

His Royal Highness, Ladies and Gentleman,

What I would like to share with you tonight is what DofE means to me and what I have learnt from this long term commitment over the course of past four years up to the moment of receiving the Gold award just yesterday.

I have asked myself this question... what is DofE actually about? Well... I believe it is primarily about ourselves as individuals, the participants; we are in a way forming the programme. By taking part we are setting out on a great journey of enlightening our minds by doing the various activities of our choice, let it be sport, music lessons, teaching English in Nepal or learning a magic trick.

I will try to walk you through this journey using a mountain. Climbing a mountain, for me, is the process I experienced during completing the various sections of this programme. I always start with identifying the challenge, getting to the top. Followed by strengthening relationships, in this case the teamwork which is essential to complete the climb successfully. Finished by the third step of being at the top and enjoying the view reflecting back upon the climb. So try to keep this image of the three step mountain in your mind for the next few minutes.

If we start with the challenge and link it to my own journey I had a fear of speaking in front of large groups of people, it gave me the sense of not being well prepared and I don't like that feeling. I was aiming to overcome this challenge. I joined the student council and slowly worked through small presentations towards giving speeches in slightly larger assemblies towards getting rid of this uncomfortable feeling. It took some time and practice, but it gave me a sense of achieving something I wanted to overcome. And I think I did.

Sometimes we are looking for new motivation when overcoming a challenge. I have played tennis for over ten years now and 4 years ago I wanted to quit, I had no reason to continue training because I simply didn't enjoy competitions. My challenge in this case was to find some sport to keep myself busy with, because without sport I don't feel like living. At that time I was just joining DofE and that became my new motivation. I set myself the goal of achieving the Gold award at some point and to achieve that I had to continue playing tennis... in fact I have even started fencing!

The second stage of the climb is the teamwork. For one summer I went to a summer camp that I used to go to when I was younger, some people say I'm still quite young, but this time I took the role of a tutor. For the summer camp to run it is essential for us to cooperate as a team in order to keep the kids busy with great games and workshops and in order to keep the camp going over the course of two weeks. I find it quite valuable to create new bonds with the people as well as strengthening relationships with friends I already know. The summer camp became the best part of our summer and we keep on reuniting with the people throughout the year.

The final stage of the mountain climb is then being on the top of the mountain. At that point it is important to take in the view and have an open mind. This came to me every time we were

completing our adventurous journey, the expedition. Most remarkably in the last one in June, where we wanted to walk across the Lower Tatras National park covering over 80 kilometres in distance and 5200 metres in altitude. And we did. Walking these mountain tops helps you to think about what is important in life and how to prioritize certain things over others, such as coming later to the camp site just because we wanted to enjoy the beautiful lake view we had during lunch.

And that for me is what DofE is mostly about. Gaining an overview of certain issues in our life and identifying those as rather manageable problems. DofE helped me to find new ways to tackle some problems and it also showed me how to work with different types of people, skills I consider quite valuable in future life. So now I can say that I have learnt how to climb a mountain, both literally and metaphorically.

I would like to leave you with one last analogy. This time using a river. I can say that DofE has left me with the skills I have obtained during its completion and allowed me to practice and develop these skills to a higher level. We can also say that this process has built a complex network of river channels in which we now need to learn to swim. And that for me is a good inspiration for life.

Thank you