



Advice for an Unit Leader –What is the Duke of Edinburgh's award?

"The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is a life-changing experience.

Through your unique DofE programme, you can discover new talents, develop essential skills for life and have fun with friends. Any 14–24-year-old can do their DofE. Achieving an Award isn't a competition or about being first. It's about setting challenges and pushing personal boundaries. DofE has three levels: Bronze, Silver and Gold. For each level, you need to do four or five sections."

The different sections are Physical, Skill, Volunteering, Expedition, and at Gold Residential.

The Bronze award can be started at 14, Silver at 15 and Gold at 16. It can be started at any level, but the award must be completed before your 25th Birthday.

What are the time scales?

For Bronze they must spend 3 months working towards the skill, physical and volunteering sections, they must then complete an additional 3 months on any of the sections. So, it will take a minimum of 6 months to complete the bronze award.

In principle this would be 1 hour a week for 3/6 months, so 13/26 meetings, which is roughly 1 or 2 full school terms.

For Silver the volunteering section is 6 months/26 weeks unless they didn't complete Bronze which means they must do 1 of the sections for 1 year/ 52 weeks.

For Gold The volunteering section will take 1 year/ 52 weeks or if they didn't do Silver 18 months/ 78 weeks.

The time frames are flexible it doesn't have to be consecutive weeks, if it is a better balance for your unit or for the volunteer, they could attend every other week, this works particularly well if they would like to alternate with a ranger unit or would prefer a lower time commitment.

For Bronze, the overall goal is to have 13/26 hours spread over a minimum of 3/6 months.

If your meeting is over 1 hour the additional time can also be counted, towards the 13/ 26 hours but they must still attend for a total of 3/6 months the additional hours can count towards when units aren't meeting due to holidays, time spent planning with the unit or attending events outside of the unit may also count towards the total time.

So, to earn their award they must have attended meetings for a minimum of 13/26 consecutive weeks and have completed 13/26 hours of volunteering.

What is the purpose of the volunteering section?

“Volunteering is about making a meaningful contribution in your community, influencing change and shaping the world you want to live in. You should look for an activity that is meaningful to you. You can volunteer alone or in a team, in person or online.”

The volunteer should be making an impact in Guiding by gaining leadership skills, this can be a great way to recruit new leaders into your unit, although many may decide not to continue after their DofE, they should be getting involved in as much as possible, even if they only volunteer for a short period of time they should be able to gain, organisational skills, learn to work as part of a team all which will help them when trying to apply for jobs or uni in the future.

They also have the potential to stay and become a new unit leader, with the unit if they find that they really enjoy it.

It can seem like a lot to balance, and many young leaders leave due to exams. If you find a young leader has a lot of potential, try offering a lower commitment period around exam season maybe they come every other week or take 6 weeks off for exams. Taking time out of the exam schedule to volunteer can be rewarding and is a very good break, so try and encourage them to still attend sessions if they feel able and try to drop them an email once the exam season is over welcoming them back.

What to do with a new unit volunteer?

During their 1st term, you should try to follow the Welcome to being a young leader pack, this includes an e-learning that must be completed before they start volunteering, it is an introduction to the safeguarding practises in Girl Guiding.

There is also guidance on how they can get involved with girls, starting with joining in the activities e.g.: partnering up with a girl in an activity involving pairs. To helping the girls working in small groups, then working on leading a game, before hopefully being able to help lead a full unit activity by the end of the term.

Some other things that can help settle a new volunteer in is to give them specific tasks, they can be in charge of the register, filling in the record sheets for UMA's if you have physical copies, setting out activities, making drinks/ preparing snacks if you have them.

They should be included as much as possible, and should be able to support the unit, they can help by setting up activities while other leaders run a game, to help keep the unit running smoothly or vice versa when they are confident enough.

Guidance for volunteers who haven't been involved in guiding before.

Before a new Volunteer joins your unit you should ask:

Why do you want to volunteer with Girl Guiding?

What do you want to gain by volunteering with guiding?

What do you think the purpose of Guiding is?

What do you hope to get out of volunteering, and what skills do you hope to share?

Are there any special talents, hobbies, or experiences you would love to bring to the unit?

How much time can you realistically give, and how often can you attend meetings?

What time frame are you looking at volunteering for?

Does this meeting time and location suit your weekly schedule?

Would you be interested in also joining Rangers, if you aren't already?

If they are under 18 it is worth suggesting that they join Rangers alongside being a young leader, it gives them the chance to enjoy the program and understand it more from a girls' point of view.

How should they be documenting/ tracking their volunteering?

Making a diary or log of what happened at the unit each week is a really good way to track the volunteer hours it is also a great way of showing progression as what they achieved each week. There only needs to be a few sentences a week unless they achieved a big milestone and wants to document more, this can also be used to help with writing an assessor's report as it shows what progression you have made in the time frame.

This should be tracked by the volunteer, they will ask you for an assessor's report at the end, and some schools like each session to be signed by a leader.

What to include in an assessor's report?

The assessor's report is the final part of the section it will require on of the unit leaders to write a paragraph or 2 about the progress the volunteer has made. Before filling this in you should remind yourself of their goal. Include any memorable moments that you are aware of e.g. the 1st time they lead an activity and include any achievements they have earned.

Conditions for signing off volunteering hours.

The volunteering section is a challenge and there should be progress, They should be getting involved with the leadership team and trying to help, if you feel they haven't put in enough effort then you do not have to sign off their section, you can also be tell them that they only earned half the hour. If you feel like they haven't earned the full hour, let the volunteer know what they could do to assist the unit, or if there are some tasks they might be able to take on like doing the register at the start of the meeting, setting up the snack if your unit has one or helping set up any resources needed to complete the activities in a meeting.

If you feel like you have any more DofE related questions or would like some help on a more specific issue, please email me on

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