

Continuing to strengthen wellbeing and school engagement of disadvantaged youth

2026-2027 Pre-Budget Submission



“This continues to be an incredibly valuable and enriching experience for all involved. The young First Nations people on the APY Lands are living in some of the most remote communities in Australia and the opportunity to use the Duke of Ed Framework to encourage and promote engagement in new activities as well as celebrate and reward them for their efforts is very enriching.”

- Teacher, Ernabella (an Anangu Aboriginal community), South Australia

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Executive summary

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award (Duke of Ed) is a globally recognised non-formal education and accreditation framework. The Duke of Ed challenges young people aged 14 to 24 to develop knowledge, skills and capabilities for life and work in a rapidly changing world, through self-guided learning beyond the classroom.

First Nations students, students living in regional, rural and remote locations, students with disability and students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, or a combination of these, are more likely to experience educational inequity^{1,2,3,4}.

The Australian Government has made it clear its objectives to create a better and fairer education system for all students to help them catch up, keep up and finish school⁵. The Australian Government has also set an ambitious target that by 2050, 80 per cent of workers will have a TAFE or university qualification⁶.

The Duke of Ed offers the Australian Government a proven, scalable personal development framework to invest in students by:

- Building practical and transferable skills
- Encouraging mental health, physical wellbeing, and resilience
- Promoting active citizenship, volunteerism, and lifelong learning
- Supporting school engagement and participation
- Laying foundations for improved employability and enhanced educational attainment.

The Duke of Ed is proud to be a trusted partner of the Australian Government providing access to the Duke of Ed Framework for disadvantaged young people in communities across Australia. We welcome the opportunity to continue working alongside the Australian Government to ensure that disadvantaged students are afforded opportunities to thrive both at school and in life.

Investment sought

We seek \$6.0 million over four years (2026-2027 to 2029-2030) to continue and expand this effective and established Disadvantaged Youth Program, enabling at least 6,000 students from priority equity cohorts to access and complete the Duke of Ed. This represents an average investment of approximately \$1,000 per student. The program will be delivered through targeted grants to schools and community centres, supported by national quality assurance, reporting and independent evaluation in partnership with the Department of Education.

¹ AIHW. 2025.

² CEDA. 2018.

³ Victoria University. 2020.

⁴ OECD. 2012.

⁵ Australian Government Department of Education. 2025.

⁶ Australian Government Department of Education. 2024.

Opportunity

Since 2015, the Australian Government has supported over 12,000 disadvantaged young people use the Duke of Ed Framework at a total investment of \$6,451,500. This includes First Nations students, students in regional, rural and remote areas, students with disability, and students from low SES backgrounds.

By participating in the Disadvantaged Youth Program, students have experiences that build protective factors such as confidence, resilience, goal setting, teamwork and school attainment. Participation addresses other risk factors in particular school disengagement and contacts with the youth justice system. Furthermore, our Disadvantaged Youth Program addresses equity and inclusion by overcoming participation barriers experienced by disadvantaged students. Barriers that may include financial, resources, lack of support, stigma, lack of role models, physical or intellectual constraints through living with disability or mental health issues.

Table 1 below shows key findings from an independent evaluation of the Disadvantaged Youth Program⁷.

Family backgrounds, parent/carer education and income levels and postcodes continue to shape young people's academic success and future life and career opportunities. Our Australian experience, supported by international research, demonstrates that using of the Duke of Ed Framework has more to offer young people living with disadvantage and/or disability through:

- Achievement and development while still at school
- Transition into the next phase of education or employment
- Identity and quality of life^{8,9}.

Table 1. Disadvantaged Youth Program evaluation results showing percentage of respondents positive about key attributes (n=207)

Attribute	Percentage (%)
I feel proud about the things I've been able to achieve	95%
I'm learning how to set my own goals	94%
I'm better at communicating with others	92%
I have developed skills that will be useful for getting a job	92%
I can do good things for my community	90%
I'm better at solving problems	89%
I can cope better when things change	89%
I'm more confident	88%
I can cope better with stress and challenges	84%
I'm better organised	83%
My school results have improved (n=191)*	78%
I like going to school more since I've been doing the Duke of Ed (n=186)*	73%

* Some respondents are not currently at school, so this question was not relevant.

