Thesis Title

How can we make the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme more inclusive for disadvantaged pupils?

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the intersection of extracurricular activities (ECAs) and social justice through a qualitative case study of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofEA) within a multi-academy trust (MAT). It critically examines the Award's potential as a mechanism for advancing educational equity. While economic barriers are frequently cited as the primary obstacle to participation, this research challenges that assumption by revealing the equally significant roles of peer relationships, cultural familiarity, and recognition in shaping pupil engagement. By elevating the underrepresented voices of disadvantaged pupils to reveal nuanced barriers to ECA participation, this research adds to the growing evidence base that highlights the importance of ECAs in fostering belonging and identity, particularly among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Drawing on Nancy Fraser's tripartite framework, encompassing economic, cultural, and political dimensions, this research critically examines how school-based interventions often operate as affirmative remedies, addressing superficial inequalities without confronting underlying structural injustices. While initiatives such as Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) funding are used by school leaders to alleviate financial barriers, this study finds they fall short in addressing the deeper sociocultural and political factors that constrain meaningful participation.

Ultimately, the study argues that while schools alone cannot resolve structural injustice, they can play a critical role in mitigating its effects. Practical recommendations are offered to support school leaders in fostering more inclusive models of engagement. This thesis thus contributes to broader conversations about educational inequality, agency, and the transformative potential of ECAs.

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This thesis is dedicated to my children, Lerryn and Fraser, my greatest champions throughout this journey. From such a young age, they have understood that every hour I spent writing instead of with them was, in some way, for the benefit of children who need it most. If more of us thought as selflessly as Lerryn and Fraser, perhaps work like this would not be so necessary.

Author's declaration:

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

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Signature ..... Tuesday Humby.....

Chapter One: Introduction

In 1937, German born educationalist, Kurt Hahn devised an experiential learning programme for boys enrolled at Gordonstoun, the Scottish private boarding school he had founded three years earlier (Gordonstoun, 2024). Originally called the Moray Badge scheme, the programme sought to challenge the young boys of Gordonstoun with a series of physical and mental challenges, including the completion of a project and an expedition (BBC news, 2016). One of his students to benefit from this scheme at the time was Prince Philip of Greece, who later married Queen Elizabeth the Second. In 1956, Prince Philip agreed to give his name to the Badge scheme. This scheme is now known as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofEA) and every year hundreds of thousands of young people take part in the Award across the world (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 2024). Hahn's early motto was 'There is more in you than you think' (KurtHahn.org, 2024). However, the DofEA goes further to purport itself as a mechanism for social mobility; 'Achieving an Award will give you skills, confidence and an edge over others when you apply for college, university or a job' (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 2023a).

As an educationalist, interested in issues of fairness, inequality and social justice as they apply to schools, I became interested in this claim and hence began exploring the possible value of the DofEA as an initiative for schools who were keen to enhance social equality. Given that there was limited research evidence on the DofEA itself, I explored the wider evidence from the field of research of Extra-curricular activities (ECAs) that might help assess my question around how beneficial the DofEA might be. Although far from being clear-cut, my literature review did reveal enough evidence to make me conclude that there were definite potential merits in the DofEA which could, in theory, compensate for or reduce social inequality. However, it was also evident from the data sets of schools I was working in, as well as the DofEs own data (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 2025a) that young people who were already identified as potentially disadvantaged by economic inequality (and are therefore entitled to Government funding via the Pupil Premium Grant) are not proportionally represented in uptake of the DofEA. The schools' data sets also

indicated that these young people are also more likely than their non-economically disadvantaged peers to 'drop out' before completion of the Award. Since there was also research evidence that concluded these young people were more likely to benefit from ECAs and therefore potentially the DofEA, this lack of parity in participation (Fraser, 2008a) was troubling and I was keen to explore the reasons why this was the case.

This thesis employs the theoretical framework of feminist social philosopher Nancy Fraser, which has been developed over the last couple of decades in an ongoing dialogue with other prominent social justice theorists (Honneth and Fraser, 2003, Fraser, 2008b). Fraser (2008a) asserts that the 'most general meaning of justice is parity of participation' (p. 16) in which individuals are able to participate in social life as equals with their peers (Fraser, 2005). To overcome injustice Fraser argues we need to dismantle institutionalised obstacles which prevent peers from participating with parity (Keddie, 2012). Fraser identifies three broad areas which pose a barrier to parity of participation: economic, cultural, and political barriers. Overcoming these barriers requires addressing three domains: redistribution, recognition, and representation. As Fraser explains,

> 'In condemning forms of maldistribution, or misrecognition, or misrepresentation, the idea is that these are states of affairs, situations, that block some people from participating on a par with others so they violate the norm of parity of participation'.
>
> (Fraser 2016, p4).

Redistribution concerns the economic structures that create or sustain inequality. In the context of the DofEA, this thesis examines how maldistribution may prevent economically disadvantaged students from participating or completing the Award.

Recognition focuses on the cultural and social factors that contribute to inequality, particularly the ways in which certain groups may be undervalued or stigmatised, limiting their access to opportunities. This research explores

whether aspects of the Award's design contribute to misrecognition which may alienate or discourage full engagement among disadvantaged pupils.

Representation refers to the political and institutional structures that determine whose voices are included in decision-making processes. My research investigates whether pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have a meaningful role in shaping their DofEA experience within their schools, or whether they are subject to misrepresentation. These concepts are explored in greater depth in Chapter 3.

Fraser's framework provided both a useful structure for my analysis, which sought to uncover structural, cultural and institutional barriers that may limit participation, and helped me locate my research in the wider discourse on social inequality. This in turn allowed me to consider not just how the DofEA might become a means to help lift children out of cycles of poverty, if made more equitable and accessible, but better understand the reasons why these cycles exist in the first place (Smith, 2018).

The originality of my study lies in the amplification of the voices of the pupils themselves who are already classified as 'disadvantaged' by the government due to parental income, to uncover possible reasons or barriers why these pupils chose not to take up the scheme and/or drop out of the scheme once started. By deliberately seeking and representing the voice of young people who have chosen not to partake in the award scheme or dropped out of the scheme once started, I am providing an original contribution to the field of Extra-Curricular activity (ECA) within the broader and over-lapping field of school-based education. This study also offers a novel contribution by applying Fraser's theoretical framework to this field, an approach that has yet to be extensively explored in existing research.

Furthermore, by applying Fraser's framework and exploring how barriers interact to limit the participation of economically disadvantaged pupils in the DofEA, I then use these findings to propose practical solutions for school leaders who wish to promote a more equitable model of engagement.

1.1 What is the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme?

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofEA) was founded by His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh in 1956 and was rapidly expanded overseas, leading to the formation of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award International Association in 1988 (IDofE Handbook, 2019). The Award's original iteration was the 'Moray Badge Scheme', designed by German educationalist and the Duke's former headteacher, Kurt Hahn. Both the Duke of Edinburgh and Hahn shared a common concern about the personal development of young people. According to Hahn, the proficiency of modern youth was declining in a variety of ways, which became known as the 'Six Declines of Modern Youth' described as follows,

> 'First, Hahn observed a decline of fitness, due to modern methods of locomotion which led to physical illiteracy; second, a decline of initiative and enterprise, due to an epidemic he called spectatoritis; third, a decline of memory and imagination, due to the restlessness and lack of reflection in modern life; fourth, a decline of skill and care due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship; fifth, a decline of self-discipline due to the availability of stimulants and tranquillisers; and sixth, worst of all, a decline of compassion due to the haste of modern life which led to 'spiritual death'.
>
> (Van Oord, 2010, p256).

Igo (2025) argues that these trends have become even more pronounced since Hahn's death in 1974, embedding themselves within contemporary culture. He writes,

> 'Consumer culture has embraced the 'weakened tradition of craftsmanship,' providing us with toys and tools which we can't repair, even if we wanted to. 'Unseemly haste' seems to be a necessity for

> those balancing working, commuting, and childcare, while being constantly available to co-workers or supervisors after work hours'
>
> (Igo, 2025)

While both Igo and Hahn's perspective may seem overly negative, both industrialisation and the rise of the internet have undeniably transformed the way we, and our children, live our lives. The decline in children's physical fitness is a well-documented phenomenon. Sandercock and Cohen (2019) identified an accelerated decline in both children's fitness levels and their engagement in physical activity between 2008 and 2014. The concept of spectatoritis, defined at the time of Hahn's writing as a 'disease of leisure' (Bobbitt, 1933, p.549) and characterised by an overindulgence in passive entertainment rather than active participation, is particularly relevant in our digital age. When Hahn was developing the DofEA, the internet as we know it today, did not exist. Today, 97% of households in the UK with children aged 0-18 have internet access, with mobile phone ownership nearly universal by age 12 (Ofcom, 2023). Ofcom also reported that 89% of children now regularly play video games. The cognitive implications of such digital engagement are still an emerging area of research, so whether this is leading to a decline of memory and imagination is debatable. Although, Dikshit and Kiran (2023) found that prolonged engagement with social media has the potential to impair working memory, a key component of cognitive function.

While the notion that children's self-discipline has declined due to 'stimulants and tranquilisers' may initially seem exaggerated, existing evidence suggests there is some validity to Hahn's assertion. Data from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2024) reported a 16% increase in children and young people (aged 17 and under) in alcohol and drug treatment between April 2023 and March 2024, although it should also be noted that the overall number of young people in treatment remains 41% lower than the peak recorded in 2008-2009. Nearly half (49%) of young people entering treatment reported a concurrent mental health need.

Again, there is no research evidence that proves children of today are inherently less compassionate than children in the past, but in a cross-temporal meta-analysis conducted on 72 samples of nearly 14,000 American college students between 1979 and 2009, Konrath, O'Brien & Hsing (2011) found a significant decline in empathic concern and perspective-taking, with the most substantial drop occurring after 2000.

The four 'antidotes' that Hahn proposed to combat these six declines: expeditions, fitness training, sustained projects and engagement in service, form the basis of the DofEA today, which sees its participants, who must be between fourteen and twenty-four years of age, complete four sections at one of three levels (Bronze, Silver and Gold). The four sections still reflect the 'antidotes' that Hahn proposed nearly a century ago.

1.1.1 The Expedition

Young people must plan for, train for and take part in a physical expedition. Originally a 'hike', the DofEA has now expanded what could constitute the expedition to all modes of transport which involve physical exertion, including completing the expedition by horseback or canoe. At Bronze level this expedition must take place over two days and include an overnight stay. At Silver level this extends to three days and two nights. At Gold level this further extends to four days and three nights. Explaining the perceived value as an antidote, Igo (2025) explains,

> 'Spectatoritis becomes impossible when each team member needs to put on their pack and hike to the next campsite. Students who may have previously been on the sidelines of daily activities find themselves thrown into the mix, cooking food for the team, giving the team directions from the map and setting up their shelter for the night. Taking time away from screens and social media, from extracurriculars and jobs, to be in wild places, is a new experience for many students. They often begin to recognise the "confused restlessness" and "unseemly haste" when far

> enough removed from it. Though it's impossible, afterward, to keep it all from pouring back in, many students set goals for how to hang onto some of the perspective and calmness they learned on their expedition.'
>
> (Igo, 2025)

To take part in the expedition section, for the average child using the cheapest DofEA recommended kit list from their affiliated providers on their website, as of February 2025, and discounting optional items and items commonly found in the home, the clothing would cost £408.40 and the personal kit £160.20. The group kit (based on teams of three) would cost £374 for which the child may have to pay a proportion. Travel costs would also need to be factored in.

1.1.2 The Physical Section

Young people must choose any sport, dancing or fitness activity that requires a sustained level of energy, although this need not be strenuous. They must continue this activity at an average of an hour a week for three months at Bronze level, moving to between three and six months at silver and between six and twelve months for the Gold award.

1.1.3 The Skills Section

Young people must choose an activity that broadens their understanding and increases their expertise in a certain skill. Examples include learning first aid, playing an instrument or learning to cook. At Gold level, around one fifth of participants use 'learning to drive' as their skill (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 2024b). This skill must continue for three months at Bronze level, moving to three to six months at silver and between six and twelve months for the Gold award.

1.1.4 The Volunteering Section

Young people must also volunteer, whether that be in their school or wider community. Crucially, the organisations they volunteer for must be established for civic benefit and not-for-profit.

To achieve the Bronze award, young people must have volunteered for a minimum of three months, this extends to six months for Silver and twelve months for Gold.

Gold award holders have also had to complete an additional residential section, which involved undertaking a shared activity in a residential setting away from their home, in an unfamiliar environment, for a minimum of five days and four nights. This residential must be done with an organised group, registered charity or Approved Activity Provider. Historically, young people must have needed to join this individually and not with an existing group of friends or as part of a school or youth group trip. However, very recent changes have been made to allow for more flexibility around who a participant can know on the residential, to make the experience more accessible to young people (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award 2025b).

There is now an E-DofE tracking system so participants can log progress, and which sends push notifications to participants to remind them to upload evidence towards their goals. Some schools capitalise on the links with the school day curriculum, allowing participants to use other extra-curricular activities, for example participation at a sports or drama club as evidence of development of 'skills' for completion of their skills sections. Staff who undertake the expeditions as leaders, are required to complete a minimum level of training, such as the lowland leaders' qualification.

1.2 International Reach

The success of the DofEA in the UK led to the formation of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award International Association in 1988 (IDofE Handbook, 2019)

and since, the Award has now rolled out to more than 120 countries across the globe as the International Duke of Edinburgh's Award (IDofEA). Over a million young people undertake the Award every year (Intaward.org, 2025a). Abroad, the Award's scheme works on a franchise model. Whilst the framework stays the same, the Foundation (the UK base organisation) are clear from their literature that each nation can ensure it is culturally relevant for its participants and for its nation (Intaward.org, 2025b). However, to date, there is no formal mechanism for ensuring that this is the case. Headquarters, who oversee the licensing of Award operators and provide advice and support to the National Award organisations across the world, are based in London, UK (Intaward.org,2025b). Interestingly, the scheme has survived delivery in countries that have gained independence from colonial rule, although often the name has been changed. For example, the Bahamas renamed the Award in 1996 to the 'Governor General's Youth Award' and in Nigeria the Award was reintroduced in 2014 as the 'International Award for Young People Nigeria'. Apart from dictating that there are four sections, countries may influence the scheme as they see fit. Many ex-colonial countries are still economically dependent on the DofEA Foundation in Britain and therefore may not be viable without this monetary support. This may well influence how the Award scheme is being delivered and the extent to which the operational units in ex-colonial countries feel they can depart from the Foundations blueprint.

Moreover, this does suggest the scheme is far from politically neutral and potentially reinforces a western hegemony both within and beyond the UK. As we have seen from their website rhetoric, the DofEA has a clear vision from its founder about what constitutes a good character and is clearly attempting to shape the narrative from the centre. This has attracted some criticism; Petersen and Flynn (2008) are particularly critical of the Award, arguing that it serves as a neoliberal mechanism of power, one that serves particular regimes of truth about what constitutes a good life and a good person. It is true that there are some neoliberal characteristics inherent in the design of the Award, such as the development of ideals such as personal initiative and self-discipline. Success in the Award is framed as a matter of personal effort through perseverance.

Individualising success or failure in this way means that any broader societal constraints, such as distributive injustice, could be overlooked (Fraser, 2004). The Award also explicitly positions itself as a means to enhance a young person's employability, framed as an investment into your marketability, reflecting a neoliberal emphasis on human capital development (see section 2.10.1). However, Petersen and Flynn's assertions can be contested. The DofEA is inherently non-competitive; success is not predicated on surpassing others but on personal achievement. Notably, the expedition component necessitates teamwork, emphasising collaboration over individualism. The Award also explicitly promotes volunteering and civic engagement through the Volunteering section, which is designed to foster a sense of social responsibility rather than individual gain. These elements suggest that the DofEA cannot be wholly characterised as neoliberal.

The International dimension of the Award did however make me consider its implementation, particularly in countries reliant on the Foundation's funding. If these countries lack the capacity for meaningful representation to be able to depart from, or challenge, the western designed blueprint, could this be leading to social injustices being reproduced through the inability to focus on tackling their own contextual inequalities? Whilst that question was beyond the scope of this thesis, it did influence my methodology in terms of wanting to explore the extent of young people's perceptions of the Award scheme. Did they place the same value on the blueprint of sections the founders saw as the necessary antidote to the decline of youth? What effect was this having, if any, on their choice to participate or stay on the scheme?

1.3 School Leaders Pursuit of the Scheme

The school leaders I work with are highly sensitive to criticisms that they are reproducing privilege through 'misinterpretations of history and the 'othering' of minorities, shaping both white and non-white subjectivities and identities' (Peters, 2015, p643). Many educational professionals acknowledge and destabilise privilege through the inherent power relations in the production and dissemination of knowledge (Begum and Saini, 2019), by attempting to rid their

subject curriculums of the ‘self-generating arrogance (of the western academic canon in its entirety) …and the stories that it tells to reinforce its hegemony’ (Smith, 2021,p14).

Pursuing the Award scheme may seem at odds with this work; after all, the DofEA’s namesake was one of the most privileged members of the English aristocracy, and it is perceived by some as a resource through which white middle-class communities gain economic advantage (TES, 2017; Douglas, 2009; Campbell et al, 2009). Therefore, it is worth exploring why the Award scheme remains so attractive to schools.

Within the last five years there has been a push by both the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted (the schools inspectorate body) to encourage schools to focus on the development of ‘softer skills’, which they recognise as potentially important to educational attainment and future employment (Brown, 2013). The DfE have attempted this push though their own championing of ‘character education’ via the non-statutory Character Education Framework (DfE 2019a). The release of this guidance coincided with the start of the Covid pandemic in England and therefore did not get the traction it may have otherwise been afforded. Also released in September 2019 was the new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework which brought in the discrete judgment area of ‘Personal Development’. For a school to be judged as ‘good’ under this (still current at the time of writing) inspection framework, leaders must ensure that they ‘develop pupils’ character’ (Ofsted 2024, para 338). In both influential documents, the DofEA is cited as a ‘high quality provider’ (Ofsted 2024, para 337) for helping schools to deliver a quality programme of character education. Ofsted do not typically recommend providers in their frameworks and the DofEA is only one of three external initiatives that appears in their latest school inspection handbook. Through the combination of sections outlined earlier in 1.1.1 to 1.1.4 , the DofEA could provide evidence that school leaders are developing pupils to be ‘responsible, respectful and active citizens who contribute positively to society’, supporting pupils to be ‘confident, resilient and independent and to develop strength of character’, so they can keep themselves ‘physically and mentally healthy’ (all Ofsted 2024, para 474).

Having been endorsed by Ofsted, many school leaders in both my own MAT and the case study MAT for this thesis, have used monies obtained from the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) they receive to pay the registration fee (and in some cases other costs) for their Year 9 disadvantaged pupils to undertake the DofE Bronze Award. They do this in the knowledge that the DfE supports this spend, as this is viewed as a legitimate means to tackling the 'non-academic barriers' which widen the attainment gaps, worsened by the Covid pandemic (DfE 2021a). The DofEA have published their own marketing materials on how their award is both a good use of PPG and useful evidence in Ofsted inspections (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 2018 and 2019a). On the face of it, their assertions could be said to be accurate; the Award scheme does extend a school's curriculum 'beyond the academic' (Ofsted 2024, para 336) and could be evidence of 'wider work to support pupils to be confident, resilient and independent, and to develop strength of character' (para 474) both requisites of the 'good' criteria in the inspection handbook. Given the high-stakes nature of Ofsted inspections in England (UK Parliament, 2024), it is not difficult to see how school leaders could view the DofEA as a method of best securing that 'good' judgment for personal development.

The DofEA has also been around for seventy years and as such, it is a name many families are familiar with to some extent. As such, many schools use it as a selling point on open evenings. How effective this is for pupil recruitment is unknown. However, the Award is viewed favourably by employers on applications (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 2019b) and again there will be plenty of families who are aware of this and therefore expect to see it as part of the school's extra-curricular offer. In a school system where competition to fill places can be rife, school leaders need to utilise any marketing methods they can.

Hence, arguments that the Award scheme is just a means to reinforce western privilege or a middle-class resource to gain economic advantage (Douglas, 2019), whilst I am sure are not lost on headteachers, are overshadowed by the endorsement of the Award from the DfE and Ofsted and the need to remain in a competitive schools' market. Therefore, if the DofEA is to remain as a

permanent feature in our schools' curriculum offer, it is all the more important that we seek ways to ensure parity of participation (Fraser, 2008).

1.4 Research Context

This study was important to me both professionally and personally.

In my work context, I have recently become a CEO of a small multi-academy trust (MAT) of six schools in the North-West. Prior to this and when I began this research, I was working for one of the largest MATs in the country serving forty-three schools across England. This trust serves some of the most socio-economically disadvantaged wards in the country. Data from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019) indicates that 47% of the academies serve the communities in the most deprived quintile in England, with 68% of their pupils living in communities in the top two most deprived quintiles. As such these schools attract significant Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) funding. The intention is that these monies are used to raise the attainment of these pupils due to the wide and persistent attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers. As I have previously outlined, school leaders have been spending some of this money on paying for disadvantaged pupils to undertake the DofEA. However, school leaders cannot spend public money without evidential evaluation; headteachers are therefore expected to 'prioritise and allocate financial resources appropriately, ensuring efficiency, effectiveness and probity in the use of public funds' (DfE, 2020, standard 7). With scrutiny of public spending, school and MAT leaders must ensure that bought programmes such as the DofEA provide value for money in their own setting (ESFA, 2021). In theory and based on the albeit limited research evidence around the DofEA (which has been almost entirely funded by the DofE Foundation), there is evidence that the scheme is value for money (Pears, 2010, NFER, 2020, PWC, 2019).

However, my own initial research made me question this assumption. As we will see, the data indicates that currently the very pupils who are being targeted for this spend (those entitled to PPG) have a poorer uptake and lower completion

rates than peers not entitled to PPG. DoEAs' statistics also show only 15.3% of their Award entries are from young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 2025) whereas the percentage of pupils eligible for PPG in England for the same year was 24.6% (Gov.uk, 2024a). Therefore, predicting that the Award scheme is going to remain a significant draw for school leaders while it remains endorsed by Ofsted and gives potential leverage to filling a school's roll, we must assume that school leaders will continue to channel significant funds into the Award. Therefore, professionally, as a MAT leader, I felt it was an imperative to explore how we ensure retention rates for our young people are high, so we are not wasting public money. My previous position within a large MAT who offer the DofEA to all Yr9 pupils, allowed me access to participants and administrative data to conduct this original research that I felt would be beneficial not just for my own MAT, but the wider school sector.

The research was also influenced by my own personal history and values. Almost my entire career has been driven by a deep interest in fairness and social justice. While my own state schooling was perfectly adequate, I was struck at a young age as to the inequity between my state school experience and my brother's private school experience. My own school offered many extra-curricular provisions (mainly in sports and the arts) and residential experiences which included trips abroad. However, the range and frequency at my brothers' school was far superior. In my first teaching position in a state school very similar to the one I had attended; the department went to great lengths to provide a vast range of extra-curricular experiences to rival that of any private school. I was proud of this and valued being part of a team that were consciously competing with the offer provided by fee-paying schools. However, it was not until I took my second teaching position, in the most socio-economically deprived area of Cornwall, did I realise what inequity really looked like in terms of England schooling. I was admittedly very naïve. It was there I learnt that many children came to secondary school unable to read or write. Only a handful were passing their GCSEs in English and mathematics. I quickly learnt the necessity of free school meals and understood the importance of a

free breakfast. Asking parents or carers to pay for the type of experiences that we had developed at my previous school was unconscionable. Yet these pupils were among some of the most talented I have ever taught and certainly did not need my privileged pity. They needed me to work out how to enhance their experience of my subject as far as I could, on a limited budget, so they could achieve the same top grades as any other pupil in any other school in the country. They also needed confidence and self-efficacy if they desired to go into a highly competitive industry in the subject I taught.

Over twenty years later and I am still hugely privileged to work with communities that offer the same level of challenge and reward. As my career has also developed into school and then Trust leadership, it remains as important to me to explore ways to address issues of maldistribution, misrecognition and representation in the experiences our pupils receive in school. Given all that I learnt about the impact of extra-curricular activity from my initial literature review as well as being influenced by my own personal history as outlined above, I was convinced enough that the set of experiences that the DofEA offers could be beneficial to young people. While I may not fully agree with the negative framing of Hahns 'six declines of modern youth', I do acknowledge that the rise of mobile technology and in particular, social media, has had an impact on pupils behaviourally. I did not think that the DofEA alone could provide an 'antidote', but it might help pupils develop socially, perhaps academically. It could be the difference in whether they were shortlisted for a course or job interview, or it could have helped develop a young person's self-efficacy to a point that once shortlisted, they have the confidence to go in and be successful in an unfamiliar interview situation. While I acknowledge the social inequality that may arise from pursuing a scheme rooted in middle-class values, I was committed to uncovering barriers to participation and designing solutions to help pupils overcome them.

1.5 Research Questions

The focus of the study was two-fold. Firstly, to explore the barriers to both uptake and completion of the Award for our young people, and then to help

school leaders consider the delivery of the Award in such a way that obstacles to parity of participation are addressed and removed, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In formulating my research questions, I considered the need to be sufficiently broad to allow for the interpretation through a theoretical framework, while also authentically capturing the participants' experiences and accurately representing them in findings.

My overarching research question is as follows,

1. What prevents parity of participation on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme among Key Stage 3 pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds?

My subsidiary research questions are,

2. What are disadvantaged pupils' experiences of the Award scheme in English schools?

3. What are the barriers that disadvantaged pupils face, which contribute to them not taking up the Award scheme in English schools?

4. What are the reasons why disadvantaged pupils drop out of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme?

5. How can school leaders mitigate these barriers to participation?

1.6 Structure

This chapter has introduced the purpose of the thesis, the research context and my research questions. My literature review follows in Chapter 2, by firstly exploring the concept of disadvantage in English schools, focusing on how the government policy of the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) aimed to address educational inequalities through redistribution. I examine the limited research on the most effective uses of these funds, noting that while the PPG represents a significant investment, its direct impact on reducing socio-economic disparities

and enhancing outcomes for disadvantaged students remains an ongoing topic of debate.

Given that my research is located in the wider discourse on extra-curricular activities (ECAs), I explore pertinent literature in this field, specifically looking at what the research tells us about the benefits of ECAs and what may improve participation rates. To provide a focused analysis, I then examine these findings through the lens of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Through this exploration, Chapter 2 aims to lay the groundwork for understanding the complex relationships between government policy, resource allocation, and extra-curricular engagement in addressing educational disadvantage.

In Chapter 3, I consider some of the foundational aspects of social justice, setting the stage for the theoretical framework that underpins my analysis of participants' perspectives and experiences. While Fraser's framework is often applied at a macro level, analysing large-scale social and political structures, I argue for its relevance in a school-based context. Ultimately, this approach not only highlighted the interplay between economic, cultural, and political dimensions of injustice but also provided a comprehensive framework for identifying and addressing barriers to equitable participation in the Award scheme.

