



awardsplus
Edinburgh and The Lothians

Strategy
2023-2025



Supporting achievement
for all
through youth awards

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Welcome

Awards Plus - formerly Friends of the Award - is having a refresh. Not a reinvention, but a reset.

2023 marks 25 years since Friends of the Award in Edinburgh and the Lothians was established. From 1998 it has delivered and supported take-up of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award through local authorities, schools and youth groups. In particular, young people with no affiliation, and needing some extra help at an individual level, have been at the heart of its story.

Thousands of young people - especially from marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds, or going through mental health difficulties - have been helped.

It's well-established that youth awards can have significant benefits - and that they should be available to all. Participation can build confidence and self-esteem, promote healthy lifestyles and lead to new skills and qualifications to help future prospects.

Personal needs of young people have been prioritised by Friends of the Award, often through council, youth work and health care collaborations delivering the Duke of Edinburgh's Award in accessible and inclusive ways. A partnership with NHS Lothian Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) has been sustained since 2006. Experiences have been created that wouldn't otherwise have been possible - with benefits that for many have been life-changing and transformational.

Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme delivery has been complemented by a variety of schemes in an evolving and integrated mix. These include Junior Award Scheme for Schools (JASS), John Muir Award, National Navigation Award Scheme, Leave No Trace, Bikeability, Mountain Training awards and others. All recognise, celebrate and/or accredit non-formal learning.

Youth work, outdoor learning and youth awards have a strong mainstream presence across formal and informal learning in Scotland. But it's not equitable. Additional support is urgently needed to target certain audiences, to focus on geographical areas, to address health and social challenges. Understanding

individual needs and tailoring bespoke responses is often what's needed to overcome barriers and to nurture opportunities.

The reasons for establishing Friends of the Award in 1998 are no less valid now. It was set up to fill gaps in provision. To make sure that young people didn't miss out. To look out for those not catered for, hard to reach, or in need of some extra help - for whatever reason.

Today, there is still a 'poverty of opportunity' for many young people.

This is where Awards Plus - building on the track record of Friends of the Award - comes in.



Summary

As it turns 25, Friends of the Award is evolving into Awards Plus in Edinburgh and The Lothians

A new name reflects three things

- Support for a range of youth awards – outdoors-focused, nature-based, adventurous – building on a foundation of Duke of Edinburgh's Award provision.
- Commitment to meet the needs of *all* young people; to provide extra, bespoke support, especially for those who benefit most from additional help that wouldn't otherwise be available to them.
- An approach that identifies connections, pathways and progression between youth awards.

'Awards Plus' keeps youth awards at its heart. Extra help is central for young people who might need it. Awards routes and journeys are encouraged.

Awards Plus does three things

To be accurate, *continues* to do three things. These strands of activity aren't new. There's renewed emphasis on each being integral to what's offered by Awards Plus: they interact and are mutually supportive.

- Run, support and signpost **nature-based awards - youth awards** with elements of enjoying, learning about and caring for nature.
- Lead, co-ordinate, train for, equip and support **expeditions**, primarily for Duke of Edinburgh's Award participation.
- Provide **1:1 mentoring support** for young people experiencing mental health difficulties who are open to outdoor activity opportunities and youth awards involvement.

Awards Plus is here for individuals, youth groups and schools, as well as working with various partners, across Edinburgh & The Lothians.

In particular, it's for young people aged 14-25 who may miss out on opportunities for practical, logistical or financial reasons, due to additional support needs, and for reasons associated with mental health difficulties.

A **new strategy for 2023-25** focuses on **three organisational priorities and three outward-facing agendas**. This fits the work of Awards Plus with opportunities and challenges facing young people and educators in Scotland today. It builds on a 25-year track record of supporting achievement in accessible, inclusive ways. And it gives a foundation for future growth.

As an organisation, Awards Plus will focus on:

- **Consolidation & Coherence** – bring more joining-up and clarity to what it offers
- **Connections & Collaborations** – strengthen current partnerships, build more, be more creative
- **Security & Longevity** – planning, funding and staffing take a longer (3-5 year) view

and position work to contribute to:

- **Nature-based Awards, Non-formal Learning, Personal Achievement**
- **Mental Health support**, partnering with Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
- **Learning for Sustainability**

A re-set, building on its strengths, will set Awards Plus to confidently navigate its next 25 years.

Part 1

1.1 Who we are, what we do, who we work with

Awards Plus, formerly Friends of the Award, is a Scottish charity operating in Edinburgh and The Lothians **supporting achievement for all through youth awards**.

