

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award

Monday, December 15, 2025

Produced by Randall Anthony Communications. The Globe's Editorial Department was not involved.



A new gold standard for public education taking root

A growing number of young people of all backgrounds and abilities, including carpentry student Tevaughn Thompson (top left), are gaining access to the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award's experiential learning framework. SUPPLIED

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award - Canada is on a mission to enhance public education and student outcomes, with school districts across the country now piloting Award Canada's experiential learning framework in high schools, colleges, universities and apprenticeship pathways.

For more than 60 years, the Award framework has been used chiefly as an extracurricular activity by public and independent-school teachers, as well as groups such as Scouts, Cadets and other organizations interested in youth development.

Award Canada CEO Mark Little says the new focus on public-school education is rooted in making "personal growth accessible to every young person in Canada."

The Award's framework is non-competitive and open to youth of all abilities and backgrounds.

Participants choose their own goals in four sections: Skill Development, Voluntary Service, Physical Recreation and an Adventurous Journey. So long as their goals match this internationally recognized criteria, participants pursue their goals supported by an Award Leader / teacher and third-party mentors

such as coaches and others who assess progress.

As participants progress through the Award's three levels, they achieve a Bronze, Silver and ultimately a Gold Award.

While the accolade adds to a resumé, Dr. Little says the Award's greatest value is "it gives young people a way to develop resilience, character and confidence."

Led by education consultant Laura Briscoe, Award Canada's co-curricular initiative is now being piloted in the Maritimes, Ontario and across Western Canada. It is already being credited with unlocking student

engagement, empowering teachers, and building bridges between education and industry.

Ms. Briscoe says her desire is to boost student engagement and improve learning outcomes by helping students make "more purposeful connections between their learning experiences and their personal- and career-goals."

She says Award Canada's inclusive platform offers all learners a way to make learning more relevant.

"Students thrive when they see themselves as capable learners; when their confidence grows, their engagement and connection to school deepen.

"The Award offers a way to celebrate all students for who they are. It inspires them to challenge themselves in new ways, and to think beyond siloed subjects."

While she says some administrators initially expressed concern that using the Award could potentially overload teachers, they quickly discover it is a bonus rather than a burden.

"Educators appreciate how it helps them to reach every learner with different personalities and pathways all through one tool."

To craft Award Canada's co-curricular strategy, Ms. Briscoe began by undertaking research. The results showed how the Award could serve as a vehicle to bridge education and industry gaps across the country. "There was also a clear opportunity to empower student voice – to see themselves within the curriculum and also recognize supportive teachers."

To further inform the strategy and help launch pilot programs, Ms. Briscoe formed an advisory committee of educators from across the country. The group now includes Laura Elliott, a recent executive director of the Council of Ontario Directors of Education.

Ms. Elliott says, "Once directors of education and senior administrators and principals know about the Award, they say, 'I want this for students.'"

Ms. Elliott says Ontario's Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB) and Peel District School Board were among the first to use the Award framework to reach diverse learners and connect personal achievement to curriculum goals.

For example, Mika Hukkonen, a GECDSB Enhanced Carpentry Program student, says, "We are given a phenomenal opportunity of acquiring the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award. I'm improving my skill in carpentry and construction; my physical goal is to improve my strength in the gym, and I'm volunteering in my community. This program helps me set and push toward goals, which help improve many aspects of our lives."

Similarly, Ms. Briscoe says GECDSB is offering students in Aviation and Aerospace and Environment Specialist High Skills Major a chance to pursue their Bronze Award. Among the results, she says the aviation pathway from high school to college and ultimately industry is strengthened.

"Motivated students go above and beyond – from volunteering at air shows and in STEAM initiatives to inform elementary students about flight curriculum, to doing ground school as a co-op experience, and more."

In another example, Ms. Briscoe says the Award is partnering with Fanshawe College and Sheridan College on a federal grant to support Women in Red-Seal Skilled Trades, including aerospace, construction, robotics, transportation and manufacturing.

Award Canada is also working with Skills Canada, which promotes students pursuing skilled trades and technology careers.

Most recently, Skills Ontario became a Collaborative Award Partner, recognizing students as they work toward their goals at the provincial competition. Skills Ontario CEO Ian Howcroft noted, "When we acknowledge students' sustained commitment, we help strengthen the broader vision of career-pathway development in skills and trades."

Ms. Briscoe says ongoing reflection is part of the Award process. "Participants consider how their experiences are impacting their lives. 'What does it mean to them? How are they applying what they learn?'"

With school boards and post-secondary institutions joining the movement, Award Canada's co-curricular initiative is demonstrating its own potential to become a gold standard for holistic, inclusive and experiential education.