In Chapter 4, I present an overview of my research methodology and design which lay the groundwork for my empirical investigation. Central to this discussion is my adoption of a critical realist approach and how this stance informed the development of my research design, guiding the selection of methods that aimed to uncover underlying mechanisms and structures influencing the phenomena under investigation. Given that I was interviewing children, I also present the methodological considerations I employed when engaging with young participants, including ethical considerations.

I have deliberately kept my findings and discussions together in Chapter Five, adopting an abductive approach to enhance the analytical depth of the study. By integrating findings and discussion, I was able to analyse themes from my

own perspective and through Frasers' theoretical lens, more seamlessly exploring how the identified themes relate to broader social inequalities.

Finally, in Chapter Six I draw together my conclusions. In line with the aims of this research, I offer a series of actionable recommendations tailored for school leaders, aimed at informing policy and practice. Additionally, I critically reflect on the study's limitations, acknowledging areas where further investigation is warranted. To this end, I propose considerations for future research, highlighting potential avenues to expand upon the current study's contributions. This chapter serves as a culmination of the research journey, bridging the gap between empirical findings and practical applications within school settings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 What does disadvantage mean?

There is no universally agreed term for what ‘disadvantaged’ means within education. As the UK children’s commissioner states, defining exactly what we mean by disadvantage is complex, as it can manifest in many different ways’ (DeSouza, 2023). These could include ill health, disability, literacy difficulties or an unstable home environment, but the list is almost endless and spans social, economic and cultural elements both inside and outside of a school environment (Kelleghan, 2001), and in many cases is impossible to reliably measure.

The label of ‘disadvantage’ in schools by contrast is a strict one and laid out by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Education Funding and Skills Agency (ESFA) to mean pupils who have been entitled to free school meals (FSM) at any point in the past six years, and children who are, or have been, in the care of the English local authority. (ESFA, 2024a) (DfE, 2024a). This strict definition is to allow for the distribution of government funding to Local Authorities and Multi-Academy Trusts in what could be considered the most equitable way, since it applies a formula which entitles schools to extra income for all their pupils who meet the definition, through the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG). Currently the funding rates for the 2024/25 financial year for FSM pupils are £1480 per pupil, with the money given to schools via their local authority or direct from the ESFA in the case of academies. The purpose of the PPG is for ‘raising the educational attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities to help them reach their potential’ (DfE, 2024a, para 1). This grant also serves as an illustration of Fraser's (2003) concept of redistribution, where government funding is reallocated with the aim of achieving more equitable outcomes.

Pass et al. (2015) critique the language used by the DfE, stating that they imply that non-disadvantage is the norm leaving the disadvantaged as the ‘others’.

The DfE do not write in terms of middle or working class, but I feel that Pass et al. do make a valid point when they state that it is difficult to reconcile the PPG with genuine equality and true social justice, when the language talks in terms of 'them (the disadvantaged) and their peers' (DfE, 2024b). This could also lead to misrecognition of children and young people, since the PPG ascribe the label of disadvantaged to a child if they have triggered the strict criteria at some point within the last six years. This does not tell us anything about the current financial situation of the family or indeed why they triggered the strict criteria in the first place. The label of children and young people as disadvantaged in education in England is therefore very much a contested and political concept.

For the purposes of this thesis, however, it was necessary to apply some parameters to the research sample. As one of the aims of my research was to understand how better we can ensure inclusivity and parity of participation (Fraser, 2008) for pupils eligible for FSM in England, using the strict criteria did enable me to identify the target group of young people whose voice I wanted to capture. Therefore, while acknowledging that this is a far from ideal definition for the reasons stated above, I use the term 'disadvantaged' within this thesis to mean children and young people who have been entitled to free school meals (FSM) at any point in the past six years and those children who are, or have been, in the care of the English local authority. I was very aware that this needed to be treated sensitively, and this is further discussed in the ethics section within the methodology chapter.

The Pupil Premium policy (PPG) was first announced in 2010 and introduced by the Coalition government in 2011. Given that the Coalition government was made up of both Conservative and Liberal Democrats, Shain (2016) argues it was most likely a compromise between the coalition for the harsh Conservative austerity measures that were brought in, as well as a means to try and address the declining PISA scores. PISA, an international assessment administered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), measures the ability of 15yr olds in reading, mathematics and science.

The Coalition government stated that the PPG was established to counteract the wide and persistent attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers (DfE, 2022). It is true to say, and certainly not unique to my experiences in either MAT, that leaders at all levels work tirelessly to look at ways of closing this attainment gap between the disadvantaged and their non-disadvantaged peers. However, on an analysis of attainment data over five years and across England prior to the Covid pandemic, it would appear this has been futile;

> 'In last year's Annual Report, we modelled that if the trend over the last five years were to continue, it would take over 500 years for the disadvantage gap to be eliminated at secondary level in English and maths. This year the data suggests an even more extreme conclusion: the gap is not closing. Over the last five years, our headline measure of the gap at secondary level has not changed. If this were to continue, the gap would never close.'
>
> (Hutchinson, Reader and Ahkal, 2020, p11)

The causes of such a gap have been and continue to be widely researched (Education data lab, 2015. Crenner-Jennings, 2018, The Sutton Trust, 2024).

2.2 Why education matters

In the Government's own commissioned research, educational attainment has the most influence relative to other factors on future poverty (HM Government, 2014).

Factor	Certainty	Strength	Coverage
Educational Attainment	High	High	High
Parental Qualifications	High	Medium	High
Childhood Poverty	Medium	Medium	High
Home Learning Environment	Medium	Medium	High
Non-Cognitive Development	Medium	Medium	High
Parental Ill Health and Disability	Medium	Medium	Medium
Child Ill Health	High	Medium	Low
Long-term Worklessness & Low Earnings	Medium	Low	High
Family Size	Medium	Low	Medium
Neighbourhood	Medium	Low	Medium
Family Instability	Medium	Low	Medium
Drug & Alcohol Dependency	Low	High	Low
Housing	Low	Low	Medium
Debt	Low	Low	Medium

Table 2.1: Relative influence of factors on future poverty.

(HM Government, 2014, p10)

In this table, certainty refers to the level of confidence the researchers are that the factor genuinely influences outcomes. Strength refers to how powerful the factors effect is on pupils outcomes when it is present. Coverage refers to how widespread or common the factor is among children and families.

This in turn has a direct link with future earnings as exemplified in the following table.

Gender	FSM	KS2 Tercile	N. Observations	Undiscounted Earnings	Discounted Earnings	N. GCSEs	GCSE pts
Female	Not FSM	Bottom	231,973	£880,213	£335,948	7.54	26.79
Female	Not FSM	Middle	283,867	£1,090,915	£420,178	8.41	39.58
Female	Not FSM	Top	344,523	£1,348,779	£521,862	9.25	55.33
Female	FSM	Bottom	86,736	£745,972	£273,136	6.53	19.00
Female	FSM	Middle	62,692	£889,388	£330,890	7.22	27.76
Female	FSM	Top	29,541	£1,120,795	£427,430	8.39	43.40
Male	Not FSM	Bottom	294,443	£1,350,119	£530,264	7.28	23.44
Male	Not FSM	Middle	308,483	£1,559,818	£610,507	8.24	35.64
Male	Not FSM	Top	319,663	£1,889,477	£734,372	9.21	52.01
Male	FSM	Bottom	92,787	£1,207,229	£458,811	6.23	16.10
Male	FSM	Middle	63,867	£1,336,998	£509,549	6.95	23.74
Male	FSM	Top	26,368	£1,587,776	£612,973	8.34	40.11

Table 2.2: Summary Statistics by demographics

(Hodge, Little and Weldon, 2021)

Here we can see FSM pupils fall behind their non-FSM peers in every comparative group, accessing fewer GCSE grades and scoring fewer GCSE

points. However, this is presuming the pupils make it to the end of school. The stark fact is that there are higher rates of exclusions seen in areas of high deprivation (Public Health England, 2018). Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) are four times more likely to receive a suspension and five times more likely to be permanently excluded than those who are not (Gov.uk, 2023).

The cumulative effects of poverty are cyclical with a strong likelihood of disadvantaged children becoming disadvantaged parents with their own children experiencing poverty (HM Government, 2014). Continuing to live in poverty means you are more likely to suffer from mental health issues and substance misuse (Public Health England, 2018).

It gets worse. As the following graph shows, the difference in life expectancy between the least and most deprived areas in England, as measured by the Slope Index of Inequality (SII), was 9.4 years for males and 7.6 years for female:

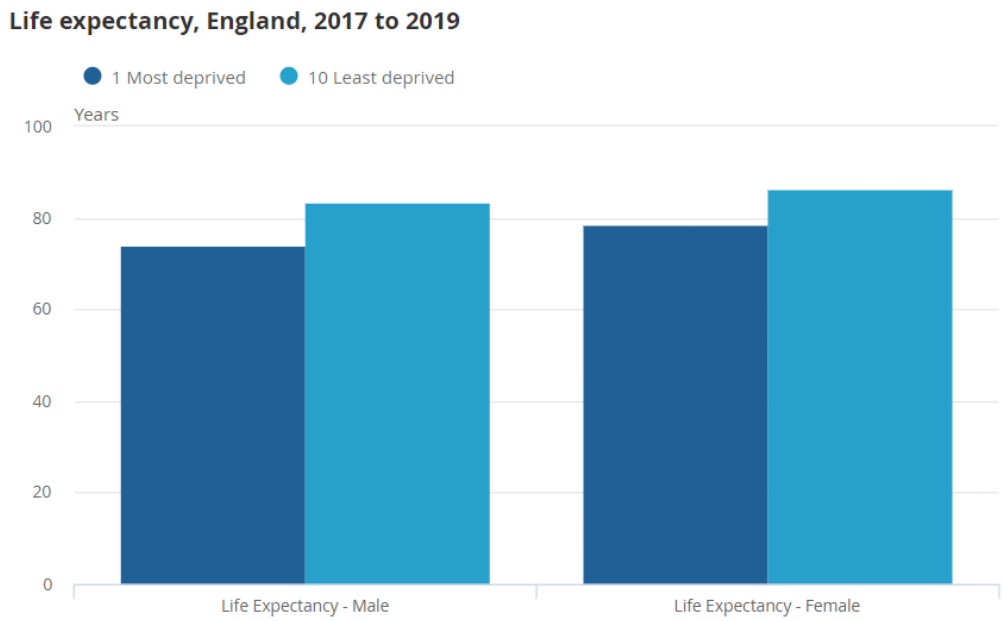

Figure 2.1: Life Expectancy, England, 2017 to 2019

(Office for National Statistics, 2023)

Given the stark findings in the research, it is evident why the Government felt it necessary to enact an initiative with the purpose of increasing educational attainment among disadvantaged children. In theory, the PPG could serve as an effective mechanism for fostering long-term economic stability and mitigate the impact of poverty.

2.3 Issues with the Pupil Premium Grant

While on the surface the PPG, and the criteria to which it is applied, may appear to be a fair measure for redistribution of government funding, it is problematic. Critics of the policy argue that it has had a limited impact for several reasons. Craske's (2018) research of the PPG, using semi-structured interview and analysis of policy documents, suggested that the policy was being used to underline an increased neoliberal agenda in schools. Craske identifies that a key message within the policy is that schools are best placed to know how to spend this money for impact. This does encourage neoliberal facets such as greater economic freedom through de-regulation and promotion of individual responsibility. Further he argues that the combination of national accountability measures used to show impact for Pupil Premium, and schools' ongoing struggles to raise overall attainment, leads school leaders and staff members to rethink the concept of disadvantage for their school population. This results in disadvantage being reconceptualised to fit a matrix of moral/pastoral obligations and efficiency/economic competitiveness, in which the tensions between these two orientations are uncomfortable and unresolved. In doing so, the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) is being used as a tool to shift the responsibility for social inequity from the government and onto the individual schools. This, he argues, is consistent with a neoliberal vision of education that puts the onus on individuals rather than the state for the responsibility of the education system and its pupils. This redistribution of monies is seemingly doing nothing to tackle the root causes of inequity; since the onset of the PPG policy, the number of children living in poverty has risen from 3.5 million to 4.3 million, of which 2.9 are living in 'deep poverty' (Child Poverty Action Group, 2024). This is echoed in the findings of Pass et al. (2015) who also argue that wider societal factors have been wholly disregarded in this steer to address educational inequality through

individualised solutions. Instead, they argue that social justice is often being reduced to whether parents are able to get their child into a 'good' school and the issues around this fair access are being brushed aside.

In Table 1.1 we can see that educational attainment is the highest relative influence on *future* poverty; in the table below, however, it is clear that the factors that make it harder to exit poverty *now* are not educational attainment, but lack of sufficient parental income. This is often caused by long-term worklessness, low parental qualifications, parental health or family instability, family size or drug/alcohol dependency. Table 1.3 below summarises the relative influence of each factor on the length of child poverty spells;

Factor	Certainty	Strength	Coverage
Long-term Worklessness & Low Earnings	High	High	High
Parental Qualifications	High	High	High
Family Instability	High	Medium	Medium
Family Size	High	Medium	Medium
Parental Ill Health and Disability	Medium	Medium	Medium
Drug & Alcohol Dependency	High	High	Low
Child Ill Health	Medium	Low	Low
Housing	Low	Low	Medium
Debt	Low	Low	Medium
Neighbourhood	Low	Low	Medium
Educational Attainment	N/A	N/A	N/A
Non-Cognitive Development	N/A	N/A	N/A
Home Learning Environment	N/A	N/A	N/A

Table 2.3: Relative influence of factors on the length of child poverty spell

(HM Government, 2014, p8)

While educational attainment is arguably within the control of schools to address, it seems unrealistic to expect schools to resolve the widening gaps in other areas. These issues, which were not created by the schools themselves, cannot reasonably be expected to be fixed solely within the educational system. Given that childhood poverty has increased since the launch of the PPG, it is fair to conclude that economic redistribution through PPG is not the panacea to

all the problems of social inequity. Nor is social inequity merely solved by better educational attainment. According to Fraser (2004), justice requires more than just addressing the economic inequality through redistribution, the social and cultural dimensions such as access to recognition and participation in societal structures also need to be addressed.

However, with seemingly no other solutions, the government has given schools the license to spend the grant tackling 'non-academic barriers' to success in schools (Gov.uk, 2024b). This is because it is recognised that many disadvantaged pupils also lag behind their peers in what are considered the 'softer skills' (Donnelly *et al*., 2019, Goodman *et al.,* 2015) which could then also be a further barrier to educational attainment and future employment (Brown, 2013). This is how school leaders have justified utilising PPG spend on the DofEA in schools.

Given that there is no signal from the current government that there will be any immediate change to the PPG, it seemed appropriate to explore what research evidence could tell us about effective or ineffective spend. I was interested in how my own research could potentially add to this field as well informing guidance to school leaders to ensure that if they were utilising monies on the DofEA, it was not being wasted on unused registration fees.

2.4 What the evidence says about effective Pupil Premium Grant spend.

Despite being established eleven years ago in April 2011, there is relatively little research undertaken on the most effective use of the PPG and within this, even less that has considered how the PPG has been used to tackle 'non-academic barriers'. The PPG was introduced without any trial and nationally across England, meaning that is no longer possible to design an evaluation with a clear counterfactual (Gorrard, 2022). Ofsted's first report in 2012, based on a survey of headteachers, did not show encouraging signs, reporting that only one in ten of these headteachers had significantly changed the way they were supporting

pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds (Ofsted, 2012). The DfE then commissioned a report in 2013 (Carpenter et al., 2013) which was followed by a report from the school inspection service Ofsted in 2014. Both reports concluded that although the PPG was making a difference in some schools, it was too early to say whether it was able to be used in such a way as to close the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers. Since these reports, there have been a handful of published studies which have considered the impact of the policy. These have highlighted several issues. For example, Abbott, Middlewood, and Robinson (2015) identified a significant issue with the allocation of Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) due to the lack of clear guidance. Their research in schools rated as "Outstanding" by Ofsted revealed that, in the absence of clear guidance, school leaders often relied on their values and ethos to determine how this additional capital should be spent. They found that in all the schools they included an aspect of 'curriculum enrichment' in their PPG usage. However, in some examples, PP funding had been 'lost to general funding' (p181) undermining its targeted purpose. These issues around allocation and impact of funding were also expressed by Machin and McNally (2011) who highlighted that while estimating the costs of a policy was generally straightforward, trying to estimate the future benefits was more difficult. However, they made a case for the PPG leading to benefits of improved attendance at school and higher achievement at age 14 which could lead to short- and long-term economic benefits that we may not observe, for example staying on into further education, a higher probability of employment and a lower probability of turning to crime. Their research also found it was high ability students from disadvantaged backgrounds who were most likely to benefit from the PPG. While directing PPG resources toward high-ability students from disadvantaged backgrounds may seem like a sound strategy for maximising impact of the PPG spend, it inevitably raises concerns from a social justice perspective. Such an approach may inadvertently perpetuate inequities by prioritising pupils with higher academic potential, rather than addressing the broader needs of all disadvantaged students. According to redistributive justice theories, like those proposed by Fraser (2004), equitable outcomes require not only targeted support for individuals based on their needs

but also a recognition of the structural barriers that affect all disadvantaged groups.

Foody's (2019) doctoral thesis explored teachers' awareness of Pupil Premium students within their own lesson planning and delivery. Through his five case studies, he found that a failure to discuss the classroom teacher's role and their own perceptions of the policy led to issues around accountability and lack of information at classroom level. Foody's argument was that if teachers were more aware of pupils' material disadvantage, they could deliberately adapt their practice to overcome these barriers and this could, in theory, work to have a positive effect in reducing the attainment gap. This was also recognised by the then government who published their own guidance in February 2024 on how school leaders can use the PP effectively, which, as Foody advocates, begins with a call for diagnostic assessment of the barriers that disadvantaged pupils face. If done well, this should be done with the input of the classroom teachers. This participatory approach itself may provoke more information sharing at every level in a school. This approach aligns with Fraser's (2008) call for representation, as it ensures the genuine recognition and inclusion of all voices in the decision-making process. By involving teachers in these discussions, the process becomes more participatory, reflecting Fraser's belief that equitable outcomes require the active inclusion of all stakeholders in decisions that impact them.

The 2024 DfE guidance for school leaders on the use of PPG appears to have been solely informed by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) which has become the 'go to' for advice for school leaders on research informed practice. The EEF is a charity, part-funded and endorsed by the government and therefore not strictly independent. They provide a toolkit based on evidence from research projects conducted in mostly mainstream schools. This research is freely accessible to all; however, it is not without its critics. Burn et al. (2016) argue that EEF research has its limitations, in that there is an exclusive reliance on quantitative evidence. How transferable the studies are to different contexts is also not clear or explored in the findings of these studies (Morris and Dobson, 2021). However, with the lack of research alternatives available, the EEF does

provide school leaders with a rationale for their spend, using an evidence base which is clearly endorsed by the DfE (EEF, 2022a).

Nevertheless, in the recommendations, although 'Extra-curricular activities' is cited as a possible wider strategy, given the seal of approval in the 'menu of approaches' ratified by the Department for Education (2024b, p13), the research provided by the EEF is very limited. Currently within this field, the EEF only report on the evidence from studies with impact data on Arts Participation (EEF, 2025a) and Physical Activity (EEF, 2025b). However, they do not publish the studies, only give their rating of the security of evidence. For these studies, they rate that security as 'moderate' and admit a large percentage of the studies are not independently evaluated. The small number of studies which explored 'outdoor adventure learning' concluded that the evidence based was so weak that the impact could not be communicated (EEF, 2025c). This is a potential issue for school leaders who are looking to use the Duke of Edinburgh's Award as part of their overall strategy for PPG spend; whilst keeping in line with the DfE guidance, there is no neatly citable 'evidence' to draw from. This matters, because school leaders must publish their PPG strategies on their websites and justify their use of the monies. This highlights some of the real issues with trying to analyse the impact of the spend. However, there is a deeper issue in relation to economic conditions which creates a confound for any of these studies or indeed any future studies on PPG impact. Gorrard (2022, p450) neatly summarises this issue as follows,

> 'In years when the economy is poor, and there are more FSM-eligible pupils, then the newly eligible ones will have higher average attainment than the other longer-term FSM-eligible pupils, and so the official attainment gap will appear to decline. The opposite will happen when the economy improves, and the attainment gap will appear to increase. This is not, however, anything to do with Pupil Premium impact'.

Allen (2018) also raises the issue that FSM eligibility does not identify the poorest children in our schools. This is principally because the receipt of

means-tested benefits (and tax credits) pushes children eligible for FSM up the household income distribution (Hobbs and Vignoles, 2009).

Gorrard (2022) also highlights that economic change leads to more or fewer families in England using private schools. This is particularly evident at the time of writing, as the new Labour government has announced that VAT will be added to private school fees from the 1st January 2025, at the cost of an additional 20%. The government estimate fees to increase by around 10% and that around 35,000 pupils will move to the state sector over the long term (bbc.co,uk, 30th October, 2024). As Gorard (2022, p450-p451) explains,

> 'If the pupils on the cusp of using private schools are, on average, slightly higher attaining than the remaining pupils in the state-funded system then in years when they are in the state-funded system they will be included in the calculations, and so the attainment gap will appear larger. The official gap will appear smaller in years when such pupils are in private schools and omitted from the gap calculation. Again, this is nothing, directly, to do with the impact of Pupil Premium funding. It will just confuse the conclusions drawn from a simple time series analysis'

Gorard found that previous studies generally took no account of these changes in the economy. When the data is flawed or inconsistent, the risk of drawing incorrect or misleading conclusions increases, potentially leading to ineffective or harmful policies. This also risks perpetuating injustices, as it can obscure or distort the realities of those most in need of attention and reform.

2.5 Identifying what may be more effective

The current trends are bleak. They suggest it could be over fifty years before the educational attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children in England closes (Education Policy Institute, 2017) and these inequalities have now been further perpetuated by COVID-19 (Education Endowment Foundation 2020).

Yaghi (2021) in their own literature review identified that academic provision is perceived by schools and evidenced to be the most effective way in targeting disadvantaged pupils' lower achievement. Coupled with the fact schools are currently driven by governments accountability measures, which focus almost entirely on progress and attainment, it is likely schools will continue to utilise funding to try and close the attainment gap. Other redistributive methods, such as paying teachers more to teach in disadvantaged areas have been found to be ineffective as teachers then move on when the funding has stopped (See et al. 2020).

Conversely, research shows that concentrating on academic intervention alone may not help. It has long been suggested in research that cultural experiences, such as going to museums, learning a new skill such as a musical instrument or attending residential experiences are important for children and that school experiences play a powerful role in a child's development (Lester, Theakston and Twomey, 2023; Hackett et al., 2020; James et al., 2024; Jucker and von Au, 2022).The accumulation of experiences could therefore enhance pupils educational outcomes (Glynne-Percy, 2019). We also know that disadvantaged children are significantly less likely to partake in cultural experiences than non-disadvantaged children (Sutton Trust, 2014). Research finds that working-class parents have significantly fewer resources (in terms of money, time and energy) to engage in these experiences with their children (Barrett 2018; Ball, 2003; Gewirtz, 2001). Shain (2016) also points to the wealth of research evidence that indicates that even where attainment gaps are narrowed, the middle and upper classes will go to great lengths to maintain their advantage. One area where they can do this is the development of cultural capital.

2.6 Understanding cultural capital

'Cultural capital' is now very much on the agenda of school leaders in England and Wales, since Ofsted started judging schools on whether they are ensuring pupils have the 'cultural capital they need to succeed in life' (Ofsted, 2023). The term was created by French sociologist Bourdieu (1986) to explain the way power was transferred in society to keep the prevailing class structures intact,

as access to what is considered worthwhile or necessary to succeed in Western society is limited to those positioned to acquire it. Bourdieu describes this as 'the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment' (p282), since ability or talent is in itself the product of an investment of time and cultural capital. This is where he argues the class structures are kept intact as he states the transmission of embodied cultural capital is a 'hereditary transmission of capital'(p284). Bourdieu (1979) argued therefore that social justice cannot be achieved through solely redistributing wealth, it would also mean challenging the cultural and symbolic dominance of privileged groups to make space for the recognition of marginalised values and norms, essentially a redistribution of power. He also emphasised the need for a social system in which individuals have access to the various forms of capital necessary to influence their lives.

The DofEA could be viewed as a prime example of how cultural capital functions in the context of social class, as described by Bourdieu. The DofEA, while ostensibly a merit-based program, requires significant time, resources, and access to opportunities that are not equally available to all. For those from more privileged backgrounds, the ability to participate in and excel in the DofEA may be influenced by the cultural capital they already possess (Lareau, 2011), such as the 'hidden form' of support of family members who may have also undertaken the Award as well as access to the financial resources and other support needed to complete the award.

By inspecting whether cultural capital is being considered and subsequently taught, Ofsted (and by proxy the government) clearly believe that if you are not deliberately teaching it, or ensuring pupils have the access to acquiring it, you are disadvantaging pupils' future success. But who dictates what constitutes cultural capital? Given that schools are judged on it, you would be forgiven for assuming that there was also clear criterion for school leaders to work too. However, Ofsted have defined 'cultural capital' as,

> 'The essential knowledge that pupils need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement'

(Ofsted, 2024, para 255)

What the ‘best that has been thought and said’ constitutes is clearly subjective and indeed has been left up to schools to decide as currently academies do not have to follow the national curriculum (Gov.uk, 2025a). This is of course problematic. What is valued in one school may differ considerably from another and as we have established by the increasing numbers of children in poverty, successive governments have been unable to identify what children and young people truly need to ‘succeed in life’.

The concept of cultural capital can also be seen as problematic. Bourdieu frames communities lacking cultural capital as deficient, implicitly suggesting that these communities are somehow inferior or disadvantaged due to their lack of access to the cultural resources that are valued in society. Yosso (2006, p76) argues that the term cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy with white, middle class as the standard;

> ‘Cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, but rather it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are valued by privileged groups in society’.

Other communities are judged in comparison to these accumulated norms of privileged groups and seen as culturally poor, and therefore lacking in the capital needed for social mobility. As a result, Yosso explains, schools often work from the assumption that they need to ‘help’ disadvantaged young people whose race or class background has left them lacking in this ‘essential knowledge’. We have seen that the DofEA also works from this assumption; it was established because its founder believed that there was a deficiency in modern youth and the Award scheme could provide the ‘antidote’.

Moreover, Yosso argues that there is significant ‘community cultural wealth’ that often goes unacknowledged or recognised. For example, the notion of linguistic capital, which acknowledges young people who arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills, or aspirational capital which Yosso

describes as the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, in spite of very real barriers. Yosso's concept of community cultural wealth aligns with Fraser's (2016) argument that recognising and valuing the diverse forms of capital present in different communities, which are often overlooked or misrecognised, is essential for addressing social inequalities. Erickson (2008) also makes the point that the value of different cultural repertoires varies across different fields. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1979) thinking, he argues that cultural advantage is therefore derived from understanding which type of culture to apply in a given context or situation. This reinforces Fraser's call for a more inclusive understanding of cultural recognition, one that values the cultural wealth that exists across all communities, rather than narrowing the scope to a limited set of skills and experiences.

