



From the Headmaster

We were all deeply saddened to hear the news of the passing of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, a man who has had such a profound impact upon generations of RGS students. As a school which is rightly proud of its royal connections, the death of the Duke was all the more keenly felt. Prince Philip believed passionately in giving young people the best possible start: confidence, resilience and teamwork being just some of the values which he held dearly. He wanted to transform young people's lives, irrespective of background, culture and ability. It is notable that so much of his messaging chimes closely with our own passionately-held beliefs; indeed, this inclusivity and ambition also remain at the very heart of our ethos as a school to this day.

The Duke first considered the idea of a national programme to support young people's development in the autumn of 1954 at the request of his inspiring former headmaster, Kurt Hahn. During his lifetime, Hahn summarised his beliefs about the younger generation at the time into six points, collectively known as the *Six Declines of Modern Youth*:

1. Decline of *Fitness* due to modern methods of locomotion;
2. Decline of *Initiative and Enterprise* due to the widespread disease of *spectatoritis* (i.e. "excessive indulgence in forms of amusement in which one is a passive spectator rather than an active participant");
3. Decline of *Memory and Imagination* due to the confused restlessness of modern life;
4. Decline of *Skill and Care* due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship;
5. Decline of *Self-discipline* due to the ever-present availability of stimulants;
6. Decline of *Compassion* due to the unseemly haste with which modern life is conducted.

It highlights how little things change as these could easily be read as commonplace criticism of young people in the twenty-first century! In response to these concerns, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme was launched in February 1956. The programme had four sections: rescue and public service, expeditions, pursuits and projects, and fitness. The aim was that young men should make the best use of their free time, nurture appropriate interests and acquire self-confidence and a sense of purpose that would support them into their future and help them to become well-rounded citizens.

Clearly ahead of his time, the values which the DofE Award served to instill and the selfless sense of service and compassion resonated closely, and continue to do so, with schools and institutions across the land, and indeed across the globe as now over 130 countries deliver the award. The fact that our boys – albeit with

sensible restrictions in place – embarked on their DofE practice expedition in the days immediately after the announcement of the Duke’s death was particularly poignant for the boys involved. Although, owing to Covid restrictions, they were unable to camp out, the sore feet and blisters were testament to the physical challenges which the Award still demands!

It is, however, not just the DofE Award which will remain a lasting legacy. The Duke devoted the majority of his life to putting those interests of others before himself. The Prime Minister commented on his *ethic of service*; religious leaders of all faiths remarked upon his *extraordinary life of dedicated service*; and at his funeral tributes were paid to his *kindness, to his deep and genuine sense of service and humility*, and the way in which his life was *a blessing to others*. In the twenty-first century we want our boys to be successful, to be ambitious, to be driven; however, as we continue to find ourselves in a rapidly-changing, uncertain world dominated by challenges and difficulties, it is those characteristics of collaboration and co-operation, kindness and compassion, altruism and service which will ensure our boys truly make a difference as tomorrow’s members of society and leaders. The Duke embodied each of these.

As the tributes continued, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster, noted: “*Prince Philip has been an example of steadfast loyalty and duty cheerfully given. May he rest in peace.*” I am sure I speak for generations of RGS students in echoing these sentiments.