Aims

Focusing on 14 – 25-year-olds - on an individual basis as well as working closely with schools, youth groups and agency referrals – Awards Plus:

- provides access to learning, recreation and personal development experiences, leading to a wide range of positive impacts and benefits including recognition, certification and qualifications.
- promotes active and adventurous lifestyles, nature connectedness, and positive physical and mental health.
- improves citizenship, community involvement and life chances.
- advances accessibility, equality, inclusion and diversity by making opportunities available regardless of personal circumstances.

In practice

Awards Plus aims to provide:

- a bespoke, individualised approach that is inclusive, accessible and welcoming.
- a focus on gaps in provision, offering support where it might be most needed and otherwise be missing.
- expertise in outdoor-based, adventurous, nature-connected youth awards, understanding a range of relevant awards, their criteria, and how they can join up. A strong focus on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award is complemented by Junior Award Scheme for Schools/JASS, John Muir Award, Ramblers Scotland Out There Award, Junior Forester Award, Bikeability, Mountain Training and National Navigation awards and others.
- expertise in making expeditions accessible; we're a Duke of Edinburgh's Award Approved Activity Provider for Expeditions.
- high staffing ratios, combining professionals skilled in outdoor settings and mental health-informed approaches with a committed, caring volunteer base.
- an approach focused on active engagement, encouraging young people to broaden their horizons and build their sense of self-worth.
- a combination of mentoring, coaching, leadership, provision of organised activities, facilities and equipment.
- a collaborative approach, supporting learners and volunteers through effective partnership working.



1.2 What does Awards Plus do?

Awards Plus provides nature-based youth awards, expeditions and 1:1 mentoring support, for individuals, youth groups and schools – with a focus on young people who might need extra support. This includes direct delivery, guidance, training and signposting.



1.2.1 Nature-based youth awards

Youth awards can offer focus and motivation, positive engagement with education, and valuable recognition of achievement.

Nature-based awards create opportunities to spend time enjoying, learning about and caring for nature.

Benefits can include:

- hands-on, experiential and real-world learning experiences.
- building valuable skills and knowledge – from practical capabilities such as navigation, wildlife ID and path maintenance to environmental awareness to transferable skills such as teamwork, communication and problem-solving.

- learning in, through, about and for nature – ‘Learning for Sustainability’. Spending time in wild places can inspire responses such as creativity, curiosity and connection.
- awareness of climate and nature crises and opportunities to be a positive force for change, through conservation work, advocacy and adopting sustainable lifestyle choices.

The diverse mix of youth awards in Scotland invites connections and progressive opportunities. Different awards can be integrated and overlap. Pathways for learners can be mapped out to meet individual interest, skills and aspirations.

Awards Plus (as Friends of the Award) has been supporting Duke of Edinburgh's Award participation at Bronze, Silver and Gold levels and across all Sections for twenty five years. Extensive expertise helps make the DofE Expedition Section accessible for young people who may face additional challenges (see below).

A range of awards and qualifications focused on nature, adventure and outdoor skills are increasingly requested and delivered. These include Junior Award Scheme for Schools/JASS, John Muir Award, Heritage Hero Award, Scottish Junior Forester Award, Bikeability, Lowland Leader Award, Mountain Training and National Navigation Award Schemes.

An 'Open Programme' is co-ordinated and delivered by Awards Plus to support involvement and achievement. Whilst the Duke of Edinburgh's Award is its focal point, other awards form part of a rich mix of delivery creating opportunity to meet each young person's interests.

1.2.2 Expeditions

Expeditions take young people on journeys – physical, emotional and intellectual. They are powerful experiences with potential to engage head, heart and hand. They create memories. They cross boundaries. They are shared – whether what’s being shared is good or bad, uncomfortable or extraordinary. They promote responsibility and independent achievement. They can help young people develop a sense of place, a sense of others, a sense of themselves.

The *Outjoymnt Report* surveyed nearly 11,000 people and concludes that:

“Camping connects people – to the outdoors, to nature, to each other, and most importantly to themselves. Positive emotions generated from outdoor enjoyment help to alleviate

everyday stressors and promote feelings of life satisfaction. It is no surprise then, that the more people camp the more this can improve happiness and well-being.”

Dr Kaye Richards, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Liverpool John Moores University

Many factors can result in young people missing out on the opportunity to complete their DofE Expedition Section, or not experiencing the satisfaction of a multi-day journey and a night under the stars. Participants may have physical or mental health challenges. Schools might not be in a position to organise expeditions; there’s often a lack of qualified leaders; participants may not have access to suitable clothing and equipment; additional, bespoke guidance might be needed.

The approach taken by Awards Plus addresses individual needs, within a group setting. Adjustments can be made, adapting arrangements while still meeting criteria. It can make all the difference to a young person setting out on an expedition and successfully completing it.