HOW THE AWARD INSPIRES



CARLY ROGERS
Grade 10 Student
Bronze Award participant
J. M. Olds Collegiate,
Twillingate, NL

"My Career Education teacher introduced me to the Award. It has helped me get involved in activities beyond the classroom, and is teaching me to set goals and enhance my time management skills.

The goals I'm pursuing are multifaceted – from learning about financial literacy and nursing, to volunteering at the library and at our community Halloween Carnival, to sports training and organizing an overnight trip to Marble Mountain to learn downhill skiing.

It's challenging and exciting."



KATE KONSTANTINOVA
B.Sch., B.Ed., M.Ed., OCT
Chemistry and French Teacher,
Greenwood College School
Silver Award alumna; Award
Canada Leader

"Growing up, the Award helped me focus on activities that gave me the most joy, and find deeper intentions when setting and working towards achievable goals.

It also taught me how to give back to my community and be open to new experiences.

High school is such a delicate time for every individual. The Award provides students with a way to add more meaningfulness to their commitments.

As an Award Leader, it's a joy to mentor youth."



SCOTT MCFADZEAN
CEO, London International
Airport
Award supporter

"Canada's aviation sector depends on the next generation, and that starts with education. Aviation thrives when young people can experience it firsthand.

If we want to diversify and strengthen our pipeline of future pilots, mechanics, engineers and innovators, we must open the doors wide – particularly for girls and underrepresented groups.

None of this is possible without the teachers who champion these opportunities and guide students into real-world learning.

That's why we're proud to support The Award's efforts to connect students with environments where experiential learning becomes a possibility."

ABOUT THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S INTERNATIONAL AWARD - CANADA

A registered charity, The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award - Canada is a nationally accredited, internationally recognized experiential learning framework that equips educators, mentors and community leaders to guide young people aged 14 to 24 through meaningful personal development.

As participants achieve their goals, they earn

a Bronze, Silver and Gold Award accreditation. Award achievers automatically become part of the Award Canada Alumni Network at age 18 and are invited to connect with the Global Award Alumni Network, a professional space for Award achievers worldwide.

To learn more, visit www.dukeofed.org

UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY AND POWERFUL OUTCOMES INSPIRE SUPPORTERS

When she stepped into her role as director of philanthropy at The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award - Canada, Anastazia Krneta brought with her a deep belief in the power of experiential learning. Today, like other passionate Award Canada supporters, she says witnessing the positive impact first-hand changed everything.

Ms. Krneta's appreciation was shaped in part by her son's journey at a United World College (UWC) in Germany, where educational principles inspired by Kurt Hahn – founder of both UWC and the Award – are foundational.

"I witnessed first-hand how an environment centred on courage, compassion, challenge and community can change a young person's trajectory," she says. "My son, who lives with a physical disability, was not seen through a lens of limitation. He was encouraged to stretch, to explore and to lead. That philosophy is at the very heart of the Award."

Today, she sees that same spirit reflected in young Canadians of all backgrounds and abilities who participate in the Award. "Through the Award, they discover that they are capable of far more than they imagined," says Ms. Krneta.

Victoria, B.C.-based siblings Julie and Eric Findlay say their youthful experiences as Award participants pushed them in positive direc-



Victoria, B.C.-based business family siblings and Award alumni Eric and Julie Findlay. SUPPLIED

tions they might not have taken otherwise.

"When we started volunteering as part of the Community Service section, we had no idea how important that would be," says Julie. "The diverse ways we got involved, and the skills we learned, were extremely valuable and made a tremendous difference when we applied to university."

Eric adds, "Thanks to our mentors, we also learned to deal with adults in ways that were simply not available in school. We had to always do our best. And we learned the value of

keeping track of our progress and our accomplishments."

As heads of Andrew Sheret Limited – one of Canada's oldest family-run businesses – the Findlays see their support for the Award as an investment in Canada's youth and future.

"We believe recipients are better prepared for the workplace and for higher education. We know that a job applicant who is an Award achiever will probably have more to offer," says Eric.

"The Award is structured to create a well-rounded individual. It instills confidence, social skills, dedication and commitment," adds Julie, noting that "working through the three levels of the Award made us better prepared for work and play for the rest of our lives."

Ms. Krneta says Award Canada's vision is that every young person across the country, regardless of geography, ability or circumstance, can benefit from an Award experience. "We are committed to doubling participation by 2030, reaching 30,000 young people annually through public schools, community groups and Indigenous-led partnerships."

She says philanthropic investment is crucial to help schools and other groups deliver the framework, train educators, and build supports needed to ensure inclusivity and sustainability.

To learn more, visit www.dukeofed.org/empowering-infinite-potential

ONE FRAMEWORK. ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES.

The Award adapts to every young person's goals, from skills and education to leadership and enriching experiences. Your support makes these opportunities possible for youth across Canada.

Donate now. Unlock their potential. donate.dukeofed.org

THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S
INTERNATIONAL AWARD

CANADA