A further tension with the notion of 'cultural capital' is the need for school leaders to be able to evidence their impact, not just for Ofsted but also for the PPG spend. Schools must currently show how they are using their PPG effectively through publishing a statement on their website every year using a DfE template, as well as ensuring plans are scrutinised by governors and trustees. Evidencing impact of the development of 'cultural capital' is problematic, not least because there are no clear criteria. Craske (2018, p35) found this to be true in his fieldwork in a secondary school in England,

> 'Pupils are 'cared' for with money going towards funding trips, school uniform and other material goods but these often needed to become expressed as plots on a graph or table so they could demonstrate impact to external authorities.'

Therefore, school leaders may be driven to look for ideas and solutions that they can more easily evidence to external authorities, rather than have the true freedom to explore what may actually be helping to close attainment gaps.

From the current literature to date, whether the PPG can work as a strategy to reduce social inequality is far from substantiated (Freedman, 2018; Copeland, 2018). As we have seen, wider societal factors have not been taken into

account in what is an individualised policy (Pass et al. 2015), leading to schools bearing the responsibility for addressing macro issues which require regional or national solutions. As we have also seen, the government are keen for school leaders to attempt to prove that the PPG can be effective. The stakes are high, since PPG spend is a focus of Ofsted inspections (para 377, Ofsted, 2024). We have also seen the recommended research avenues via the EEF toolkit for school leaders are either inconclusive or weak when it comes to exploring the impact of 'extra-curricular activity'.

I therefore decided it would be helpful to explore the field of extra-curricular activity (ECA) more widely and locate the Duke of Edinburgh's Award in it. This was to understand the benefits of ECAs more generally, and, given my focus on promoting equitable participation, I was particularly interested in what existing research could reveal about participation within this broader field.

In reviewing the literature in this field, I sought to specifically explore any research around the perceived impact of extra-curricular activity on children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

2.7 Defining Extra-curricular Activity

There is no universally agreed definition of extra-curricular activity (ECA) and depending on where you are in the world, ECAs may also be known as Organised Activities (OAs), Enrichment or Structured activities. For the purposes of this thesis, I define ECAs as additional activities which pupils participate in, which take place beyond the school's taught curriculum. The main characteristics of ECAs can be seen in this context as activities which include the presence of an adult and other peers and are structured, in the sense that they are organised by adults around specific goals (Bohnert, Fredericks and Randall, 2010). ECAs can be distinguished from other social activities through the presence of that structure. Unstructured activities by comparison are more spontaneous in nature (Fletcher, Nickerson and Wright, 2003).

2.8 The benefits of Extra-curricular Activity

There is now an emerging field of research that strongly indicates the value of ECAS both during adolescence and into young adulthood (Fredricks and Eccles, 2008., Fletcher, Nickerson and Wright 2003). I have summarised what I have found to be the main potential benefits of ECAS into three categories, however the research evidence shows that these are very much intertwined.

2.8.1 The acquisition of skills

Eccles et al (2003) describe this benefit as the acquisition and practice of specific social, physical, and intellectual skills that may be useful in a wide variety of settings including school. For example, in a study of adolescents in six high schools, Darling, Caldwell and Smith (2005) found those who participated in ECAs reported 'higher grades, more positive attitudes towards schools, and higher academic aspirations once demographic characteristics and prior adjustment were controlled' (p51).

Similarly, in a three-year longitudinal study of 251 students aged 9-10 (at the start of the study), Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen (2015) found that, after controlling for variables, participation in arts, crafts and music ECAS related to higher rates of adaptive behaviour, academic attainment and working skills, with longer duration of participation generally associated with more positive outcomes. There was also evidence to suggest that the young people who benefit the most from ECAs are those who are economically disadvantaged (Marsh and Kelitmann, 2016). Chanfreau et.al (2016) in their study of whether ECAs were able to close the educational attainment gap between the disadvantaged and their non-disadvantaged peers, found that low-cost and convenient ECAs, in the reassuring location of school with the familiarity of staff, had a positive effect on both pupils' academic and social outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. In another longitudinal study, Morris (2015) examined maths achievements from ECAs for advantaged and disadvantaged youths, finding that the less advantaged high school pupils made substantial academic improvements where their more advantaged peers did not, concluding that academic ECAs can be a form of

'resource compensation' which can help to reduce the achievement gap. However, the gain is also attributed to the fact these pupils may have fewer opportunities to engage in enrichment activities were it not for the ECAs provided for by the school due to prohibitive costs (Hjalmarsson, 2022).

2.8.2 A sense of belonging and subsequent well-being

There is no agreed definition of what constitutes a sense of belonging. Mahar, Cobigo and Stuart (2013) have sought to theorise a sense of belonging as being unique to the individual, centred on subjective feelings of value, respect and fit. They argue that this belonging requires a referent group to anchor those subjective feelings, therefore it requires 'groundedness'. It also requires a level of reciprocity, in the sense that there are shared feelings, experiences or understanding as well as the self-determination to choose whether they do or do not belong. There is evidence that a young person's sense of belonging, including relationships in social groups at school and time spent in non-compulsory activities, provides a primary source of school attachment, which then significantly facilitates motivation and achievement (Fairclough and Hamm, 2005). Marksteiner and Kruger's (2016) research found the more educated a student's parents, the more positive the student's attitudes were toward school and the more positive their attitude, the stronger their feelings of social belonging. They also found students with a lower socio-economic background felt they belonged less to their school (Ostrove & Long, 2007). As we have seen from the evidence of relative factors of future poverty, children's socioeconomic background heavily depends on parental education so this would make sense. If their parents have had negative education experiences, this in turn could influence their children's view on school and their sense of belonging to an academic context. Therefore, the concept of sense of belonging may help to understand disparities between pupils from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

In terms of the potential benefit of ECAs, Eccles, Lord and Roeser (2003) argue that through ECAs we contribute to the well-being of one's community and in doing so, develop a sense of agency as a member of that community. This in

turn leads to a sense of belonging as being in a socially recognised and valued group (Eime et al, 2013). Linver, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2009) found youth participating in what they called 'prosocial' activities, such as volunteering, showed the most positive development not just in terms of academic competence but in all other areas of personal development tested. This may well be connected to the sense of belonging and subsequent well-being that derives from this. Feldman & Matjasko (2005) claim that this goes further than just a sense of belonging; by shaping the norms and values that young people are exposed to by association, this will subsequently influence their future activity choices, influencing their own development pathway.

Research also indicated that young people who participate in ECAs for longer periods of time and in a wider breadth of activities tend to experience greater gains across academic, psychological and social outcomes (Guilmette et al. 2019) and are far less likely to drop out of school (Mahoney and Cairns, 1997). In terms of impact, Eccles et al. (2003) found that this had the most positive effect on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, again attributing this to the development of a sense of agency as a member of a community. They found that participation in the ECAs increased pupils' positive identification with their school and in turn, the teachers' positive perceptions of the pupils. This sense of school connection was also revealed in a study by Brown and Evans (2002), who were keen to explore whether youth participation in ECAs led to a greater sense of school connection for non-European American students. They found that pupils who engaged in ECAs had greater levels of school connection regardless of ethnicity and concluded that ECAs facilitated inclusion and a sense of belonging for minority groups, which led to greater school connectivity and retention. Disadvantaged pupils seem to have more to gain from these interactions with school and teachers.

2.8.3 Heightened resilience, social and behavioural competence

Very much connected to this sense of belonging, Eccles et al. (2003) argue one of the key benefits of ECAs is that participants establish supportive social networks that can help both in the present and in the future. This is turn will help

young people deal with challenges. New experiences also mean learning to deal with new challenges, which can help develop a young person's executive functioning, their social and behavioural competence, particularly by fostering resilience (Simpkins, Fredericks and Eccles 2005).

The value of sporting ECAs appears the area which has garnered the most academic research to date. Linver, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2009) found that adolescents aged 10-18 (sample size of 1711) had more positive development outcomes when they combined sport activities with other activities. However, the research was not all positive in this regard; Denault, Poulin and Pederson (2009) completed a study of the number of hours spent in sports, performance and fine art and youth clubs over a school year for 363 youths, with an average age of 13. They found that while participation in sports clubs was positively associated with alcohol use, involvement in the performing arts and fine arts ECAs were negatively linked to depressive symptoms. Marsh and Kleitman (2002) also found that there is a diminishing return for extremely high levels of ECAs.

Yet, there is also evidence that the limitations to participation may be having a wider causal effect to widen the gap; Fletcher, Nickerson and Wright (2003) found that parents with adequate financial resources as well as a commitment to transporting their children to the various ECAs (something which is out of scope for the most disadvantaged families) are more likely to have participating children. This extra participation was seen to enhance pupils social and behavioural competence and these non-academic competencies led to teachers having a more positive evaluation of them within the classroom setting. Chesters and Smith (2015) argue these ECAs can connect young people with peer and adults from a diverse range of backgrounds and thus facilitate the development of their social capital. In short, disadvantaged pupils have more to gain from attending ECAs and more to lose if they do not.

2.8.4 Limitations of the research

Despite the increasing evidence that indicates the benefits of ECAs on young people, one issue with the research evidence to date is that the results are typically showing associations rather than exploring the causation. Pre-existing personality and social differences between participants and non-participants may account for at least some of the correlations found (Holland and Andre, 1987). Both Shulruf (2010) and Donnelly et.al (2019) question therefore the validity of the data and analysis used to date and argue that the current knowledge of ECAs may not therefore affect students' educational outcomes as positivity or negatively as the research suggests. There has also been criticism of the standard of evaluations in the interventions; Cummings et.al (2011) in their review of interventions in UK schools found that there were few studies that demonstrate adequate control mechanisms and/or satisfactory statistical techniques. They also critique the qualitative research exploration, arguing that there was often little detail about the context in which the positive changes as a result of the interventions were achieved, critical to understanding the change in order to replicate it. Donnelly et.al (2019) thus call for more research to be conducted on participation in ECAs.

2.9 Extra-curricular activity – participation

Literature surrounding participation is far more limited than the impact of ECAs more generally, however it does indicate that several factors have an impact on participation and retention in ECAs, including family context, age and gender, scheduling of ECAs, the training levels of staff and social and personal factors.

2.9.1 Family Context

One of the central themes that emerged was the influence of social class and parental involvement on ECA participation, which very much leant weight to Bourdieu's (1986) claims of the hereditary transmission of cultural capital keeping class structures intact. Studies indicate that students from higher income homes, particularly those with mothers who possess higher educational qualifications are more likely to participate (Hjalmarsson (2022); McNeal (1998);

Aumetre & Poulin (2015). This is supported by Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson (2014) who found that nearly half of middle-class children (42%) took part in five or more extra-curricular activities, compared to less than a tenth of working-class children (6.5%).

Fletcher, Nickerson and Wright (2003) found that young people who are most likely to participate are those who have parents who model and value affirmative behaviours at home and in the community. They found children who were high in the personality traits of conscientiousness and more likely to feel comfortable and confident in social situations, were more likely to participate. Morris (2015) further underscores this point by showing that middle-class parents are more proactive in ensuring their children participate in structured ECAs, which are seen as enhancing skills and credentials. Conversely, working-class parents tend to favour less structured activities and were comparatively less interventionist regarding their children's educational paths (Lareau, 2011). Behtoui (2019) found that children from single-parent households often face fewer opportunities to engage in ECAs, primarily due to a lack of financial and social resources.

2.9.2 Age and Gender

Although a very small-scale study, Glynne-Percy (2019) identified participation of disadvantaged pupils diminishes after the age of eleven and that children who had not participated in ECA before they transition to secondary school would likely never participate throughout their education. Wang and Eccles (2012) also identified a decline in participation of ECAS from the age of around 11-13, which continues through adolescence. Early experience of ECA would appear to be advantageous, especially for disadvantaged children facing adversity who may benefit most. Wang and Eccles (2012) found no racial or ethnic differences in the continued participation, but they did observe boys showed a more significant reduction in involvement in ECAs compared to girls. This gender gap in participation was also found by McNeal (1998) who found the participation rates of males in sports was consistently higher than that of females, but that females were found to participate in a wider range of activities

(this finding is further corroborated by Eccles & Barber (1999) and Aumetre & Poulin (2015) with a higher proportion of females in performance based activities such as music, drama, orchestra etc (Feldman and Matjasko 2007). Donnelly et al. (2019) found the same gender imbalances existing across several activities. In the domains of music, dance, art, and voluntary work the percentage of females was found to be disproportionately higher than males.

2.9.3 Scheduling of ECAs

The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned research into participation of ECAs in 2017. In this study Betram et al. found that whilst some schools make ECAS compulsory as part of the school day, the majority do not. This may be down to issues around directed time in UK schools (which limits leaders to directing only 1265 of the hours a teacher works across 190 days), but there is also evidence to suggest that the positive outcomes of ECAS are linked to intrinsic motivation (Yeo, Liem and Tan, 2022), so schools who do make ECAs compulsory may not see the positive youth development outcomes they may expect. The vast majority of programmes in the UK are therefore constructed around teachers and other school staff who volunteer to run ECAS. The DfE study found that only 19% of these activities are free of charge across the schools studied (although this was a small sample size). Views of school leaders to extend their school day and make ECAS compulsory were mainly negative. Leaders believed that forced participation may limit other activities within the community outside of school and cause issues with family routines and transportation.

That is not to say, however, that ECAs should be ad-hoc and not as structured or reliable as the core school curriculum. Evidence and inferences from other research (Scott-Little, Hamann and Jurs, 2002; Fashola, 1998) would suggest that ECAs appear to be most successful when they do have a structure and predictable schedule, as well as strong links with the school day curriculum.

Transportation can be a key challenge in terms of access. It can be very challenging for schools to transport young people home in the evening after

ECAs, especially in rural areas (Donnelly et al 2019). Aumetre and Poulin (2015) and Betram et al. (2017) also found that problems with public transport and transport arrangements were recurring factors that inhibited participation in the voluntary ECAS. Thus, the predictability of the timetable is critical for parents and their children, especially for younger children who do not live within walking distance from their home.

2.9.4 Training of staff in running ECAs

Research highlights the quality of ECAs is significantly related to the characteristics of the staff (Fischer and Theis, 2014) and indicates the importance of having well-qualified and committed staff to ensure stability in the management of extracurricular activities. Well-qualified and well-trained staff were one of the characterising factors of higher participation rates in Scott-Little, Hamann and Jurs (2002) research. This can often be problematic given that the staff are often volunteers and potentially volunteering outside of their own subject specialism.

2.9.5 Social and Personal Factors

Donnelly et.al (2019) found that the desire to form friendships and then spend more time with peers and friends was significant in terms of motivation to participate in ECAs. In an interesting study of why South Asian students were not mixing with their white peers in ECAS, Crozier and Davies (2008) were able to challenge the prevailing assumption that non-participation was because they were ‘not allowed’ to participate. Instead, they found that the girls made the choices for themselves and had no desire to participate. Bartko and Eccles (2003) also considered positive social norms, support for efficacy and autonomy, and opportunities for skill building to be among the features most likely to lead to participation gains in ECA. Recruitment and retention campaigns for ECAs that focus on enjoyment, socialisation, mastery, goal setting and relating to others appear to be effective strategies (Assante and Lisman, 2023). This was also reflected in research which explored dropout rates of ECAS in sport, finding that intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints, such

as perceptions of competence, social pressures and lack of enjoyment were far more likely to be the cause of drop out than structural constraints such as difficulty of travel (Crane and Temple, 2014).

Although the research is limited, these various factors highlight the complex interplay of individual, family, and structural influences in the participation of young people in ECAs. They also highlight the unequal distribution of access to activities based on family context, as well as disparities in cultural capital related to gender differences. This can be seen as a form of misrecognition, where certain cultural practices are valued over others due to gendered expectations (e.g., girls in dance, boys in sport). Such misrecognition perpetuates gender-based inequalities and restricts access to social opportunities that pupils may have benefited from.

2.10 The benefits of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award as an ECA

Academic literature in this field related to the DofEA appears very limited and largely conducted by commissioned partners, which unsurprisingly presents a favourable picture of the merits of the Award scheme, including personal development benefits through raising the self-esteem and fitness levels of its participants (Pears, 2010; NFER, 2020), positive character traits (Pears 2010, Campbell et al., 2009) as well as having a positive social value for communities which benefit from the volunteering (PWC, 2019). The DofEA themselves state that in return for participants' efforts,

> 'Achieving an Award will give you skills, confidence and an edge over others when you apply for college, university or a job. Beyond your academic achievements, universities want to see evidence of so called 'soft skills' that you have developed through extra-curricular activities, such as communication, commitment, leadership and teamwork. Your DofE Award is a fantastic way to demonstrate and evidence these skills in practice.

> You'll also make a difference to other people's lives and your community, be fitter and healthier, make new friends and have memories to last you a lifetime.
>
> Our participants also tell us that doing their DofE gives them character traits like confidence and resilience, that can boost their mental health and wellbeing and help them face and overcome personal challenges.'
>
> (Duke of Edinburgh website, 2023a)

Non-commissioned literature has also focused on trying to ascertain its impact on, for example, wellbeing and self-efficacy (Kuhn et.al, 2021, MacMahon and O'Reilly, 2005, Fitzpatrick, 2016, Campbell et.al., 2009) and the ability to apply their learning to other aspects of their lives (Bailey, 2003).

Cole et al. (2020) have questioned the approaches to measuring the impact of the scheme, arguing that the claims of personal growth have been overextended, leading to 'unrealistic and self-serving claims' which in turn have led to a form of elitism surrounding the Award scheme that means it 'cannot be negatively questioned' (at p52). In terms of my own research, I felt this could be explored further through ascertaining whether pupils faced any resistance in their decision to either not opt-in or drop out of the Award scheme.

Campbell et al. (2009) did conduct some research around barriers to participation by asking participating young people already on the award what reasons they perceived as to why their peers had not taken up the award. Laziness, lack of commitment and lack of knowledge were the most cited responses (p102). The attitudes revealed in Campbell et al. (2009) study exemplify a troubling deficit perspective, wherein young people who are not involved in the DofEA are perceived as lacking in qualities such as motivation and commitment. This perspective mirrors Kurt Hahn's view on the 'decline of youth,' (KurtHahn.org, 2024) where the emphasis was placed on the perceived deficiencies of young people, rather than considering the broader structural or contextual factors that may influence their participation. Both perspectives underscore a tendency to focus on individual shortcomings, rather than

understanding the economic, cultural or environmental influences that may shape young peoples' participation with such activities. To date, I am unable to find research evidence that explores the voice of disadvantaged pupils and those who do not take up the Award scheme. Based on anecdotal evidence from the Duke of Edinburgh's Research and Insights team, they confirm that they are not aware of any research, nor have they undertaken any studies which explores this due to the problematic nature of access.

2.10.1 The Duke of Edinburgh's Award as an employment enhancement

One of the claims from the DofEA is that completion of the Award leads to a greater chance of employment or selection of higher educational institutes (Duke of Edinburgh's website, 2023a).

The DofE Foundation have asked employers to endorse the skills and attributes they believe that DofEA provides young people and in doing so, show their own allegiance with the award. To date there are 103 employers featured on their website, well-recognised names for the average British teenager and spanning a range of industries including large energy companies, banking and retail. In 2019, United Learning Trust, one of England's largest Multi Academy Trusts undertook research with Ratcliffe Hall Ltd to explore the methods major employers used to select employees. In terms of what these employers considered to be the most important activity undertaken at school, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award was ranked the highest (Duke of Edinburgh, 2019). It was seen as more valuable than 28 other activities, including work experience, team sports and participation in school councils. Although the evidence is limited (12% representation of all UK employers), if it can be said that employers are more likely to view candidates who have the DofEA on their CV favourably, then ensuring disadvantaged pupils have access to the scheme could improve their access to employment. Likewise, while the DofEA does not in itself garner any UCAS points, there is evidence to suggest that it can be used effectively to enhance the UCAS Personal Statement (Reidy, 2015). Again, there is a lack of research in this area so we cannot say for certain whether it does improve selection to higher educational institutions. But if the 12% surveyed in the

previous study is representative of UK employers as a whole, then using the PPG to ensure that disadvantaged pupils are able to burnish their personal statements and CVs with the award seems a sensible way to help reduce a potential inequality in access to employment and/or higher education. This in turn may help break the stubborn cycles of economic inequality.

However, it is concerning that if this is the case, it must also be correct that the DofEA does have the potential to entrench existing inequalities. If disadvantaged pupils are underrepresented, which they are currently, then the Award scheme is only serving to perpetuate class structures that deny people parity of participation. Therefore, if schools in our MATs were offering participation to all students, we could potentially be doing the exact opposite of what we intended with the initiative and exacerbate the problem of economic inequality, unless school leaders ensure that all disadvantaged pupils undertake and complete the award. Thus, if school leaders are to endorse and promote the DofEA, parity of participation becomes an even more compelling issue to address.

2.11 Participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award

There is no research evidence available that explores the relationship between those who complete DofEA and social mobility or income. Instead, whilst it could be said media around the DofEA is largely positive and 'carefully managed' (Dakin, 2009, p233) there is certainly a perception that this is an award 'used to burnish a middle-class student's resume' (Douglas, 2019). The DofE Foundation are trying to address this through launching their own 'resilience fund' for to help support young people facing financial hardship (or in need of specialist support).

The number of disadvantaged young people who have enrolled on the Award currently constitute 15.2% of the overall number in the 2023/34 year (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 2025a). This figure may be misleading, as firstly there are no statistics that show the number of disadvantaged young people who go on to complete the award, and secondly the parameters of what constitutes a

young person to be ‘disadvantaged’ in the eyes of the government is essentially an economic measure and influenced by a number of other government policies such as eligibility for income support or universal credit. This figure is also challenged later by my own research into completion rates within a case study Multi-Academy Trust (MAT).

2.12 Conclusion

The research on Extra-curricular Activities (ECAs) suggests that they do have the potential to provide a range of benefits for young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. We have seen ECAs are associated with improved academic attainment, social development, and resilience. However, despite the broad consensus on their potential value, the evidence base remains limited, often relying on correlational rather than causal studies. The DofEA is no exception; it carries many of the hallmarks of what makes ECAs beneficial, including the requisites to promote a sense of belonging, which as we have seen facilitates motivation and achievement. Yet the research on its impact is even more restricted. While it is often promoted as enhancing personal development and employability, there is a distinct lack of independent, robust research that critically examines these claims, particularly in relation to disadvantaged students.

Both ECAs generally and the DofEA specifically raise important concerns about participation and inequality. Evidence suggests that young people from lower-income backgrounds face more barriers to engaging in these activities, including financial constraints, transport difficulties, and a lack of parental support or awareness. If disadvantaged students are underrepresented in these opportunities, ECAs, including the DofEA, may inadvertently reinforce existing social inequalities rather than mitigate them.

This leads to an important question: is using Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) funding for ECAs, and specifically the DofEA, a justifiable and effective intervention? The answer is debatable. While some research suggests that structured enrichment activities can contribute to social mobility, the PPG was

designed primarily to raise academic attainment, and its use for non-academic interventions lacks a strong evidence base. Nevertheless, given the persistent educational attainment gap, there is a possibility that, if implemented effectively, PPG spending on ECAs could have a positive impact. The DofEA, with its structured approach and recognised benefits in personal development, could be a tool for making a meaningful difference, provided that participation barriers are addressed. This is not withstanding the underlying issue of whether we should be promoting the Award scheme at all, given that it is not politically neutral and could be seen to be reinforcing hierarchal structures which keep our young people locked in cycles of poverty. That said, we have also established that school leaders are very unlikely to depart from the Award scheme, given its value (from Ofsted and the DfE) in such a high stakes accountability educational system, and therefore we need to ensure that it is as inclusive as possible.

What remains clear is that the PPG alone will not eradicate inequality in society. Redistribution of resources within the education system can only go so far when wider societal structures continue to disadvantage certain groups. If we are to fully understand how ECAs, and the DofEA in particular, can be leveraged to support disadvantaged young people, we need more research. Specifically, studies that centre the voices of the young people themselves. Without this, there is a risk of misrecognising or misrepresenting their experiences and needs. To date, this perspective has been largely absent in the research, meaning that a study focused on the participation and barriers faced by disadvantaged students in the DofEA would represent an original and valuable contribution to the field, as well as useful advice for school leaders.

In the next chapter, I introduce the reader to the theoretical lens I used to support both my lines of questioning and as the framework to make sense of my participants perspectives and experiences and explain the manifestation of social inequality in my findings.

Chapter 3: The Theoretical Framework

3.1 Components of Social Justice Theory

Social justice theory is a multidimensional concept which has been much theorised but often centred on concerns regarding the equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and rights across society (Fraser, 2004). While there is no singular definition, several core components underpin most social justice theories: distribution (Rawls, 1999), recognition (Fraser and Honneth, 2003), responsibility (Young,1990) and capability (Sen, 2010). Each of these concepts will be examined in relation to the three broad areas, first introduced in Chapter 1, which Fraser argues pose a barrier to parity of participation: economic, cultural and political barriers. The following sections will address Fraser's approach to each of these in turn. However, it is important to note that from Fraser's standpoint, these should not be viewed in isolation. Instead, Fraser argues these theories of justice should be 'three dimensional, incorporating the political dimension of representation alongside the economic dimension of distribution and the cultural dimension of recognition' (Fraser, 2008, p15).

3.2 Economic inequalities and the need for redistribution

Distributive justice, as conceptualised by Rawls (1999), emphasises the fair allocation of resources, prioritising the least advantaged. Rawls imagines a society where social status has not been determined by wealth, and by sitting behind what Rawls calls a 'veil of ignorance', people do not judge others based on their personal characteristics. In this situation, Rawls argues, a just society would prevail, with true impartiality and thus fairness. Rawls presents a framework for achieving justice within society based on fairness. Central to Rawls' theory are two key principles.

Rawls' first principle, the Equality Principle, asserts that every individual should have equal basic liberties, such as freedom of speech, political rights, and personal autonomy. These rights should be protected and distributed equally across society without discrimination. In the context of the DofEA, this principle suggests that all young people, regardless of background, should have an equal

opportunity to participate. No individual should be excluded based on wealth, social status, or other arbitrary factors such as which school they attend. A truly fair system would ensure that the Award's benefits are accessible to all.

The second principle, known as the Difference Principle, allows for social and economic inequalities but only if they work to contribute to improving the circumstances of the disadvantaged. In practice, this means that if certain participants in the DofEA come from privileged backgrounds and have greater access to resources, such as better equipment for expeditions, the overall structure of the Award should ensure that these advantages translate into benefits for those with fewer resources. For instance, in the context of the DofEA, this could mean inflating costs for those with financial means to pay for the Award to therefore provide financial assistance for those who cannot.

Critics of Rawls argue that his theory violates individual rights by coercive redistribution (Nozick, 1974) and overlooks the significance of community and shared values in shaping individuals' identities (Sandel, 1998). Young (1990) also criticises Rawls for focusing mainly on distribution and giving insufficient consideration to historical and structural injustices. Fraser's theory of redistribution, like Rawl's, ultimately centres on achieving fairness. However, for Fraser, achieving economic justice will be achieved only through challenging the structures of neoliberal capitalism which have exacerbated inequalities embedded in the economic system (Fraser, 2009). The concept of redistribution targets material injustices such as poverty and exploitation as well as class inequality, which perpetuate unequal access to wealth, resources, and opportunities. In terms parity of participation, Fraser identifies that class structures of society have led to economic inequalities which then deny people the resources that they need to interact with others as peers (Fraser, 2008, p16). These inequalities disproportionately affect marginalised groups (Fraser, 1997). Redistribution focuses on transforming those economic structures to alleviate material disparities.

