

## **Award Temporary Changes review and Gold Award starting age**

### **Proposals for International Council October 2022**

#### **Background**

The temporary changes to the Award that were introduced in June 2020 to provide flexibility during the pandemic, have been under review by a working group of representatives from more than 20 NAOs. The group met on four occasions between January and June 2022

Specifically, the changes and flexibilities were:

- a) Participants can volunteer from home as part of their Award
- b) Participants can volunteer for family members
- c) Participants may be granted an extension to complete their Award after their 25<sup>th</sup> Birthday.
- d) Gold Residential Project – participants may go home to sleep at night
- e) Gold Residential Project – Participants may complete some or all of the GRP virtually.

The group has considered all the changes very carefully and are recommending to the International Council (IC) that the changes remain permanently as part of the Award framework BUT only at the discretion of individual NAOs. It is not the intention to adjust the handbook or broadcast these changes.

The reason for the group recommending that these flexibilities remain is that there are many very specific instances where providing this flexibility has enabled young people to access and complete their Award. For instance, in cultures where young women are not able to stay away from home, where young people due to illness or disability are unable to leave their homes and where a young person's economic circumstances mean they simply cannot afford to stay away from home, the current flexibility to requirements for the Gold Residential Project has proved helpful. This would be in line with our commitment to accommodate the different needs of young people and the use of reasonable accommodations to do so. This approach would also support our commitment to equity, diversion and inclusion, as reasonable accommodations aim to provide equal opportunities, so young people's skills and talents can be developed and used to full capacity.

The above information was shared with all National Directors on 1 June with an indication that the proposal would be put to International Council. To date no feedback or comment has been received.

#### **Recommendation 1**

- a) **That the current five “temporary” changes remain in place, but their use is entirely at the discretion of the NAO (Foundation for IACs) and only in exceptional circumstances based on the needs of the individual young person.**
  - 1. **Participants can volunteer from home as part of their Award**
  - 2. **Participants can volunteer for family members**
  - 3. **Participants may be granted an extension to complete their Award after their 25<sup>th</sup> Birthday. (note this flexibility already exists in the Handbook at p25)**
  - 4. **Gold Residential Project (there would no change to the title of this section) – participants may go home to sleep at night**
  - 5. **Gold Residential Project – Participants may complete some or all of the GRP virtually.**
- b) **To support this, simple guidance will be developed for NAOs as to when it is appropriate to use this flexibility.**

- c) **The specific flexibilities will not be published in the International Handbook but will be supported by examples/short case studies that give guidance to NAO staff.**
- d) **This guidance will emphasise the outcomes for the young person that each section is seeking to achieve. It will also emphasise that the flexibilities are available to make the Award more accessible for the widest range of young people.**

### **Continuing the Gold Award**

At the request of the representatives on the working group they also considered the issue of the starting age for the Gold Award for those continuing from Silver.

The group noted that the current rigid age range of 16 was to ensure the Gold Award “is more of an adult challenge” (Handbook p27). The group felt that since this approach was agreed there was more evidence to indicate that young people’s maturity was less linked to age but more to their life experiences and culture and varied considerably between individual young people. The group also observed that for many NAOs the gap between completing Silver and being able to start Gold (at 16) meant that many young people lost the momentum of progression in the Award and many active participants were lost at this point.

The group also observed that since this rule was put in place it has become clear that young people are maturing faster and at different rates. The Award is a series of personal challenges based on the needs of the individual. The personal development and learning that they gain from the Award is not so closely linked to their age but their maturity.

It was clear in extensive discussions that there was no rule or age that would suit the wide variety of cultures, challenges and structures in which the Award operates. The group therefore recommends:

#### **Recommendation 2**

- a) **That for young people continuing from Silver to Gold there should be no age restriction.**

### **Direct entry to Gold – starting age**

The Group then considered the issue of direct entry for the Gold Award and whether there should be an age restriction. The group extensively debated a variety of options and their relative strengths and weaknesses. Some NAOs consulted Award Leaders.

In summary the group felt

- a) That completing the Award with a peer group was the most motivating factor for participants
- b) The maturity level of individual young people varied hugely within the Award’s age range
- c) That the minimum period of participation as a direct entrant should remain at 18 months (Handbook p29)
- d) That flexibility should be given to NAOs to decide on the direct entry age

#### **Recommendation 3**

- a) **That the age of direct entry to Gold should be decided by the NAO and take account of the young person’s maturity and ability to make the most of the challenge offered by the Gold Award.**
- b) **That guidance should remain that the ideal starting ages for Award levels are 14, 15 and 16.**