The Awards Plus Open Programme includes training, practice and qualifying expeditions. It’s for:

- young people from Edinburgh and The Lothians who haven’t managed to complete expeditions through their own DofE Centre’s provision.
- young people who may need extra support and adjustments on their DofE journey e.g. for financial reasons, support with mental health difficulties.

Expeditions guidance is available for schools, youth and community groups.

Free or low-cost use of personal and group equipment for expeditions can be accessed from an extensive kit store.

“I’ve had difficulties with my mental health. Doing an expedition and achieving my Duke of Edinburgh’s Award has been the most positive experience in the past three years.”

2022 participant

“My expeditions with Awards Plus/Friends of the Award have really shown me how much I love the outdoors, and they’ve definitely helped to foster my camping and hiking skills in a safe environment. They’re skills I’ll definitely use for camping in my own time.”

2022 participant

1.2.3 1:1 Mentoring support

Issues relating to a young person’s mental health are many and varied. Some might be seen as a common, if challenging, part of youth and a feature of modern life. But the ever-present nature and scale of issues, stresses and pressures – as well as personal circumstances - can cause vulnerability, anxiety, struggle, isolation and crisis. For some, additional support is beneficial. Mental health services are stretched beyond capacity and failing to meet a rising demand.

There are multiple benefits in connecting young people facing mental health struggles with youth awards, with nature, and with their wider community. Youth awards offer a framework and focus. A support role can help to target suitable opportunities in an informed way. Recognising achievement at every step of a participation journey can have great value, from making an appointment and getting on a bus to completing an adventurous expedition or getting involved in a conservation project or climate campaign.

Youth awards can feel unattainable for many young people who are struggling with motivation, anxiety or self-esteem, however. There’s a need to hold open doors to opportunities which might otherwise seem closed. Every young person’s needs, interests and timeline is unique. A tailored 1:1 approach can provide the time and support to identify suitable opportunities, help reach appropriate milestones and celebrate every success.

Awards Plus offers a mental health-informed youth work approach. A young person aged 14-25 experiencing mental health difficulties can access 1:1 mentoring support for awards participation. After a referral from a mental health support agency such as the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) or a partner school/youth group, a pattern of regular contact with a support worker is established.

“Having a mental health condition meant that my son K wasn’t able to do his DofE at high school, it wasn’t inclusive and not flexible enough for his needs. After his discharge from CAMHS, doing it through Friends of the Award was the only thing that gave him focus. Completing it gave him something positive to look forward to. I cannot thank the Friends of the Award team enough for all their support throughout the past year.”

Parent

Features of this support include:

- a tailored 1:1 approach. This provides the time and space to form a constructive relationship at a pace suited to each young person, and to identify suitable youth awards-related opportunities.
- regular in person and/or online exchanges. These can focus on (re-)engagement with natural spaces, communities, active choices, volunteering, self-paced challenges and goal-setting – in ways that suit each individual.
- recognising achievement at every level. Each unique success is noted, from showing up, to meeting requirements of a DofE Section/milestone, to successful award completion.
- support to participate in an access-focused Open Programme of activities and expeditions, exploring any concerns or adjustments that might be needed.



1.3 Who does Awards Plus work with?

With a remit to operate across Edinburgh and The Lothians, Awards Plus mainly works with individuals, youth groups and schools. A range of partnerships, from Councils to national agencies to local charities, support this activity.

1.3.1 Individuals

Individuals aged 14 to 25 form a core audience, matching the age range for DofE participation, with a focus on young people looking for extra support.

In particular, Awards Plus is for young people who may miss out on opportunities for practical, logistical or financial reasons, due to additional support needs, and for reasons associated with mental health difficulties. Participation is often co-ordinated through partners and referring agencies. 1:1 mentoring support can be accessed via a referral process. There's no need to be part of an existing a group.

What's on offer

- A year-round 'Open Programme' offers support towards DofE at Bronze, Silver, Gold levels (including Expeditions and Sectional achievement), Junior Award Scheme for Schools/JASS, John Muir Award, as well as opportunities to develop skills through the Ramblers Scotland Out There Award, National Navigation Award Scheme, Lowland Leader Award and others.
- Expeditions (including training, practice and qualifying) are run as part of the Open Programme from spring to autumn. These can be accessed by young people who haven't managed to complete them through their own DofE Centre's provision. This might be due to youth groups/schools having low numbers, or individuals may require adjustments and benefit from extra support (including 1:1 Mentoring support referrals).
- Financial support is available for participants from certain local authority areas to cover activities, training and expeditions. Where possible provision is subsidised or free, otherwise costs are kept to a minimum or a limited contribution requested.
- Equipment: free or low-cost use of personal and group equipment can be accessed from an extensive kit store.
- Individuals who have experiences of mental health struggles can access tailored 1:1 mentoring support towards youth awards via a referral from CAMHS or another supporting organisation.
- Introductions and links to relevant organisations can be made for further opportunities, volunteering, skills development.