Fraser (1997) identifies two types of remedies for redistribution. Firstly, affirmative remedies such as welfare policies, income redistribution or

affirmative action. These remedies aim to mitigate the inequalities but would not fundamentally change the underlying structural system which causes them. Therefore, Fraser also argues that transformative remedies are needed, focused on altering the systemic cause of the inequality by targeting the processes that produce outcomes (Dorrien, 2021). This may be through the restructuring of the economic frameworks, although Fraser is challenged by Wright (2010) for not fully elaborating how transformative remedies could realistically dismantle capitalism without triggering unintended consequences.

Redistribution of resources is not by any means a new phenomenon and has 'supplied the paradigm case for most theorizing about social justice for the past 150 years' (Fraser 2001, p21). Indeed, the PPG is a perfect example of how a government has decided to try and redistribute financial resources to reduce inequality. Fraser would explain this as a typically right-wing partisan approach to justice, viewing justice as a 'matter of fairness' that can be eliminated through removing those barriers that have created 'unjustified disparities between the life-chances of social actors' (2001, p23). The social actors in our case are children who have had no influence over the economic conditions they are born into or later find themselves living in. Therefore, it is easy to see why a government may see redistribution as the most appropriate way of levelling the playing field for their future life chances. The PPG could therefore be seen as an affirmative remedy. However, without the corresponding transformative remedy, the underlying inequality remains as this PPG redistribution has done nothing to close attainment gaps or lift children out of poverty. As we have seen in Chapters 2.2 and 2.3, parental income is just one of many proxies for future poverty. A transformative remedy would also need to involve various other factors such as the home learning environment, ill-health. and drug and alcohol dependency (HM Government, 2014).

Fraser however is keen to warn us not to look at redistribution and these remedies in isolation, telling us that it is a very reductionist idea that if we take care of these underlying economic inequalities that everything else will sort itself out as a matter of course (Fraser, Bua and Vlahos, 2024). Nor should we reduce all forms of oppression to class, as justice requires addressing

intersecting dimensions simultaneously (Fraser 2008) , for example in the racialised or gendered nature of poverty. Therefore, redistribution forms just one part of Fraser's broader theory of justice.

Taking this into the much smaller scale scope of this research, the fact remains that a significant proportion of our pupils will be denied the tangible resources needed to participate in the DofEA due to economic constraints. Even for those families who are near the top of the threshold for eligibility for free school meals, the costs of participation in the expedition alone, as outlined at 1.1.1., would equate to nearly half of their monthly income (DfE, 2024c). Affirmative remedies, such as using the PPG to pay for the DofEA are therefore needed to allow parity of access to the programme. However, eliminating the financial costs does not put all pupils on an equal footing; we know that paying for the Award for disadvantaged pupils is not guaranteeing uptake or completion. Nor is there research evidence available that explores the relationship between those who complete DofEA and social mobility or income. It was therefore necessary to consider potential transformative remedies.

3.3 Cultural inequalities and the need for recognition

Recognition theory focuses on the role of mutual recognition in shaping individual identity, self-respect, and social justice. It has been hotly contested by philosophers, particularly in debates concerning whether recognition should be prioritised over redistribution in addressing social injustices (Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

Axel Honneth, drawing from Hegelian philosophy (1995), argues that recognition is fundamental to human flourishing. His theories centre on the idea that individuals, especially in social institutions like schools, require recognition from others to achieve self-respect and personal identity. He identifies three forms of recognition: love (in personal relationships), legal recognition (as citizens with rights), and social esteem (recognition of individuals' contribution to society). For Honneth, social injustice arises when individuals or groups are denied recognition in any of these forms and interprets struggles for recognition

as a means of overcoming oppression and alienation. While Honneth and Fraser agree that recognition is a primary means of achieving justice and both reject 'the economistic view that reduces recognition to a mere epiphenomenon of distribution' (Fraser and Honneth, 2003, p2), Fraser critiques Honneth for being more individualistic, as opposed to focused on addressing the structural inequalities that shape recognition. Fraser distinguishes between cultural injustices (e.g., misrecognition of identity) and economic injustices (e.g., maldistribution of resources) and contends that overemphasising recognition risks diverting attention from material inequalities, which require structural economic reforms. Fraser also identifies that there are institutionalised hierarchies of cultural value which lead to inequality in status. The solution to ensure parity of participation is therefore recognition. Rather than seeing recognition as distinctly separate from distributive politics, Fraser views recognition as 'one crucial but limited dimension of social justice' (Fraser and Honneth, 2003, p199) and argues that justice today requires both (Fraser, 2001). She later revised her theories to add a third dimension which is explained in the next section.

Honneth replies that Fraser's idea of participatory parity is 'inherently arbitrary' (p179) and that we only learn which aspects of public life are important for individual autonomy through individualistic concepts. Frasers response was as follows,

> 'My approach does not require an ethical account of the sorts of participation that are required for human flourishing. It assumes, rather, that participants will decide that for themselves by their own lights. Far from pre-empting their choices, justice as participatory parity seeks to ensure them the chance to decide freely, unconstrained by relations of domination'.
>
> (p232)

Their debate continues to shape contemporary discussions on justice and equality, particularly as it relates to recognition.

In explaining the politics of recognition, Fraser departed from the 'identity' model of recognition most commonly associated with Taylor (1992). In this model, group-specific cultural identities, which have been marginalised due to prevalence of a more dominant culture, would see group members collectively joining to produce a 'self-affirming culture of their own' (Fraser, 2001, p24), repairing 'self-dislocation by contesting the dominant culture's demeaning picture of the group' (Fraser, 2000, p110). Fraser challenges this identity model in a number of ways. Firstly, if a group come together as a result of misrecognition, this could put pressure on individuals to conform to the new group's culture.

> 'The result is often to impose a single, drastically simplified group identity, which denies the complexity of people's lives, the multiplicity of their identifications and the cross-pulls of their various affiliations'.
>
> (Fraser, 2001, p24)

Fraser goes further to say the identity model then reifies culture as it endorses separatism whilst ignoring the inevitable struggles for power within these new culturally aligned groups. 'The identity model thus lends itself all too easily to repressive forms of communitarianism, promoting conformism, intolerance and patriarchalism' (Fraser, 2000, p112). In short, the hegemonic groups will still be the most dominant and nothing will have tackled the underlying issues of misrecognition for the marginalised. Therefore, through Fraser's lens, recognition in the identity model sense, can potentially do more harm than good.

Instead, Fraser calls for the 'status model'. The status model by contrast does not require that we recognise a specific group identity (Fraser et al. 2004). Instead, what we should be recognising is the status of the group members and asking ourselves whether they are 'full partners' in the social interaction. This leads us back to parity of participation. Are pupils being prevented from participating as peers? If they are, then this needs to be recognised, not by forming factions, but by tackling the underlying cause and ensuring that the

misrecognised peer has full parity of participation; that there is reciprocal recognition between groups and that, importantly, they have status equality. In our context, this would involve creating a school culture where differences of any kind are acknowledged and accepted; a place where no individual felt marginalised due to their economic status. It is the status model of recognition that many school leaders strive for as it would 'de-institutionalize patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation and to replace them with patterns that foster it' (Fraser, 2001, p25). Achieving this would signal that we have gone beyond affirmative remedies and achieved a transformative remedy to inequality.

How do we do this? Fraser acknowledges that you would first need to understand what is stopping the misrecognised from being full partners in participation. The reasons may be very different for individuals. Only by understanding what these reasons are can you start to remove the obstacles to parity and ensure status equality. Fraser's status model of justice shares some important commonalities with other theorists. As we have previously seen, Bourdieu's (1986) work also highlights the way status and recognition are embedded within economic, cultural and educational social fields. Fraser's status model resonates with Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, where certain groups are subordinated through cultural misrecognition. Both theorists also emphasise the importance of structural justice in overcoming these inequalities.

Turning back now to consideration of my research questions, we know from exploring the economic barriers that at least some form of redistribution is required to allow our disadvantaged pupils parity of access to the DofEA. However, we are also aware that there is a culturally dominant group in terms of the current uptake; white pupils from non-disadvantaged backgrounds. Applying affirmative remedies by removing the financial barriers to participation could, in theory, mean that the notion that the DofEA is something that 'middle class children' do is eroded, albeit over time. However, Campbell et al.'s (2009) found evidence that by 2006 there had been no change in the perception that the DofEA was for 'white middle-class children' since the 1970s (citing Noel, 2006

and Copisarow, 1975). To what extent have these views been institutionalised? There is no current research evidence to answer this. However, if it is true to say that this is an Award that promotes access to higher education and/or better employment prospects as seen in my earlier research and that it perceived to be for 'middle-class children', its very existence could be seen as threat to social equality. If this is the messaging, then children eligible for PPG may then views these opportunities as just for the children who are economically better off. The obstacle to parity of participation is then the pupils' own belief that the DofEA is not meant for them, the cause being entrenched status inequality. This consideration influenced the design of my interview schedule, so I could actively explore whether there was a perceived hierarchy between those who partake and those who do not.

Through these theoretical insights, I understood that removing financial obstacles would not be enough to ensure parity of participation. The distributive approach does not consider matters of cultural disadvantage in education (Keddie, 2012). We would also need to address status inequalities through recognising how our pupils are positioned and providing differential support to address their needs to ensure full participation.

In some ways, the DofEA already seeks to address the need for cultural inequalities in its keen focus on development of character traits, namely confidence, independence and resilience. Whilst it is not explicitly theorised, the assumption is that development of these character traits may lead to greater self-efficacy and respect, which in turn would lead to the greater recognition for which both Fraser and Honneth (2003) advocate. As we have seen in Chapter 2.10 whilst the existing research is limited and weakened by the lack of comparative data, some studies exist which present a tentatively positive picture as to how the DofEA is able to help pupils develop positive character traits (Pears Foundation 2010, Campbell et al., 2009). However, this does little to address the issue that without confidence or resilience in the first place, disadvantaged pupils may not sign up or may be more likely to drop out.

It also still leaves the nagging question about whether we should be doing the award at all. Petersen and Flynn (2008) argue the worthwhileness of the scheme has long been taken for granted. Of this we are guilty. We have assumed that the way the Award could help our disadvantaged pupils in relation to character development and exposure to cultural capital are positive ones, but it is true that character traits do not in themselves guarantee success or happiness in life (Garrett, 2010). We could also be accused of entrenching class structures through hegemony, which Fraser (2019, p7) describes as,

> 'The process by which the ruling classes makes its domination appear natural by installing the presuppositions of its own worldview as the common sense of society as a whole.'

Encouraging children to modify their character by cultivating predetermined traits aligned with a culturally specific norms, shaped by the subjectivities of a middle-class founder, may well perpetuate misrecognition. This approach imposes an externally constructed standard of value, disregarding other identities and the community cultural wealth identified by Yosso (2006) and described in Chapter 2.6.

These concerns cannot be neatly addressed within my research. However, school leaders should give them consideration. Could there be a counterhegemony for a new common sense? Who should have a say about what that looks like? This leads us to the final lens of Fraser's framework.

3.4 Political inequalities and the need for representation

Participatory justice insists on the inclusion of all individuals in decision-making processes (Young, 1990). Young argues that to achieve justice we need to address not just economic inequalities or cultural domination but also the ways in which power structures exclude and silence certain groups in political life. For Young, the aim of justice is not merely to distribute resources, but to create a society where all groups are able to participate equally and have their voices heard. In this sense, Young and Fraser are closely aligned in their commitment

to a multidimensional understanding of injustice. Young calls for more emphasis on participatory democracy and focus on the political actions of marginalised groups. She does this primarily through her social connection model of responsibility, a framework for understanding structural injustice and collective responsibility (Young, 2011). This framework emphasises forward-looking, collective action over blame, and she encourages individuals and institutions to recognise their roles in unjust systems. This marks a departure from the approach taken by Rawls (1999), which primarily situates justice as a matter for state institutions to resolve through fair distribution, whereas Young shifts the focus toward individual and collective responsibility within everyday social structures, pushing beyond the idea that injustice is solely a problem for governments to fix.

Marxist critics such as Wood (1995) argue that Young underplays the role of economic and class-based oppression. This is echoed by Fraser (in Olsen, 2008) who critiques Young for focusing too much on social responsibility, without adequately addressing economic structures and institutional reforms needed to achieve justice. Fraser was influenced by the growing recognition that injustices cannot be fully addressed without considering the political structures that enable or deny participation, thus introducing the concept of representation as a third dimension of justice in the early 2000s (Fraser et.al, 2004). Fraser's concept of participatory justice is only achieved when all individuals can participate equally in social, economic, and political life, which she argues requires distinguishing between maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation, which participatory justice on its own fails to do.

Recognising that distribution and recognition 'are in themselves political' there was nonetheless a need to explore for whom and for what the political structures allow; who is 'included in, and who excluded from, the circle of those entitled to a just distribution and reciprocal recognition'? (Fraser, 2008, p17). Dorrien (2021) argues Fraser had taken for granted the ordering role of politics until 'economic globalization challenged it' (p27) and this led to her recognising that this dimension was absent in her previous work. Influenced by the work of Max Weber (1958), Fraser's theory developed (2008a; 2008b; 2011; 2014a;

2014b) so that political injustice was a central category in itself, arguing that redistribution and recognition must be related to representation, which addresses political exclusion and the structures of decision-making in a globalised world (Fraser, 2005). This is to allow us to 'problematize governance structures and decision-making procedures' (Fraser et.al, 2004, p380). In doing so, Fraser warns us that fixing the political will not lead to fixing it all, as the political is just one part in a social totality and cannot be abstracted from the other parts.

Fraser (in Fraser, Bua and Vlahos, 2024) describes that in developing this theory, she soon found that it was necessary to distinguish between three different forms that contribute to misrepresentation, as described below.

3.4.1 Ordinary-political misrepresentation

This form pertains to injustices within established political structures, where certain groups are systematically denied equal participation. Fraser (2008) gives the example of voting systems which 'unjustly deny parity to numerical minorities' (p40).

3.4.2 Misframing

Fraser (2009, 2013) is particularly interested in how hegemonic political actors shape the dominant frames that determine what counts as legitimate political discourse. For instance, she critiques neoliberal frameworks which focus on individual responsibility and market-based solutions, constraining the political conversation about redistribution and systemic change. As such, these perspectives can marginalise certain groups by framing social and political issues in a way that ignores their structural causes, or through downplaying factors which could lead to systemic change, such as tackling economic inequality and discrimination. These marginalised groups then lack standing in the political entities that make decisions impacting their lives, effectively rendering them invisible in political processes. Fraser (2008) describes this type of misrepresentation as misframing, where certain groups do not get a say at

all. This exacerbates injustice, as Dorrien (2021) emphasises, 'If you have no standing, you cannot struggle for redistribution or recognition' (p. 29).

3.4.3 Meta-Political Misrepresentation

This type of inequality arises when the processes that determine the boundaries of political communities are themselves unjust. It involves the undemocratic setting of frameworks that define who is included or excluded from political participation. Fraser (2008, p51) argues,

> 'Meta-political representations arises when states and transnational elites monopolise the activity of frame-setting, denying voice to those who may be harmed in the process, and blocking creation of democratic arenas where the latter's claims can be vetted and redressed'

How then do we overcome these obstacles? Fraser (2008) suggests applying an 'All-Subjected Principle' which asserts that all individuals who are subjected to a given structure of governance or decision-making are granted proper political representation, through having equal standing in its political processes. This principle resonates with Young's (2011) social connection model of responsibility, shifting the focus from individual to shared responsibility for dismantling systemic inequities. Both recognise that meaningful participation is a necessary condition for addressing the injustices embedded within social and political institutions.

Again, taking this complex theory and applying at its most basic to the question of how a school could ensure that the DofEA was more inclusive, we must ask ourselves who is included and excluded in the decision making around enactment of this initiative? To date, in our MATS, this has just been school leaders. However, as we have seen, this has not been a neutral decision-making process and we must locate this in a context which acknowledges the ideologies that have shaped policy (Bell and Stevenson, 2015). Our school leaders are influenced by a wider political agenda and political educational policy; in this context, this involves the need to secure a good Ofsted grade and

the need to demonstrate impact on PPG spend, using the safety of the DfE and Ofsted endorsed DofEA.

To avoid misframing, it is the young people who should be represented in the decision making and we should be affording value to pupil voice around its enaction. This may also have a positive effect on inclusivity. There is research evidence to suggest that involving pupils in decision-making enhances participation by boosting motivation, fostering ownership, and strengthening their drive to achieve individual and collective goals (Mati, Gatumu, and Chandi, 2016). Mager and Novak (2012) similarly found that while student involvement in school policy had little direct impact on academic achievement, it significantly improved self-esteem and democratic engagement. Davey, Burke and Shaw (2010, p42) describe the effect of pupil voice as,

> 'Helping ground decision-making processes in the lived reality of children's worlds as well as empowering children to access their rights to participation and to have a say – the effect of which is to make children feel respected, valued and active citizens in a shared community.'

To ensure pupils achieve parity of participation in decision-making processes, it is necessary, in accordance with Fraser's model, to first examine and establish the terms of their involvement. This requires defining the parameters of pupil voice to guarantee timely and equitable representation within decision-making structures related to the initiative. Through pupil voice, we can begin to explore the concept of counter-hegemony, enabling a deeper understanding of the barriers that may hinder participation. This approach would better ensure that the implementation of the Award is designed in a way that respects non-dominant cultures, fostering genuine representation and inclusivity within our cohorts.

3.5 Conclusion

As we have seen, these diverse perspectives of social justice theories reflect specific philosophical traditions or political orientations. This made it challenging to decide on a singular framework to adopt, without excluding essential

components of justice. As we saw in Chapter 2.6, Bourdieu's thinking seemed relevant to my research in terms of exploring any hidden, cultural mechanisms that reproduce inequality. I also felt his lens added depth to the conversation for which Rawls' distribution-focused theory did not fully account. It was also accessible to my context; in that I needed to understand the young people's experiences in my research. However, Bourdieu is pessimistic as to the ability of education to affect change and the work I have engaged in over more than two decades runs counter to this social reproduction theory. While his work would no doubt influence my thinking and therefore my research, I sought a framework that offers a more optimistic perspective on the transformative potential of education.

Young's (1990) theories again were very useful in shaping my thinking about the types of oppression that I may encounter in my research (as well as seeming to align well to the research evidence around sense of belonging as detailed in chapter 2.8.2), but her five categories of oppression felt too abstract to be of practical benefit and lacked the roundedness I sought for this research.

For this research, Fraser's framework provided the most rounded perspective while also allowing for practical exploration. Her own research primarily operates at the level of the nation-state or examines relations between nation-states and Fraser herself predominantly uses her frame to discuss and explore feminism through social theory (Fraser, 2013). However, the application of her framework across diverse fields and contexts (Bozalek, 2020; Grange et al., 2024; Kinsley, 2016; McPherson, 2019, Fernandez, 2011) demonstrates its accessibility and adaptability, reinforcing my confidence in its suitability as an analytical tool for examining smaller-scale initiatives within education.

As we have seen, Fraser's framework is not without its critics. Fraser herself acknowledges that the framework can lead to conflicts in practice (1997); for example, the need to promote economic equality through redistribution may inadvertently lead to reinforcing cultural stigmas and misrecognising groups, such as welfare policies stigmatising recipients.

In examining the various dimensions of social justice theory, it became evident that achieving true equity requires an integrated approach offered by Fraser's framework. Schools are microcosms of society, where issues of economic inequality, cultural misrecognition, and political exclusion manifest in tangible ways. Fraser's tripartite frame allowed for a nuanced examination in determining why pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds were not proportionally represented in the DofEA. It provided a very workable and practical foundation to explore the impact of redistribution, whether misrecognition of pupils was impacting participation rates and whether schools were recognising the voice of marginalised groups though the political framing of the scheme in schools. Subsequently, it also provided a sensible frame to structure my own findings and inform the nature of my recommendations which resulted from the findings of my research.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This research aims to explore the barriers that disadvantaged Key Stage 3 pupils face in participating in and completing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, and to identify strategies that may promote greater inclusivity and social justice within the programme. It gives voice to both the young people involved and the educators responsible for implementing the scheme. Research questions were formulated to explore why participation rates among disadvantaged pupils may be lower than those of their peers by examining their experiences and the challenges they encounter, as well as the actions school leaders are taking to address these barriers.

It was my aim that this research could be used to advise future practice and improve school policy in relation to the administration of the Award scheme, and therefore to better promote inclusivity. A case study of a MAT based in England, utilising research from four of their English secondary schools was undertaken to gain a real-world sense of implementation of the Award scheme and young people's experience of this.

The justification for this approach is outlined below alongside my own philosophical assumptions and positioning. Description of the research design including reflections on the use of interviews follows, in addition to an outline of the process of analysis. Practical and ethical considerations inherent in this type of research are also addressed.

4.1 Ontology and Epistemology

In planning this research, I have favoured a critical realist approach. Developed by Roy Bhaskar in the mid to late 1970s, this approach attempts to explore the causative mechanisms that explain the social world and accepts that both quantitative and qualitative methods of research can have value in undertaking such research (Edwards, O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014).

In my own research, I was interested in seeking to understand the perspective of the social realities of the young people at the heart of my research, aiming to interpret and explain their position. To do so meant utilising methodologies which 'use theory, recognise complexity and acknowledge context' (Kara, 2017). This included exploring the theories of those people who are directly involved in the delivery of the DofEA, as to what may be causing the outcomes, as well as the experiences of the young people themselves. I used baseline data to identify the extent of the issue; however, the main source of data for this research was gained through a qualitative case study of an English MAT utilising research of the DofEA within four of their secondary schools.

Qualitative research methodology, when situated with the philosophical frame of critical realism, embraces an ontological position that allows for subjective understandings of reality which was necessary for this research. It also allowed for reconsideration or modification of the research design in response to new developments which again was beneficial for this particular research (Hedrick, Bickman and Rog, 1993).

4.2 Research Design

Critical realism is compatible with a wide range of research methods. For the purposes of my research, I felt that a case study would provide the most useful methodology to explore my research questions. The research had to be conducted during a limited period of one school summer term, due to the available time and financial resources available. I was working full time during this period. The case study approach was therefore well suited to the needs of this small-scale research (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2010). It did not compromise the depth of insight that was needed to explore these questions, and I was also conscious that if I affected a good research design model, other schools could undertake similar research to add to this bank of evidence. Case studies, as discussed by Yin (2009), can provide a robust approach to exploring theoretical constructs. In this research, the theory is provided by Fraser whom I use as my lens to explore the notion of parity of participation. Utilising a case

study as an approach allowed me to consider this theory whilst providing insight into the experiences and opinions of the young people and the adults who facilitated the Award scheme. This allowed for a contextual richness that I believed contributed to the practical applications and allowed me to see how Fraser's framework was applicable to a specific, real-life scenario.

The case study schools were not part of my current Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), and as such, I held no formal responsibility for any staff or pupils within them. While there were pre-existing professional relationships with the headteachers, over five years had elapsed since I had any line management responsibility for them. Moreover, the research design explicitly communicated that participation was entirely voluntary, with no obligation or expectation to take part. Given the time that had passed and with ethical safeguards in place, I do not consider these prior relationships to have introduced any undue influence or ethical concerns that would compromise the integrity or validity of the research.

To explore the research questions thoroughly, I had to elicit opinions in a depth that I felt could only come through face-to-face interviews. Questionnaires or surveys would have allowed me to obtain a much larger dataset, however I knew it would prove more arduous for school staff to administer on the ground. I would also have no control over that administration. My previous experience of utilising questionnaires across multiple schools had left me with too many concerns about how reliable that data would have been. This was especially the case given that the research needed to be conducted in the summer term which for secondary schools is 'exam season', bringing schools additional layers of organisational constraint. I also felt that a questionnaire or survey was unlikely to be able to produce the level of depth around perception, opinions and experiences that my research questions required. It was for all these reasons that I decided face to face interviews were preferable.

The case study was undertaken over one academic term. This was to minimise the disruption to the schools' operations, thereby making participation more attractive but also to allow the whole research process to be completed over a

two-year period. In each school, four pupils were interviewed as well as one member of staff who facilitated the Award scheme.

4.3 Research Methods

4.3.1 Baseline administrative data

It was important to gather some administrative data to substantiate the perceived research problem that fewer pupils entitled to Pupil Premium were completing the DofEA. Administrative data here refers to school-held records of numbers of pupils on roll as well as enrolment figures for the DofEA, as well as how many of these children met pupil premium eligibility. I therefore started with gathering statistical administrative data from all Yr9 pupils across the four secondary schools from the year 2022/23 and looked at how that compared with the wider MAT picture. This strand of the research provided baseline data as to how many pupils had been offered and taken up/not taken up the DofEA.

4.3.2 Interviews and Interviewing Children

The practice of interviewing children for research was not widespread until this century. This is because there was a general belief that children and young people were not socially competent enough to give credible accounts of their own experiences (Fraser *et al.,* 2004). However, in line with more modern law, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which regards children as being human beings with rights, including the right to be heard (Article 12), contemporary research favours an approach whereby the child is an agent of the research rather than merely the object of the research (O'Reilly, Kiyimba, & Schober, 2013). In reality, this needs careful consideration to ensure that children's viewpoints are truly represented. O'Reilly & Dogra (2017) make the valid point that despite the enthusiasm in the research community to research in a child-centered way, it is easy to slip into adult-centric ways of interviewing. I am aware that I needed to be reflexive in my own views of children and

childhood in my research as this may well shape the interview. Concepts of childhood relating to chronological age and development age are not universal. I know I hold a typically contemporary Western view; that children are considered in terms of their social equality and entitled to socio-cultural and moral rights (Paul, 2007), but that these rights do need to be restricted for their own protections (for example the right to smoke or drink alcohol).
Just as these concepts of childhood are not universally shared, what has emerged are also differing perspectives on how researchers should approach interviewing children. Based on my years of experience conducting interviews with children, I align with the view that, while children are similar to adults in many ways, they possess different competencies. As such, traditional adult interview strategies require careful modification and adaptation to ensure that children are meaningfully engaged and able to express their views effectively (Punch, 2002).

In developing my interview protocols, I carefully considered the guidance of previous researchers, experienced in interviewing children. O'Reilly & Dogra (2017) suggest offering the child some control over the interview and the recording device, as well as providing an opportunity for the child to ask you questions, talking always in child-friendly language. Holt (2004) advises engaging in children's cultures so as to represent their views as accurately as possible and to work to manage the inherent power relationship that exists. In practice, this meant spending some time considering appropriate warm up questions and discussion. The issues relating to power differentials are discussed below.

