

Press Release: Royal visit

12 March 2014

HM The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh visit staff at The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Foundation and The Royal Commonwealth Society

Staff at The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Foundation (the Foundation) and The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) were visited by two very special guests on Wednesday March 12.

HM The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh visited the charities' headquarters in London to learn more about how the organisations are providing non-formal education programmes to empower young people in the Commonwealth and beyond.

A global Award

HRH The Duke of Edinburgh founded The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award in 1956; more than 8 million young people having completed their Award.

On HM's first visit to the Foundation, The Queen had the opportunity to learn more about the Award and how the development of digital tools is enabling them to reach more young people from diverse backgrounds.

The Award online

During the visit, one lucky Award participant had their Gold Award signed off on the Online Record Book (ORB) by The Duke. The ORB is a new global digital platform, which replaces the paper Record Book, designed to help participants, leaders and assessors doing, delivering and assessing the Award.

Amanda Lawson, who has just completed her Gold Award, says taking part in the Award helped her to overcome many challenges. Having been diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes as a child, Amanda was determined not to let her condition define her or her capabilities. "Participating in the Award has taken me out of my comfort zone. My boundaries were certainly pushed to their limits during a number of my challenges but I was determined to complete my Gold Award. Giving up was not an option." Her success in completing her Gold is a testament to the adaptability of the Award framework and its accessibility to all, no matter their background or ability.

Reaching more young people

"The Foundation works to grow the Award worldwide and to increase the diversity of its participants, particularly reaching out to those who are often on the margins of society," explains Secretary General of the Foundation John May. "Work that we are doing now will ensure that more young people have access to this tried and tested framework of non-formal education that has time

and time again proven to transform the lives of individuals and their communities. This is all of course thanks to the vision of our patron.”

The Commonwealth Essay Competition

During the visit, The Queen also heard from a winner of the RCS's longest-running educational programme, the Commonwealth Essay Competition. Speaking via video link from Wellington, New Zealand, Katherine McIndoe talked about her essay, an open letter to girls around the world who are subjected to violence and intimidation simply because of their gender.

"Being part of the Essay Competition, and the opportunities that have come from it", she said, "has given me a huge appreciation of just what a force for good the Commonwealth really is, particularly in uniting very diverse countries, as a forum for communication and for initiating real change".

The RCS recently moved into Award House, premises that the Foundation has occupied since 1996. Michael Lake CBE, Director of The RCS says, "The Royal Commonwealth Society has undergone a transformative twelve months. As we embark upon this exciting new stage in the life of our organisation, we are delighted to be sharing the newly refurbished Award House with The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Foundation.

"Like them, the focus of our work is very much on young people and on offering them the inspiration and confidence to fulfil their dreams. As compatible organisations with complementary remits, it is my firm belief that we can live together with greater efficiency than apart.

"The Society plays an important role in championing the values that underpin the Commonwealth and that lend the association its unique purpose in the contemporary world. And HM The Queen, in her role as Head of the Commonwealth and as the Patron of our Society, is a lasting inspiration."

Major milestones

The visit to Award House formed part of a momentous week for The Queen and The Duke as their youngest son celebrated his 50th birthday on March 10th. Prince Edward, The Earl of Wessex, an Award holder himself, is a trustee of the Foundation and is actively involved in ensuring it is inclusive to all.

The Queen was also in attendance at the annual Commonwealth Day Observance at Westminster Abbey on 10 March.



Notes to Editors

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award was founded in 1956 by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Foundation oversees the delivery of the Award worldwide. The Award provides a framework of experiential learning that helps young people develop skills for life and provides worldwide recognition for their achievement. The Foundation's long-term vision is to provide the world's 1.2 billion 14-24 year olds with access to the Award.

You can find out more about The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award online at www.intaward.org.

The Royal Commonwealth Society is the pre-eminent independent body working to promote the value and the values of the Commonwealth for the benefit of its peoples. An international network of individuals and organisations, founded in 1868, the Society is constituted by Royal Charter (most recently amended in 2013) and as a charity. It is non-partisan, is independent of governments and is supported by public generosity. The Society engages with its youth, civil society, business and governmental networks to address issues that matter to the citizens of the Commonwealth. www.thercs.org

The Commonwealth Essay Competition is the world's oldest and largest schools' international writing competition. Run by the Royal Commonwealth Society for 131 years, it promotes the values of the modern Commonwealth, celebrates and nurtures the creative talents of young people and provides a platform for students to compete with their peers in the Commonwealth's 53 nations. The Commonwealth Essay Competition is run in partnership with Cambridge University Press. www.thercs.org/youth/competition

The modern Commonwealth was established with 8 members in 1949. In 2014, it has 53 members with a total population of 2.2 billion. It is a voluntary association of governments and peoples, built around shared language, institutions, challenges, aspirations and values. Commonwealth countries work together to promote common values: democracy, freedom, peace, the rule of law and opportunity for all.

The Queen is Head of the Commonwealth. For further information, see www.royal.gov.uk/MonarchAndCommonwealth/Overview

Commonwealth Day is marked annually on the second Monday in March (10th March 2014). Celebrations to mark Commonwealth Day take place around the world. The Observance at Westminster Abbey in London is organised by the Royal Commonwealth Society (on behalf of the Council of Commonwealth Societies). www.thercs.org

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