⁷ The Insight Partnership. 2026.

⁸ Chrysalis Research UK Ltd. 2021.

⁹ Farid, Mariam. 2016.

Impact

- Successive independent evaluations across 10 years of the Australian Government funded Disadvantaged Youth Program confirms that young people using the Duke of Ed Framework build life skills and social connections, increase school engagement and retention, and grow in resilience and confidence^{10,11,12}. A summary of the 2025 evaluation results is at Table 1 above.
- Annual impact and outcomes surveys demonstrate that the Duke of Ed is a proven non-formal education and learning framework for building resilient, capable, and community-minded young people¹³:

76% more confident | 83% more resilient | 84% value contributing to their community | 86% improved teamwork skills | 96% now feel equipped to set and achieve life goals

- International research demonstrates Duke of Ed supports student transition into the next phase of education or employment and positively impacts identity and quality of life for young people, particularly in those with additional needs¹⁴.
- Cole et al. (2025) at Western Sydney University demonstrate that use of the Duke of Ed Framework has a measurable, positive impact on academic outcomes and personal development in secondary students with strong potential to enhance student engagement, self-efficacy, and life skills — strengthening both classroom performance and real-world readiness. Boys showed marked improvement in core subjects (such as English and Maths). All students reported higher levels of self-determination, leadership, and emotional resilience after using the Duke of Ed Framework¹⁵.
- Attachment A highlights student impacts through a case study and user testimonials.

There is a growing demand for verified non-formal education in Australia:

- Leading Australian universities (including UNSW, Macquarie University, UWA, La Trobe University) recognise Duke of Ed as contributing to educational attainment meeting entry criteria for non-formal education. This is a significant incentive for students who are struggling with the academic requirements of years 11 and 12.
- More than 135 employers (including Ernst Young, Hoffmann Reed, Paddy Pallin, and Bounce Australia) already recognise Duke of Ed credentials as a reliable record of non-formal education with this number growing.



¹⁰ The Insight Partnership. 2018.

¹¹ The Insight Partnership. 2022.

¹² The Insight Partnership. 2026.

¹³ International Award Foundation. 2024.

¹⁴ Chrysalis Research UK Ltd. 2021.

¹⁵ Western Sydney University. 2025.

Government alignment

We believe there is a significant opportunity to continue and expand the Disadvantaged Youth Program beyond its current end date of 31 December 2025. This investment provides a practical, evidence-based mechanism to support the Australian Government's priorities of lifting student engagement and attainment, strengthening wellbeing outcomes, improving school-to-work transitions, and building a more productive and resilient workforce over the long term.

By continuing investment in the Duke of Ed's Disadvantaged Youth Program it will directly support the Government's education priorities in the *Better and Fairer Schools Agreements 2025-2034* to:

- Increase student engagement and retention assisting priority equity cohorts to catch up, keep up and finish school.
- Improve student wellbeing, confidence and resilience.
- Prepare students for post-school pathways including employment, tertiary education and vocational training.

Duke of Ed also contributes to wider whole-of-government priorities such as:

- Delivering on the *National Agreement on Closing The Gap* by supporting students reach their full potential and ensuring youth are engaged in employment and education.
- Providing cost of living relief by reducing participation barriers for disadvantaged families.
- Increasing skills development by building soft skills and work readiness identified as critical workforce needs.

Not continuing funding could deepen inequities, leaving disadvantaged young people nationally with fewer opportunities for personal development, academic and career success without the opportunities presented by the Duke of Ed's Disadvantaged Youth Program.



Investment sought

We seek an additional investment of \$6M over four years (1 July 2026 to 30 June 2030) to continue and expand this well recognised and important national program focused on supporting at least another 6,000 students in all states and territories.