1.3.2 Youth Groups

Numerous youth and community agencies work extensively and effectively throughout Edinburgh and The Lothians, including with disadvantaged young people and in areas of deprivation. Circumstances can include additional support needs (behavioural, learning or physical), disability, kinship care, residential care, mental health issues, as well as reduced access to opportunities through financial hardship.

Organisations don't always have the capacity or capabilities to provide all the services they'd like to, perhaps due to budget restraints or a lack of specialist training. There's often a skills gap to support participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and other nature-based youth awards.

Awards Plus complements youthwork expertise to meet young people's interests, needs and aspirations. Collaborations increase youth award participation and build capacity to integrate nature-based activity into youthwork.

What's on offer

- The Awards Plus Open Programme can be signposted for individuals.
- Groups with an established or a new start-up DofE programme can be supported from registration to Sectional activities to Expeditions, with complementary youth awards integrated into activity (funding dependent).
- Financial support and free/subsidised access to activities is available in some local authority areas.
- Training and development opportunities are provided for youthwork leaders and educators as part of an Awards Plus volunteer programme of support.
- Mentoring for lead DofE staff can support them across all aspects towards self-sufficient delivery, including Expeditions guidance. A mentoring role can be applied to other awards.
- Equipment: free or low-cost use of personal, group and leader equipment can be accessed from an extensive kit store.
- Family and refugee groups can access this support.



1.3.3 Schools

Awards Plus works with Secondary schools in areas of multiple deprivation, with Enhanced Complex Needs/ Additional Support Units, and/or with pupils who might benefit from our services.

Schools recognise the value of focused, structured, engaging and enjoyable time outdoors for pupils. It's an entitlement for all learners in Scotland (through [Learning for Sustainability](#)); there's an expectation set out in teaching's [Professional Standards](#) for all educators to include aspects of outdoor learning in their practice as a 'key cross-cutting theme'. Schools increasingly prioritise sustainability, climate and outdoor learning approaches in their improvement plans. 'Personal achievement' is one of 'four contexts for curriculum delivery', an open door for using a variety of youth awards.

Schools often need additional support to deliver awards that might be of interest to pupils, to create a meaningful programme of nature-based activity, and to make curriculum links. There are many instances across Edinburgh and the Lothians of secondary school-aged pupils missing out on opportunities. Some are in secure sections of a school and unable to participate in 'traditional' outdoor time at breaks and lunchtimes. In some schools, particular skills and insights are needed to complement teacher expertise.

Achievement of mainstream or academic qualifications by pupils is often limited. A partnership approach can identify and support opportunities to gain accredited outcomes, certificates and recognise personal achievement. In turn this can help pupils reach positive destinations on leaving school. It also contributes to the school ethos and community connections.

Awards Plus provides age/ability-appropriate outdoor or outdoor-related sessions working towards achieving relevant youth awards. Timeframes range from a term to an academic year (or multi-year) partnership; inputs can be from half a day to multiple days/week.

What's on offer

- Planned activity works towards achieving a range of awards (as appropriate) including DofE at Bronze, Silver, Gold levels and Sectional achievement, Junior Award Scheme for Schools/JASS, John Muir Award and others.
- Financial support is available in certain local authority areas, including for DofE enrolment and Section activities for participants.
- Time outside is prioritised, with contingency planning for weather, staffing, behaviour.
- Pupil mental health is considered in terms of how nature connectedness can enhance wellbeing, as well as any anxiety or related issues that might occur.
- Support for teachers in applying outdoor learning approaches is provided.
- Collaboration with staff aims to link activity with the school syllabus as appropriate.
- Training and development opportunities are available for educators as part of an Awards Plus volunteer programme of support.
- Mentoring for lead DofE staff can support them across all aspects towards self-sufficient delivery, including Expeditions guidance. A mentoring role can be applied to other awards too.
- Equipment: free or low-cost use of personal, group and leader equipment can be accessed from an extensive kit store.

"It just wouldn't have been possible without all this support. It's not just been practical, it's been at all levels. Credit is especially due for having a good way with our pupils. That's vital. The proof? They all turned up, every single one, no flakers. 32 pupils have been supported

through their Duke of Edinburgh's Award journey, cost-free, in a disadvantaged learning community. It's an opportunity they'd never have had without this support."

