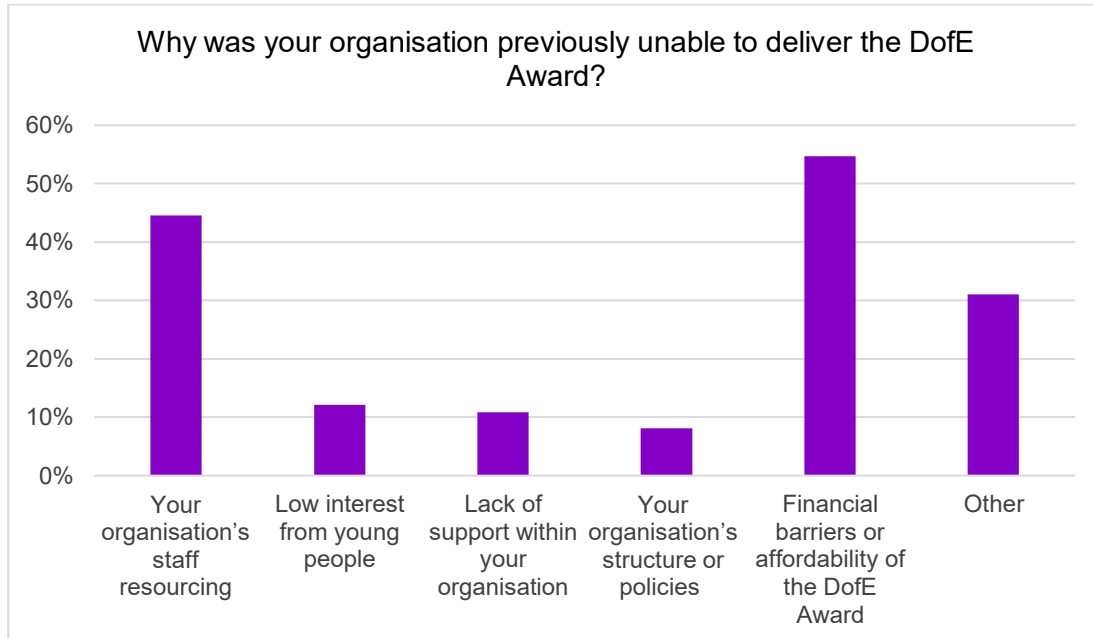
Source: Collated grant data (149 settings)

The majority (87%) of funded organisations had 5 months or less between becoming licenced (receiving their grant funding and starting to deliver the DofE) and reporting back to DofE with their final funding report by the end of March 2026. Final reports were received from 148 out of 149 LOs by the end of March 2026 (1 setting had terminated their licence during the reporting window and did not submit their final report). Of the 148 reports, 111 were from ANAP schools and 37 from mainstream schools.

In terms of the delivery status at time of reporting (7 Jan to 31 Mar), 37% of organisations reported to be in 'initial delivery underway' and 34% reported 'significant progress'. **Most new settings were in the early stages of delivery.** This is noteworthy as most new settings were reporting on their early experiences of starting to deliver DofE.

The graph below displays the data on why the newly licensed organisations were previously unable to deliver the Award.

Figure 1: Reasons why the organisation was previously unable to deliver the DofE Award



Source: Final report data (148 settings, April 2026)

The main reason that organisations were previously unable to deliver DofE was due to financial barriers or affordability of the Award (55%), followed by resourcing of staff in organisations (45%). 'Other' was the third most reported reason. This included: new/early-stage school; no eligible cohort yet; and being unaware of its suitability for their students and the programme flexibilities. The latter reason is a learning for the DofE as this suggests that ANAP settings face an additional barrier of perceiving the DofE as unsuitable for their school setting.

4.1.2 Increasing access to the DofE Award programme

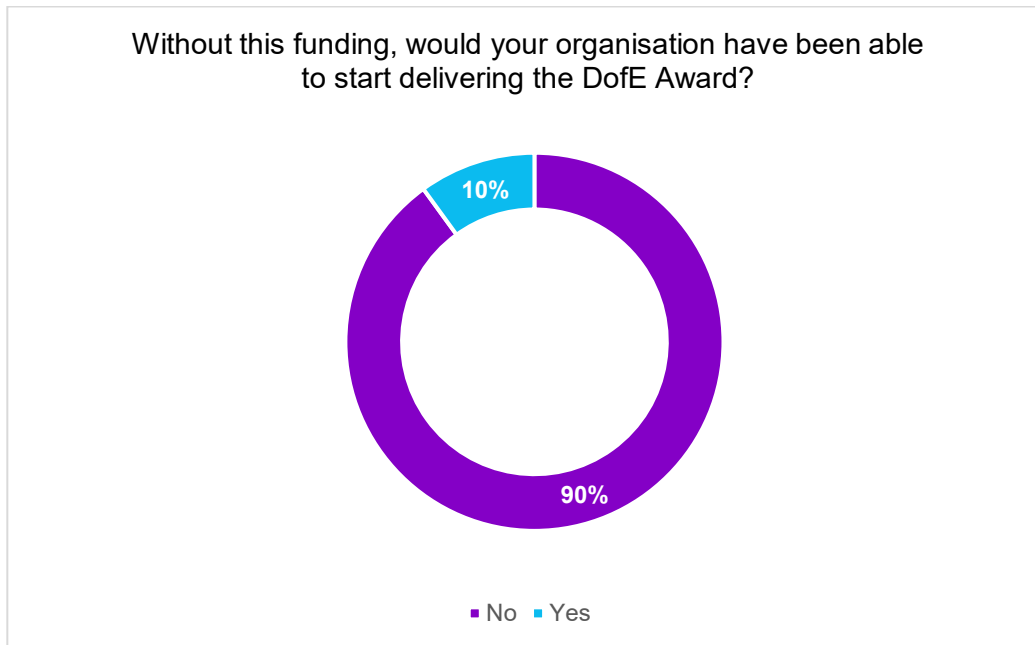
There were 3,269 Award starts between 2025/26 at the funded organisations (3,195 of these were using a funded place). The additional 74 places were purchased directly by LOs.

