



## **The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award - Australia**

**Submission to:**

**Senate Inquiry into a National Volunteer Incentive Scheme  
(Climate Army)**

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## Table of Contents

<b><i>Introduction.....</i></b>	<b><i>3</i></b>
<b><i>Establishing targeted initiatives to encourage young people to participate in the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army). .....</i></b>	<b><i>3</i></b>
<b><i>Exploring strategies to enhance volunteer engagement, including systems to recognise and compensate volunteers to promote satisfaction and positive culture.....</i></b>	<b><i>4</i></b>
<b><i>Incentives .....</i></b>	<b><i>4</i></b>
<b><i>Integrating volunteer opportunities within educational institutions to increase student participation in volunteer organisations. ....</i></b>	<b><i>5</i></b>
<b><i>TAFE and University .....</i></b>	<b><i>5</i></b>
<b><i>Creating a nationally recognised qualification scheme that provides tangible benefits to volunteers and formally acknowledges their skills and contributions across sectors. ....</i></b>	<b><i>6</i></b>
<b><i>Practical skill development.....</i></b>	<b><i>6</i></b>
<b><i>Investigating whether there are appropriate laws and safeguards to protect the health and safety of volunteers. ....</i></b>	<b><i>6</i></b>
<b><i>The structure and governance of the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army).....</i></b>	<b><i>7</i></b>
<b><i>Comparison of relevant overseas models and best practices. ....</i></b>	<b><i>7</i></b>

## Introduction

The Duke of Edinburg's International Award – Australia (Duke of Ed) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into a National Volunteer Initiative (Climate Army).

In 1956, The Duke of Ed was established as an organising and accrediting Framework for non-formal education and learning. Sixty thousand young Australians currently use the four-part Framework to establish a recognised portfolio of accredited non-formal education and learning.

The Duke of Ed submitted a proposal to your Senate Select Committee on Disaster Resilience in Australia for a National Emergency Responder Corps. Therefore, it is a great honour that we can submit this submission for the Duke of Ed (Australia) to offer a contribution towards a solution for the recruitment and retention of young volunteers for emergency response agencies.

## Terms of Reference

The formation of a National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army) to respond to the immediate aftermath of natural disasters in Australia.

### **Establishing targeted initiatives to encourage young people to participate in the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army).**

Duke of Ed has a prestigious history, with about 60,000 current registered users volunteering their service - including with emergency services, - together with many successful pilot programs already run across Australia.

The Duke of Ed's large social networks mean it has a pool of people 18-25 to target, or to attract, for a program. These young volunteers will have climate change issues front of mind and be passionate about helping combat the issues climate change presents for people, property and the environment.

The youth-targeted Duke of Ed would also facilitate a mass injection of youth into the dwindling and aging volunteer base, while creating unique opportunities for new frameworks or policy to combine tertiary education and disaster response and recovery across Australia.

Internationally recognised in 130 countries, the Duke of Ed accreditation would also tie into emergency services organisations' strategies to attract youth into their volunteer ranks. The Emergency Responder Corps is proposed to be an opt-in program, rather than a mandated program, with participants, communities and emergency services organisations reaping substantial benefits.

The Duke of Ed is well placed to contribute to such a program having effectively managed previous social contracts for federal and state governments. It is also organised on a federated model and has substantial expertise in delivery through third-party arrangements.

One example of this is that over the past eight years it has managed a Commonwealth-funded national disadvantaged youth program (\$4.2 million & 10,500 participants) in which Duke of Ed has significantly exceeded all the required KPIs.

### **Exploring strategies to enhance volunteer engagement, including systems to recognise and compensate volunteers to promote satisfaction and positive culture.**

The aim is to target school leavers 18-plus to opt in and train in emergency services for a minimum of two years. This will:

- Stimulate volunteering by those under 25 years (create an annual pipeline of recruits).
- Develop resilience through skilling the community, leadership and experience of young adults.
- Enable young adults to contribute to preparing their homes and community.
- Increased pool of trained young people to respond during a disaster and recovery.

This will fill the needs of emergency services and other volunteer organisations which are:

- Ongoing recruitment of volunteers to replace turnover of up to 30 per cent.
- Secure a younger cohort of volunteers and increase their retention, including in regional areas.
- Contributing to greater gender balance among emergency responders.
  - 18–25 age group has the lowest level of volunteering at 25 per cent (except for over 75s).
  - 15–17 age group is the most active at 42 per cent.
  - 7 per cent of volunteers engage with emergency services.
  - 22 per cent of volunteers engage with community, welfare, council and religious groups.