Gracemount High School teacher

Part 2

Strategy 2023-25

Awards Plus is a charity in its own right, operating independently throughout Edinburgh and The Lothians. It has a 25-year track record (as Friends of the Award) of operating in outdoor settings, safely, in a spirit of fun and adventure, meeting increasingly complex needs of young people.

We've identified three organisational priorities and three priorities in relation to significant contexts for the work of Awards Plus. These give a clear focus for the next three years. In summary:

- Coherence and consolidation of activity and processes is needed; there's scope for stronger collaborations; a longer-term focus is required.
- It's vital to understand the context in which Awards Plus works, to stay relevant and meet the needs of young people, partners and funders. We want to contribute and evidence good practice through evaluation and narrative. In particular, we can elevate under-represented voices in youth awards; in mental health work; in Learning for Sustainability.



2.1 Priorities for 2023-25: Organisational

Organisational priorities are to deliver benefits of multiple awards rather than promote a singular award focus, to join up all aspects of activity, and to build on current collaborations. In turn, this will increase the presence of Awards Plus, invite continued and extended partnership working, and improve long-term security.

Currently there's confusion about identity and scope for more clarity in presentation and messaging. In part this arises from varied and longstanding associations, partnerships, projects and funding arrangements. Disjointed and disconnected provision needs clarity. High staff turnover compromises consistency and longer-term working relationships.

2.1.1 Consolidation & Coherence

In three years, Awards Plus will be well-known across Edinburgh and The Lothians for its inclusive, accessible support of young people to achieve youth awards, promoting adventure, outdoor learning, expeditions, nature-connectedness. In particular, it will be seen as an enabler - creating meaningful personalised contributions to the lives of young people, including meeting diverse mental health and support needs.

Consolidation is a focus for 2023. This gives a foundation for manageable growth of a high-quality service in subsequent years. It's about meeting individual needs of young people effectively rather than striving for high engagement numbers. Increased capacity from 2024 can build activity and positive outcomes for young people.

To (re-)establish and grow a viable working model, Awards Plus will:

- focus on less-advantaged young people, understanding their backgrounds and needs.
- deliver and support a portfolio of youth awards – nature-based, outdoors-focused – to broaden horizons, cultivate self-belief and support personal achievement.
- confirm a new name - Awards Plus - and present the organisation and its work in ways that are representative, accessible, contemporary.
- make sure that varied strands of delivery and activity are inter-connected and mutually supportive.
- maintain 'Provider' status with appropriate youth awards (including DofE Approved Activity Provider for Expeditions licence), continuing to develop expertise in how they are delivered.
- adopt an organisational structure to support this model, including staff, volunteers and Trustees. Developing a flexible, responsive staffing model (including freelance and associate staff) will meet fluctuating/seasonal demand and maintain essential levels of skills, competences and qualifications.
- work closely with others across youth work/ awards, education and health settings to support and enhance activity and build presence.
- maintain a welcoming, inclusive and accessible approach that accommodates a wide range of individual requirements.

2.1.2 Connections & Collaborations

There are rich opportunities across Edinburgh and The Lothians for contributing to and benefitting from partnerships and networks. In three years, Awards Plus will be an established, effective partner with at least five organisations.

Many organisations have common and complementary goals. With the potential for a crowded and confused marketplace - for educators and young people alike - there's a need to know what is distinctive and complementary in our work, and position it accordingly.

Creative collaborations increase opportunities. They create win:wins. Working with others enhances what can be offered - from identifying hard-to-reach individuals who might benefit most to signposting towards new prospects; from supporting established ways of participating in youth awards to exploring innovative ideas; from small-scale local activities to transformative expeditions and residentials.

To effectively position its activity in relation to others, Awards Plus will:

- manage perceptions of what it does with consistent, concise and coherent communications - both in-house and with wider audiences.
- re-set current core relationships with City of Edinburgh Council and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), resulting in working/funding agreements for longer than 12 months. This involves understanding their priorities for 2023-2025, demonstrating effective ways to contribute to aims and priorities.
- identify new strategic partnerships that support our focus on delivering nature-based youth awards, expeditions, mental health support.
- work with projects and initiatives that embrace creativity, nature connectedness and fresh thinking.
- create a staffing model which identifies shared remits with partners, built-in longevity and management responsibility for partnership working. This might include secondments, projects and job-shares.



City of Edinburgh Council

The City of Edinburgh Council has a longstanding investment in youth work, youth awards and outdoor learning, including targeting disadvantaged areas with support and expertise. A commitment to increase DofE participation and completions, particularly where extra help was needed, was a key driver behind the setting up of Friends of the Award in 1998. It's a partnership that's been maintained for 25 years.