Continued government investment will achieve:

1. *Expanded reach and impact* with a national focus on First Nations students, students from low SES backgrounds, students living in regional, rural and remote locations and students with disability. The expansion aims to assist students to develop core life skills, improve wellbeing, increase school engagement, and offer schools a way of fostering connection and purpose for these students beyond formal education.
2. *Social Return on Investment (ROI)* - For the Australian community, for every \$1 invested in the use of the Duke of Ed Framework, \$4.27 in social value is generated with a future social value of \$134 million for individuals and society based on 2019 PwC research¹⁶.
3. *Enhanced support to Duke of Ed Centres* as the flexible Duke of Ed Framework allows for implementation in different ways to suit local and personal circumstances.
4. *Improved partnerships and program links* with organisations that have mutual goals to support more young people to be confident and connected to their communities and build employment pathways.
5. *Reduced risk to the government* by scaling up of an evidence-based program that is internationally recognised, effective and already achieving positive outcomes for young people across Australia.

The Duke of Ed will also continue to:

1. *Use donor funds to supplement Australian Government funding* for disadvantaged young Australians, including to support young adults over 18 years.
2. *Engage with all state and territory governments* to recognise and embed the Duke of Ed Framework into the school day including a pilot program in 11 public high schools in NSW.
3. *Grow our partnerships nationally* in four areas:
 - a. Tertiary Partners – 9 universities
 - b. Duke of Ed Employers – 136 employers
 - c. Duke4Volunteering – 22 volunteering organisations
 - d. Duke4Sports – 129 sporting organisations.

¹⁶ The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Foundation. 2019.

How the investment will be allocated

The Duke of Ed will allocate this investment through our established Program Logic (Attachment B), existing national infrastructure, digitised grant management approach, and extensive footprint across Australia to deliver the Duke of Ed Framework and drive measurable outcomes.

The Duke of Ed has a strong track record of establishing and growing Duke of Ed Centres and mentoring Duke of Ed Leaders nationally. This has supported consistent expansion of delivery capability, including 67% growth between 2015 and 2025.

To ensure efficient and cost-effective program delivery, we will continue to leverage volunteer labour through schools and the broader community, enabling scalable impact while maintaining strong governance and delivery standards.

Budget

Category	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	Total	Additional commentary
Grants	1,000,000	1,100,000	1,250,000	1,450,000	4,800,000	Typically covers registration fees, activity expenses and support for activity completion.
Staffing & On-costs	200,000	205,000	210,000	220,000	835,000	Includes salaries, superannuation and on-costs. Assumes annual CPI increase of 3%.
Administration & Corporate Support	22,000	23,000	24,000	25,000	94,000	Includes audit fees.
Consultants & Contractors	38,000	40,000	42,000	65,000	185,000	Includes evaluation and technology, system and process improvements.
Travel	20,000	21,000	22,000	23,000	86,000	
Total	1,280,000	1,389,000	1,548,000	1,783,000	6,000,000	

Note: 20% of total funding is allocated to administration and program management expenses.

Program governance

The Duke of Ed National Board and Chief Operating Officer will oversee and administer the grants applying consistent eligibility criteria nationally (as approved by the Australian Government Department of Education) and in alignment with our organisational policies.

Regular progress reporting would continue to be provided to our National Board and the Australian Government Department of Education including financial and non-financial metrics, key achievements, emerging issues and risks, and supporting case studies.

Attachment A – Hear from students and teachers using Duke of Ed

Case study: St Helens District High School, Tasmania

“It’s not like something you can blame on somebody else, it’s your commitment, you’ve got to follow through with it” (student about what they learnt about goal setting)

The District High School in St Helens has been offering Duke of Ed for over 20 years with one or two students each year. With the Government funding support, and an enthusiastic leader, the program has grown and 31 young people signed up this year, including two students who are achieving their Gold Level. For such a small school (500 pupils in total from Kindergarten to Year 12), this is a significant achievement.