This was across ANAP (51.9%) (including all types of SEND and alternative provision) and mainstream secondary schools in IMD 1-5 areas (48.1%). On average, mainstream settings enrolled more than double the number of participants compared to ANAP settings (data from the 3,195 funded places). The majority were Bronze (97%), followed by Silver (2%) and Gold (1%) (Sample N=3269).

The DofE set out to achieve 3,890 Award starts in the grant period and therefore achieved slightly less than planned (reaching 84% of its target participants). The learning collected from grants and onboarding staff, as well as from settings, suggests this was very likely due to having a short period in which to enrol young people and the smaller class sizes within ANAP settings.

Data from across the interview, FGD and final reports **strongly suggests the funding was crucial in enabling these new settings to begin delivering DofE to young people.** In the final reports, DofE Leaders were asked, 'Without this funding, would your organisation have been able to start delivering the DofE Award?', 90% answered 'No'.

Figure 2: DofE Leaders views on funding



Source: Final report data (148 settings, April 2026)

DofE Leaders from ANAP settings in the FGD also agreed that the funding had enabled their organisation to reach the eligible young people who wanted to take part. In response to the question: 'Has the funding enabled you to reach the eligible young people who have wanted to take part?', out of 11 attendees, 9 answered 'Yes', 1 answered 'partially', and 1 did not respond. The DofE Manager at Park Community School also agreed the funding had enabled this to happen: '*None of them would have done [DofE] without the funding*' (DofE Manager, Park Community School, Interview).

4.1.3 Demographics of participants

Available data on the demographic breakdown of participants (at Award start stage) **indicates the grant was successful in reaching a demographically diverse group of young people**. This is summarised below.⁸

- 37.5% of the funded participants (counted as Award starts when young people start their Award) resided in IMD 1-3 areas. This compared to 14.9% of the general DofE participants (all other Award starts in the same period 25-26).
- This indicates that the grant was successful in targeting settings in the most deprived areas.
- The average IMD of the participants connected to DCMS funding was 4.1, compared to 6.6 (all other Award starts in the same period 25-26).
- There were slightly more male participants than females (40.3% compared to 30.5% respectively, with the remaining unknown or having selected 'prefer not to say'). In the same year in all other Award starts this was 45.3% males and 47% females.
- 43.7% had a self-declared additional need.⁹ This is much higher than in the general DofE participants Award starts data where 9.4% have a self-declared additional need. We would expect to see this as the purpose of the grant was to work with young people with additional needs/SEND settings.

⁸ Total N for demographic data=3,269.

⁹ This includes all participants in a SEND-designated provider, plus participants who self-declare in Mainstream providers. Participants from non-SEND designated providers will self-declare based on their personal self-perceptions and willingness to share their circumstances.

- In the DCMS 25/26 cohort, 24.8% were from a minority ethnic background, 42.0% were from a non-minority ethnic background and 33.3% were unknown. In the same year, among the wider DofE cohort (all other Award starts), 30.1% were from minority ethnic backgrounds, 61.4% from non-minority ethnic backgrounds and 8.5% unknown.

4.1.4 Award achievements

There were 233 Award achievements in 25/26 and 26/27 (by July 2026) of the Awards started through the DCMS grant funding. These were mostly Bronze (216), followed by Silver (14) and Gold (3)¹⁰.

4.1.5 Additional reach - Investing in DofE Leaders

A total of 631 courses were taken across the DofE training portfolio by 291 individuals **suggesting that the funding has indirectly contributed positively to growing a network of adult leaders who can continue to deliver the DofE across the new settings.** There are different pathways for different roles, designed to equip Leaders with the knowledge and confidence to be effective in their roles¹¹.

4.1.6 Challenges and barriers

The overall evidence from the reports, FGD, and interview **suggests that the funding supported the new settings in overcoming the challenges and barriers previously facing them, opening a new avenue to allow them to set up DofE within their setting and start delivering the Award with young people in their settings.**

For example, in the final reports from 148 settings, DofE Leaders were asked to reflect on their experiences of delivering the grant, and 95% reported 'Yes' to the question: 'Have you been able to overcome the challenges that you have previously faced in order to deliver the DofE?'. 94% of respondents also reported that the grant had helped them overcome the previous challenges they had faced in delivering the DofE. Information on the evidence collected across all sources about challenges and barriers has been analysed, and the key emerging themes are discussed below.

4.1.7 Removing financial barriers for Award places and expedition kit

Across the final reports, the interview and FGD, DofE Leaders consistently reported that the funding had allowed them to set up the Award. **The importance of the removal of financial barriers to offer the Award participation places and expedition kit was one of the main pieces of feedback provided by DofE leaders.**

"The grant enabled me to get up and running with the DofE without the worry of cost to the school and the young people."

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

"Purchasing new equipment (particularly expedition equipment) as small centres often have tight budgets and wouldn't be able to afford this without the funding."

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

"The grant has enabled us to get DofE set up and established, it was not planned in the budget and we would not have been able to consider offering DofE without it."

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

¹⁰ This figure reflects achievements recorded at the time of reporting and is expected to rise as more young people complete their Awards and outstanding administrative processes are completed.

¹¹ With the aim of establishing a basis for high-quality and long-term DofE delivery, the DofE asks that adult Leaders undertake training via the DofE's Learning Experience Platform (LXP). More information on the available training and learning opportunities is available here: [Learning for adult volunteers - The DofE](#).

“We are in a catchment area of high deprivation and most of our pupils' families face financial difficulties. By being able to provide free enrolment to our pupils we helped to partially overcome that barrier. We have also been able to purchase equipment that the school budget would not have stretched to which means we can complete the expedition section with decent kit.”