"The City of Edinburgh Council values its longstanding relationship with the Friends of the Award/Awards Plus. Collaborative work supporting DofE participation and achievement has resulted in many young people benefitting from a wider achievement award. The Council looks forward to continuing this important work, as well as exploring other opportunities to support Edinburgh's young people."

Andrew Bradshaw, Principal Officer Outdoor Learning, The City of Edinburgh Council

Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE)

More than 323,000 young people across Scotland started their DofE programme of volunteering, physical and skills-based challenges in 2022/23. Since its inception in 1956 over 6 million young people worldwide have participated in a DofE experience.

Its 2021-26 strategy Youth Without Limits "puts the DofE at the heart of the national effort to back young people through the challenging years ahead", recognising the urgent need to support

recovery from the disruption of recent years. In particular, goals of 'Access' and 'Relevance' resonate with the 25-year track record of Friends of the Award and the focus of Awards Plus.

We share a commitment to "work with existing and new partners and young people to better understand and tackle barriers to participation and progression" and to "develop new delivery models so we can take DofE to where young people are, particularly reaching those who experience marginalisation".

The Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

CAMHS works with children and young people aged 5-18 and their parents as part of the NHS, providing specialist assessment, intervention and support to those struggling with their mental health. The potential benefits of supported Duke of Edinburgh's Award participation, as part of a young person's recovery, were evaluated and recognised by clinicians in 2006 through a partnership with Friends of the Award seen as unique in the UK at the time. There has been a direct working relationship ever since.

Funding and integrated projects have maintained this vital strand of work. An annual caseload of 50 young people is managed by 2 dedicated part-time staff (funded to Nov 2023), providing bespoke 1:1 mentoring support towards youth awards achievement and improved mental health.

"Young people experiencing mental health problems often require support and encouragement to develop the skills and confidence to move into community life, work and education. Many require supported opportunities to rediscover their strengths, build their social confidence and begin to engage with their local communities. This collaboration with Friends of the Award has provided a structure for young people to plan goals and to take first steps to become involved in groups and activities. For many these steps are not easy but the encouragement by the Support Worker and acknowledgment of their achievement through gaining sections of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and other awards has been a very effective incentive. It has enabled young people to brave new situations and meet new people".

Senior Occupational Therapist, Edinburgh CAMHS

2.1.3 Security & Longevity

In three years, Awards Plus will have sustainable long-term funding and stable staffing in place. This is essential to make sure there is capacity to work effectively with young people, schools and youth groups.

Secure medium- to long-term funding – three years and beyond - is the lifeblood of small charities. It allows a shift of focus from short-term and project-based to one that builds relationships, grows the organisation, establishes a presence. Progress on the first two strategic priorities naturally advances this aim.

As well as pursuing traditional funding sources, innovative approaches will be explored, including revenue streams, job sharing through partnerships, and in-kind benefits. Robust fundraising processes and finance management will build confidence in the charity and its work, attracting high-calibre staff to stay for longer than they currently do.

Awards Plus will:

- establish a rolling 3-year Fundraising Plan.
- introduce a budgeting process that integrates, but isn't defined by, project-based funding.
- confirm a Reserves policy and a minimum-cost operating model.
- establish a staffing model with built-in flexibility, including core full-time roles beyond 12-month contracts.
- explore job-share and partnership opportunities (with roles funded by other organisations with shared aims), secondments, apprenticeships.
- monitor, evaluate and demonstrate the breadth and impact of activity.

2.2 Priorities for 2023-25: Key Issues, Agendas, Initiatives

There's a 'bigger picture' for any organisation working with young people in Scotland. Contexts are set and influenced by broad agendas, current issues, national initiatives. These – such as pandemic recovery, education policy drivers, poverty and cost-of-living concerns, mental health support needs - create challenges and opportunities.

Increasingly, the learning landscape in Scotland is a blend of the formal and informal, with youthwork and outdoor learning approaches integrated in school settings. Parity of esteem across academic qualifications and youth awards is strongly advocated in current policy discussion. Additional support needs, including mental health difficulties, now have raised prominence.

Priorities for 2023-25 are to demonstrate and share good practice in areas of expertise. In particular, Awards Plus will contribute to youth awards inclusivity, mental health agendas, and the Learning for Sustainability entitlement for all learners in Scotland.

