



Section notes

Voluntary Service



This leaflet provides a basic outline of The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, with particular emphasis on the Voluntary Service section and what is involved in acting as an Assessor. More information can be obtained from the participant's Award Centre.

What is the Award?

The Award enables 14-24 year olds to learn practical skills that are valuable to their personal and professional development.

It is comprised of three levels: Bronze, Silver and Gold. Participants set themselves challenging personal goals in four sections: Voluntary Service, Skills, Physical Recreation and Adventurous Journey at each level in order to achieve their Award. At Gold level, participants also complete a Gold Residential Project.

Throughout the programme, participants can develop existing interests but you should encourage them to do something new that would be challenging and enjoyable. Once participants have set their goals, they strive to achieve them, showing improvement throughout their Award journey.





What is an Assessor?

An Assessor (sometimes known as an Activity Coach) is an adult volunteer who conducts specific training for participants in any section of the Award. They will act as a mentor, instructor and supervisor. They will be the person to sign off a participant's section.

They should have considerable knowledge and experience of the chosen activity and be able to listen and help with a participant's thoughts, concerns and questions. They should encourage participants throughout the activity, assisting them from start through to completion by regularly meeting with them and discussing their goals.

They should check that the young person participates regularly over the minimum time period and shows improvement while striving to achieve their goals. At the end of the process, they will be required to approve the participant's Award activities and to sign off this section.

Voluntary Service section

This section of the Award provides a young person with a greater sense of worth from having given Voluntary Service to others and their community. The opportunity to give Voluntary Service over an extended period of time enables young people to witness and experience the benefits that their Voluntary Service provides to others and encourages them to become more active, engaged citizens.

The specific benefits will obviously depend on the type of service chosen. Some general benefits include learning patience, tolerance and compassion, making a real difference to the lives of others, trusting and being trusted, as well as exploring and improving interpersonal and self-development skills, forming a life-long habit of community involvement and enjoyment.

Participants learn by doing, in keeping with the Award methodology of experiential learning. By undertaking service regularly over a period of time, it is hoped that the participant will develop a lifelong commitment to Voluntary Service and community involvement.



Time requirements

The average minimum time spent on the Voluntary Service section over the time period is one hour per week. In a structured environment, such as being a voluntary youth leader, the weekly sessions may be much longer than one hour and participants would be expected to be involved for the entire session, so as to contribute in a meaningful way.

	Minimum time	If service is chosen as the longest section
Bronze	3 months	6 months
Silver	6 months	12 months (non Bronze holders only or direct entrants)
Gold	12 months	18 months (non Silver holders only)

Plan

Participants might need to undertake some kind of training in order to carry out the Voluntary Service activity they have chosen. Participants should first think about what kind of service they would like to do. The Assessor should then discuss expectations and set goals, and participants should complete any necessary training as some activities may have legal or technical requirements such as first aid. This training would ordinarily not be for more than one third of the period of the section. It is important that the Assessor allows opportunities for questions and reviewing of the tasks undertaken so that learning takes place. Also they need to make sure that the Voluntary Service activity differs from the other section activities to ensure a balanced programme.

If the initial choice of activity proves to be unsuitable, participants may choose another activity and count the time spent towards their overall minimum time requirement. This needs to be done in consultation with the Award Leader with new goals being agreed in advance of the change. More information about changing activities can be found in the International Handbook for Award Leaders. Participants should be encouraged to update their Online Record Book (ORB) on a regular basis and upload any evidence of their activities.

Do

All participants must carry out some practical service where their skills are put into practice. Even if the Voluntary Service is heavily dependent on a course format, participants should be required to make their skills available to others. The participant will have already met with their Award Leader and chosen their Voluntary Service activity. The Assessor and the participant will need to discuss and plan how the participant will carry out the activity subject to the time requirements, providing evidence during the activity to contribute to activity logs giving details of their training, counselling and practical service. The participant and Assessor should attend regular meetings to ensure continued support to the participant.

Review

The Assessor should review the activity and sign off the section when completed. The participant will provide the Assessor with the necessary documents to sign off via their Online Record Book. They should check that the minimum time requirements have been met or exceeded, and that the participant showed reliability and commitment. This should offer a chance for the participant to critically reflect on their experience, review the high and low points and what they have learned for the future.

Signing off the section

The Assessor will need to verify that the participant has been showing regular commitment to their activity over at least the required minimum time, and has shown improvement from their initial level of ability. The specific goals which were agreed at the start of the process, or revised ones if applicable, should have been achieved.

However, if the participant has not demonstrated the commitment and progress required to complete their activity, the participant should be encouraged to continue. When the agreed goal is achieved, the Assessor should then sign the section as completed.



It is more important than ever to listen and collaborate with young people to bring about positive change. Active participation in volunteerism, or service, through the Award enables young people to develop their knowledge, skills and maturity.

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