DofE Leader, Mainstream school (final report)

The interview with Park Community School – a mainstream school new to delivering the DofE within their alternative education unit¹² – highlighted that young people felt incredibly special when they received the expedition equipment. **These feelings of being special, important and being able to take part were incredibly important to the young people.**

“They felt like a priority. They felt like it was all being laid on for them. And that was important.”

DofE Manager, Park Community School (Interview)

4.1.8 Widening access to those facing financial barriers

Feedback from DofE Leaders across the final reports also highlighted that by removing the financial barriers to offering Participation Places, DofE Leaders were also able to offer the opportunity to a more diverse group of young people. Many highlighted that the grant **supported those facing financial barriers and difficulties to take part and purchase equipment.**

“We are situated in a deprived area and have a significant number of pupil premium students. Many of them would not have considered the Award had it not been for participant funding.”

DofE Leader, Mainstream school (final report)

“Most of our children come from challenging backgrounds with social and economic hardships. This funding has given them an opportunity to do an activity that they otherwise would be not able to do.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

“Our school is in a heavily socially deprived area of the city, the grant has made it far more possible for students to partake in the scheme that otherwise would never have the opportunity.”

DofE Leader, Mainstream school (final report)

“Our setting provides education and opportunities for children who are at risk [and] feel the cost-of-living crisis harder than some... With a DofE grant we can provide them with real world opportunities that they would not be able to access in other ways. They can develop skills in teamwork and independence that they would not otherwise access without the DofE.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

4.1.9 Providing a broader enrichment offer

Feedback throughout the evaluation highlighted that introducing the DofE enabled settings to broaden activities and curriculum provision for young people **suggesting that the funding has allowed a broader offer of enrichment throughout schools.** 84% of DofE Leaders in the final reports responded “yes” in response to the question: “Has the funding enabled you to deliver or offer any new activities?”.¹³ The most frequently mentioned new activities included an expedition, litter picking, photography, arts & crafts, cycling/bike maintenance. Widening the enrichment offer both in quantity and breadth was reported to have been beneficial for the new settings, who shared having provided additional clubs and equipment, and offering DofE to pupils who would otherwise not have been able to participate due to financial difficulties.

¹² The unit supports young people with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties and seeks to reduce the risk of young people becoming not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

¹³ From 148 settings.

“The grant has removed financial barriers faced by our students to allow them easier access to skills and physical activities as school are now providing additional sports and arts clubs using equipment purchased with the fund.”

DofE Leader, Mainstream school (final report)

“...We now have digital cameras and binoculars that the students have enjoyed and this has impacted their wellbeing by being outside of the classroom in nature.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

“[I am proud of being able to...] offer young people the chance to do ‘fun subjects’ which they wouldn’t be able to do in mainstream as it is often the first thing ‘taken away’ from them due to behavioural needs.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)¹⁴

4.1.10 Engaging young people

Generally, across the reports, FGD and the interview, DofE Leaders reported **positive engagement from young people**, particularly because the financial barriers to signing up were removed. Some Leaders did share that maintaining this engagement was a challenge at times, particularly when pupil attendance was poor. In these cases, DofE Leaders shared that they continued to try and support the young people to keep going to achieve sections of their Award.

During the FGD, Leaders were asked: “**What approaches have helped young people feel most engaged to take part and throughout their DofE journey?**” During the discussions, the participants drew attention to **two main effective ways** of supporting young people’s engagement. These, including quotes from a learning exercise on what has worked well, are summarised below:

1. What works? Involving young people in the decision making, equipment and activity choices

“Being included in equipment choices for sections.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

“Ensuring they are included in the decision making.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

“Empowering them to lead their own decisions and development.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

2. What works? Embedding the programme into the school day

“Embed [DofE] into the school day.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

“Having ownership of their learning, that is practical, real world, exciting, different from school.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

“Increasing options and choices.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

In the interview with Park Community School, the DofE Leader observed challenges with young people coping with the testing nature of the Expedition and continuing with it. Whilst camping, young people were keen to go home, and in some cases experienced anxiety about being away from home. The group were supported to continue, and the DofE Leader described a very high sense of achievement at the end. The **DofE Leader shared that he felt that young people had increased their resilience by carrying on with the Expedition when they had wanted to give up.**

¹⁴ In the FGD, 11 DofE Leaders shared what they felt proud about since their involvement with delivering DofE.

“The progress was amazing by the end, but it was such hard work that at one point I thought, we're not going to get any passes here. But, you know, coming through it was amazing. ... The evening, they just really struggled being away from home. They didn't like the idea of being in a tent.

But the feeling that they had at the end, after we went through that wall, was something else...it's a joyous achievement. No one thought it was possible... with their backgrounds. So, they've proved a lot.”

DofE Manager, Park Community School (Interview)

In some cases, enabling young people to achieve a Certificate of Achievement (awarded on completion of the Physical, Skills and Volunteering sections) rather than the full Award was also cited as an effective way to keep some young people engaged in their Award journey.

4.1.11 Resourcing

The FGD discussions and final reports highlighted that starting to deliver DofE increased workload for staff, which in some cases necessitated an additional investment in adult leaders to increase capacity and undertake formal qualifications. Several organisations have sought additional DofE funding to enable this.¹⁵

Where there has been investment in staff resourcing, this has helped young people to feel adequately supported and engaged throughout their Award journeys and supported the settings to build a sustainable base from which to continue to deliver the Award.

“We have overcome the lack of interest from students by staffing the team correctly and offering real help to facilitate unit progress.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

Through reviewing the areas where LOs sought additional funding, we can see that Expedition delivery appears to be the aspect of DofE most sensitive to resource constraints, indicating that long-term sustainability may depend on organisations developing sufficient internal expedition capacity and qualified staff.