2.2.1 Nature-based Awards, Non-formal Learning, Personal Achievement

In Scotland, 'Curriculum' is defined as 'the totality of all that is planned for children and young people from early learning and childcare, through school and beyond'. It can be planned for and experienced by learners across four contexts:

- Curriculum areas and subjects
- Interdisciplinary learning
- Ethos and life of the school
- Opportunities for personal achievement

Youth awards contribute to all four contexts, especially 'personal achievement'. They can offer motivation and positive engagement with education, as well as valuable recognition of achievement. Nature-based awards create opportunities for people to benefit from spending time enjoying, learning about and caring for nature.

The highly-anticipated Hayward Review of Qualifications and Assessment (May 2023) proposes significant revisions to build on the Curriculum for Excellence and capture a wider range of each student's capabilities. The Awards Network - which brings together youth awards organisations in Scotland - proposes that youth awards models could transform recognition and accreditation in Scotland. Its vision that "non-formal learning youth awards are nationally recognised and equitably valued with formal learning qualifications as evidence of attainment and achievement" is fully supported by Awards Plus (we're an active member via hosting the Junior Awards Scheme for Schools/JASS).

High-profile awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award already have credibility and kudos in education and with employers. Capturing and valuing the full breadth of a young person's non-academic achievements, including youth awards gained in school and community settings, will be a game-changer for those less likely to gain formal qualifications.

Awards Plus will:

- promote and directly deliver a range of nature-based awards in progressive and integrated ways, exploring how they benefit young people in different settings.
- collaborate on relevant Scotland-wide evaluation and impact activity.
- support recognition of the value of non-formal learning, including parity with academic qualifications, by actively participating in advocacy and consultations led by Awards Network and YouthLink Scotland.



'Education...goes far beyond formal schooling to embrace the broad range of life experiences and learning processes which enable children, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities and to live a full and satisfying life within society.'

Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

2.2.2 Mental Health support

Services that support young people's mental health and wellbeing are more crucial now than ever. The number of young people referred for emergency mental health services reached a record high in 2022 (Young Minds); increasing demands aren't being accommodated. Significant numbers struggling with their mental health aren't seeking direct help for reasons including "they don't want to 'burden' services, anxiety about video or phone calls, not having privacy at home, or feeling shame at needing help".

The COVID-19 pandemic acutely impacted on young people. Fear, isolation and grief, as well as upheaval of existing routines, social connections, and changes to services, have had a lasting effect on many. Whilst some have bounced back, the most vulnerable have been particularly affected. The Prince's Trust Tesco 2021 Youth Index, for example, found that one in four 16 to 25-year-olds felt "unable to cope with life", increasing to 40% among those not in work, education or training. 47% didn't feel in control of their lives; 43% reported increased anxiety; 69% felt their lives were on hold.

It's well-established that connecting with nature supports physical and mental health and wellbeing, and can play a part in mental illness recovery (often alongside counselling, therapy and medication). A 'Wild and Well' hub hosted by the John Muir Trust collates many articles, research, books, films and more exploring the link between wild places and wellbeing. Taking action for nature helps individuals feel good about the difference they can make, as well as benefitting wildlife, biodiversity and communities.

Awards Plus will:

- consolidate a longstanding partnership with CAMHS, dovetailing with a range of support service providers used by CAMHS.
- develop an 'Early Intervention' referral process.
- develop a good practice model to support residential attendance, addressing anxieties and barriers to positive participation.
- integrate health and wellbeing models including 5 Ways to Wellbeing, Social Prescribing, 5 Pathways to Nature Connection, and relevant Health Impact Assessment Tools.
- place co-design - listening to the ideas and aspirations of each young person - at the heart of 1:1 mentoring and mental health support work.
- share expertise - with young people, volunteers, youth workers, educators, partners, networks - to promote good practice that addresses mental health and mental illness issues.
- build a body of narrative and evidence to illustrate benefits and impact in relation to mental health and nature-based youth awards.



2.2.3 Learning for Sustainability

All learners in Scotland have an entitlement to Learning for Sustainability (Lfs) in their education. It's a cross-curricular approach that weaves together distinct but closely-related themes of sustainable development education, climate education, global citizenship, children's rights and outdoor learning.

Learning for Sustainability is a key policy driver to ensure young people gain the knowledge, skills, values and attributes needed for life in the 21st Century: an understanding of their environment, culture and heritage; their role in the local, national and global community; the importance of connection and care to the natural world; and the significance of their choices, now and in the future, to live in a sustainable way.

“Children and young people have repeatedly asked to put Lfs at the centre of their learning experiences, calling for a greater emphasis on climate education, biodiversity and youth participation. This is clearly articulated in Professor Ken Muir’s Report; where he highlighted that the current generation of learners sees climate change and social justice as key drivers influencing the future of our education system.”