Interviews are not neutral tools for gathering data; rather they are active interactions (Fontana and Frey, 2003) which gave me the desired flexibility to have control over the questions I wanted to ask and the ability to delve into lines of inquiry I wanted to pursue in more detail. Using a semi-structured approach, I was also able to adapt the wording of the questions to suit the young person being interviewed and prompt the participants to expand on their answers. Working with children, this was particularly beneficial as it allowed me the

opportunity to check that the child had understood the question. The flexibility also allowed me to build up a rapport with the participants which allowed for exploration of a topic which needed to be carefully managed; exploring reasons for non-participation or dropping out of an activity. Semi-structured interviews meant I was therefore able to adapt existing questions to suit the participant in front of me and tailor more to their needs (Flewitt, 2014, Creswell and Guetterman, 2021). For the same reason, face to face interviews were preferable as it allowed me as an interviewer to be sensitive to non-verbal cues from the participants as to any distress or anger, as well as pick up cues that I was losing their attention. By being face-to-face with the young people, there was also an opportunity to reduce the power dynamic that exists by nature of me being an 'educator' and the young people being school children. By making sure I was sat at the same level as the young people, not behind a desk and ensuring we had the same seating meant I was positioning them as on a level with me.

However, I am aware that interviews as my primary research method had limitations. The interview context can feel like quite a formal situation for some children, who may have been anxious about participating. This is especially the case of the year groups I was to interview, who have grown up more familiar with social media and digital channels of communication rather than traditional methods (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). It was vital therefore that I spent some time at the start of the interview on ice-breaker questions to ascertain whether the child was comfortable in the situation or whether they were going to find communicating in this way too difficult. I also used the gatekeepers to help through their selection of pupils to approach for interview, so that children they knew who were extremely shy or would find the interview distressing, would not have been placed in the sample. This of course has its own limitations in terms of sampling, which I will discuss later.

Face-to-face interviews are more expensive, both in terms of time and travel. This also meant that whereas originally, I planned to conduct my study across different regions in the UK, due to budget implications, I needed to conduct my

study within the North-West where I am based. I was therefore unable to explore any regional variation in my responses.

Another potential limitation was that I knew that in interviewing children, they were likely to search for preferred responses to my questions (Danby, Ewing & Thorpe, 2011). To try and mitigate this, I chose to draw on elements of a phenomenological interviewing technique. This approach seeks to be reflective and open in style, with questions designed to generate detailed information about the participants experience (Roulston, 2010, Adams & van Manen, 2008, Bevan, 2014). In practice this meant allowing the participants to direct the level of detail given, and limiting the number of questions to try and gain a more in-depth response to each, using the participants' own words in subsequent questions (Roulston, 2010). Giorgi (1997) argued that posing generally broad and open-ended questions, allows the subject 'sufficient opportunity to express his or her viewpoint extensively' (p. 245), which I also considered in my devising of the interview schedule.

I considered the use of focus groups as potentially these would have allowed the participants to reflect on each other's ideas and experiences and may have elicited further responses (Lewis, 1992). I was aware that the power differential between myself as educator and pupil participants may have been lessened with several pupils together (Eder and Fingerson, 2001). However, I decided not to opt for focus groups as I would be unaware of pre-existing relationships and potential dynamics between the pupils, which could easily have led to participants feeling uncomfortable. Given the focus on disadvantage, the nature of the discussion could also be sensitive and quite personal to participants.

4.3.3 Recording

I used a Sony ICD-UX570 digital voice recorder to record the interviews with all participants. As a small modern device, it was discrete and not intrusive. Recording the interviews also meant I could fully concentrate on listening to the participants, which allowed me to give them positive encouragements to

continue. Warin (2021) explains that 'if you want an interview to feel like a conversation, you don't want to be incumbered by papers' (at 5:53). The limitations were that audio is not able to capture non-verbal gestures, such as nodding or shaking of the head, so I tried to verbalise these during the interviews in a natural way. This was preferable to using video devices as children of the ages that I was interviewing tend to be concerned about what they look like on camera (Grant and Luxford, 2009). Another issue with using audio recording was that the presence of a recording device may complicate existing power relations (Sparrman, 2005), so again it was important to try and reduce this by explaining to the young people what I was using it for, how long I would have the audio recording for and who would have access to that. I also told participants that at any time they could stop the recording, to give them some control over this.

4.4 Sample

4.4.1 Administrative Data

I collected published data from the DofEA website on participation rates for the same academic year. However, due to the way that the data set is collected, I was unable to gain data on completion rates at a national level. The individual four schools were able to give me this data as they had internally tracked this.
I collected the following data from the four secondary schools:
Numbers of pupils who were in Year 9 in the academic year 2022/23.
Of those pupils, how many had access to the DofEA whilst in Yr9 and what proportion were disadvantaged.
Of those pupils, how many chose to take up the opportunity of the DofEA and what proportion of those pupils were disadvantaged,
Of those pupils, how many went on to complete the DofEA and what proportion of those pupils were disadvantaged.

4.4.2 Qualitative data – pupils

To generate sufficient data on the perceptions of the Award scheme and barriers to take up and completion of the same, I conducted sixteen interviews with pupils. I was mindful that recruiting too many could lead to an excessive and unmanageable volume of data. I also felt that I could elicit enough information from sixteen for the purposes of this study and therefore it would have raised ethical issues in terms of wasting school pupils and their teachers time, to include more (Francis et al., 2010).

Pupil (Pseudonym)	School	Gender	Status
Emily	A	F	Not taken
Jack	A	M	Not completed
Charlie	A	M	Not completed
Olivia	A	F	Not taken
Harry	B	M	Not completed
Charlotte	B	F	Not taken
Grace	B	F	Not completed
Oliver	B	M	Not completed
Maya	C	F	Not taken
Fatima	C	F	Not completed
Dante	C	M	Not completed
Liam	C	M	Not completed
Hassan	D	M	Not taken
Elijah	D	M	Not completed
Lucy	D	F	Not completed
Chenille	D	F	Not completed
Total		M: 8, F: 8	Not taken: 5, Not completed: 11

Table 4.1 Participants (pupils)

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. This active selection of participants allowed for the potential to provide rich information related to the purpose of my research (Patton, 1990). For this research they were young people who chose not to engage with or had not completed the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programmes. Of these sixteen pupils, the gender split was even. Five had chosen not to take up the DofE award of which only one was male. The other eleven pupils had registered on the Award but had later dropped out. The schools received pupil premium funding for all sixteen pupils.

4.4.3 Use of Gatekeepers

The gatekeepers were those individuals who had the authority to grant me permission to access the particular group I wanted to work with (Piercy and Hargate, 2004). For this research, my gatekeepers were the school headteachers, who held the responsibility for making the decisions as to whether I could conduct the research in the first place, as well as deciding the time and where in the school the interviews were to take place. Due to the nature of the research, I needed to use a gatekeeper for access. However, this did pose some potential challenges. I was aware that gatekeepers might only recommend children who they think would say positive things about their experience of the Award scheme, as they would not want their institution reflected in a negative light (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). Or they may base their decisions on who to choose based on perceived parental reactions (Heath et al. 2007) which may have led to a skew in the data received. To try and mitigate this, it was important that the headteachers understood both the purpose and the anonymity of the research. I sent an introductory email but then followed up with a telephone call to the gatekeeper, to further explain the research and discuss how they might seek to select the sample within school. As previously discussed, due to my prior knowledge of the gatekeepers, it was also important to reiterate to them how participation was entirely voluntary. This also gave me the opportunity to reiterate that I understood the pressures of the school day and calendar (Freeman and Mathison, 2009) and would work around them.

4.4.4 Qualitative data – Staff

I conducted a further four interviews with adults who were directly working with young people on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme in schools. This sample comprised of staff who are the main staff lead on the Award in schools and are responsible for helping pupils undertake the administrative aspects during form periods in schools. All staff had been undertaking this role for a minimum of three years.

Staff (Pseudonym)	School	Length of time in role
Andy	A	3 years
Barbara	B	3 years
Cem	C	7 years
Darnell	D	5 years

Table 4.2 Participants (staff)

4.5 Data Analysis

4.5.1 Administrative data

Preparation and organisation of the data was available through the schools Management Information Software (MIS) systems. Once retrieved I completed a brief descriptive analysis of the statistics on the participation and completion rates between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged pupils, compared to the national data published by the DofEA.

4.5.2 Qualitative Data

I chose to take an abductive approach to my research. Abductive reasoning has been described as 'inference to the best explanation' (Harman, 1965 p88), a 'form of reasoning used in situations of uncertainty, when we need an understanding or explanation of something that happens' (Brinkmann, 2014, p722) or as Walton (2005) describes 'an intelligent guess' (p4). It allows for the producing of new hypotheses and theories as the research is undertaken, allowing for new theoretical insights (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). I chose to take this approach as I wanted to leave room for other concepts to emerge and be explored as my research developed. As Brinkmann (2014, p722) explains,

> ‘The goal of the abductive process is not to arrive at fixed and universal knowledge through the collection of data. Rather, the goal is to be able to act in a specific situation.’

To this end, after transcribing the audio recordings, I undertook several re-reads of the transcripts to immerse myself in the details (Agar, 1980) and to get a general sense of the data. I then coded the data using NVivo software. After removing overlapping or redundant codes, I collapsed these which left me with the dominant themes. I also analysed the data for contrary evidence which did not support the dominant themes. This thematic analysis allowed me to organise the data in the most meaningful way (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is a method which is commonly used with child interview data (Joffe and Yardley, 2004) as it allows the researcher to capture the issues that are perceived to be relevant and important from the child’s perspective.
Given the nature of the study, I decided to report my findings via narrative discussion, where appropriate using useful dialogue and quotes which provided support for my themes.

4.6 Limitations of the project

This is a small qualitative case study which aims to explain the lower participation and higher drop-out rates of disadvantaged pupils on the DofEA in England. The limitations of the study are the small numbers of accounts told uniquely from the practitioners’ perspective, and the claims that we can formulate from them. As a researcher taking a critical realist stance, I can only comment on the associations or relationships found, given the themes and theories identified. Therefore, my thesis cannot produce certainties, but I do believe it could still provide valuable insight both in relation to larger educational issues of engagement in extra-curricular activity and for school leaders on the ground trying to maximise use of the PPG and encourage inclusivity.

4.7 Research Ethics

As this project involves working with children (participants interviewed will be within the ages of 14-16), there were a number of ethical considerations involved which needed to underpin each stage of the research. In addition, approval was sought and obtained from the Education Research Ethics Committee at Lancaster University, with confirmation of this approval provided in Appendix 1.

4.7.1 Administrative Data

I needed to ensure that I used all the statistical data and accurately represented the findings, free of any personal or political agenda (Kara, 2017). I therefore ensured all data remained anonymised and confidential by redacting pupils and staff names and/or identifying features.

4.7.2 Qualitative Data - Pupils

DiCiccio-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) identity four major ethical issues as described in the table below;

Issue	Description
Harm	It is necessary to reduce the risk of any unanticipated harm.
Protection of information	It is important to protect the information given to the research by the interviewee.
Informing	It is crucial to effectively inform the interviewees about the nature of the study.
Reduction of risk	It is essential that researchers take steps to reduce the risk of exploitation.

Table 4.3 Four major ethical issues

(in Oreilly & Dogra, 2017, p130)

In terms of harm, face to face interviews conducted on the school premises limited any potential risk of physical harm. Information security was maintained by adhering to the University's established protocols and data protection standards. All participants were well informed of the nature of the study, with information sheets sent out, written consents obtained, and consent checked at the start and end of each interview. The use of gatekeepers within the schools, who knew the participants well, further reduced any risk. Duncan et al. (2009) noted that qualitative research with children presents additional challenges. Firstly, that young people have limited life experience to deal with the challenges posed. I did not consider this an issue which needed any mitigation, since I was seeking data based solely around pupils' experiences to date on the Award scheme. I was also cognisant during the process that if a participant showed any signs of distress talking about their experiences or opinions, I was skilled enough in working with young people to know how to recognise this, stop and talk to the young person in such a way as to reassure them. I have over two decades of experience working with this age group, including conducting interviews and focus groups. However, I knew schools needed to be assured I have full CRB clearance, which I ensured I took to every school visit. Secondly, consent is also often required from young people's parents/carers. This was the case for my own research. Although participants were at least fourteen years old and could therefore be considered 'competent', I wanted to ensure that the consent was given freely and without fear of repercussions for declining. Using a gatekeeper was useful in terms of selecting and obtaining the sample, it also meant that at this stage pupils identified as lacking the capacity to understand consent to participation were not selected (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). However, I was aware that use of a gatekeeper also brought a potential additional layer of pressure to the participants who may have felt that they had to partake as it was something school was asking. By obtaining permission from parents and confirming consent at both the beginning and end of the interview, I took all necessary steps to ensure that the consent was valid.

Finally, Duncan et. al (2009) noted that the power differential between researchers and participants is significant. In terms of ethical considerations, I

was very aware of the power differentials between myself as an adult educator and the participants, as school children, both in terms of my age (Holt, 2004) and by virtue of my role (Etherington, 2001). While undertaking this research, I was a 'researcher'. The schools I was researching knew me as a current CEO external to the case study MAT, but I was a former Director of Education for the case study MAT which was a decision-making role within schools. I wanted to attempt to redress this power balance and did this through putting more emphasis at the start of the interviews on ensuring the children (and staff) understood that they were active social agents to the research, rather than passive subjects (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000) by talking to them about their role in the research and what their voice could contribute to a wider system. This also gave me another opportunity to ensure that the child was truly willing to participate and share their experiences (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). During interviews it was made very clear to participants that they had the right to withdraw at any point. In addition, participants were informed of their right to simply not answer questions they did not feel comfortable in answering and their right to withdraw their data up to fourteen days after the interview (Hedrick, Bickman and Rog, 1993). Again, the style of interview was also helpful here in ensuring my own questions were limited and the structure was weighted in favour of enabling the participants to talk more and give their perspective (Hiller and DiLuzio, 2004).

I was aware that the issue of power can also become problematic in transcribing, as representation of children's talk can inadvertently privilege the adult's voice (Ochs, 1979). To this end I ensured that I found ways of representing the children's voices in my transcripts through including any non-verbal turns to convey to the audience that the child did take a turn.

4.7.3 Qualitative Data – Staff

Rights to withdraw participation applied equally to staff involved in this research. While the pupils involved in the research were not familiar with me, some of the staff were. However, I was not in any position of authority over any of these staff, nor were they in the employ of my own MAT. Permissions to audio-record

the interviews were sought in writing and stored electronically on the University OneDrive which has two factor authentication. After the recordings had been transcribed, I anonymised the data using pseudonyms and removed any identifying information. All personal information was treated as confidential and kept separately from non-personal information such as transcripts or field notes. Any hard copy data used within the project was securely stored in a locked filing cabinet. Other important considerations for these school staff was ensuring the timing of the research was least intrusive to the normal functioning of the school day or disruptive to the participants' education. Discussion with school leaders prior to setting up each interview established the least disruptive times for data collection.

4.8 Case Study - Contextualising Data

All four schools offer the Duke of Edinburgh's Bronze Award to all of the Year 9 pupils. One school also offered silver to Yr10, but this is now being outsourced, in that pupils who want to continue will be guided to an external provider to continue the next level of the Award.
The overall number of Year 9 pupils who could have taken up the DofEA from the four schools was 620.

The following table and graphs outline the variations between schools, in terms of uptake and completion of all pupils and specifically those in receipt of the PPG.

School	Funding for Award Scheme	% Disadvantaged Pupils in Yr9	% Yr9 Pupils Taking Up Award	% Disadvantaged Pupils Taking Up Award	% Pupils Completing Award (22/23)	% Disadvantaged Pupils Completing Award (22/23)
School A	Partial	52.5%	27.5%	6.25%	70.5%	60.0%
School B	Partial	39.4%	30.2%	8.13%	79.0%	30.8%
School C	Yes (whole cost)	46.3%	33.3%	10.0%	75.0%	56.25%
School D	Yes (whole cost, except food)	26.5%	80.0%	16.6%	71.9%	50.0%

Table 4.4 Uptake and Completion rates of the DofEA

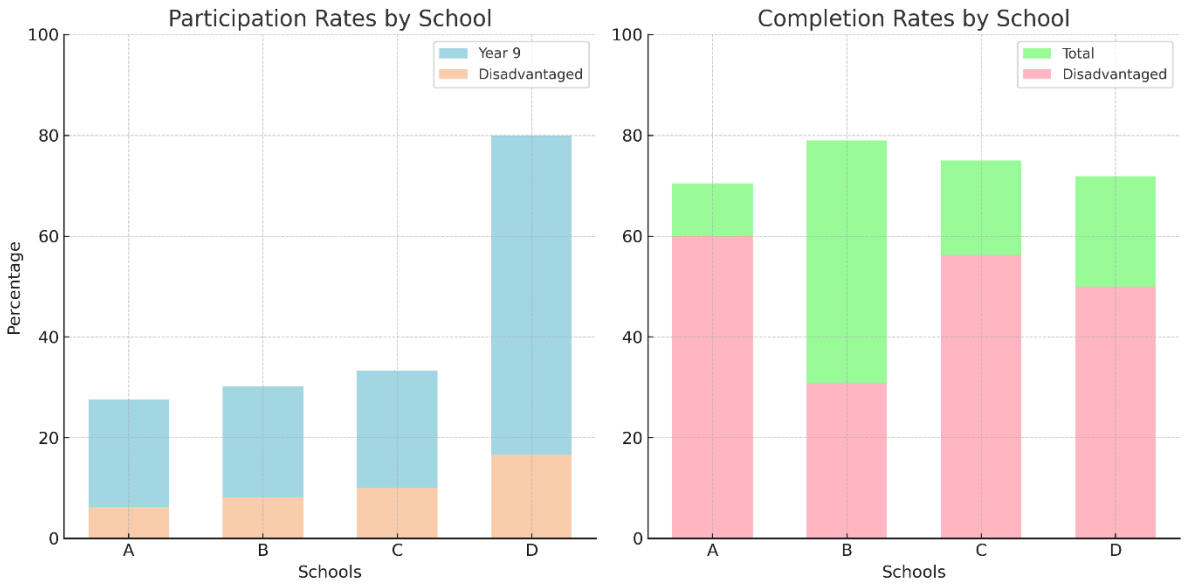

Figure 4.1 Participation and Completion rates by School

Schools A and B, where the award was partially funded, show lower participation rates (27.5% and 30.2%, respectively) for Year 9 pupils compared to School D (80%) and School C (33.3%) where the costs were fully covered. Among disadvantaged pupils, participation is similarly lower in partially funded schools (6.25% in School A and 8.13% in School B) than in fully funded schools (10% in School C and 16.6% in School D). This suggest that fully funding the DofEA might be acting as an incentive to participation. Although the partially funded schools (A and B) had lower participation rates, School B stands out with the highest overall completion rate (79%). This suggests effective support systems may help boost completion, even with partial funding.

All but one of the schools far exceed national averages for the percentage of pupils who are eligible for free school meals. At the time of writing the national average for England mainstream secondary schools was 27.1%. The school's percentage ranged from the lowest at 26.5% to 52.5% which was the highest. The overall percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals across all schools is approximately 42.3%.

Nationally, 29.9% of 14-year-olds started the Bronze DofE Award in 2022–23, with 15.3% from disadvantaged backgrounds (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award,

2025a). In contrast, 39.2% of Year 9 pupils in the case study schools enrolled, with disadvantaged pupils making up 24.3% of participants, which is well above the national figure. This suggests that schools are already deploying some effective inclusive strategies, as well as indicating strong institutional support for the DofEA programme within the MAT. However, participation among disadvantaged pupils *overall* remains low: only 9.83% took part, despite 42.3% being eligible for free school meals.

School D had the highest overall participation rate for Year 9 pupils at 80%, higher than the other schools. The higher participation rate could be influenced by the smaller percentage of pupils eligible for the PPG, which may suggest fewer barriers to participation. However, given the limited sample size, these findings cannot be generalised or definitively attributed to any specific factors without additional research.

The gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged participants in the schools in the study is very similar to the national gap, at 14.91% (national 14.6%). This gap indicates systemic challenges affecting disadvantaged pupils' participation and suggests the need for broader, structural interventions beyond the school level.

In terms of the completion rates, the DofE Foundation do not publish this data, because young people are not restricted to completing the award within a specific year. As a result, the completion data does not directly correspond to the participation numbers from any given year, making it less comparable or relatable to the cohort of participants who initially opted to start the award. However, I was able to gain the completion rates from the schools in the study for the Yr9 pupils who had opted to participate in that cycle. Overall completion rates are relatively consistent, hovering around 70-79%. Across all four schools, the completion rate was 73.7%. The completion rate for disadvantaged pupils however was much lower at 32.2%. This is a stark difference and suggests that while the strategies to encourage uptake may be having a positive effect on disadvantaged pupils in these schools, when compared to the national picture, additional measures are needed to support them through to completion.

This contextualising data reinforced the need to gain qualitative insights from the participants themselves to better understand the underlying factors influencing this data set.

This is outlined in my next Chapter, which first introduces the qualitative data before discussing the findings.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

5.1 Introduction to Qualitative Data

The qualitative data collected in this study was analysed using an abductive approach, allowing for a reflexive engagement between the data and theoretical framework. This process involved coding the data to capture key experiences and perspectives before drawing these into wider thematic categories informed by Fraser's concepts. Economic barriers, cultural barriers, and the perceived value of the Award to both pupils and staff emerged as overarching themes. These were not imposed but instead reflected the ways in which participants themselves articulated their experiences. While Fraser's framework provided a conceptual structure, the themes and subthemes also surfaced organically, shaped by the economic, cultural, and structural dimensions of participants' experiences. The iterative nature of my approach meant revisiting and refining sub-themes in light of Fraser's framework, considering how issues of redistribution, recognition, and representation intersected within the data and influenced participation.

Economic barriers are seen as a recurring concern, as highlighted by discussions on financial accessibility strategies, insufficient staffing, and perceptions of financial barriers. While staff identified proactive strategies to mitigate costs, the persistence of financial constraints highlights systemic challenges to the ongoing delivery of the Award. These barriers are compounded by issues such as a lack of volunteering placements, which further limit access and completion rates.

We will see cultural barriers also playing a significant role in shaping participation. Themes of pride and stigma illustrate how cultural attitudes, and external perceptions can potentially act as obstacles. Additionally, a lack of familial engagement is seen as a limiting factor, particularly in supporting pupils through the challenges of the program.

The data highlights the perceived and received value of the award. Here we will observe the greatest divergence in the perspectives between the staff and pupils. Subthemes such as personal growth and lifetime memories, resilience and perseverance, and wider and future benefits are discussed positively by the staff. These benefits are however not universally experienced, with pupils also reporting challenges such as anxiety around participation. The theme of sense of belonging emerges as particularly significant for pupils, alleviating boredom also plays a meaningful, albeit slightly less prominent, role in their experiences.

The following thematic map illustrates the complex and interconnected nature of the themes and subthemes identified in this research, highlighting the significant interplay between economic barriers, cultural barriers, and the value of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The overlapping and multifaceted relationships between subthemes demonstrate how these factors influence and reinforce one another.

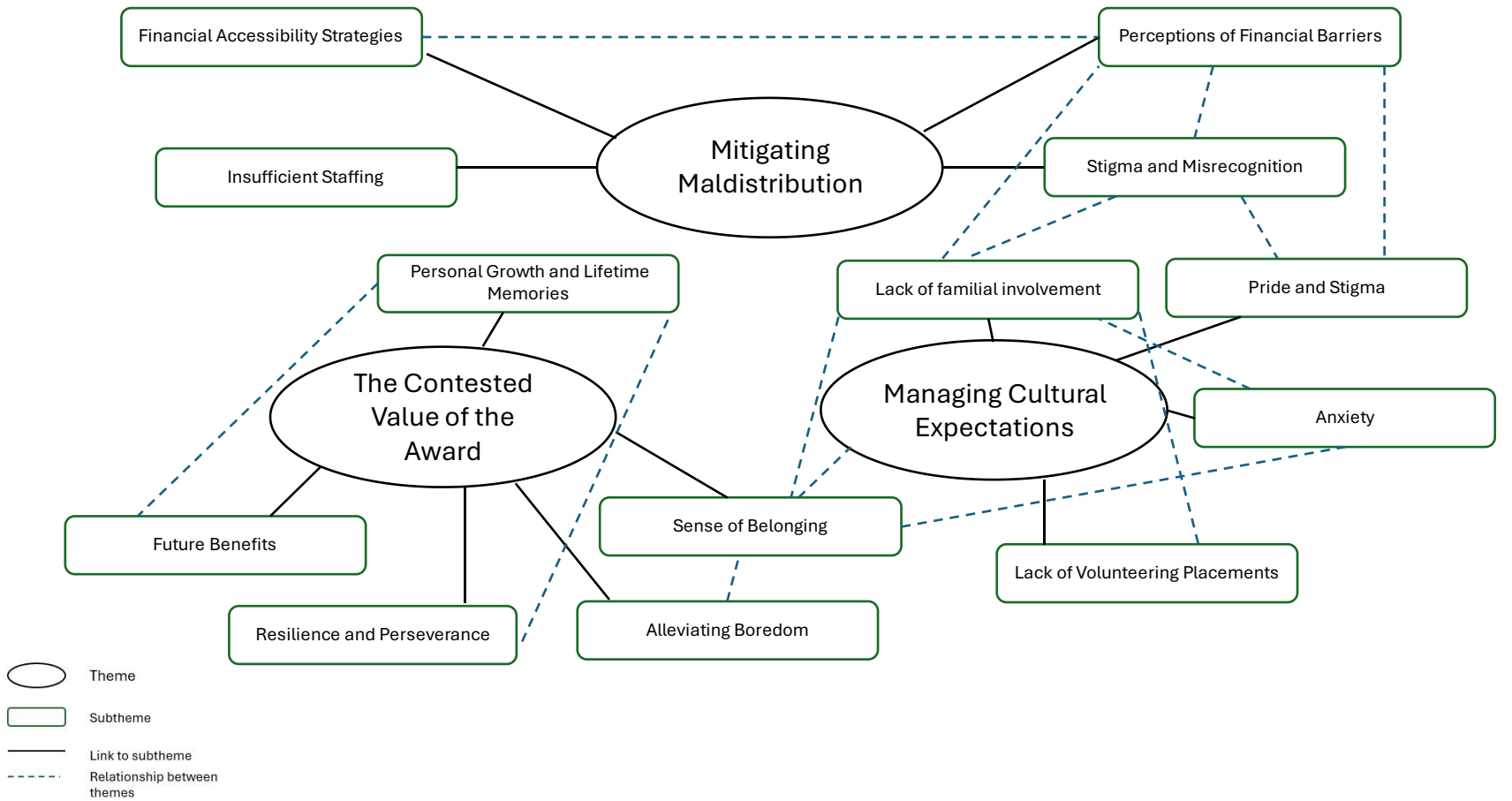

Figure 5.1 Thematic Map

This crossover between subthemes complicated the process of categorising the data into discrete sections, as many experiences and perceptions span multiple themes. For example, the social connections with both their peers and school staff were seen as a positive value of the Award, which, from the pupil's perspective, could also alleviate boredom. However, many young people also experienced anxiety which acted as a barrier, undermining the potential benefits. This anxiety may be due to lack of familial involvement, potentially brought about by economic factors.

This interplay not only shows the complexity of pupil and staff experiences but also highlights the importance of adopting a holistic approach to understanding and addressing the barriers associated with the Award scheme to ensure inclusivity.