The evidence suggests that where a wider package of funding is available, this may bolster the initial funding provided and enable the new settings to provide what they feel is an accessible and nurturing Award experience.¹⁶

4.1.12 Timeframe of grant period

While the evidence suggests the grant was largely successful in meeting its objectives, the delivery timeframe created challenges for new settings in onboarding, Award delivery and impact reporting.

During the FGD, **DofE Leaders reported that their primary challenge had been setting up and delivering DofE within the grant period (FY 2025/26).** DofE Leaders shared that this was a comparatively short finding period when comparing to other funding and made reporting on impact difficult.

DofE Leaders explained that they felt they were wanting to encourage young people's choices in their sectional activities and the short time-frame made this more difficult.

“We would probably like to have taken a bit more time and ordered things throughout the year to the demand of the learners.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

¹⁵ The funding accessed was mainly from central DofE “Resilience” and “Additional Needs Delivery Support” Funds.

¹⁶ Not all LOs were able to access extra funding, as this was available on a local level and case by case basis, as part of the DofE's wider funding offer for existing LOs.

“When you're starting it off new, you've got these ideas of what you think the students are going to want and they might be interested in. So you're buying things that, but actually, if I'd had more time to spend the funding, that could have evolved differently.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

Other leaders highlighted that the short time-period was particularly challenging because of the time needed to effectively engage young people in DofE.

“Engaging young people in the PRUs and the APs, it takes more time than it does in mainstream school.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

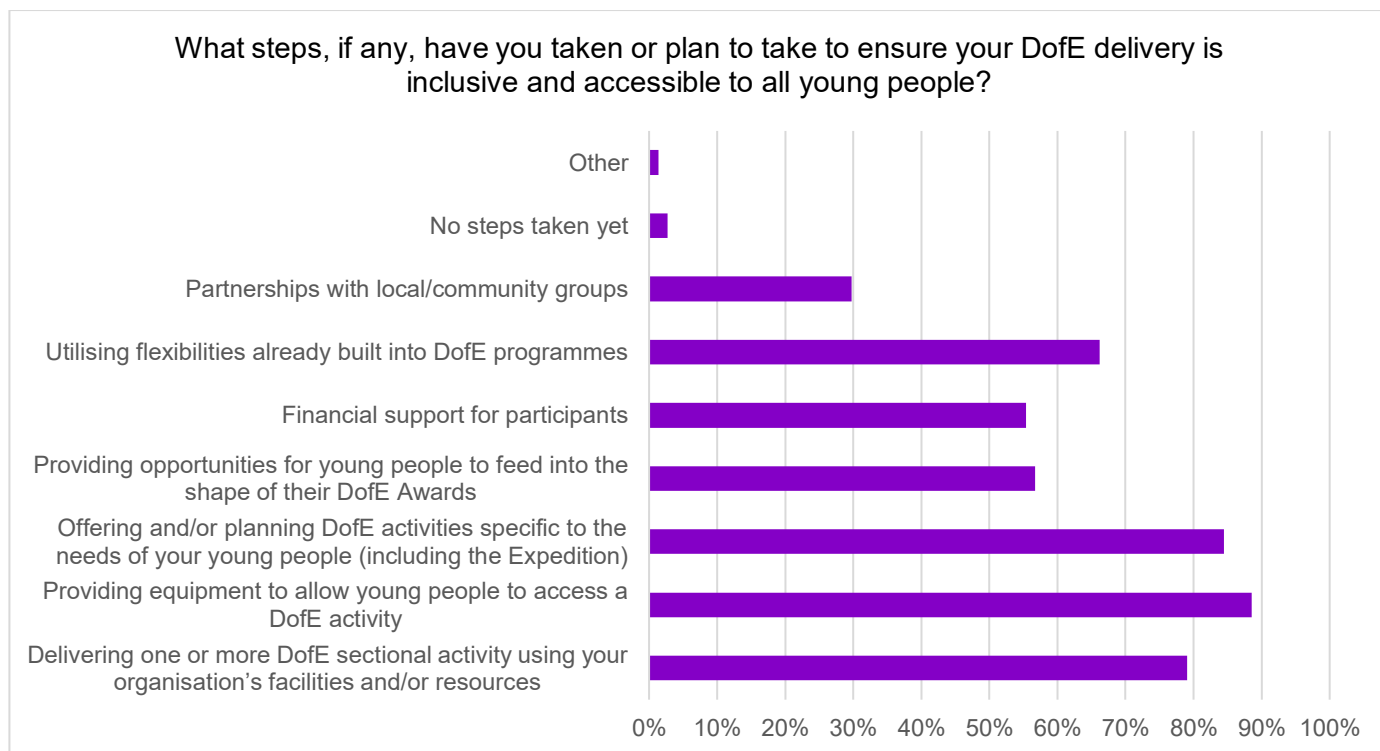
4.1.13 Inclusivity and widening access

Data collected throughout the evaluation suggests that newly onboarded settings have **embraced the flexibility and adaptability of the DofE programme, with grant funding helping to improve access through the purchase of equipment tailored to young people's needs.**

As illustrated in Figure 3, in the final reports, DofE Leaders reported the steps they had taken, or planned to take, to ensure their DofE delivery was inclusive and accessible to all young people, the 4 most commonly taken steps were:

- Providing equipment to allow young people to access a DofE activity (89%);
- Offering and/or planning DofE activities specific to the needs of your young people (including the expedition) (84%);
- Delivering one or more of your DofE sectional activity using your organisation's facilities and/or resources (79%);
- Utilising flexibilities already built into DofE programmes (66%).

Figure 3: Steps taken to ensure DofE delivery is inclusive and accessible to all young people



Source: Final report data (148 settings, April 2026)

Qualitative findings from the final reports and the FGD highlight similar findings around widening reach and inclusion.