Learning for Sustainability Scotland, Jan 2023

Scottish Government has strengthened the profile and visibility of Learning for Sustainability in its 2023 'Achieving Excellence and Equity: National Improvement Framework and improvement plan'. This document 'sets out the vision and priorities for Scottish education and the national improvement activity that needs to be undertaken to help deliver those key priorities'. Its refreshed Action Plan includes ambitious commitments to ensure that every school embraces Learning for Sustainable by 2030.

It's a time of system-wide reform in Scottish education. Learning for Sustainability features in several key aspects including:

- Professor Ken Muir's Report 'Putting learners at the centre: towards a future vision for Scottish education'. It highlights “the need to strengthen values, attitudes, knowledge and skills in the context of Learning for Sustainability, particularly given the increased profile and relevance of climate change to the current and future generations of children and young people”.
- The National Discussion on Education (with responses from Learning for Sustainability Scotland, Awards Network, YouthLink Scotland).
- A review of qualifications and assessment by Professor Emeritus Louise Hayward.

Whilst there is exciting momentum, inclusion needs much more emphasis. Extra support is needed for non-mainstream pupils, for less affluent areas, for marginalised and excluded learners.

Awards Plus will:

- position activity as part of the national entitlement to Learning for Sustainability, in particular in ways that address the attainment gap.
- Contribute to a **refreshed Action Plan** (June 2023).
- Contribute to the Lfs Professional Learning Directory, where educators access training and resources that support them to embed Lfs in their practice.
- Identify place-, nature- and climate-related activity that relates to DofE strategic goals of Relevance and Impact.
- Apply a 'Conserve Audit' methodology to quantify activity where appropriate.

3 Awards Plus is not

To avoid ambiguity and assist with focus, it's important to identify some of the things that Awards Plus is not, or isn't a priority in the next three years.

Awards Plus isn't:

- an offshoot of any other organisation.
- a collection of disconnected projects that operate in bubbles.
- working with Primary School-aged children; our expertise is with those in Secondary School settings and beyond (usually aged 14-25, occasionally 12+).
- an organisation of mental health professional practitioners at the level of occupational therapists, child psychologists; support provided applies youth work approaches in mental-health-informed ways to complement mental health services.
- a 'freelance instructor' service; there's a focus on supporting young people through working relationships with organisations.



4 25 years of Friends of the Award

Friends of the Award was established as a charity in 1998 to complement and support delivery of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) by local authorities in Edinburgh and the Lothians. Its founders recognised the value of DofE participation in the personal development of young people aged 14 – 25 through its holistic programme of activities requiring commitment over time. Learning new skills - including interpersonal skills such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, healthy lifestyles – helped to develop self-confidence to take on future life challenges. And that's still the case.

Whilst disadvantaged and marginalised young people potentially had the most to gain, they were under-represented in overall participation. Through Friends of the Award, resources were focused on areas of multiple deprivation, those facing mental health issues, with physical disability, hard to reach learners, young people with learning difficulties, young carers and those in care, individuals

within the criminal justice system, ethnic minority backgrounds and the LGBT community.

To ensure that as many barriers as possible were removed Friends of the Award developed expertise to run the technically challenging DofE Expedition Section - through direct delivery, recruitment and training of volunteers, sensitive activity and risk management, and provision of free or affordable kit hire.

In 2006 the positive potential impact of DofE participation was recognised through a new partnership with NHS Lothian Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Since then, bespoke support for young people from a range of challenging backgrounds has been sustained, helping to address isolation through mental health struggles and be part of recovery plans.

Many opportunities and challenges explored through DofE participation were evident at younger ages. In 2010, a new Junior Award Scheme for Schools (JASS) was developed by Friends of the Award in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council. Meeting a need for 5 - 13-year-olds, JASS was set up to offer a structure for holistic learning. As a simple non-accredited scheme, it promotes early development of interpersonal skills, can assist with Primary to Secondary School transitions, and introduces the idea of an award framework and focus. With a modest fee attached to its use, it has generated income to reduce dependence on grants.

"Friends of the Award has strong heritage to build on and, in 2023, we open up a new chapter with a name change to become Awards Plus", says Chairman Patrick Neville. "In refreshing our focus, we continue to look out for those not catered for, hard to reach, or in need of some extra help – for whatever reason. Supporting access to a wider range of youth awards recognises and celebrates what are often significant achievements. Our new strategy is an evolution of an established and successful model and I am very optimistic that we can continue to make a huge difference in young people's lives when the demand for and benefits of the support we provide is greater than ever."



awardsplus
Edinburgh and The Lothians



"I'm more capable of doing things and believe in myself a bit more. My self-confidence has gone from -3 to about an 8 out of 10!"



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