For staff, there was a much heavier emphasis on the subthemes directly relating to economic barriers. Within this there was a strong focus on the operational and structural challenges that they faced in implementing the Award. This suggests that staff view financial and resource-based barriers as key issues impacting the inclusivity of the Award. This may well reflect their immediate priorities or responsibilities in managing the program.

Pupils' responses highlighted a different set of priorities and experiences to the staff. The greater emphasis was on subthemes such as sense of belonging, anxiety and alleviating boredom, which suggests that pupils place significant value on the social and emotional aspects of the Award. There was also a strong emphasis on lack of volunteering placements which highlighted a practical barrier encountered by pupils, limiting their ability to complete the Award. Overall, the pupils' focus painted a picture of their lived experiences, where friendships and enjoyment coexist with practical and emotional challenges.

The difference in perspectives also highlights the importance of integrating both sets of insights when looking to address the barriers to inclusivity and achieve

parity of participation. It was therefore necessary to consider how to address these at a systemic as well as an individual level, when considering ways to help improve participation.

In choosing to present the staff perspectives first, my intention was to foreground the dominant narratives that were being used to underpin and shape the practice within schools. This provides the reader with a contextual frame against which the subsequent analysis of the lived realities of the young people's accounts can be read.

5.2 Theme 1: Mitigating Maldistribution: *"okay, what's the minimum cost that we can have?"*

This theme explores staff's efforts to mitigate costs through financial accessibility strategies, including logistical adjustments to the award scheme. The data found mixed perceptions among staff about whether financial concerns deter participants and that of pupils, who did not identify monetary reasons for non-participation. Stigma associated with accepting financial assistance is discussed as part of this theme. In the final sub-theme, issues relating to distribution of staffing are raised and discussed which indicate the subtle interplay that exists between redistribution and recognition.

5.2.1 Subtheme 1:1 Financial Accessibility Strategies

All staff interviewed had gone to some lengths to consider how to reduce costs for pupils for the Award scheme. In School A, which partially funded the Award for pupils, staff took a pragmatic view to reducing the cost;

Andy: *We look at it from the sense of what's the lowest that we can make it essentially. Obviously, we're fortunate to get some additional funding from the school budget. We sit down and we think about, okay, what's the minimum cost that we can have?*

That leaders start from the viewpoint of the economic barriers indicates that redistribution is a central concern for them. This is perhaps not surprising given

that research has shown school leaders are increasingly preoccupied with financial constraints, with reports highlighting their struggles to balance budgets, the necessity of making spending cuts, and even the redirection of pupil premium funding to cover core costs (DfE, 2024d; NGA, 2024; Sutton Trust, 2024b). All schools demonstrated substantial efforts to both reduce costs and ensure that any costs arising are achievable for parents over time to minimise costs for disadvantaged pupils.

In terms of overcoming these perceived barriers, there were some commonalities to all schools, such as running the Award scheme in house with the staff overseeing it organising the expedition. Many schools will use an external provider to organise and deliver the expedition section of the Award scheme; this saves school staff needing to undertake various training, such as a lowland leader's qualification. However, outsourcing the delivery to an external provider does come at a cost. For example, a check of ten on the list of approved providers from the DofEs own website for the north of England shows that the prices come in at an average of £190 per pupil for the Bronze walking expedition. All schools in this research had managed to secure some funding from the Duke of Edinburgh's scheme to subsidise the registration fees (currently £28.00) for disadvantaged pupils, by half. Another commonality was that every school also subsidised the places for the disadvantaged pupils, although the amount was variable and the source of the funding also differed.

School A had a separate budget line for the DofE Award at £3000 a year. This was specifically ringfenced to pay for the license of being a DofE centre, disadvantaged pupils' registration fees and reducing expedition costs for disadvantaged pupils. This included paying for their coach fares to expedition. Any spare money was typically spent on replacing equipment for expedition, which would benefit all pupils. Staff spoken to also revealed that this budget was not enough to maintain this year on year, so they put in a charge to parents and carers to bolster the pot to ensure that other costs (such as paying staff to come on the weekend expedition) would be covered.

Andy*: So, the money that we have, it comes from the parents and the kids. Yeah. From the initial setup, the school paid the license fee. That's basically the budget gone.*

Fraser (1997) recognises that material injustices such as poverty, as well as class inequality perpetuate unequal access to opportunities;

> 'Maldistribution constitutes an impediment to parity of participation in social life, and this a form of social subordination and injustice'
>
> (Fraser, 2000, p116)

Asking parents to contribute will disproportionately affect pupils from lower income backgrounds in our schools as the economic maldistribution that already exists in our communities will cause an impediment to parity of participation. This lack of access could further entrench social disparities as families who have greater financial means can more easily participate in the Award, reinforcing existing cycles of privilege and disadvantage. There is also a need for schools to consider the wider implications of asking parents to pay for ECAs. The Child Poverty Action Group (2025) highlights that many parents experience feelings of guilt and pressure when they are unable to afford these costs, which can contribute to stress and a sense of exclusion for both parents and their children. Research has also indicated that financial stress experienced by parents is associated with problem behaviour in adolescents (Ponnett, 2014). Inclusive policies must therefore consider both emotional and social impacts.

School B, who partially fund the Award for pupils, had been able to take advantage of the Duke of Edinburgh's resilience fund to mitigate economic barriers. The resilience fund is set up to support marginalised people, which includes those in receipt of free school meals and/or eligible for pupil premium. The fund allows for up to £125 of support for each participant who meet these criteria, as well as up to £2000 for sectional equipment. The school had not applied for the funding in the last academic year, but fortunately the DofE had

allowed them to carry places that they had previously successfully applied for but not used, across to the next academic year to use for equipment.

Barbara: *So they have, like, this fund. Yeah. Is it called the resilience fund. There have been some places given out on that in previous years, and we're talking like 2 or 3 previous years. So that money, we could put into the fund, they put into the funds for the tents, sleeping bags, all of the mats. So that was really, really lucky to be honest. Because I think we got about 15 at £25 each, so we were talking a good couple of £100, and that set us up so that we could guarantee we could supply all the PP kids with a tent, a roll mat, a sleeping bag.*

However, we see here a tension between the limited resources and ambitious redistribution goals: the money does not always cover what is needed and leaders are reliant on the resilience fund. That schools will need to continue to navigate external funding to sustain accessibility is problematic for the future of the Award scheme. Instead, Fraser would argue we need to focus instead on transforming the structures that would alleviate these material disparities (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Arguably the PPG is an affirmative remedy for redistribution, but it does not come even close to the funding required to ensure economic parity.

Another method of saving on costs was to run what School B called a 'restricted' expedition. This involved using a private site where they had already been able to set up their camp before they went off on the walk. The school said that one of the most expensive costs for the pupils was the outlay for backpacks (the recommended backpacks as advertised in the Duke of Edinburgh's own kit list come in at around £100). By finding a site where the pupils could set up camp beforehand, the school negated the need for expensive backpacks.

Barbara: *It does kind of change the goal post a little bit in terms of what the students have to do. And it does kind of bump up the cost in terms of camping*

because the site charge £30 a head rather than a campsite that might have been £5 or £6 a head. Right. But that's still cheaper.

I: *But do they still stay over?*

Barbara: *Oh yeah. We camp on the grounds. They just set up and then we go for a walk, come back and do the cooking and everything they would have done if they had the backpack. It also helps with the staffing requirement because then we are camping in a really secure private place, and some staff are happy to come and watch the site but don't really want to do the walk. So, we don't need as many staff with like the camping qualifications and things.*

This is inventive, but offering 'restricted' expeditions to save on equipment costs does alter the program's original intent. Barbara, herself acknowledges; "*It does kind of change the goal post… but that's still cheaper*.". There did not appear to be any consideration of how pupils perceived these adjustments or the impact on the program's original educational intent, beside its economic benefit. This is problematic through Fraser's lens, as she argues that the distribution of material resources (in this case how the section of the expedition is framed) 'must be such as to ensure participants' independent and voice' (Fraser, 2001 p29). Fraser refers to this as the 'objective condition' of participatory parity. To meet this condition, forms and levels of material inequality and economic dependence should be precluded to achieve parity of participation. In this sense, social arrangements on the Award scheme are potentially denying some of the pupils the means and opportunities to interact with each other, in the same way as pupils from schools that do not need to run 'restricted' expeditions.

School C had been able to offset all of the costs for disadvantaged pupils through use of the pupil premium funding as well as the subsidies from the Award scheme.

Cem: *Yeah. We have paid for all camp fees and everything like that. There's no cost at all. We've been lucky as we got a whole lot of kit that the Duke of Ed paid for years ago and it's lasted a while, we've lent it out to other schools as*

well to help them reduce their costs, but some of the tents are a bit tired now. Going forward, it's gonna be like 10 pound per student. That's still really reasonable. It is reasonable when you think that you're getting use of all of the equipment, camp for a couple of nights, transport, gas, and everything for your stove. So, yeah. All those things do add up.

School D, which fully funded the Award, was similar to School B in that there was a specific school budget line for the DofE Award scheme which had decreased over the past few years from £8,000 to £5,000. Leaders explained this was due to tightening school budgets. However, staff explained that this still meant that almost the entire year group had been able to access the expedition. On top of the £5000 they also paid the highest additional responsibility allowance payment to staff for organising and running the scheme. School D explained that they used to also ask parents for a donation, but that they have not needed to do that for disadvantaged pupils for the last few years. They explained that the staff training was also funded as well as additional payments to staff who are needed to ensure safe ratios on expedition.

Staff explained that this was all quite deliberate in leaders' thinking about how to ensure that any economic barrier they could think of for disadvantaged children had been removed. One school had gone to great lengths to ensure some refugees were still able to participate, despite arriving mid-year. They explained how they had sourced all the items for them, including walking socks, and asked an interpreter to participate so the children were able to understand the offer. School D also explains,

Darnell: *The funding we get, it's been worked out on the number of PP kids in each Yr 9 group and it covers equipment so the kids don't have to go and buy boots, they don't have to buy a rucksack, sleeping bag. They don't have to do it. It's everything except for food because we find that they want to get their own food and get what the others are getting and think we'll get that wrong. Not sure how you can get noodles wrong but there you go. And even if it was like a particular child that wanted this, we would buy food.*

The school had recently undergone some staffing changes which meant there were fewer staff willing to go out on expedition and help organise, so the staff lead had started to look at external providers. However, the most local to them was £350 per pupil for the same experience for which they were charging £85. The school assumed that this would lead to greater drop out, so then started offering the expedition overtime payment to staff, as this was cheaper than outsourcing the expedition.

The earlier research highlights that financial barriers can prevent participation in ECAs (Fletcher, Nickerson, and Wright, 2003), and the DofE acknowledges this with the establishment of a resilience fund. However, the term ‘resilience fund’ itself is somewhat misleading, as it implies that the issue lies in pupils' lack of resilience, rather than addressing what is more likely to be the root cause—their inability to afford the Award. By framing the challenge as one of ‘resilience’, it suggests that these pupils simply need to develop greater personal fortitude. This framing aligns with Walker’s (2014) findings which highlight how poverty is frequently constructed as a personal failing rather than a structural issue. Walker’s research demonstrates that individuals experiencing poverty often internalise feelings of shame and inadequacy when support mechanisms reinforce notions of deficiency rather than structural disadvantage. The very language of a ‘resilience fund’ risks contributing to this stigma, shifting responsibility onto disadvantaged pupils rather than acknowledging and addressing the broader economic inequalities that limit their participation. There is a risk this framing from the DofE is oversimplifying the problem and shifting the focus away from the structural issue of financial inequality. However, through Fraser’s lens, this does at least recognise that just rectifying the financial barriers, through affirmative remedies, will not automatically lead to parity of participation and should not be looked at in isolation (Fraser, Bua and Vlahos, 2024).

5.2.2 Subtheme 1:2 Perceptions of financial barriers

With such a focus on trying to reduce costs for pupils to undertake the DofE, it was perhaps unsurprising that all but one of the participants did not then see

money as a barrier to participation; even for this individual pupil, the school had then found ways to mitigate the barrier. However, the pupil also recognised that this could be a barrier for others;

I: *Did you ever speak to any of the others about why they also dropped out?*

Dante: *Not really but it may be because they're not up to it or maybe because, I'm not trying to be disrespectful, but it's a financial situation at home or something.*

I: *That's not disrespectful, it could be a really valid reason, couldn't it?*

Dante: *Yeah. The school helped loads with me because (teacher), he helped me through it. He helped my mum pay it because my mom wasn't able to pay. My mum couldn't afford it all upfront, but they wanted me to do it because they could see me doing it well.*

I: *That's great.*

Dante: *Yeah, so they let my mom pay it like month, by month, week, by week, and then she paid it off and my mom was really thankful for letting them give her time because she was stressing.*

While some pupils, like Dante, recognised that financial constraints could impact others, none cited money as the primary reason they had dropped out of the award scheme after initially signing up. When asked directly whether he had to pay for anything, Oliver explained, "*No, they said they had all the stuff and we would just need trainers."* When questioned further about whether costs might have prevented him from signing up, he replied, "*No. I don't think so."* Similarly, three other pupils indicated that their parents had managed the financial aspects of the award, yet none of these pupils expressed concerns or discussions about the cost at home. Jack responded, "*Well, it didn't for me, but I don't know about my dad,"* and Charlie said, *"My dad said as long as I'm enjoying it, the money's fine."*

Even though all pupils were aware of the subsidies available and the financial support from the school, it appears the financial aspect was not a significant decisive factor in their decision to participate.

This is interesting because, as highlighted in the previous subtheme, school leaders are so preoccupied in mitigating economic barriers that they may not have fully considered the reality of the situation. This suggests a potential gap in communication and a misrecognition of the factors influencing their pupils' decisions to participate. Furthermore, the leaders may have oversimplified the group identity of their pupils who are eligible for PPG, which, as Fraser (2000) warns, 'denies the complexity of people's lives, the multiplicity of their identifications, and the cross-pulls of their various affiliations.' (p112).

5.2.3 Subtheme 1:3 Stigma and Misrecognition

School D was the only school where staff reported that the parents of disadvantaged pupils had raised concerns about the costs.

Darnell: *There are parents that have come to me and said, I can't afford to buy the equipment. And I go, you don't need to. Yeah. Can you provide your child with food? Yes. I can provide my child with food. Well, you're fine then.*

This practical solution does reflect recognition of financial struggles.

However, all schools said they offered instalment payment for parents for any sort of trip or expedition which was outlined in letters. Interestingly, three of the four schools explained that they did not outwardly state in the letters or in the assemblies that the places would be so heavily subsidised (or outright paid for), because they feared a backlash from other parents who may feel that this was unfair. Staff recognised that many of the parents whose children did not qualify for the pupil premium, were nonetheless very close to the threshold for qualification. When asked whether this could therefore be stopping some disadvantaged pupils from taking it up, as they were not aware of the full benefits they could receive, the answers were mixed.

I: *Have you ever got wind of anyone not doing it because of the money?*

Andy: *No. Because I'm quite I've got quite a good relationship with the year groups. More with the girls probably, I'll have to think about the boys. I do say at launch don't let money be a barrier you know, please come and talk to me. Tell moms and dads to email me.*

While Andy's intention here is well meaning, it could be problematic. Firstly, it exposes that the access to economic support could be dependent on the strength of relationship the pupil has with the member of staff. Given that Andy himself admits he has a better relationship with the girls than the boys, his assumption that all pupils would feel comfortable to 'come and talk' about their family's financial situation, could be seen as contradictory. Secondly, admitting to their teacher that money is a barrier requires a certain level of humility but also confidence, from children who are only fourteen. It also presumes the pupils know about their family's financial situation and evidence suggest this is rarely the case (Kim, LaTaillade and Kim, 2011).

Cem from School C recognised that removing all economic barriers may still not lead to all pupils taking up the award.

I: *Do you think if you told them from the outset it was going to be basically free, you'd get more disadvantaged pupils taking it up?*

Cem: *I don't think so. They might be embarrassed… they don't want to be seen to be a charity case. I think it would make it worse.*

It is unclear how much the concern around complaints from parents who do not qualify for financial assistance influences the views of leaders here. Reluctance to advertise subsidies, out of fear of backlash from other parents, raises questions about whether these measures are fully transparent or inclusive. This raises further questions about whether some pupils may have faced subtle forms of misrecognition, such as feeling excluded from the dominant culture of the program, which as we have seen has been historically white middle-class (TES, 2017, Douglas, 2009, Campbell et al, 2009) or perceiving it as an activity

better suited to peers with different social or cultural backgrounds. This is particularly important, as research has demonstrated the striking impact of institutional habitus on pupils' identities. Institutional habitus shapes not only pupils' academic experiences within educational settings but also their sense of belonging and recognition, reinforcing or challenging existing social hierarchies (Crozier, 2015).

School C staff also revealed that they had noticed that some pupils were reluctant to borrow used clothing and footwear, especially the boots. This had become more of a problem in the last few years, as the equipment had become older.

Cem: *They don't want them because obviously, the boots that we're buying are from Sports Direct, they're not great. They've been worn and caked in mud and things like that. It's a bit like PE kits, I guess. They just don't wanna wear the old PE kits… would rather get a detention. But they're fine using the tents and the roll mats and all those things.*

To try and stem the dropout rate of pupils who refused to borrow kit, the school had taken the measures of planning out the expedition route, so walking boots were not needed.

Cem: *So now, where we pick routes, you can do it in trainers really. It makes it accessible for students. And at bronze you don't want your parents going out and sort of shelling out loads of money on fancy kit that actually they might not use again because they don't like it or whatever. So, you try and make that first one just accessible so they can do it in trainers and things like that.*

The comments here expose the interplay between economic and cultural inequalities. They raise the same issues as we have seen earlier, around the reliance on leaders' affirmative actions, such as providing kit, as a means to address the inequalities. However, redistribution alone cannot dismantle deep-seated cultural barriers. While schools have attempted to accommodate financial constraints, there are signs of insufficient attention to how pupils perceive these efforts. Leaders are relying on their own 'feelings' as to how

subsidies would be received, rather than through consultation with pupils on how these subsidies are presented. This approach is problematic, as Tyler and Campbell (2024) highlight that the stigma associated with poverty, along with the loss of dignity, self-worth, and the pain of this shame, is one of the most detrimental and disabling impacts of living in poverty. Approaches to solving poverty may be acting in a way that reinforces stigma, perpetuating the divide between those in poverty and those working to end it (Watts and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008).

If we approach this issue utilising Fraser's status model (as described in Chapter 3), we need to look pragmatically at what these pupils need in order to participate as peers in the scheme. There is, as Fraser asserts 'no reason to assume that all of them need the same thing in every context' (2001, p31) and actually what they may need in this case is to be 'unburdened of excessive ascribed or constructed distinctiveness' (p31). In our case, this would involve leaders looking beyond the economic, and beyond their own perceptions that these pupils would be embarrassed by their financial situation. In doing so, they may recognise that pupils could become more involved in the framing of the Award and its sections from the outset. This could involve finding 'institutional remedies for institutionalised harms' and entrenching 'new value patterns that will promote parity of participation in social life' (2000, p116). A starting point for school leaders would be to first acknowledge that recognition deficits may have been overlooked by their focus on redistribution.

5.2.4 Subtheme 1:4 Insufficient Staffing

Throughout the interviews, despite talking at length about how they had managed to mitigate economic barriers, staff all spoke with a degree of frustration about not being able to go further with the award scheme, due to staffing constraints. This was seen as a key barrier to expanding the reach of the DofE Award. The lack of staff support, particularly in terms of time and commitment, can again be understood through Fraser's concept of redistribution. In the case of School B, for instance, the DofE Award flourished when a dedicated leader was in place. However, the departure of this leader

due to a promotion resulted in a collapse of the program, it had 'fizzled out' and with it, the enthusiasm from other staff to get involved. The leader explains,

Barbara: *The staff who all volunteered were close you know, I think they all started at the school around the same time together and probably as NQTS (newly qualified teachers). So, when the old lead left, they all just dropped out. I think it was social for them as well you know, the expeditions. So that's hard to build up again if you're new to the school.*

This reflects how the redistribution of roles and responsibilities can affect the sustainability of such initiatives. Research within the literature review also found that the quality of ECAs was significantly related to the characteristics of the staff (Ascota-Tello,1998) with well trained and qualified staff a characteristic of high participation rates (Scott-Little et al. 2002). When the staff members who were central to the scheme's success left, the Award lost its foundation. This reliance on a single leader and volunteer-driven support highlights an inequitable distribution of effort and resources, making the Award vulnerable when that support is removed.

School A shared similar concerns around getting staff on board;

Andy: *We didn't have, like, a history of DofE, we were a new start up. I think most of the staff probably knew what DofE was, but they'd not experienced it at the school, there was nothing to get really excited about. It was just another initiative in probably a year where there were loads, so it was hard to generate support from other staff, especially when you're basically asking them to do it for free.*

The lack of a history of DofE in the school was also problematic in School D's experience.

Darnell: *We were like a fresh new start up just without the new start-up funding and help. But we didn't have staff who'd really done it before. We didn't have staff who knew what it was about. We didn't really know what we needed from staff. That didn't help!...we knew we needed help when it came to the*

expedition weekend but we didn't have staff to like dish students out to. What would be ideal is if actually you had a team of eight or ten staff to start with and you split the students up into their expedition group straight away and that member staff who was gonna be their expedition leader became that. And like that person would log on every couple of weeks and check their EDofE but we don't have that. We just don't have it yet.

School C echoed the staffing concerns;

Cem: *It's tough. I think because so much time for teachers is directed and things like that now. And some staff they have the right intentions and that they're more than willing, but when it comes to the time, obviously your priorities are elsewhere.*

All leaders did not know how they were going to try and drum up more support from staff for delivery of the award.

Darnell: *In reality, I think it'd be a bit of a challenge to go consistently year after year.*

There is clearly an unequal distribution of time and effort required to run such programmes. Teachers, already stretched with their existing responsibilities, are asked to volunteer additional time to run an extracurricular programme without additional pay. This reliance on unpaid volunteerism speaks to a broader issue of resource inequity, as schools often expect staff to provide extra support without the necessary redistribution of institutional resource support systems. This exemplifies a maldistribution issue that is inherent in the English school system where systemic underfunding and inadequate resources in schools disproportionately burdens teachers (Sibieta, 2024), leading to teachers experiencing burnout and job dissatisfaction (Xie et al, 2022). While it is beyond the scope of this study, this did make me consider the extent of the operational disparities specifically in the DofEA between the case study schools and those that serve more affluent families. Shain's (2016) research pointed to the lengths middle and upper classes will go to maintain their advantage and it would be interesting to compare the resource allocation, particularly in terms of

volunteer support across schools in light of the research evidence in Chapter 3 that extra-curricular activity can connect young people with peer and adults from a range of backgrounds thus facilitating development of social capital (Chesters and Smith, 2015). Lack of access to a wide range of volunteers for expedition in our case study schools may be leading to a greater disparity between these schools and schools who serve predominately non-disadvantaged pupils.

In Fraser's theory of justice, individuals must be valued and recognised within their social context. Only through equal respect for all participants and equal opportunities to achieve social esteem, can what Fraser calls the 'intersubjective condition' of participatory parity be met (2001, p29). The staff's frustration with their inability to fully engage with the DofE programme highlights a potential failure in the recognition of their roles and contributions. For instance, Darnell describes how, at his school, there was no proper support structure to facilitate the DofEA effectively. The lack of a clearly defined and supported team for the expeditions meant that staff were not able to perform their roles effectively, leading to a sense of underappreciation and frustration.

Furthermore, these findings touch on the lack of recognition for the professional needs of teachers and their heavy workload. This results in a systemic devaluation of the importance of such extra-curricular initiatives (Donnelly et al, 2019), apart from in the independent school system where pupils are still much more likely to be able to continue to access ECAs (Robinson, 2024).

One solution could be to look at giving time to the DofEA within the school day, however as we have seen the research evidence suggests the positive outcomes of ECAs are linked to autonomous motivation (Yeo, Liem and Tan, 2022) so this may not lead to the intended benefits.

One of the issues with lack of staffing was the ability to undertake comprehensive pupil voice to find out why pupils were dropping out or not taking up the Award. Staff said that this was anecdotal, on corridors generally asking 'how it is going?' or after the expedition they asked whether they

enjoyed it, but there was no systematic gathering of pupil voice from any of the schools. This was verified by the pupils, who could not remember anyone seeking their views about why they did not take up the Award or dropped out of it. The lack of systematic engagement with wider pupils' voices in understanding why they drop out or do not take up the Award raises further concerns about the recognition of pupils as active participants in the decision-making process. The absence of a structured approach to gathering pupil feedback about their experiences with the DofEA, as described by both staff and pupils, reflects a failure to ensure young people's perspectives are recognised and represented in their own educational experience. These young people are not being given a platform to voice their opinions and concerns. This lack of representation may contribute to feelings of exclusion (Connor, Posner, Nsowaa, 2022; Charteris and Smardon, 2018), as pupils may feel that their experiences and perspectives are not valued or considered in the development of the program. To counter this, through Fraser's lens, we would need to transform the school systems in regard to the decision-making around the implementation of the Award scheme, ensuring that its participants, and potential participants, had true representation. However, truly transformative measures would need to involve tackling the underlying issues around school funding, which would give more resources to school leaders. This would be a necessity if we were to insist that they undertake this important work (Flutter, 2007; Cheminais, 2015).

5.3 Theme 2: The Contested Value of the Award. *"It looks good on your CV. That's what I got told. I don't know what a CV is."*

All staff involved in the delivery of the DofEA thought very highly of the Award and were able to talk at length about its value. This included the personal growth of both themselves as leaders and the perceived personal growth of participants, particular in relation to social and recreational enjoyment as well as confidence building. However, a notable disconnect emerged between the staff's perception of the Award's benefits and the experiences of the pupils. The latter group appeared less certain about the value of the program. This disparity is further examined through the subthemes outlined below.

5.3.1 Subtheme 2:1: Personal Growth and Lifetime memories

The reasons why staff undertook to lead of the Award were similar. All but one had undertaken the Award scheme when they were in school and had both enjoyed the experience and felt that it had helped develop them personally.

Andy: *I think I just value all the different things that it brings into one person and how it shapes you. It shapes your future hugely. Not just undertaking it but delivering it. It's a whole new skill set.*

Where leaders have felt that it has developed them personally and perhaps even helped advance their own career, it was inevitable that there was already an ingrained respect for what the Award may be able to do for the pupils they served (Ashworth & Mael, 1989; Jost, Banaji & Nosek, 2004). Leaders spoke fondly about teachers who had volunteered for them, so there was a real sense of wanting to 'give back' and become the role models that had once inspired them to both undertake and complete the Award. 'Lifetime memories' was cited by three staff.

Cem*: I see kids now who are, I say kids who are like 20, 21, 22, out and about and they've done their thing and they still talk about it. So, it's lifetime memories.*

This perspective aligns with the broader educational emphasis on developing the 'future self', a concept integral to previous government initiatives on character education and Ofsted's inspection framework on personal development. While Ofsted (2024) is explicit in stating that inspectors 'will not attempt to measure the impact of the school's work on the lives of individual pupils' (para 337), they want schools to play a crucial role in preparing students for adult life and fostering societal engagement. However, Cem's reflections highlight a temporal disconnect; his former pupils discuss their experiences retrospectively, and such reflections may not resonate with younger pupils, particularly those around fourteen years old, who are less likely to appreciate the long-term benefits at the time of participation. Stevenson and Clegg (2011) contend that a student's ability to perceive their current ECAs as contributing to

future employability is important. In their discussion of ‘possible selves’, representations of the self in the future, they assert that the more fully developed these future selves are, the greater their motivational impact. However, they also recognise that factors such as socio-economic status can shape an individual's perceptions of what is achievable (Leondari, 2007).