“This grant will provide opportunities and allow us to tailor the award to suit the individual students involved.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

“We have adapted our school timetable so students can complete parts of the programme during curriculum time, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to fully participate.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

“In a PRU, [we have been] able to offer the same opportunity and Award as in a mainstream setting, that the [pupils] see their siblings and friends getting.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

“Funding helped buy gym equipment, which has helped the participants on their DofE Physical section, but it has also become part of their sensory regulation outside of their DofE activity time.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

4.1.14 Pursuing the DofE Sports Project

The initial approach

A licensing-based approach with NGBs was initially explored with the intention of formalising delivery through a structured agreement between the DofE and NGBs. However, through direct engagement and feedback from the sector, key barriers to pursuing a license model were identified.

“The proposed model risked adding an administrative burden without delivering clear value.”

NGB (feedback on proposed licensing model)

“We do not feel that pursuing the licence route is the right step for us at this time.”

NGB (feedback on proposed licensing model)

Other barriers included:

- Misalignment with federated NGB governance structures.
- Duplication with existing safeguarding, accreditation, and club assurance frameworks.
- Capacity constraints within NGBs and volunteer-led club networks.
- Limited added value compared to existing informal or indirect DofE-aligned delivery already taking place within sports clubs.

As a result, **a decision was made not to progress with a licensing model, and instead to pivot towards a strategic partnership approach.** The revised approach was developed iteratively through engagement with NGBs and shaped by sector feedback.

Under this model, NGBs are positioned as strategic enablers and partners, rather than licensed delivery bodies, and so far, feedback has been generally encouraging and promising.

“We are very keen to support club members who are undertaking their DofE. Working directly with clubs...would be a positive and manageable first step in building our partnership.”

NGB (feedback on proposed licensing model)

As the licensing model was not taken forward, no NGBs were formally licensed during the reporting period. Instead, engagement during this phase focused on relationship-building, model development, and validating a more suitable partnership approach. This has resulted in a stronger foundation for future collaboration, with several NGBs expressing interest in continued engagement under the revised model.

4.1.15 Partnership and collaboration (DofE Sports Project activity)

How effective was the strategic partnership approach with the NGBs sector?

The project team reported that **the strategic partnership approach within the sports sector (NGBs) was becoming increasingly effective over the reporting period**, particularly as the project evolved from an initial licensing model to a more flexible, partnership-led approach informed by direct sector engagement.

The project transitioned to a strategic partnership model which has sought to:

- Align with how NGBs operate at a national and system level.
- Build on existing sport sector safeguarding, workforce and club accreditation frameworks.
- Focus on enabling access to activities and recognising participation, rather than enforcing delivery standards.
- Position DofE as a complementary pathway, rather than an additional compliance layer.

This shift in approach is reported by DofE staff to have improved engagement and receptiveness from NGB partners and hopefully laid the foundations for a more scalable and sustainable approach.

Overall, the partnership approach represents a positive improvement on the initial licensing model, resulting in a more fit for purpose framework grounded in sector insight, with potential for national scalability and applicability across wider enrichment sectors.

How did the collaboration between The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the identified organisation's function?

Project learning has shown that collaboration functioned most effectively when there was strong alignment between DofE objectives and NGB strategic priorities, alongside an openness to flexible and non-prescriptive approaches.

In this period, collaboration primarily focused on relationship-building, model design, and validation, rather than delivery. However, this phase has been critical in establishing trust, sector credibility, and a shared foundation for future phased implementation.

What were the communication channels used, and how effective were they in coordinating activities between the different stakeholders/partners?

A range of communication channels were used to engage prospective NGB partners, including virtual meetings, presentations, outreach emails, website contact forms, shared documentation, a dedicated Sports Project Working Group and sector forums delivered both in person and online.

Overall, these channels are reported to have been effective in supporting the development of:

- Strong bilateral relationships with NGBs.
- Continuous feedback loops to inform and refine the partnership model.
- Increasing clarity and consistency of the evolving partnership offer.

However, limitations included early-stage messaging challenges linked to the initial licensing model, which required repositioning and clearer articulation of the value proposition.

As the project transitions towards delivery, project staff have reported that there is an opportunity to strengthen communication through more formalised partnership structures, including:

- Cross-partner forums and shared learning spaces.
- More formal onboarding and partner guidance.
- Shared platforms for communication and insight (e.g. Sport England's *Leading the Movement*)

Were there any conflicts or issues among partners and stakeholders and how were they resolved?

While no significant conflicts arose with partners, several challenges were identified during the reporting period, primarily relating to the initial delivery model and differing organisational contexts.

Key challenges included concerns that the original licensing model did not align with NGB structures, capacity constraints across NGBs and volunteer-led clubs, uncertainty about the value proposition, data sharing and monitoring requirements, and the need to ensure alignment with existing brands and participant journeys.

These challenges were addressed through active engagement and feedback, redesigning the model as a strategic partnership, adopting a more flexible and collaborative approach, strengthening the articulation of shared benefits and outcomes, and exploring phased implementation through pilots and testing.

The DofE intends that this **more responsive and adaptive approach has reduced the risk of future misalignment as the sports project moves towards delivery**. This will continue to be monitored.

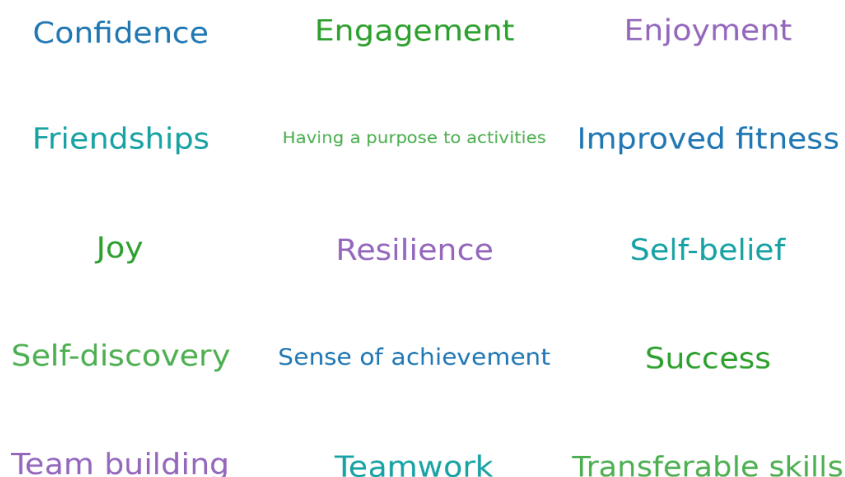
4.2 Impact

In relation to this grant, the exploration of impact has focused on gathering the views of perceived impact, benefits and achievements among DofE Leaders through reports, interviews and an FGD, and the collection of case studies/stories.

