

➤ Mérite Jeunesse Award 2009

"Consciously or unconsciously, every one of us does render some service or other. If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and will make, not only our own happiness, but that of the world at large" Mahatma Gandhi. (Taken from the International Award for Young People Handbook).

If you grew up in the UK you will be no stranger to the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award was founded in Great Britain in 1956 and was designed to motivate and encourage the self-development of young people.

The popularity of the Award has grown well beyond the borders of the United Kingdom. Today, the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Association, established in 1988, boasts members from more than 120 countries and to date more than six million young people around the world have taken part.

Here in the Grand Duchy, the Award is known as the Mérite Jeunesse and is placed under the haut patronage of His Royal Highness Grand-Duke Jean. The Mérite Jeunesse Foundation has been presided by His Royal Highness Prince Guillaume since its establishment in 1993.

The International Award is an exciting self-development programme available to all young people between the ages of 14 and 25. It aims to equip them with life skills to make a difference to themselves, their communities and the world. The award is designed to inspire, guide and support young people in their self-development and recognise their achievements.

The award is certainly rigorous and not easily achieved it is designed to push the participants' boundaries in different skill areas. The award is about individual challenge and recognises that each person's challenges will be different depending on their abilities.

There are three levels of Award:

Bronze: for those over 14 and under 25

Silver: for those over 15 and under 25

Gold: for those over 16 and under 25

The Award comprises four sections: service, skills, physical recreation and the adventurous journey. The candidate's commitment of time and energy increases with each of the three levels of participation: bronze, silver, or gold. There are four sections at Bronze and Silver level and five at Gold. With



Grace Courlander with Prince Guillaume (2009)



ISI practice expedition (2008)

assistance from adult Leaders, participants select and set objectives in each of the following areas:

Volunteering: undertaking service to individuals or the community.

Physical: improving in an area of sport, dance or fitness activities.

Skills: developing practical and social skills and personal interests.

Expedition: planning, training for and completion of an adventurous journey in the Grand Duchy or abroad.

As the Award is a programme of individual challenge, participants are encouraged to work at their own pace. The Award is often referred to as a marathon, not a sprint; subject to the maximum age limit, participants can take as long as they want to complete the Award.

The International School of Luxembourg launched the Mérite Jeunesse Award for high school students just one year ago. On March 17 at this year's award ceremony at the BGL-Kirchberg, parents and school representatives looked on proudly as ISL's first group of 14 "méritants" received their bronze and silver insignias from Prince Guillaume and Minister for Family and Integration, Marie-Josée Jacobs.

Middle School teacher Phil Moran, who supervises the award at ISL, explains its benefits, particularly within the context of the International Baccalaureate Diploma programme. "We have CAS (Creativity, Action, Service) here already as part of the IB, a community service requirement of 150 hours. This is an ideal set-up for the Mérite Jeunesse. Most of our students are already doing a skill, service and sport. The role of Mérite Jeunesse is to set the challenge and push the students just a little more. If you are playing sports and involved in Global Issues, maybe you are missing a skill. Maybe this could stimulate a kid to pick up a guitar and start playing it. The knock-on effects for the rest of your life are quite profound."

Most ISL students had never heard of the Duke of Edinburgh's award or the Mérite Jeunesse until last autumn when Phil Moran turned up at an Upper School assembly dressed in full expedition gear complete with compass, map, boots and rucksack, to tout its benefits. "I wanted to grab their attention," Moran explains. "The expedition is perhaps the smallest component of the award, but it is the bit they all remember and often makes the biggest impact." The strategy has borne fruit: more than twice as many students have signed up for 2009, including a team of four who will take part in

 Courtesy of the European School, International School and Athénée

ISL's first gold award expedition, crossing the Alps from Mont Blanc to the Matterhorn, in June.

ISL students who have achieved the award echo Moran's appraisal. "It's tough work and involves commitment, but is so much fun to accomplish, especially the hike. I think if people were more aware of the possibilities there would be even more candidates," reflects Michael Cannon, silver award recipient and one of this spring's gold award hopefuls. Bronze recipient Ewan Globber explains further, "I learnt that even when you feel like you can't keep going, you can. And I learnt that I can push myself way past my expected boundaries if I am part of a group." Indeed, working together as part of a team with a common purpose is one of the fundamental aspects of the award and students clearly recognize the benefits. "The Mérite Jeunesse

award helped me get to know people I didn't know at all before the trip. Since then we have stayed close. The whole award was actually a lot of fun and we came back from it with many stories and good memories," commented Keenan Vanot, as he received his bronze insignia.



Linda and David Cadwallader (2009)

tion sparked by his own completion of the Duke of Edinburgh's award as a secondary school student in his native England. He trekked through the Pyrenees at 18, has worked with an environmental project in Mumbai and has traversed the Himalayas and Tasmania. This extensive experience gives him complete credibility with students when he tells them, "Don't whine before you try it. Try it first and then tell me what you think." Student feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. "Many of our kids have never had to carry a pack, walk in bad conditions or sleep in a tent. Some of them can't imagine that they are going to enjoy being out in the wet and the cold." The wonderful thing is that they do. "I like to see them come out of it and say it was tough, but with a big smile on their face!"

David Cadwalla has been running the Mérite Jeunesse for almost fifteen years at the European school. In 1992 just six children took part in the award and since then that figure has grown to around 80 children who are involved today.



ISL 2009 Award recipients with Phil Moran far right

All nationalities in the European school take part although David admitted that much of the European school's success is down to its strong angle-phone core of students.

"The Award very much belongs to the participants most of my energy goes into the Service and Adventure Activity parts which are the elements which the participants difficult to organise for themselves" He spoke to 352 about the time one particular boy wanted to learn Japanese it was then David's



Prince Guillaume, Grand-Duc Jean and Marie-Josée Jacobs Award Ceremony (2009)

job to go and find someone to take on that role. The boy subsequently went on to study Japanese in his gap year.

Skill activities have ranged from everything from learning to play a musical instrument, arts and crafts to webdesign.

The European School's internal service programme includes librarian and Tier Monde activities where students have raised money by having school discos and cake stalls. External student service projects include work with the Protection Civile, Green Peace and Amnesty International.

David and his team of six colleagues are clearly passionate about the Award and they all put in a tremendous amount of time and energy making sure participants fulfill their individual requirements and hopefully have lots of enjoyment along the way.

Around 75 young people received their bronze, silver and gold awards at the award ceremony on March 17. Two gold-award students, Grace Courlander from the European School and Anne Kerschenmeyer of the Athénée, made presentations about their experiences in attaining the awards through their respective schools. Grace said "The first thing I said when I was told about the Mérite Jeunesse was absolutely no way I will be doing that ...freezing mornings, continuous walking, bugs.. but I ended up staying three years and loved it"

Out of all the laureats who were accoladed at the 2009 Mérite Jeunesse Ceremony, 54 received the Bronze, 36 received the Silver and 14 received the Gold Award.

For more information on the Luxembourg Award scheme please visit <http://merite.jeunesse.lu/>