The pupils interviewed were unable to discuss personal growth benefits in any depth, suggesting a disconnect between the leaders' assumptions about the Award's impact and how these benefits are perceived and experienced by the pupils. For example, the school leaders were keen to express how the Award scheme was able to help pupils in learning how to balance their school and social lives.

Darnell: *That opportunity of being able to manage and balance everything all at once with your school, your social life with this award…it’s helpful.*

However, despite these perceptions, none of the pupils were able to express the same viewpoint.

The difficulty pupils in this study had in articulating the value of the Award scheme is perhaps unsurprising, given that many of these pupils either initially opted not to participate or subsequently dropped out. The one exception was benefits to their mental health, which was cited by more than one pupil.

Charlotte: *It was presented to me as, like, an opportunity to have, like, knowledge of what it's like outside of the school premises and… it's kind of, a sort of like a trip. But it would also help you, like, impact your mental health and well-being outside of school as well.*

This is also not surprising, considering the increasing concerns regarding mental health among students in recent years (NHS England, 2023; UK Parliament, 2023). Even before the onset of the pandemic, the Department for Education (Department of Education, 2018) recognised the growing importance of supporting mental health in schools, issuing guidance in 2018 to address this issue. Subsequently, this emphasis on mental well-being has been integrated

into the Ofsted framework, where achieving a 'Good' rating now requires schools to demonstrate that they have equipped students with the knowledge and skills to maintain their mental health. Through Fraser's lens, we could argue that this focus on mental well-being is a way to alleviate the pressures caused by the economic, cultural and social inequalities in the first place. The very nature of needing to give mental health much greater emphasis could be a product of us focusing on affirmative remedies instead of the transformative remedies that would be required to rectify social injustice. As such, it is arguably a superficial solution that fails to challenge the underlying systems of injustice.

Charlotte also alludes in the quote above to the value leaders place on exposing pupils to opportunities that they that may not otherwise have experienced, believing that this led to a personal growth in the pupils. This was also reflected in Andy's comment.

Andy: *Personally, I'm not that fussed if they actually get the DofE award. Yeah. I want them to just try and do something different. About the experience….some of them, they've never been camping. Yeah. So, I think for me, it's those ones that have never done it, actually going and doing something that the families haven't been able to provide for them already and getting that experience.*

There was a sense from this response that the value of the experience that the Award scheme provides, was in some way superior to what the pupils' families had provided. This attitude was echoed from a leader at School D who said,

Darnell: *So it's something that, like, their parents, whatever situation that they are in, wouldn't be able to offer.*

While the literature did find that parents with adequate financial resources are more likely to have children attending ECAs (Fletcher, Nickerson and Wright, 2003; Robinson, 2024), the perspective of some leaders' framing of the Award's value as compensating for, or surpassing the limitations of pupils' home environments, risks perpetuating a deficit view of disadvantaged families. The

values and experiences that schools prioritise are inherently subjective, shaped by a variety of factors including institutional goals and leadership perspectives (Higman and Djohari, 2018). Of concern, is that if leaders of the Award scheme across schools all share a similar set of views, this could, as Fraser (2001) warns ‘systematically depreciate some categories of people and the qualities associated with them’ (p29). In our case this is the ‘underacknowledged distinctiveness’ (2000, p115) of pupils’ existing backgrounds and experiences. If leaders fail to do this, we could inadvertently reinforce cultural hierarchies.

Behavioural and social competence was evidenced in the literature review as a key benefit of ECAS (Eccles, 2003; Simpkins, Fredericks and Eccles, 2005) and social competence was an aspect of personal growth that leaders observed in pupil behaviour. For instance, Darnell commented on the transformation of some of his pupils, stating,

Darnell: *Some of my girls became very much more outgoing. So, there were quite a few shy girls that I'd been a personal tutor for in year 9 and for that year group all the way through. And there was kind of that little lost looking girl that you'd see in the corridor with her head down, kinda shuffling along. I don't know if it was through DofE or just through growing up, but she transformed.*

Similarly, Barbara observed that some quiet students, previously disengaged, took on significant leadership roles.

Barbara: *There were some of the quiet girls who hadn't really ever raised their heads or done anything. And all of a sudden, they're, you know, launching a food bank project and they're going round collecting thousands of items of food and delivering it to the food bank.*

While such observations suggest a positive impact on pupils' confidence, it is important to consider that these changes might not necessarily be attributed solely to participation in the DofEA. It is well-documented in the literature that adolescence is a period of significant personal development. For example, Choudhury, Blakemore and Charman (2006) discuss how adolescence is marked by heightened sensitivity to social feedback, which contributes to

changes in self-image and behaviour. They argue that increased social interaction through social settings such as school, can result in notable shifts in self-confidence, often independent of specific interventions. Therefore, while the DofEA may have provided a platform for these transformations, it is crucial to recognise that these developmental changes observed in participants could also be, as Darnell considers, a part of the natural process of growing up.

In terms of perceived value of the Award on prospects, only three of the pupils cited that they thought it would help them with later life, in terms of either job or university applications. Even then, pupils were very hazy about what staff had told them about the potential benefits.

Emily: *It looks good on your CV. That's what I got told. I don't know what CV is. I think it's something to do with your job.*

I: *And did they tell you about any of the benefits of getting that award?*

Fatima: *I feel like they did, but I just can't remember.*

The case study school where the uptake was the poorest was also the school where none of the pupils were able to talk about benefits and could recall nothing about what staff had told them.

Although all schools have some form of launch of the Award scheme, the school with the highest uptake did appear to have a more comprehensive programme of taster sessions. Where the introduction was through a one-off assembly or tutor time, pupils were unable to recall any of the value that the staff perceived to be attached to completion of the award. Given that the research evidence showed the DofEA has been endorsed by employers (The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 2019b), and may enhance students' CVs or UCAS personal statements, it was concerning that only a few pupils recognised that the Award may help bolster future employment opportunities. This may be systemic to the schools in the case study, given their high levels of disadvantage. It may also be that leaders consider just getting pupils on the

DofEA to be an achievement within itself. This again risks perpetuating a deficit view of these pupils and their families.

Pupils' limited ability to articulate the Award's benefits or recall meaningful promotion of its value suggests a gap in representation. Fraser makes a distinction between ordinary-political misrepresentation, which occurs where decisions wrongly deny some of the included the chance to participate fully as peers and a less obvious form of misrepresentation which she calls the 'boundary setting aspect' of the political. Fraser (2008a, p41) explains,

> 'This injustice arises when the community's boundaries are drawn in such a way as to wrongly exclude some people from the chance to participate at all.'

While my findings do not evidence that leaders are excluding any pupils from the chance to participate at all, there is evidence of ordinary misrepresentation where they are not fully informing pupils of the potential future gains of the Award scheme. Without meaningful representation, pupils may struggle to see the relevance of such initiatives to their lives, undermining long-term engagement, but also diminishing the justice potential of the scheme. More thorough representation of the programme, highlighting the benefits of each section while encouraging pupils to engage more deeply with the concept of their future selves, could help drive greater participation.

5.3.2 Subtheme 2:2: Resilience and Perseverance

Leaders emphasised the value of the DofEA in promoting resilience and confidence, particularly through experiences that push students outside of their comfort zones. For many pupils, this would be their first time undertaking an overnight stay away from home, which from their perspective provided a valuable opportunity for personal growth. The concept of the 'comfort zone' was frequently discussed, with leaders highlighting the importance of allowing pupils to step beyond it, within a relatively safe environment.

Darnell noted: *When they are pushed out of their comfort zone. Well, you're forced to be resilient, reliant upon yourself, resourceful, you've got to make decisions because staff aren't with you even though they're watching you from afar.*

Similarly, Andy pointed out that overcoming challenges, such as untangling knots in difficult weather conditions while carrying heavy backpacks, fosters achievement and supports resilience, stating,

"Achievement, knowing that you can do something that's been really hard. You're trying to untie a knot and it's just lashing down and you've been carrying a heavy bag for hours. All those things really support students, developing them, and I think they come away with the real buzz of it and carry on talking about it."

These experiences align with existing research, which suggests that extracurricular activities like the DofEA help build resilience in adolescents. Eccles et al. (2003) argue that repeated challenges develop perseverance and adaptive coping. Similarly, Fletcher, Nickerson, and Wright (2003) highlight how structured activities foster resilience by helping students manage setbacks in a supportive environment.

A further perceived benefit of the Award was its capacity to build personal resilience not only through the expedition and volunteering components but also by requiring pupils to commit to a consistent effort over time. This perseverance was particularly evident in the weekly sessions that students had to attend, which some initially found difficult. Barbara explained,

"*For some there is this sense that it's just about a camping trip and then they realise they've got to do an hour a week, and spend you know at least thirteen weeks at it. Potentially twenty-six, twenty-seven if you do it for six months. And then they think, this is too much for me."*

At this school, when pupils realised the commitment required, leaders placed particular value on the expedition component as a means of promoting personal

growth, even if pupils did not complete the entire Award. Barbara further explained,

"We do have some who come on the expedition weekend that hadn't done anything else. Yeah. And I just kept reminding them, you'll only get your expedition certificate. You won't get your DofE certificate…If they do all the other sections and they get the certificate, that's great. It looks good for them, doesn't it, in the future. But I think for us as a school, success is getting them to just step out and try something. Even if it's any one of the sections, even if they just go and volunteer somewhere, it's something that they wouldn't have done or experienced, isn't it, beforehand."

Barbara's approach, as articulated in this example, reflects a thoughtful and socially just perspective on educational participation which aligns to Fraser's principles of recognition. From a social justice perspective, Barbara's recognition of pupils' agency and the adaptation of the program to fit individual needs helps address potential inequalities in participation. Instead of insisting on equal participation, where every pupil must meet the same standards, she prioritises providing opportunities for personal growth while respecting their individual circumstances. By allowing pupils to participate in the expedition component, leaders are still acknowledging them as a 'full member of society' (Fraser, 2000, p113) even if they have not completed other sections, Barbara provides an equitable alternative that ensures all pupils have the chance to experience something new and meaningful, regardless of their ability or desire to fulfil the full requirements of the Award.

However, for some pupils, despite adjustments, the Award's demands were seen as too overwhelming, leading to disengagement. Staff noted that resilience, particularly the 'stickability' to follow through on tasks, was a key factor in whether pupils completed the program. As Barbara explained,

"I do think it's resilience though. So even if you get them to sign up, what they are lacking is that stickability. And you see that in their attitude towards equipment, like, trying to get it back in can be hard and often it's still dirty, it's

still wet, or it's missing. They shrug it off like it doesn't matter. And then sometimes we see that attitude transfers into the Award itself, in that a lot of them will do the expedition, but won't do anything else and don't finish it, and when you challenge them, they just shrug it off. It really doesn't seem to matter."

This aligns with research by Fredricks and Eccles (2002), which indicates that the level of resilience required to persevere in challenging activities can be influenced by an individual's prior experiences and their ability to cope with setbacks. However, the comment also highlights an issue with the way the Award is presented; if the expedition is framed as the primary attraction, serving as the main incentive for pupils to join, then once it is completed, pupils may fail to recognise the value of the remaining sections. Unless leaders have emphasised the broader benefits of these other components, pupils may struggle to see their relevance, which could contribute to higher dropout rates.

The experiences of pupils who did drop out of the Award also highlight challenges to resilience. Charlie, for example, had a prior negative experience with camping, which led him to drop out of the program. He explained, "*I was going to do it and I had signed up right, then I went camping with my cousin and after that…no."* When asked about his reasons, Charlie stated, "*It rained."* Similarly, Elijah expressed disappointment that the reality of the Award did not meet his expectations, saying, *"I just didn't enjoy it. Well, there's a lot of meetings for it, which I thought they would be a bit better. And the expedition would probably be fun, but then it's a lot of meetings to get to that point."* Fatima, too, expressed uncertainty about the program, reflecting a lack of commitment, saying, *"I was a bit unsure but then I thought, well, I can drop off at any time if I don't want to do it*." These responses do suggest a lack of resilience or perseverance. The extent to which the DofEA can foster resilience through exposure to new experiences and challenges, does depend on the individual pupil's level of commitment and perseverance (Eccles et al., 2003; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). Adaptation of the program to align with pupils' current levels of resilience, and a more explicit articulation of the value of all

sections, could play a crucial role in fostering long-term personal growth and better support sustained engagement in the scheme.

5.3.3 Subtheme 2:3: Alleviating Boredom

When exploring the reasons behind pupils' initial participation in the Award scheme, half the pupils cited boredom as a major reason for undertaking the Award. As Oliver stated, "*To be honest, I was just a bit bored*," and Lucy echoed this sentiment, saying, "*I wasn't really doing much, so I decided, you know, I'll do something, stop me being bored*." Chenille also noted that the Award provided "*something to look forward to*" in her schedule, helping to alleviate her sense of boredom.

The connection between boredom and engagement in structured programs like the Award can be understood in light of broader socio-economic trends which point again to underlying maldistribution. Cuts to public funding, particularly in areas such as youth services, libraries, and community-based clubs, limit opportunities for young people to engage in extracurricular activities (Sutton Trust, 2024b, Ames 2024, UK Youth, 2024) As a result, many adolescents have fewer avenues for social and recreational engagement, which can contribute to feelings of boredom and disengagement. Anderson (2021) describes boredom as 'a felt consequence of austerity in places where youth services have contracted' (p198). Programmes like the DofEA therefore fill a gap by providing an organised, structured activity, offering a potential outlet for pupils seeking to avoid the monotony of unsupervised time.

However, while the Award may have served to alleviate boredom at the outset, pupils reported that it did not consistently meet their expectations, particularly outside the context of the expedition. Despite the initial excitement and potential for engagement, many pupils expressed dissatisfaction with the regular sessions.

This disconnect highlights the importance of ensuring that schemes are designed to align with pupils' interests and needs, particularly given the limited availability of alternative opportunities. However, simply tailoring these schemes

may not be sufficient to address deeper issues. Anderson (2021) contends that boredom in contemporary youth is a symptom of the 'neoliberal counterrevolution' and the rise of right-wing populism, both of which are associated with the societal promise of constant intensity. This 'promise of intensity' suggests that life should always feel eventful. I concur with this argument, especially in relation to the experiences of adolescents growing up in a media-saturated environment, where our young people are accustomed to the rapid consumption of content, often in the form of 30-second videos, creating a heightened expectation of constant novelty and excitement. In this context, it becomes increasingly difficult to engage pupils in sustained activities that do not conform to the fast-paced, instant gratification culture they are immersed in (Wong et al. 2020). This phenomenon closely aligns with Hahn's Declines of Modern Youth (Van Oord, 2010) which led to the inception of the DofEA, outlined in Chapter 1:1. For example, the decline of fitness is evident as passive screen consumption replaces physical activity. The decline of initiative and enterprise could be said to mirror the reluctance to engage in sustained efforts when immediate rewards are not apparent. In this way, Hahn's concerns remain strikingly relevant and present significant challenge for school leaders who aim to cultivate long-term engagement in the DofEA.

5.3.4 Subtheme 2:4: Sense of belonging

The value of friendship and peer relationships emerged as a critical factor influencing pupils' decisions to engage in and persist with the DofEA. All staff interviewed recognised the importance of these social connections. Further to this, the social value of the program was not limited to peer-to-peer interactions, but also extended to the relationship between pupils and staff. As Barbara noted,

"They think they'll just lend a helping hand and then they come and see these kids in a different light, and they go, wow. They're so different. I think it builds like that family ethos and that's good for the whole school."

Cem also observed that some pupils, who were previously reserved began engaging more openly with staff. He stated,

“There was definitely a few that kinda came out of their shells a bit. And even if they were still kinda shy and quiet around the academy, they'd come bouncing into the room to tell you what they've done at the weekend, which was really nice.”

He went on to say,

“I feel like they were able to connect with members of staff that they otherwise wouldn't have had anything to talk about or any reason to chat with. Which is nice, isn't it? “

This shift from anonymity to active participation highlights the vital role that social experiences within ECAs play in fostering trust and rapport between pupils and staff (Brown and Evans, 2002). These experiences often provide a welcome contrast to the fast-paced structure of the school day and offer valuable opportunities for personal bonding and mutual understanding (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005). This was demonstrated in a few positive experiences recalled by some participants. For example, Grace reflected on a memorable moment during a practice session,

Grace: *We did this practice once on the field and we played hide and seek in it, like, when it was getting dark, and then we had a big game of football with everyone there. Just everyone coming together. Yeah. So, I think that's a moment I’ll cherish for all the time.*

This suggests that while the overall impact of the scheme might not have been fully realised by all pupils, certain social and enjoyable moments still contributed to their overall experience.

However, the strong influence of friendships also became apparent when considering why some pupils chose not to continue with the Award. Of the sixteen pupils interviewed, twelve had undertaken the Award scheme and

dropped out. Of these twelve, ten told me that one of the factors which determined why they dropped out was because their friends had also dropped out. From the pupils' perspective, the influence of friendship and belonging was stronger than I had anticipated, despite the literature review identifying that the desire to form friendships and then spend more time with peers and friends was significant in terms of motivation to participate in ECAs (Bartko and Eccles, 2003; Donnelly et al 2019).

For Harry, and many of the others, maintaining a sense of belonging with friends was more important than continuing the Award independently.

Harry: *Me and my friends were all going to do it together right. And then a lot of them stopped and then I thought I'd stop as well.*

I: *Did many of your friends take it up?*

Fatima: *Yeah. A lot of them. We said it was gonna be a laugh really. A good laugh.*

I: *So, are you friends still doing the Award?*

Fatima: *No. We all dropped it.*

I: *All at the same time?*

Fatima: *Pretty much.*

Lucy: *I realised my mates weren't doing it. So, I dropped out.*

The absence of familiar social support made the volunteering section less appealing for Oliver, reinforcing the notion that belonging is intricately linked to persistence in group-based activities.

Oliver: *I liked that I could do all the clubs with mates, we'd get the same clubs. So, we went to the same club all the time. But then you had to do the volunteering, and I wasn't with my mates for that.*

For Chenille, concern about being alone due to her friend's illness demonstrates the anxiety that can arise when that social support is threatened.

Chenille: *My friend was sick, so that really made me think, oh God. I'm gonna be alone with people I don't really speak to.*

Social anxiety and the absence of familiar peer support can significantly impact pupils' willingness to participate and their overall experience. For some pupils', especially those who may already feel marginalised, the prospect of navigating unfamiliar social dynamics appears to be acting as a deterrent to engaging in the DofEA. This challenge is particularly acute for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, who, according to Ostrove and Long (2007), may feel less connected to their school community and more dependent on peer groups for validation and belonging. The findings also aligned closely with the broader theories of belonging which suggest adolescents are particularly motivated by the need to belong to peer groups, with social activities offering a sense of identity and acceptance (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). For example, the work of Mahar, Cobigo, and Stuart (2013) highlighted the individual nature of belonging, emphasising feelings of value, respect, and fit, all of which are influenced by relationships with referent groups. However, the sense of belonging gained from being in a socially recognised group (Eime et al, 2013) may be compromised by the structure of the Award scheme itself. The division of activities into different sections, such as skill development, volunteering, and expedition groups, can limit opportunities for pupils to engage in these experiences together. This fragmentation makes it difficult to foster strong friendships and a deeper sense of belonging, as pupils may not share these key moments with their peers.

Again, this comes back to Fraser's notion of justice through recognition, that we need to emphasise the importance of creating environments where the pupils

social and emotional needs are acknowledged and addressed. I feel it would be unfair to suggest that the case study schools were not doing this. It was evident that all leaders recognised the significance of this issue, and, like the pupils, identified friendships as the primary factor contributing to student dropouts. Andy commented about the importance of finding a central figure, a "*kid that everyone's gonna follow*" because '*if that person does it, they won't drop out*". Cem also reflected on the importance of groupings,

"If they are in a close friendship group, as long as they all stay in, none of them will drop out. But you have to be careful about how you group them on expedition, because if they're not together, that's when the problems start".

This dynamic can work both ways. On one hand, tightly knit friendship groups can create a sense of security and motivation, as long as all members remain engaged. However, if a pupil is not part of such a group, the perceived exclusivity may deter them from joining the Award in the first place. On the other hand, if a pupil does join but is not included in these close-knit groups, they may feel isolated and are more likely to drop out due to the social exclusion. Cem's reflection highlights the delicate balance required in ensuring that the social dynamics within the program are inclusive and supportive for all participants. All the leaders shared their experiences of pupil dropouts that occurred when they had not successfully managed this aspect.

Andy: *As soon as one sort of dropped out, it was kinda like, oh, that second one goes and the third one goes.*

Barbara: *There was a group that did it last year, and half of them dropped out and then the others followed.*

Darnell: *In one of the groups last year there were two sets of friends within the same group on expedition. They weren't friends. There was two separate friendship groups right? But we thought it would be fine. I said look, you've got to walk as a four, but you can walk ahead and behind each other. You just gotta navigate, get yourselves there. When you're at the campsite, you're in two*

separate tents. They dropped out. When I tried to unpick it, they didn't even dislike each other.

While these friendships provide an initial motivation to engage, there was a real sense of frustration from leaders at how these dynamics could overshadow intrinsic motivations for participation. They felt that undertaking the Award independent of their existing social circles would help pupils build their resilience and independence, however, to convince pupils to do this was 'extremely hard'. Staff stated they did not feel they had the time or sometimes the energy to engineer groupings that Cem describes above. They did not feel they had the resourcing to spend time targeting the pupils they felt would most benefit from taking up the Award nor instil the confidence in an individual child to try it on their own without their friends.

As Darnell highlighted,

"And I was desperate for her (child) to do it. So, I kept having to put my energy into that kid saying "you can do this". And then on expedition she said my friends haven't come and I was like you don't need them here, you can do this yourself. And her face when she did it was absolutely amazing. I was like, x, you've done this, you've done that, you've absolutely smashed it."

However, Darnell said this was the exception and that most pupils struggled to engage without the support of their friends. Darnell's experience highlights the challenge of fostering individual resilience and independence. However, the importance of empowering pupils to pursue goals beyond social conformity needs careful thought in terms of how to position that with pupils in a way that does not seek to undermine their existing social circles. This, Fraser would warn us, could encourage displacement and reification (2000, p120). Thought also needs to be given to introducing pupils to the benefits of forming additional connections while avoiding being patronising.

Darnell also implied that the Award scheme may facilitate stronger relationships between the staff members and pupils, in this case with pupils wanting to go and help staff with one of the sections of the scheme.

Darnell*: They want to go and help the staff for their volunteering. Their skills, they want to go and do textiles. They want to go to music club. We can see that influx in the enrichment.*

There is also an inference that taking part in the Award scheme leads to a positive engagement in a wider range of extra-curricular activities. This could be seen as a positive outcome of the DofEA, since the literature did evidence that young people who took part in a wider range of ECAs experienced greater gains across a range of outcomes, including academic and social (Guilmette et al. 2019). However, these activities were not formally tracked, which could limit a full understanding of the broader impact of the DofEA. While there is no obvious bias presented in Darnell's comment, earlier research did find that that participation in ECAS can lead to teachers having a more positive evaluation of a pupil within a classroom setting (Fletcher, Nickerson and Wright's (2003). In pursuit of inclusivity, leaders will need to be aware that bias may exist, especially where pupils are actively volunteering to 'help' staff members. While this may further promote a sense of belonging, this could also reinforce a system where those already accessing certain activities are then further advantaged, whilst those who do not take up the Award may be overlooked or undervalued.

5.4 Theme 3: Managing cultural expectations - *"They haven't even heard of it unless they have watched the Inbetweeners"*

Interviews with staff revealed that all staff involved with the delivery had thought not only about how to mitigate economic barriers which may lead to non-participation, but they had also given thought to mitigating what they saw as cultural barriers. As revealed by Andy's comment below, staff recognised lack of familial involvement at home and at school. Andy was from school A where over half the pupils were eligible for the Pupil Premium Grant.

Andy: *It's not a school where it's been in the history of the school. Some schools they've had all the brothers, all the sisters, cousins, friends that have*

done it, but it's not here. They haven't even heard of it unless they have watched the Inbetweeners.

This was perceived to make uptake in the Award more difficult, due to some practical barriers but also a heightened sense of anxiety around undertaking the Award. These are explored as subthemes.

5.4.1 Subtheme 3:1 Lack of familial involvement

Out of the sixteen pupils interviewed, four said they currently did other extra-curricular activity either inside or outside of school. A further four told me they had taken part in clubs when they were lower down the school in Year 7 and 8. Half the pupils had not taken part in any ECAs during their time at secondary. Of these eight, two were able to recall doing an ECA at primary school (football and netball).

Out of the sixteen pupils' interviews, fourteen had not experienced camping.

The limited engagement with ECAS for this group of young people adds weight to the prior research, that earlier experience of ECAs (especially for disadvantaged children) is more likely to encourage future uptake (Glynne-Percy, 2019).

When asked whether any family members had undertaken the Award scheme, one pupil said their uncle may have done it. Another pupil said their older brother had undertaken the award but was unable to recall whether they had completed it. When asked whether they knew if their parents had heard of the Award before, there was only one who was clear that their parents did know what the Award was. The rest could not say or said that their parents did not know what it was until they received the letter from school. Staff in all schools told me that, while they had not undertaken a formal survey, they understood that the vast majority of pupils within the schools did not have a sibling or parent who had already undertaken the award.

When I asked leaders specifically whether they felt there was any cultural barriers which, despite their best efforts, still stopped children in their community undertaking the award, or dropping out of the award, the responses demonstrated that leaders had considered familiarity with the scheme.

Andy: *I know some of them think, it's not for me. It's what other people do. And however hard you try and explain that's not true, they don't buy it.*

Barbara: *We have the same trouble around convincing pupils that University is an option for them. But then, if your parents haven't been, and your siblings haven't been but you're a tight close family, then you can see why they think that can't you? And our families are quite tight you know. Close I mean.*

This lack of prior involvement they felt led to some misconceptions about the Award scheme, that the perception seemed to be it was 'all about the camping'.

Darnell: *There is a stigma, I suppose, in the school that it's absolutely brutal. It's hard work. We get sunburned. We get blisters. We have to carry heavy bags for twelve hours a day. Someone collapses. There are all these horror stories!*

Another issue some staff found with the lack of familiarity with the scheme, was that some parents became very dependent on the school to help pupils through some of the aspects of the Award, especially making sure they kept up with the E-DofE which is the online portal where pupils are supposed to record their progress.

