

Dear Ben, Graham, and the Somerset Freemasons

Firstly, can I thank you once again for your continued support of the Somerset DofE Team and the award across the county, the year 2023/4 has been the biggest ever recorded in the county – and part of this success is due to the bursary fund and how we have been able to use it to support disadvantaged individuals and SEN centres access the award.

An amazing 2908 young people signed up to an award this year, this is nearly 300 over last year – an amazing achievement, 1558 also achieved an award during the financial year – again, higher than ever.

	01 Apr 2021 to 31 Mar 2022				01 Apr 2022 to 31 Mar 2023				01 Apr 2023 to 31 Mar 2024			
	B	S	G	Total	B	S	G	Total	B	S	G	Total
Total Awards Started	1834	441	361	2636	1804	547	271	2622	1906	668	334	2908
Disadvantaged Awards Started	356	66	50	472	316	67	20	403	353	94	27	474
Total Awards Achieved	711	222	69	1002	1131	211	121	1463	1136	318	104	1558
Disadvantaged Awards Achieved	111	25	13	149	183	17	20	220	201	55	18	274

There is also a rise in disadvantaged young people starting an award – those with SEN, financially disadvantaged, asylum seekers, children in care etc. This is the group that we really try to target, as the award means so much more to them in terms of achievement. This is also the group that are applicable for bursary support, and it is your funding that is helping them to access the award.

The bursary fund is still healthy, however we are spending more than we are receiving, so within two years the pot will run dry, if we continue to support our centres and young people in the same way. In the past 12 months, we have spent £12089 and have a further £2530 to pay out after Approved Activity Providers have delivered expeditions / residentials – this figure also includes £6000 towards our alternative DofE programmes with - In The Mix and ARK.

147 young people have benefitted from a bursary - so an average of £99.44 is being spent on the individual young people. Without the bursary, I am certain that many of these young people couldn't access the award.

In 2023-24 – we received £10000 from the Freemasons, thank you. This was used for individual applications as well as the alternative programme, where we work with young people that are risk of NEET (Not in Employment, Education and Training) so on the verge of being expelled by school. The programme works well as the young people get to work on their DofE award whilst being supported by youth workers, who can help them understand behaviour, consequences, and relationships, alongside the award and learning life skills, to improve their attendance at school, behaviour and communication with staff and peers. We have been running these programmes for five years now with proven results, however, don't have the finances to continue to support ourselves going forward.

In 2024-25 – we have received a further £5000 from the Somerset Freemasons, thank you. This will be used to support individuals and SEN centres with participation places and where needed their sectional activities. We will be pushing back for centres to support their own expeditions going forward, to try and limit spend and make our finances last longer.

The DofE Team and Somerset Freemasons, had three great excursions with centres and Freemasons getting together for walks and bike rides, raising awareness of the award and bursary fund. All three were great days out and everyone involved enjoyed the day. We have one planned for this next year with the Kings of Wessex School in the Cheddar area in July.

We also have done several tree planting events, with young people from our alternative programmes and the Freemasons, allowing them to hear from the providers about the difference the award makes to these young people. I am sure there will be more of these in the forthcoming year, as the Woodland Trust are great at supporting our tree applications. The last event was particularly special, as we also had a plaque given to us, recognising the partnership between the two organisations. This is proudly on display at Kilve, next to the Freemason tree.

The Somerset DofE team is speaking to other organisations like the Rotary Club, Women's Institute and Lions Club, to see if they would help support the fund, little success so far, but we will keep trying, to see what we can do to avoid the fund drying up over the coming years.

We were however very successful in terms of securing funding from DofE directly for a few individual centres - 70 participation places and £4420 in terms of funding towards kit between 7 centres, which helped save bursary applications and our committee fund a little, as we would have had to support the places without the DofE funding.

Our reach across the county is enormous, 66 centres – schools / colleges / SEN / Community groups – we continually look for more, but any that we take on now are very small as we have the large ones under our umbrella already. Our target for the next year needs to be 3000 young people starting an award – a very tall order, but we will at least try!

Aside from the support of these centres, the bursary applications and committee, we also organise and run 3 Gold residentials and many expeditions for individual centres or Open Awards for young people who don't access the award through their school / college. We attend Freshers Fairs, School Assemblies, and any event possible to promote the award and the difference having an award makes to young people. Our little team of three is incredibly passionate and committed to the award and growing the reach and access across the county, as well as meeting the DofE strategy of Access, Relevance, Quality, and Impact.

Our thanks as always go to all the Somerset Freemasons who support us, attend our events, and help promote the work that we do. We look forward to continuing the partnership in the forthcoming year, and if anyone has any suggestions for fundraising opportunities, please get in touch.

Yours faithfully

Carol Authers, DofE Operations Manager, 11/04/24