Throughout the FGD, DofE Leaders shared what they felt proud about since their involvement with DofE. These achievements ranged from seeing the excitement among young people; being able to offer their pupils new activities and a chance to achieve an Award; and setting up their school/setting to continue delivering the DofE.

Figure 4: Word cloud - Reported benefits

From your perspective, what have been the main benefits for young people from taking part in a DofE Award? (one word or short sentence)



Source: FGD with 11 DofE Leaders in ANAP settings gathered in Mentimeter (May 2026). All words were given equal weighting.

In the final reports, FGD and interview, DofE leaders were asked about what benefits, if any, they have witnessed among young people participating in their DofE activities so far. A thematic analysis was conducted to explore the key themes of the reported benefits. Five themes emerged: **resilience, confidence and self-belief; independence and life skills; access to new experiences; higher engagement and motivation; and stronger teamwork and communication.**

The key themes of responses and some illustrative quotes are included below. **Participants in the FGD and interview particularly reported with enthusiasm and optimism that they had witnessed increased resilience among young people participating in DofE.** The findings across these themes

also add evidence to the earlier finding that suggested the settings receiving funding from the grant were successful in engaging young people through the **opening up of new opportunities** through involvement in the Award programme. These themes are also prevalent in the case studies included below.

Resilience, confidence & self-belief

“[It is] early stages but pupils have been enjoying the new activities and [have] gained confidence.”
DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

“Increased resilience through meeting challenge and adversity. Through overcoming fear that things were going to go wrong but coming through that and surprising themselves.”
DofE Manager, Park Community School (Interview)

“The purchase of skill-specific equipment that matches the interests of our young people has ensured a high level of engagement in the DofE Award.... This has increased the confidence of our young people as they are able to experience new things as well as having their ideas valued and validated as they chose the skills they wished to work on...As a special needs school many of our students have experienced isolation and exclusion and by taking part in DofE their boundaries are expanding.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

“It’s also a really good platform for talking about resilience. [...] This is new, you’ve never done it before. So, you’re going to make mistakes, you’re going to get it wrong. What matters is how you manage that [...], nobody was perfect at something [new].”
DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

Case Study 1: Park Community School

The Park Community School in Havant, Portsmouth, started to deliver the DofE in 2025 having received funding from the DCMS Access grant for participation places and expedition equipment. The Headteacher wanted to start DofE within the behavioural unit - a PRU unit for Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) and was hoping their involvement in the programme could reduce their risk of becoming NEET.

Four Bronze DofE participants (aged 14 to 15) were interviewed by their DofE Manager, having recently completed their Expeditions. They described the programme as a challenging but rewarding experience that helped them achieve things they had not thought possible. Participants highlighted the Expedition as a particularly significant aspect of their DofE journey, with one commenting that “**I didn’t think I could do it all [but] I done it**”. Another reflected on completing their Expedition by saying, “it hurt my legs – I couldn’t walk the next day!” but “**we did something hard and I didn’t think we could do it at the start**” demonstrating their sense of achievement and perseverance.

The importance of funding and access support was evident in participants’ responses. When asked about this support, one participant noted that they had received “tents and rucksacks and tranguas (portable stoves),” while another stated, “I couldn’t have done it otherwise, my mum couldn’t have afforded it.”

Participants also recognised why DofE was important for young people. One participant said, “**it was really challenging but I’m really proud of myself that I done it,**” while another felt that DofE held value because “you’re making memories”. It also provided opportunities for new

experiences: one young person explained that they took part in boxing for their Physical section, while another highlighted learning navigation skills during the Expedition.

These experiences appeared to build confidence, resilience and self-belief, with participants expressing pride in overcoming challenges and completing activities outside of their usual experiences: **“it’s better and different to other subjects because you’re getting out into the real world and learning”**.

When asked to sum up their overall experience, one participant answered, **“I’m really pleased I did it all and everyone should have a go at it”**.

Following the success of the DofE programme in Park Community School, the school are aiming to continue offering the Award and are hoping to deliver the Award more broadly across the mainstream section of the school.

Independence & life skills

“The benefits of students taking part in activities they otherwise wouldn’t try is invaluable for their development. As they grow more confident, not just in themselves but socially will last a lifetime.”

DofE Leader, Mainstream school (final report)

“Many of our students are extremely excited and enthusiastic about their various skills and activities that they are completing and are particularly looking forward to the expedition. Many of our students are starting to learn for the first time how to show initiative, how to motivate themselves and sort out things that may be in the past their parents would’ve done for them.”

DofE Leader, Mainstream school (final report)

“In our DofE cooking skills section, we would then make things like chicken breast and coating it in fresh breadcrumbs and then putting it in the air fryer to cook so that they had the similar sort of food that they may have at home using their air fryer, but a healthier version. ... It’s developing their skills and... preparation for adulthood.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

Access to new experiences

“The children have not had the opportunities to camp or travel outside of their areas. This gives the children enriching new experiences that allow them to build confidence and new skills they wouldn’t have the opportunity to do otherwise.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

“The participants enthusiasm for the award has been amazing and their excitement for the expedition has been incredible as they now have the opportunity to do something which previously was not possible for them.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

“Being able to give new opportunities to young people, but also changing their perspective of new opportunities e.g. enabling young people to do something they already love but more often and with a purpose.”

