



A growing number of Cambridge schools are embracing the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award. Among them is ACG Education's group of schools

Go for Gold

ACG Strathallan has offered the Cambridge programme since it first opened in 2001, and offers all stages of the Cambridge Pathway. It is one of five ACG schools based in New Zealand, all of which are now offering the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award.

Deputy Principal Robyn Pryor, says: "We initially introduced the Award in 2003 to provide students with an opportunity to develop a number of core skills such as leadership, teamwork and confidence. It supports our aim of providing students with a holistic education which complements the academic Cambridge programmes we offer. We find that international students in particular gain a great deal from their participation. Many create new friendships and experience new things."

Students can take part in the Award from the age of 14. It is comprised of three levels – Bronze, Silver and Gold. To achieve each Award, participants must complete four sections: Service, Skills, Physical Recreation and Adventurous

An Adventurous Journey
ACG Strathallan's Bronze Award students on their expedition

Journey. The Gold level also includes a residential project.

Robyn describes the benefits of the Award programme as "tremendous": "It is a great way for students to develop their skills and ability in a number of areas," she says. "The scheme develops leadership skills through encouraging self-reliance, perseverance and a sense of responsibility to others. The various components of the Award give students a safe environment to push themselves outside their comfort zone and build confidence and self-esteem. It also encourages a lot of self-reflection, and all of these are life-long skills which help students become the best version of themselves."

Students who take part in the programme often go on to take up leadership positions within the school, or seem to be more likely to get involved in a range of other school activities.

Robyn says the Award is very student-driven, starting with students having to decide on the skill or service they will do. Once the student selects

What students say

Deputy Principal Robyn Pryor describes the Gold level of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award as "a more challenging award that requires a more intensive time commitment", but as these former students testify, it is well worth the effort:

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Sarah Balchin:

Throughout the experience, I gained lifelong skills in perseverance, commitment and teamwork. The Award has been brought up in job interviews and has been a great point of discussion for the interviewer to get to know me better. It motivated me to study and work within the environmental sector and I now have a degree in Environmental Science. I believe it equipped me with the skills, knowledge and confidence to get to where I am today."

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Sarah Summerscales:

Completing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme gives you a point of difference when applying for university and scholarships and when looking for jobs. The programme teaches so many life skills that are invaluable to many aspects of life. Looking back five years after completing my Gold Award, it was one of the best things I could have done."



Four of ACG Strathallan's students who achieved Gold level in the Award
Left to right: Hsiao-nee Loh, Sarah Summerscales, Sarah Balchin
and Angelica Ballé

their skill or service, they have to maintain a regular commitment to each section of the Award over a minimum period of time. "This requires students to take the initiative and be responsible for their own personal development," says Robyn.

The wide variety of skill and service activities the school's students have taken part in include coaching junior sports teams, writing the personal memoirs of a resident at a local retirement village, native tree planting, learning a musical instrument, tutoring younger students, cooking an unfamiliar cuisine, calf rearing, dog training and assisting with theatre productions.

The Adventurous Journey section of the Award involves undertaking a team journey or expedition in an unfamiliar environment, and Robyn says that this brings both mental and physical challenges:

"Students who have a good level of physical fitness can be challenged by having to work as a team and by having to support slower walkers or those less comfortable with the activity, whereas students who have never hiked before can find the experience physically challenging."

Robyn sees a close link between the skills students develop through the Duke of Edinburgh programme and the Cambridge learner attributes: "The learner attributes emphasise the importance for schools to consider what goes on beyond formal classroom instruction. Cambridge International looks to create learners who are confident, responsible, reflective, innovative and engaged. Co-curricular activities like the Award provide an opportunity for students to develop these inter- and intra-personal skills." 🍌

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Cambridge International is now working with the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Foundation to help create more opportunities for Cambridge schools to offer the Award. We will be monitoring interest in the Award when schools register with us and talking to existing schools. If you are interested in offering the Award, talk to your local Cambridge representative. You can also read our blog post at blog.cambridgeinternational.org/doe-award