### **Incentives**

Attraction to and completion of the program will be significantly enhanced if accomplishment entitles the participant to receive a level of TAFE fee/HECS rebate.

Other incentives may be forthcoming from key suppliers such as telecommunications companies showing an interest in favourable data plans for volunteers.

## **Integrating volunteer opportunities within educational institutions to increase student participation in volunteer organisations.**

The Duke of Ed can utilise a future pool of the active participants it already has through education departments, universities and research institutions across Australia. We are already a part of the state and federal governments education curriculum, in partnership with the Department of Education, with about 30,000 current active participants. These young participants could create a future pool of volunteers for emergency response.

The Duke of Ed Framework has three levels of accreditation: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Each level is made up of four sections, which include physical recreation, skills, adventurous journey and voluntary service. The activity for each section is left to the supporting agency and the registered Duke of Ed user.

Since the 1970s, registered participants have already chosen to meet their volunteer service requirements through emergency services organisations such as:

- SES,
- RFS/CFA (including QFES)
- Marine Rescue
- St John Ambulance
- Surf Life Saving.

Therefore, existing partnerships with these organisations can be leveraged to allow for the effective implementation of this program.

### **TAFE and University**

The program includes an option to concurrently complete the requirements of Gold Duke of Ed Award. This can be incorporated into TAFE or university offers, by including the option to opt-in for the emergency responder program. Apprentices and trainees are also a key target groups – this initiative is not just for those wanting to go to university.

It also goes without saying that participants would gain incredible skills for their resumes and micro-credentials to further certify their learning.

As mentioned, the Duke of Ed National Emergency Responder Corps' vision is to target school leavers 18-plus to incorporate six online training modules currently available for training volunteers. The program could support the delivery of preparedness activities within communities in-line with reducing the impacts from natural disasters. This initiative would also relieve impacts on other volunteers who are working in emergency management and response organisations.

The successful longevity and record numbers of registered users of the Duke of Ed Framework in Australia is evidence of its ability to procure and develop required expertise and knowledge that would ensure the program's success. The Army, Navy and Air Force Cadets have recently signed an Agreement to use the Duke of Ed for all cadets in Australia.

Robust national consultation has already occurred over recent years with most states and territories including Ministers, MPs and Senators, NEMA and our submission to the Senate Inquiry into Disaster Resilience.

Positive preliminary discussions have also been undertaken with emergency services organisations, including QFES, NSW RFS, WA Fire & Emergency Services, SA SES, NSW SES, AFAC and NSW & ACT Apprentice Employment Network. Support in principle correspondence can be supplied if required.

## **Creating a nationally recognised qualification scheme that provides tangible benefits to volunteers and formally acknowledges their skills and contributions across sectors.**

A reliable volunteer recruitment pipeline of school leavers would substantially increase the number of trained emergency responders (volunteers). This will engage young adults to undertake emergency responder training, while concurrently being accredited for a Silver or Gold Level Duke of Ed.

Volunteers will aid with community preparedness, disaster response and recovery operations, to make up for the shortfall in volunteers and defence personnel.

### **Practical skill development**

The program could be implemented through resilience development by upskilling the community and the experience of young adults, especially through practical skill development such as:

- Chainsaw training and permit
- Search & navigation
- Fire-fighter support
- Flood boat skills
- Driver safety
- Working from heights
- Use of hand tools
- First aid certificate
- Sandbagging
- Radio & communications
- Leadership & teamwork.

Additionally, it would enable those young adults to better contribute to preparing their own homes and community in the event of a disaster or emergency – or taking the responsibility to reduce their own risk and bolster social unity by helping the community do the same.

## **Investigating whether there are appropriate laws and safeguards to protect the health and safety of volunteers.**

The Duke of Ed as a product is used by licensed organisations who are required to fully comply with all safeguarding and WHS legislation. This is further reinforced through the Quality Assurance process that the Duke of Ed has in place as a licence compliance requirement.

## **The structure and governance of the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army).**

The key feature of the proposed structure is that no new agency is required to be formed. The proposed Emergency Responder Corps, with an added embracing of climate action, would be rolled out via a software platform that connects to all relevant agencies.

The Duke of Ed has put its hand up to assist either project manager or contribute to the project management of a state pilot.

## **Comparison of relevant overseas models and best practices.**

The Duke of Ed is proud to say that its model of recruiting participants, in addition to the success of those volunteers, is a world-leading framework.

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award was founded in 1956 and is considered world-best practice for managing and accrediting a balanced engagement of non-formal education, in a way that develops core life skills.

**Peter Kaye AM ESM**  
**Chief Executive Officer**