DofE Leader in a ANAP setting (FGD)

Higher engagement & motivation

“Students now recognise that they are working towards something meaningful to them, which has had a positive impact on the attitude and engagement of our older learners. They are enthusiastic



about starting their volunteering work with the local hospice and they are already experiencing the benefits of setting clear goals within each of their sections.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

“I have already witnessed benefits among young people participating in the Award. I have witnessed students’ motivation increase as they are engaging in an activity of interest.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

Case Study 2: Hope School and College

The Hope School and College in Greater Manchester provides education to students who present a diverse range of needs including severe learning difficulties and profound and complex physical and medical needs.

The availability of **funding was critical to introducing and delivering DofE at Hope School and College, with the DofE Manager stating that without it, the organisation “wouldn’t have been able to deliver it at all.”** The funding enabled the school to provide “essential equipment, subsidise expedition costs [...] and activity expenses”, removing financial and practical barriers to participation for young people with SEND. The funding also helped establish longer-term capacity, with the school investing in equipment and staff development to create “resources and expertise that can be used with future cohorts”.

The **grant supported 44 young people to start their DofE, and 40 Bronze and one Silver participant have now achieved their Awards.** Staff have reported a “remarkable” impact on these participants, including “greater resilience, independence, and self-belief”. Staff also observed **improvements in “attendance, engagement and willingness to participate in new experiences,”** and learners who were initially anxious about new environments became “**increasingly confident in navigating new places, working as part of a team, and solving problems independently**”.

The Expedition section was highlighted as particularly transformative. Staff reported that for many participants it involved “walking the furthest distance they had ever completed,” managing unfamiliar situations, and staying away from home overnight for the first time. One learner, who was initially overwhelmed by the prospect of the Expedition, successfully completed it and afterwards “reported feeling **more confident in trying new things and demonstrated increased independence both in college and at home**”. Another participant, who had previously avoided group activities, developed stronger communication skills and showed “increased engagement in lessons, greater willingness to contribute in class, and improved confidence when working with others”.

The assistant headteacher described the impact of DofE as “exceptionally positive” and highlighted how the programme supports the organisation’s commitment to preparing young people with SEND for adulthood, employment and independent living: “**the programme provides a structured framework for developing essential life skills that cannot always be taught in a classroom environment**”. They added that DofE has strengthened the school’s culture by creating opportunities for learners to challenge themselves and has become “a vehicle through which learners can demonstrate their strengths, build confidence, and celebrate achievements that may not always be recognised through traditional qualifications alone.”

Overall, the DofE Manager concluded that it had enabled learners to “achieve things they never believed they could do” and provided **“the confidence, independence, and sense of achievement that will continue to benefit them long after completing their Award.”** The assistant headteacher agreed, adding that the school leadership team would “strongly recommend the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award to other organisations”.

Stronger teamwork & communication

“These are a group of students that might not have otherwise worked together so already it has been great to see them in the same room, getting to know each other.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

“Pupils are highly engaged with the programme and are developing key team-work and communication skills. Pupils have taken part in bushcraft and are showing development in their levels of resilience.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

4.2.1 Previous years

The impact of Access funding from DCMS has been captured through a collection of case studies, impact reports and evaluations. The most relevant sources of evidence include a case study of Barndale School, based in Northumberland, which is a school for young people with various additional needs, including physical disabilities, learning needs and neurodivergence, and was funded by the DCMS Access Without Limits project between 2022 and 2025. This [video](#) includes the voices of young participants, parents/carers, and school staff.

In relation to DofE delivery in mainstream school settings, reporting on funding from DfE and DCMS, an [Access Impact Report](#) was published in late 2025. This documented an analysis of IMF outcome data by State of Life. In addition, an [Evaluation Briefing](#) on DCMS grant funding from 2022-2025 was recently published which documented further learning from implementation and further case studies.

This evidence is relevant because the programme built on learning from previous years and used a similar DofE delivery model in the continuation of the funding in ANAP and mainstream schools in IMD 1-5 areas. It therefore provides an indication of the expected impact of the recent DCMS investment.

4.3 Feedback and improvement

Most of the findings in this section draw on feedback gathered from DofE Leaders in the newly enrolled settings in the final reports, interview and FGD. The feedback offers important learning about what has worked well and what could be improved both in terms of the support package provided by the DofE.

4.3.1 Support to deliver DofE

Available evidence suggests **that new settings were primarily satisfied with the support they received to get set up and start delivering the DofE Award programme.** For example, in the end of grant reports (Sample N=148 settings), 97% of DofE Leaders responded “yes” to the question “Did the onboarding process leave you feeling ready to get started with DofE?”. In addition, in response to the question, “How supported did you feel during the onboarding process?” 88% responded “supported”, and 12% responded “somewhat supported”.

Training bursaries for DofE Leaders, followed by participant bursaries, were the most commonly chosen areas where respondents felt that the DofE could better support their organisation through grant funding, supporting earlier findings on resourcing.

What has worked well?

In the FGD DofE leaders fed back that **helpful and responsive communication from DofE staff** was something that had worked well, including being there to answer questions and explain processes. This, along with other areas that respondents felt had worked well, are included below.

In the interview with Park Community School, the DofE Leader reiterated the **appreciation to the support that was given to aid them in accessing wider funding** which enabled them to resource more staffing support, training and expedition equipment.

“Really helpful DofE staff”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

“Good communications with DofE staff”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

“Funding was received smoothly”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

What can be improved?

In terms of what can be improved in future grant funding, **participants in the reports, FGD and interview reported that they needed more time to set up their DofE Award and deliver the commitments of the grant.** As already discussed, the short timeframe of the grant presented a challenge to the newly onboarded settings to both set up the infrastructure to deliver the grant as well as engage and provide choice to young people. Many were keen for a continuation of funding for a greater period of time (2-3 years).

