



YOUTH WITHOUT LIMITS

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award in the Supported Learning Department of a Secondary School

January 2022

Tim McArthur



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Background

The Robert Burns Academy is a secondary school in East Ayrshire that has been open for under a year. It is the amalgamation of Auchinleck and Cumnock Academies brought together in a new purpose built campus which also includes Hillside an ASN school, supporting pupils with moderate to severe additional needs.

All schools had previously experience of DofE in their mainstream programme. Hillside have offered Bronze level previously.

Supported Learning

With support from East Ayrshire's Centre Support Officer and senior management team at the school, it was decided to offer the DofE within the Supported Learning department.

Carolyn Devine, DHT of Supported Learning, said "I felt that DofE would provide a very positive framework to give young people some structure and a firm target to work towards. I knew they would gain resilience, teamwork, increase in self-confidence, community benefit through volunteering and achieving new skills. It complements their curricular studies and gives the pupils experience of working and learning outdoors which benefit their health and wellbeing".

With support from Mark Kerr, a staff member with previous DofE experience, the school enrolled fifteen young people at Bronze level DofE.

The DofE programme

One of the key elements of introducing the DofE was the requirement for it to be done within the school day, due to transport arrangements based on the catchment area.

As with any DofE Participant, activities should fit in with their interests to increase engagement. The DofE Leader chose to focus on activities which were already a part of the pupils' day and show them the link to DofE to minimise the concern about starting something new.

The proposed programme possibilities were discussed individually and collectively with each of the group members to encourage them to make the decisions on what they would do on both a personal and group basis – they felt that the group decision gave good support for each other and encouraging to keep them going.

On completion of any section, pupils will be given a Sectional Certificate. Once they complete Volunteering, Physical and Skills sections they will achieve the DofE Certificate of Achievement. Sectional certificates are great for rewarding resilience and encouraging motivation and the Certificate of Achievement is an acknowledgement of achievement by the young people.

Physical Section: The group goes twice a week to a specialist centre run by the Yipworld, a very positive voluntary organisation in Cumnock. They walk there and back – a round trip of forty minutes each time so they decided to use this as their physical activity.

Sectional activities

Skill Section: At the specialist centre the young people learn to ride and maintain bicycles; a great choice for their skill activity. The majority were unable to ride before they started, and none had done any form of cycle maintenance previously. As a result, one young man is getting his first bike for his 18 birthday!

Volunteering Section: The new school campus is set in substantial grounds offering a wide range of volunteering activities close at hand. From helping school janitors with regular tasks, maintaining parts of the grounds, developing gardens and litter picking, the pupils have chosen an activity which suits them.

Expedition: Currently the group are concentrating on their Volunteering, Physical and Skills sections. In the Spring, expedition training around the campus will be introduced and the expedition will likely start and finish at the school, in an environment familiar to the pupils.



Summary

- The programme is completed within the school day but within the pupil's own time because of transport constraints but also to ensure adequate support is available. (Note: young people with additional needs can use curricular activities for their DofE).
- Participants worked individually and as a group to choose their activities so can support each other.
- Participants have been able to choose activities that are practical and that they are already involved in.
- Participants can gain sectional certificates and DofE Certificate of Achievement encouraging motivation.
- Activities are relatively local, greatly reducing carbon footprint, keeping anxiety levels down. This then enables easier supervision by Leaders and benefiting their school community in the process.
- Great opportunity for personal development for members of staff in becoming involved with DofE



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