St Helens is a small, coastal town on the north east coast of Tasmania, and is classified as 'outer regional'. Young people in the area face a range of barriers to participation, including costs, and some of them are technically homeless, living in transient accommodation in campsites and having to move every 28 days.

Duke of Ed has had a profound impact for this group. The young people say:

- ‘You learn good life skills’
- ‘We know what we are going to have to do when we’re older’
- ‘It teaches you how to balance priorities’
- ‘I’ve used it on my resume, and I now have a part time job in town’
- ‘You have to keep pushing, and also that it’s important to start organising early’ (in relation to community service activities)



A key element of Duke of Ed for this group is their community service, where they have visited a nearby nursing home weekly or fortnightly to either do activities with the older people (painting, indoor bowls, fishing) or simply talk. The young people say that this was the highlight of their Duke of Ed experience, because they feel like they are doing something valuable for their community, and they have learnt valuable lessons about respect, empathy and compassion and improved their communication skills.

The other highlight was the Adventurous Journey, with hikes on the Freycinet Peninsular or the Walls of Jerusalem for the more experienced students, including hiking through snow this year. One student has made short videos of their trips and posted them to YouTube, adding an extra dimension to the experience. This has both taught valuable lessons in planning and resilience, and given them the skills to continue hiking outside of school and Duke of Ed.

The Duke of Ed Leader says that she can see significant changes for students over their time in Duke of Ed. Each year, there is an Award ceremony where the young people cook a meal, serve the meal for their parents and talk about their experience with Duke of Ed.

The Duke of Ed Leader says the young people start the year shy and uncertain, and then at the Award ceremony are willing to stand up and share their stories with the whole group.

Government funding has covered registration costs and some of the equipment for the Adventurous Journey, which was also supplemented by borrowing gear from another school. The Duke of Ed Leader says that any cost is a barrier for these young people, so the funding has made their participation possible. For one girl, Duke of Ed was the activity that kept her in school for two years after her attendance started to decline. Using the Duke of Ed Framework has supported students at school, helped them learn new skills, improved their communication skills and built connections in their local community.

Testimonials

*“The Duke of Ed has had a **profound impact on building the capacity and confidence** of our Year 11–12 students... Many of these students entered Year 11–12 with histories of high suspension rates, low attendance, and socialization challenges during Years 7–10. For some, these camps were the first positive school experiences they’ve had. The Duke of Ed pushed them out of their comfort zones and fostered positive peer interactions, helping to build lasting memories and relationships... Our Year 12 students have become role models for the incoming Year 11s.”* – Teacher, New Norfolk High School, Tasmania

*“I have had a really positive experience delivering the Duke of Ed and using it as a **powerful** tool to **engage our at-risk students**. The Duke of Ed has provided meaningful opportunities for students to contribute to our school community, including volunteering... It also offers students a unique chance to develop skills they might not otherwise access through the regular school curriculum... Students have shown real commitment to improving their physical fitness and are **stepping up as emerging leaders** within our school. It has been a joy to watch their sense of connectedness grow as they gave their time to the Cockburn Youth Centre, NIDO Childcare Centre, and the local Senior’s Centre. The **transformation in their confidence, attitude, and engagement** has been fantastic to watch... Their families report on **positive approach to school** due to their engagement with their Duke of Ed activities and we also track **attendance and grade improvements** due to their overall increase in positive experiences associated with school.”* – Teacher, Hammond Park Secondary College, Western Australia

*“The most valuable aspect of my Duke of Ed experience has been the **boost in self-esteem and confidence**. Through various challenges and adventures, I learned to push my limits, set goals, and achieve them.”* – Student

*“The Duke of Ed has provided consistency within my life and has had a **positive impact on my mental health**. I have been able to connect with peers, and they have made me feel valued and part of a team.”* – Student

*“They are at risk of leaving school early. They aren’t seeing future education for themselves. [But through participating in the Duke of Ed] **many go through to year 12 with self-confidence and resilience**.”* – Teacher