“Too short on time”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

In addition, participants in the FGD said that they would like clearer communication about what is included and what is not, and other ideas such as including running DofE into new job roles within their settings (job descriptions and advertisements), as highlighted in the summary of learning below.

In the interview with Park Community School, the DofE Leader highlighted that additional support with finding volunteering opportunities would have been welcomed, as well as more direct guidance about what equipment to buy and where from.

“Clearer communication around things [that are] not included”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (FGD)

4.4 Sustainability

As the grant provided funding to new settings across the ANAP and mainstream landscape within the grant funding period, it was important to the DofE that the new settings were supported to set-up DofE delivery in a way that would enable them to continue to deliver the Award into the next academic year. Participants in the FGD, interview and final reports were asked about their opinions on how confident they felt about their ability to continue with delivering DofE.

“The equipment bought through this grant makes the delivery of the DofE award sustainable and life-changing for our participants.”

DofE Leader, ANAP setting (final report)

4.4.1 Continuing to deliver DofE

Across the data sources that the evaluation has drawn on, **the feedback on the prospect of sustainable delivery is encouraging in that the new settings generally have the intention of continuing and have taken steps to do so.**



“Receiving the grant has enabled us to buy resources that are sustainable for future years.”

DofE Leader from an ANAP setting (final report)

“This equipment is reusable and therefore will be used to support young people undertake the Award at different levels throughout the school for this year and for many other years.”

DofE Leader from an ANAP setting (final report)

92% (Sample N=148 settings) of the respondents in the final reports answered “yes” to the question “Since receiving this funding, are you confident that your organisation will be able to continue delivering the DofE, beyond the grant funding period?” Among those who answered no, the main reasons given included “your organisation’s staff resourcing” and “financial barriers or affordability of the DofE Award”.

The FGD also provided helpful feedback on the likelihood of sustainable delivery of DofE. Participants outlined the steps they had taken to ensure the future of DofE in their setting and this discussion highlighted some promising findings, summarised in the below table. For example, **DofE leaders reported having embedded DofE into their curriculum, training staff in DofE, establishing a local network, having sustainable equipment, and included DofE in new job descriptions.**

5 Conclusions

This process evaluation has detailed considerable learning as outlined in the report, leading to the following concluding points.

1. The grant successfully reached the targeted schools and expanded access to DofE.
2. The funding was essential in enabling participation and overcoming financial barriers.
3. Evidence suggests the programme successfully engaged young people who have additional needs and/or access education in an alternative setting, as well as young people who are living in deprived areas.
4. Early insights from DofE group leaders point to positive benefits among young people including building self-belief and resilience.
5. Strong foundations have been established for sustainable delivery.

5.1 Overall Conclusion

The evaluation has found that the DCMS grant was highly successful in increasing access to the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award for **young people who have additional needs or access education in an alternative setting, as well as young people who are living in deprived areas.**

By removing key barriers to participation and supporting settings to deliver DofE effectively, even in the early stages, particularly by removing financial barriers, purchasing equipment, and by making their delivery inclusive to young people with additional needs, taking part in DofE is reported to have brought many positive benefits for participants. Through gaining access to a wider range of enrichment activities in their schools, DofE Leaders have witnessed participants building their self-belief, resilience and independence. Further, the new settings have worked hard to establish a strong platform for ongoing and sustainable DofE delivery in the future, by developing local networks and establishing internal capacity to deliver the Award.

This evaluation provides solid evidence that the DCMS funding has widened access, removed barriers, and created meaningful enrichment opportunities for young people who are unlikely to have accessed them otherwise.

6 Recommendations

Based on the findings and learning throughout the evaluation, the following recommendations are proposed for consideration by DofE:

1. Where possible, provide multi-year funding, enabling new settings to have more time to set up their delivery and young people to progress their Award and experience benefits within implementation periods.
2. Continue to increase access to DofE for young people in ANAP settings and mainstream schools in IMD 1-5 areas by raising awareness of the Award's flexibility and adaptability. Evidence from this evaluation, alongside existing research, can be used to demonstrate the benefits for young people and the potential for DofE to support the Government's enrichment agenda through a trusted delivery framework.
3. The DofE can do more to further support delivery by helping organisations build both staff and organisational capacity to deliver a nurturing DofE experience. This could be through enhanced training, qualification opportunities, resources, additional support and training to deliver expeditions for staff, as well as signposting settings to additional available funding.
4. The DofE can enhance the support package for new settings by further improving guidance and communication, for example, on eligible expenditure and reporting requirements and timescales. The DofE could also improve the experience for new settings by providing clearer advice on ways to maximise the opportunity for long-term sustainability to further enable organisations to continue to offer DofE.
5. The DofE could strengthen the potential for long-term sustainability by encouraging new settings to embed DofE within curriculum planning, integrate delivery responsibilities into staff roles, develop local delivery networks, and establish succession plans for trained leaders.
6. The DofE should continue to develop and test its partnership-led Sports Strategy by strengthening strategic relationships with NGBs and piloting partnership arrangements that better align with the needs and structures of the sports sector. This revised way of working should be monitored and continually improved.
7. The DofE should continue to strengthen evaluation and impact measurement by adapting the IMF to suit ANAP settings, as planned. This would enhance understanding of participant outcomes in these contexts. In addition, it can amplify young people's voices throughout evaluations and apply learning from current and previous grants into future programming.

We also suggest considering these recommendations in the context of wider government policy and programmes, including opportunities to scale this work to support the delivery of an enrichment premium, helping to remove barriers to positive activities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. There may also be opportunities for these learnings and this work to contribute to wider initiatives, including the PE and School Sports Partnerships Network and the Enrichment Expansion Programme.

The DofE offers its thanks to DCMS for their generous support, which has made it possible to increase access to the Award and support delivery in existing organisations. With this funding the DofE has been able to provide young people life-changing opportunities across England.