

## Reading Hack: Duke of Edinburgh's Award Volunteering

This guide is to help library staff support young people who are volunteering to achieve their Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE). We know that one of the ways libraries engage young people throughout the year is through DofE volunteering, but that it can sometimes be difficult to keep DofE volunteers busy during quiet times, or come up with engaging, long-term projects for experienced volunteers. Having a plan in place in advance can save staff time and ensure young people have a rewarding experience from their first contact with the library.

This pack includes:

- An introduction to DofE for library staff
- Volunteer roles for 3, 6 and 12 month placements to share with young people
- A template email/letter that libraries can send to schools and youth groups in their community, to tell them that DofE volunteer placements are available

We'd love to hear from you about DofE volunteering in your library. If you want additional support, or to share case studies with the rest of the Reading Hack network, please email [readinghack@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:readinghack@readingagency.org.uk).

### What is the Duke of Edinburgh's Award?

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) is an achievement programme for 14-24 year olds. There are three different levels to the award, Bronze, Silver and Gold. Young people commit 3, 6 or 12 months to volunteering, learning a new skill, taking part in a physical challenge and going on an expedition.

Reading Hack is a licenced Approved Activity Provider, which means that library volunteering has been approved by DofE as a way that young people can achieve their award. More than 1,800 organisations across the UK – including schools, colleges, universities, youth clubs, the Scouts and Guides, young offender institutions and businesses – help to run the DofE and need volunteering opportunities for their young people.

A record 271,439 young people started their DofE programme last year.

### How does DofE Volunteering work?

To achieve their DofE, young people must commit to volunteering for 3, 6 or 12 months to help people, the community or society, the environment or animals. Volunteering should take place for a minimum of an hour a week. Volunteers are encouraged to give their time in a way that challenges them and allows them to offer support in a way that fits with their skills and experience.

DofE volunteering works best when young people have a clear role and can show progression. At the end of their placement they will require proof of their contribution,

## Reading Hack: Duke of Edinburgh's Award Volunteering

usually in the form of a certificate, letter of thanks or signed timesheet. Use the volunteer roles in this pack as guidance when assigning young people a volunteer role.

3 months: Young people will be working towards their Bronze or Silver DofE, and may be new to volunteering. Short tasks that can be done within an hour will work best.

6 months: Young people can take on more challenging long-term projects, with support from library staff. Be guided by the young person and how confident they feel about certain tasks to find a balance.

12-18 months: Young people are making a serious commitment and can really make the role their own. They can have more creative control, and even run their own projects.

### Why recruit young people taking part in DofE as library volunteers?

- Libraries provide a free, easily accessible volunteering opportunity for young people.
- Volunteering is a stepping stone for young people to become library users
- Offering DofE volunteering placements is a good first step to expanding a library's year-round volunteering offer
- Young people must commit to volunteering for a set amount of time to achieve the award, so library staff always know in advance how long young people are planning to stay
- Young people who volunteer for 3 months for their Bronze Award may come back to do a longer period of volunteering for their Silver or Gold Award

### How can libraries reach out to potential DofE volunteers?

Most DofE volunteers will come to libraries through regular recruitment methods. However, there are some easy ways of reaching DofE volunteers specifically:

- Use the template in this pack to schools and youth groups know that volunteering opportunities are available. Address letters and emails FAO Duke of Edinburgh's Award Co-ordinator to reach the right person
- Put up posters in the library to let young people know that DofE volunteering placements are available
- Use the library website or social media to share stories or testimonials from young people who have already used library volunteering to achieve their DofE
- Share on Twitter. There are regional DofE accounts such as @DofELondon and @DofENorth as well as more local ones like @DofEWandsworth and @DofENorthTyneside

### How can libraries set up DofE volunteering?

- Think about the additional support/added value your library wants or needs, and how a young volunteer might deliver that

## Reading Hack: Duke of Edinburgh's Award Volunteering

- Decide how many young volunteers your library can support at any one time
- Work with young volunteers to decide what their role will look like, and encourage them to make suggestions based on their own interests, skills or ambitions
- Remember some roles may need to be adapted to suit young people of different ages and abilities
- Let staff know what the young volunteers will be doing and why

Libraries that haven't worked with young volunteers before should read the volunteering support packs on the Reading Hack Resources Bank. These include more general information around setting up a volunteer policy, safeguarding checks and risk assessment.

### What comes next?

- Young people might want to keep volunteering after their placement finishes, or might come back to the library at a later date to complete a higher level of the DofE Award
- Don't view it as a failure if a volunteer decides not to stay; your library has helped a young person gain valuable skills, achieve a prestigious award and give something back to their community. There will always be a steady stream of other young people looking for similar opportunities
- Ask young people for feedback on their experience, and share positive stories with the rest of the library, local authority and Reading Hack network
- Libraries could overlap volunteering placements so that more experienced volunteers can train new ones before they leave

### Useful resources

- You can see the Reading Agency's AAP information page here:  
<http://www.dofe.info/en/content/cms/leaders/approved-providers/reading-agency/>
- You can see DofE volunteering requirements for young people here:  
<http://www.dofe.info/en/content/cms/doing-your-dofe/activities-sections/volunteering/volunteering-require/>
- You can find volunteer certificates, here:  
<https://readingagency.org.uk/resources/?programme=hack>
- You can email any questions, case studies or feedback to  
[readinghack@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:readinghack@readingagency.org.uk)

**Remember:** Young people who are working towards their DofE should be registered for the award before they start volunteering, otherwise they're volunteering time won't count towards their DofE Award.