Attachment B – Program logic and overview

Objective:	To increase access of young people experiencing disadvantage and/or disability to The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award and its outcomes; that is, to build skills to equip them for life and work.	
Target audience:	First Nations students, students living in regional, rural and remote locations, students from low SES backgrounds and students with disability	
Outcomes: Students	Short and medium-term impacts Students with disadvantage and/or disability have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved capacity to set goals • Attainment of new skills • Improved life skills • Improved resilience/capacity to overcome challenges • Improved confidence in personal ability • Improved recognition by others • Improved engagement in schooling 	Long-term impacts Students with disadvantage and/or disability have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved performance in school • Improved participation in further education and/or the workforce • Active involvement as a citizen in community life
Outputs: Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duke of Ed Centres use funding to build capacity and capability to support students (Centre) • Local design matches local circumstances (Centre) • Students experiencing disadvantage enrol in the Duke of Ed (Student; supported by Centre) • Duke of Ed Leaders manage Centres through regular meetings, support for individual program design, acting as mentors to students (Centre; supported by Duke of Ed Australia or Award Operating Authority) • Students participate in, complete and log activities; have a Duke of Ed Level conferred in a recognition ceremony; and report on their experience to the community of interest (optional) (Student; supported by Centre) 	
Outputs: Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding guidelines and eligibility criteria developed, approved and promoted (Duke of Ed Australia) • Funding allocated consistent with guidelines (Duke of Ed Australia) • Centres apply for funding by completing an online application form (Centre) • Centres report expenditure and achievement (Centre) • Quality assurance and audits of Duke of Ed Centres that receive funding (Duke of Ed Australia or Award Operating Authority) • Summative and formative evaluation at the end of the funding cycle to identify program outcomes and potential improvements for future activity (Third Party) 	
Inputs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding (Australian Government, donor funds, partnerships) • The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award – Australia • Award Operating Authorities in NSW, Queensland, Northern Territory • Duke of Ed Centres • Volunteers • Community 	

Attachment C – About Duke of Ed

The Duke of Ed is a globally recognised non-formal education and accreditation framework used by 14 to 24-year-olds in more than 120 countries, inclusive of all backgrounds, locations, cultures, and abilities.

Use of the Duke of Ed Framework supports school engagement and participation through goal setting and social skills acquisition to build a sense of achievement and accomplishment, tackling challenges using voluntary service, physical recreation, skills development, and outdoor journeying for Bronze and Silver Levels, with an additional residential project for Gold Level. In the longer term, Duke of Ed lays the foundation for improved employability and enhanced educational attainment.

Over 55,000 young Australians use the four-part, three-Level Duke of Ed Framework annually. Supported by a national network of over 1,200 Duke of Ed Centres and near 60,000 adult volunteers in cities, rural and remote areas. 287 Government schools, 473 Catholic and independent schools, universities, Indigenous communities, refugee support programs, prisons and youth training centres, community organisations (such as Surf Life Saving), disability groups and other youth programs deliver the Duke of Ed.

The Duke of Ed governance structure is based on a social franchise model using a multi-tier set of licences. As an international organisation, The International Award Foundation, governed by its Trustees, has overall responsibility for the Duke of Ed. The International Award Association is a member organisation that facilitates the delivery of the Duke of Ed through its member countries.

In Australia, the National Award Operator (The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award – Australia) is a not-for-profit company with the sole object of managing the Duke of Ed in Australia. It is supported by a second body, The Friends of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award in Australia (DGR status), who fundraise and advocate on behalf of the Duke of Ed in Australia.

The National Award Operator licences Duke of Ed Centres directly in Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia, Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania to deliver the Duke of Ed Framework to young people in their school, organisation or local community. It also licences State and Territory Award Operating Authorities in New South Wales, Queensland and Northern Territory to manage the delivery of the Duke of Ed across Duke of Ed Centres in their respective jurisdictions.



Attachment D – Reference list

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