Andy: *There was a massive drop off for them last year. And it was because they were not keeping up with E-DofE. It has to become a habit. And sometimes the parents will go 'what are you going to do to help my child do it?' But the parents forget how independent it is. And I think that's what's impacting.*

This frustration from the staff view is rooted in the fact that many parents, due to their lack of prior exposure to the Award, do not possess the necessary knowledge or habits to guide their children (Von Otter, 2013). In Andy's example this means the inability to guide their child to log into and keep up to

date with the portal which tracks progress towards competition of sections. However, from this perspective, it seems reasonable for parents to rely on the 'experts', the school staff, to provide this support. In such cases, the most practical way for parents to assist their children might involve applying pressure on the school to ensure adequate guidance, as this could be viewed as the most effective way to secure the necessary resources and expertise for their child's success.

Lack of family exposure does however mean that the significance of the Award as a career enhancer for example, maybe lost on these pupils. In such cases, the Award risks being seen as something irrelevant or unattainable, a form of misrecognition of the Award scheme itself, which could then lead to lower participation and engagement. The lack of parental engagement or familial history with the Award further highlights how dominant cultural narratives about success and participation can alienate pupils who draw on alternative forms of cultural capital, such as resilience or communal support (Morris, 2015). This could, as per Bourdieu's (1986) theory, be inadvertently reproducing class hierarchies. We could also be marginalising the lived realities of our young people and their families who do not engage with the Award by failing to recognise and value the cultural capital present within their communities (Yossi, 2016).

This also made me reflect on the earlier research of Chanfreau et al (2016), which suggested that ECAs need to be held in the reassuring location of school with familiar staff to have the most positive effect on socially disadvantaged pupils. The role of the school may need to compensate for lack of prior knowledge at home, to give a further sense of security from the school environment. This takes us back to the theory around the sense of belonging, that requires a 'groundedness' (Mahar, Cobigo and Stuart, 2013) which does not come from the family home in relation to this Award. According to this theory and in relation to this theme, school leaders would need to create a referent group for pupils to anchor feelings of fitting in. If leader fail to do this *before* the scheme is launched, then it is less likely that pupils are going to participate. What is frustrating in this context is that the literature highlights

ECAs as being capable of fostering that sense of belonging (Eime et al, 2013), especially in the types of opportunity the award scheme provides, such as volunteering (Linver, Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2009), but there needs to be a sense of belonging in the first place to encourage participation. Intervention would be required to get them to the point of initiating the Award scheme, or ECAs in earlier years, to help encourage participation.

It was however clear from the findings that leaders *had* given some real consideration to pre-exposing pupils to similar activities that they would undertake on the expedition, so as not to overwhelm the pupils when it came to the real thing.

Barbara*: So we get sort of practicing putting tents up for example, in the school field. And we go out on certain bits of the walk so they get used to it and there is a familiarity.*

Darnell*: We practice bits beforehand, so they know they can do it, like reading an OS map. We do some orienteering around the academy. They find that fun as it's a new skill but in a familiar environment.*

One school attempted to undertake a camp out with Yr8 to introduce them to what they would experience on the expedition. However, this was cancelled due to poor weather and not reinstated.

School C had tied the expedition to some team building activities which were run on the camping site. They explained that they did this to make the expedition feel less daunting as a large proportion of the children had been on a residential with primary school, where they did team building activities.

These initiatives are commendable and supported by research as the types of activity which would be beneficial in enhancing participation (Eccles, Lord and Roeser, 2003). However, they were all implemented at the stage where pupils had already signed up for the Award and would be better placed in the period prior to opting to register.

I was also interested to explore the reality of parental influence on whether pupils undertook the award or not. Most pupils' parents did not have knowledge of the Award scheme, and the vast majority of pupils could not recall what their parents' attitude toward the Award was. There was only one pupil who could clearly recall their parent being slightly negative about it.

Dante*: My mom actually said it would have been a bit boring for me.*

However, when the pupil said he was like to give it a go, this was not met with any resistance.

Dante*: She didn't mind. She said it was my choice. It's up to you, that's fine.*

While my earlier research evidence found that income had a greater impact on individual variables on the probability of participation in ECAs (Aumetre and Poulin, 2015), there was little evidence in my findings to suggest that parental influence was having a negative impact on take up or retention of the Award.

This contrasted with the view of the leaders in schools, who felt that parents' attitudes where more influential in their children's decision making. In School D, which was the school with the least PP pupils, the leaders talked about some of the families having been exposed to the Award scheme through different organisations such as Scouts or Cadets and told me that where this was the case, the parents were 'really keen'. But leaders in the other three schools said that engaging parents could be challenging, not just in the Award scheme but in school more generally.

Andy: *We've also got some really quite turned off parents when it comes to anything school really. Many of them came here when it was X (the predecessor school) and so their experience of school wasn't the best. They even call it by that name, like they don't accept this can be a different school.*

If we assume that Andy's view here is accurate and that the parents hold a negative view of education, this could, in turn, influence their children's view of school, their sense of belonging in it and therefore potential willingness to

participate in ECAs. Further, gaps in cultural familiarity, could in theory lead to perceptions of the Award as being for 'others'. This relates to Fraser's idea that systemic cultural dominance marginalises certain groups. However, this raises a concern as Andy appears to be making an assumption about the parents' experience and constructing a narrative that might not be a reflection of reality. It was the case that none of the leaders made any attempt to contact parents beyond the original letters, to try and encourage uptake. This may inadvertently be denying them the opportunity to participate in the conversation regarding their children's education and extra-curricular activities. In this sense, the parents are not afforded the recognition necessary for genuine participation in these processes and, through Fraser's lens, may be contributing to a cycle of misrepresentation, which ultimately undermines the inclusivity of the Award. Fraser (2008) explains this as 'misframing' as they have been excluded in all matters of the frame-setting for the scheme. The result, she argues, can be a serious injustice;

> *'Those who suffer it may become objects of charity or benevolence. But deprived of the possibility of authoring first-order claims, they become non-persons with respect to justice'*
>
> *(p42).*

As seen in the first theme, leaders' focus on redistribution over other forms of justice appears to align with the concern raised in the quote about 'objects of charity'. Fraser's words act as warning to leaders to recognise the importance of recognition and representation in the decision-making processes that shape these pupils' educational experiences.

5.4.2 Subtheme 3:2 Lack of volunteering placements

Another cultural barrier identified, in the context of these communities, was the limited access to volunteering opportunities, necessary to complete one of the four sections of the Award.

For pupil Liam, the main reason that led to the dropout was the struggle to find a place for volunteering as he explains *"Because with our age, people don't take us. So it's difficult to find them."*

Accepting that not all of their pupils were going to be able to find volunteering opportunities within the local community, leaders in three of the schools had organised their own volunteering projects which the pupils could then select for that particular section. There was only one school did not help pupils find placements.

Darnell: *It's supposed to be up to them to find them, that's part of getting the Award, that independence.*

This was school D which had the lowest percentage of disadvantaged of pupils and the highest percentage of pupils overall opting into the Award. This was the only leader who expressed this view.

Three of the schools had organised litter picking projects. This was available for pupils to undertake during school time, so they could effectively achieve this section by volunteering during lunch time sessions. Leaders explained that this meant that young carers (whether registered or not) could therefore still undertake the award, as they could still fulfil after school and weekend commitments at home. They also ensured that they considered religious priorities in the scheduling of placements.

Two schools also offered their own foodbanks, which pupils could then volunteer to work in. Leaders explained that they would spend half a term planning for their food bank project, generating interest from the community and publicising both the drop off and pick up times. The schools found that keeping some in-school volunteering opportunities going meant that where children had organised placements elsewhere and these had broken down, it did not mean they failed to achieve that section.

Barbara: *So that was really good because even the ones who kind of started volunteering elsewhere and it tailed off… we were like, come on, turn up on a*

Monday and help out with that. So, we just kind of swept everyone along with it and kept them coming.

School A spent considerable time trying to assist pupils in finding placements outside of school. This was often in their previous primary schools, where they would typically go and assist with an after-school club. They also facilitated some working in local charity shops. One leader talked about how they had established a growing relationship with the community and looked for local community events at which the pupils could volunteer.

However, all leaders expressed that finding placements was very hard.

Cem: *A lot of kids ended up volunteering with family members at things. Which is a shame as you want them to go and do Oxfam or at a church, or an old people's home. I did have a few that did that, but to be honest it was hard work. We tried to encourage them to go and find their own placements but so few actually managed that.*

Barbara: *When they volunteer with us it actually really helped when it came to signing things off because we could just do that straight away and get it signed off. Whereas all the ones who've done something external we had that added element of making them remember to get that done, but I do feel like they probably had a better experience of volunteering. More opportunities to increase their confidence.*

The comments reflect a commitment to ensuring all pupils, regardless of socioeconomic status, can meet the Award's requirements, but they also highlight how leaders have needed to demonstrate a degree of flexibility in the design of the Award, to provide the equity of access needed to complete.

One leader told the following story.

Barbara: *We went down to the palace with a Gold group and we were milling around with this really posh girl's school that said they had been out to Hawaii for their expeditions. Then this other school was like "Oh well we've been*

building a school in Africa" and then we had our kids who were like "Yeah I did a foodbank and gave the food to my Nan" or "Well I helped out in the school library" and we had to say to our kids it doesn't matter, we're here. We've achieved exactly the same. You can still put it on your CV and its exactly the same Award. They've just done it slightly differently than you've done it.

Barbara's attempt to reassure her pupils at School B, speaks to a broader issue; while the Award is intended to be inclusive and open to all, the reality is a clear maldistribution of resources within the context of this Award scheme. The disparity between the experiences of the different schools is stark and demonstrates a significant gap in the opportunities available to pupils from difference socio-economic backgrounds. Clearly some schools have access to substantial resources, which allow them to undertake international activities, such as school building in Africa. These experiences are likely to be perceived as more valuable on job applications or UCAS statements, therefore stating that they have achieved 'exactly the same', while clearly said with the best intentions, is also misleading. This reflects the neoliberal agenda that critics such as Peterson and Flynn (2008) have associated with the Award, though the real issue lies not with the scheme itself but with the ways in which some parents strategically manipulate it to confer social and educational advantage.

Similarly, in terms of the skills section of the Award, leaders told me they made sure that pupils knew that the skills element could be something that they were already doing or already interested in. One school had explicitly linked their extra-curricular programme to the Award, so it was clear which activities 'counted' toward the skills element. This was very explicit in the marketing and promotional materials for enrichment in the academy.

When asked whether leaders spoke individually to pupils about what they could do for these sections, the response from all was that they may have this conversation with an individual adult, such as a form tutor, but only if they have already signed up. We are therefore unable to determine if pupils are initially opting out of the Award due to the challenge of having to secure a volunteering placement. This demonstrates that pupils are being misrecognised, as they are

“denied the status of full partners in social interaction” (Fraser, 2000, p.114). This inequality is evident in their ability to complete the Award compared to their more affluent peers. While school budgets may limit what leaders can control, they do have the power to acknowledge that difficulties in securing placements may be a significant deterrent to participation and to act. A possible solution could be to identify pupils who may require additional support or, at the very least, provide reassurances about securing placements before they register for the Award.

5.4.3 Subtheme 3:3 Pride and stigma

Related to the first theme of economic barriers, sense of pride was expressed as a potential barrier to uptake of the Award by leaders, due to their perception that families would not want to accept support.

Cem: *I think it can come down to pride. Pride's an interesting one, isn't it? Because this is a proud community. It's a proud community and I found in in previous schools with similar communities that the barriers go up to things when you offer support, it’s like the ‘I'm not putting on someone else's boots’ mentality.*

Leaders expressed that this only applied to the material things, such as embarrassment about boots and sleeping bags, or borrowing a bag. They likened it to the same refusal they see in school when pupils are told to borrow a spare PE kit or borrow a pair of the school shoes when they have come in in trainers and infringed the uniform policy. Leaders said pupils would rather spend a day in isolation, that be seen in second hand clothing. This is not exclusive to the schools in the case study, The Children’s Society (2020) also found that pupils would rather truant from school that face the stigma that came with borrowed uniform.

Cem’s comments warrant attention in the context of Fraser’s theory. For some families, there is an element of pride that prevents them from accepting help or support, which is particularly relevant in working-class communities (Gilbert, 2018, Manstead, 2018), whereas we have seen the DofEA is often associated

with middle-class aspirations. This is a form of misrecognition, where the pride of the family members is not acknowledged by the educational system, leading them to reject potentially beneficial schemes like the DofEA. If this is the case, then deliberately mitigating economic barriers through affirmative actions may actually be contributing to the lack of uptake, as families do not want to be seen as a charity case. While I found no evidence of this from the pupils themselves, I am aware that it is a small sample size, and I did not interview parents.

I did press this further by asking the pupils whether they thought there was a 'type' of pupil who did the Award scheme. The term 'overachievers' was mentioned by three pupils. Notably these were all from the same school.

Jack: *It's the overachievers. Because those overachievers do things after school, so it fits in nicely. Doing all the other elements isn't so much additional. If you're already doing things, it just, like, sits alongside all of that instead of having to take all these things on extra.*

Charlie: *Or they're a bit of an overachiever. An overachiever.*

Olivia: *Someone who's smart or something. An overachiever.*

The term 'overachiever' creates a stigma that separates these individuals from others, who may perceive themselves as being less capable or 'smart'. This mirrors the dynamics identified by Willis (1997), where working-class students internalise a sense of limitation shaped by societal structures which then reinforce divisions in perceived ability and aspirations based on class position.

This pattern of social comparison could affect the motivation to engage in the Award and their sense of belonging, if the pupils already feel less capable (Jansen, Boda and Lorenz, 2022; Korpershoek et al, 2019). If these perceptions are not addressed, then we risk reinforcing a sense of exclusion for pupils who do not identity with the label of being an 'overachiever'. This could contribute to the reinforcement of social hierarchies within school settings.

However, the answers in other schools were more mixed. Some pupils indicated they saw the Award as being fully inclusive.

Fatima: *It could be anyone. There were loads of people in there. Yeah. All types of all people, like, different people.*

Lucy: *Anyone can do it.*

Harry: *Not a type. It's more about following people.*

I: *You mean you do it if someone you know or like does it?*

Harry: *Yeah. And that's random, It's not like just the sporty kids.*

Other pupils indicated that they thought being confident or outgoing was a pre-requisite of joining.

Hassan: *They're really like a Performing Arts type. The ones that picked dance and drama for the options.*

I: *That's interesting, why do you think that is?*

Hassan: *They're adventurous and outgoing.*

Prior experience of similar activity was also cited as an influencing factor in the 'type' of pupil who might take up the opportunity to participate.

Grace: *I think it's more people who've experienced that type of thing before. I was in a group full of girls who were in, I think, guides, and they'd done camping quite a bit.*

Chenille: *I think people who enjoy camping and then just spending time with your friends.*

The comments from pupils are insightful and reflect the earlier research. For example, the earlier research found that, while they may not be 'overachievers', pupils with high prior attainment are more likely to participate in ECAs

(McNeal,1998), and cyclically, pupils who engage in ECAs are reported to have 'higher academic attainment (Darlinng, Caldwell and Smith, 2005, Metaspelto and Pulkkinen, 2012). We also know from the research that a cause of this may be the time spent in ECAs, which provides a source of school attachment, which then significantly facilitates motivation and achievement (Finn, 1989, Fairclough and Hamm, 2005, Brown and Evans (2002). In terms of attracting pupils who are 'outgoing', Fletcher, Nickerson and Wright's (2003) research did find that children who feel confident in social situations are more likely to participate in ECAs. As we will see in the final subtheme, pupils are more likely to feel confident if they have had some prior exposure to similar activities to those undertaken on the Award.

Again, when considering inclusivity, it is important for leaders to consider how these perceptions may shape their pupils' decisions to participate, especially if they are contributing to the development of stigma. Whether it is accurate or not, many of the pupils do appear to have created their own idea of the traits inherent in those who undertake the Award. As such, if they do not see their place within that referent group, they are less likely to engage, even if the Award could offer valuable opportunities for developing those very traits they refer to.

However, apparent from the interviews was that many of these pupils were confident and self-assured in their sense of identity. When questioned as to the reasons why pupils did not want to take up the Award, or had dropped out, Emily for example was very clear that the Award just did not align with her interests.

Emily: *I'm not into sort of camping stuff.*

I: *Have you tried camping before? Ever been with your family before or friends in the backyard?*

Emily: *No.*

I: *How do you know you're not into it then?*

Emily*: (laughing) I just know.*

I: *Not even to try?*

Emily: *Absolutely not. I don't like creepy crawlies. I don't like insects. I don't like animals like squirrels or foxes.*

I: *So going out into the countryside and potentially coming across those is not something that would be appealing to you?*

Emily: *No. I'm not doing any of that. No. I'm not outdoorsy. Tents? Hard no. None of my friends are outdoorsy.*

This dialogue illustrates the importance of balancing a desire to encourage exploration and participation, with an understanding of individual agency. It is clear here that Emily has made her decision based on her own deep sense of self-awareness, rather than a lack of understanding or exposure. As educators, we must be cautious about pushing the notion that young people must 'try things', to know their preferences. A clear understanding of their dislikes can be just as valid as trying something new. By framing these young people as 'lazy' or disengaged, as some literature might, we may be misrecognising them.

5.4.4 Subtheme 3:4 Anxiety

Another common thread throughout the interviews was the perception from staff that many of the pupils felt anxious about partaking in something they had not already experienced. Staff felt that this went beyond normal anxiety experienced when taken out of your comfort zone. They felt that pupils experienced anxiety to the point where they would use excuses so as not to partake. Reflections from staff as to the reasons for this was the lack of knowledge also at home about the scheme, which could have acted as reassurance to the child.

Cem: *They haven't got the knowledge about it…and I think a lot of the problem with our kids is they're very anxious about anything they don't know. Like if we*

buy in a Domino's they go for pepperoni or margarita. Like that's it. And they won't even try anything else.

Barbara: *We like to think they will value this more because it's something that normally they probably don't do at home at weekend and probably wouldn't. They might go out to the park. That might be it. So, I think that they must really value this additional opportunity. But yeah, it doesn't work out like that. They want to stay in the park.*

Both comments reflect a view that pupils should inherently value opportunities outside of their typical experiences, whether that be trying a new pizza or leaving the park at the weekend. These assumptions however could inadvertently perpetuate a deficit view, where the pupils existing cultural practices are seen as less valuable, or less meaningful. It positions the pupils in lacking something essential, such as the 'right' kind of leisure activity to undertake at the weekend. These views neglect the notion that pupils may already have rich, meaningful participation in their current forms of engagement (Yossi, 2016).

Staff felt strongly that uptake on the Award would improve year on year as it became more common knowledge within the school and community, and therefore more likely that eventually an older sibling or relative would have undertaken the experience. Staff talked about going to some lengths to make pupils feel more comfortable about the experience and to alleviate anxiety. As we saw in subtheme 3.1, practices like Barbara's staggered exposure, where pupils could practice skills (such as pitching tents or orienteering) in a familiar environment before going on the actual expedition is a clear attempt to make the DofEA seem less intimidating. This aligns with Fraser's theory of recognition, as it acknowledges the value of activities already important to the pupils, rather than making them focus on the activities of a dominant, advantaged group which Fraser (2000) asserts has been 'falsely parading as universal' (p115). For example, by framing what they were already exposed to and comfortable with as legitimate skills for the DofEA, the staff effectively made it more accessible to pupils who may not see themselves as "outdoorsy".

However, for some students like Emily, whose rejection of camping was definitive ("*Tents? Hard no."),* the cultural disconnection remains insurmountable despite these efforts.

Interestingly, while we have observed misrecognition between staff perceptions and pupils' lived realities across many of the subthemes, staff's perception of anxiety was, in this case, very much reflected in the pupils' responses.

Olivia and Maya for example expressed concerns brought about by fear of the unknown.

Olivia: *The thing is as well that I've never really, like, camped… outside of school either. It was, like, in year five I was meant to go to camping yeah, to X but because of COVID we didn't go.*

I: *And you think that was what stopped you from signing up, that you hadn't been before?*

Olivia: *I don't know really. But I think so. And a bit of, because we couldn't go in Yr five, I'm over it now.*

Maya: *I know that DofE is like all about new experiences but like I think it was a bit too new, it's put me off a bit.*

I: *Which bits do you think put you off?*

Maya: *The trek thing and then having to go and work someone for a bit. I just couldn't see myself doing that.*

The absence of previous experience with activities like camping made it more difficult for these pupils to commit to the Award.

Jack and Charlotte's reluctance to be away from home or Hassan's struggles with changes to his schedule illustrate how emotional and sensory needs can shape students' ability to participate.

Jack: *I didn't want to be away from home.*

I: *Did you know you would be when you signed up?*

Jack*: I didn't think about it then.*

Charlotte: *It's a bit scary.*

I: *Yeah?*

Charlotte*: It can be. It's very…if you've never been on a camping trip. Well, like, when they're going on, like, the big trips, I don't want to be like, oh my god, I'm freaking out. I want my mum. Well, she can't drive all the way there just to pick me up.*

Hassan: *The cost wasn't the problem. It was… I get really panicky when my schedule changes. And I had to do things, but on some days, it kinda makes my head go a bit overstimulated and it kinda messes my day up. And you can't necessarily do the sport or skill you are supposed to every week, because on some days you might be in a really bad place.*

Other pupils told me the experience was just too stressful.

Harry: *Well, it's just like stressing me out a bit and it felt just a bit like too much.*

Chenille: *I'm still doing like the volunteering part of it but I'm not doing the actual DofE, because I enjoyed the volunteering, but it was just like, it just felt like a bit of added stress, you know, the rest of it.*

These comments reflect the importance of social contexts in determining how individuals perceive and engage with opportunities. In many of these cases, the lack of familiarity with the activities on the Award, or the absence of supportive people they feel safe with, could trigger a fear of failure or rejection, leading to non-participation or dropout. This aligns with some of the earlier research, which found that intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints were more likely to be the cause of drop out than structural constraints such as difficulty of travel

(Crane and Temple, 2014). Staff however may be misrecognising this as a lack of resilience, as seen in subtheme 2.2.

I also found that while there is evidence of staff sensitivity to cultural and religious needs (e.g. avoiding expeditions during Ramadan and involving interpreters for refugee students), there is little mention of directly involving pupils or their families in the decision-making processes. For instance, pupils like Maya and Hassan express anxieties about the novelty of the experience, suggesting they feel excluded from shaping how the Award is presented or adapted to their needs. Jack's reluctance to be away from home could have potentially been addressed through greater consultation. My discussion within subtheme 3.2 regarding misframing, is equally relevant in this context.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has explored the complex interplay of economic, cultural, and structural barriers affecting participation in the DofEA, alongside the perceived value of the scheme. Through an abductive approach, themes emerged organically, revealing significant divergences between staff and pupil perspectives on the challenges and benefits of the Award, the discussion of which has been deepened through the consideration of systemic inequalities and remedies through the application of Fraser's theoretical framework.

Economic barriers were a major concern for staff, who worked extensively to mitigate financial obstacles through school subsidies, external funding, and logistical adjustments. However, despite these efforts, from their perspective financial constraints remained a persistent challenge, particularly regarding staffing shortages and resource allocation. Pupils meanwhile did not widely identify cost as a direct obstacle, suggesting a potential misrecognition of their lived experiences by school leaders. Fraser's concept of redistribution was useful here in demonstrating that while affirmative remedies, such as subsidies, can reduce financial barriers, they do not necessarily lead to full parity of participation when cultural and social barriers remain unaddressed. Misrecognition of pupils' lived experiences, where staff assumed economic

barriers were the most pressing issue, may well be leading to poor participation rates.

Cultural barriers, including lack of familial involvement and concern about obtaining volunteering placements further shaped participation. Many pupils had no prior knowledge of the Award before entering secondary school, and nor did their families. This unfamiliarity appeared to create an uncertainty and anxiety. Fraser's notion of recognition helped highlight how the dominant narratives around the Award may fail to acknowledge and validate the cultural backgrounds of pupils who do not have a tradition of extracurricular participation. Staff attempted to address this through preparatory experiences, but the limited engagement of families suggests that deeper structural changes are needed to challenge both the cultural perceptions and cultivate a degree of familiarity with the Award that would develop the confidence required for pupils to enrol.

The perceived value of the Award varied considerably between staff and pupils. Staff placed high value on personal growth, resilience, and long-term benefits, often reflecting their own positive experiences with the Award. Pupils, on the other hand, were less certain of these benefits. While some cited social connections and alleviation of boredom as reasons for taking part, they did not always recognise the wider implications for employability or skill development. Additionally, peer influence was a significant factor, with many pupils dropping out when their friends did. Fraser's concept of representation was particularly useful in understanding this issue, as it highlights the importance of ensuring that all voices, particularly those of pupils, are included in shaping and delivering the Award. The lack of systematic engagement with pupil perspectives suggests that decision-making processes may not be fully inclusive, which in turn affects retention and engagement.

Overall, the findings suggest that achieving true inclusivity in the Award scheme requires more than just financial support. Fraser's framework has been instrumental in illustrating how a holistic approach is required to reach parity of participation. To achieve a more just and equitable extra-curricular experience,

it is essential to address the multifaceted challenges of maldistribution, which as we have seen extends beyond the financial barriers associated with the expedition, to encompass broader staffing and resourcing constraints faced by schools. Furthermore, issues of misrecognition must be tackled in a way that preserves the integrity of the Award while acknowledging diverse cultural values. A more inclusive design is necessary, one that ensures pupils can see themselves reflected in the scheme, eliminating any perceptions that it is intended for others. This transformation is contingent on rectifying misrepresentation. Achieving this requires actively engaging pupils and their families in the decision-making processes surrounding the Award, ensuring their voices are heard and integrated into program development. It is imperative to respond meaningfully to concerns raised about the scheme's failure to alleviate boredom, to take seriously the anxieties pupils experience, and to recognise the significant role of peer influence.

By synthesising the key themes discussed, the final chapter will offer recommendations for fostering a more equitable and accessible experience for all pupils, that is intended to be of practical benefit to school leaders.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter revisits the research questions and synthesises the key findings of the study, highlighting the main barriers to participation in the DofEA among disadvantaged Key Stage 3 pupils. In responding to the final research question, I offer a series of recommendations for school leaders which I believe assist in mitigating barriers to participation and increasing participation in the Award. This chapter reflects on the study's contribution to knowledge, while acknowledging its limitations. I also consider areas for further research. The chapter concludes with a final personal reflection on the research process and its broader implications.

6.1 Research questions – main findings

6.1.1 What prevents parity of participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme among Key Stage 3 pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds?

A key finding was the misrecognition by staff regarding the primary barriers to participation. While schools concentrated on removing perceived economic constraints on pupils to improve participation, my findings show these financial constraints were not as influential as anticipated. Instead, this study identified both social and cultural factors as primary barriers to participation.

Although school leaders and staff expressed a deep respect for the DofEA, there was a notable lack of awareness regarding its potential to promote social mobility, both among pupils and their families. This lack of awareness resulted in a failure to effectively communicate the scheme's long-term benefits to pupils. Consequently, pupils were not encouraged to consider their future selves, in relation to the Award's value. This created a disconnect between how staff perceived the value of the Award and how pupils experienced it. As a result, participation rates were affected, particularly among pupils from backgrounds where the Award was less familiar, or where its benefits were not

recognised at home. Without encouragement from parents, these pupils were less likely to engage compared to those whose families understood and valued the Award. This lack of familiarity is leading to disparities in participation.

Another key finding was the depth to which peer relationships played a central role in determining participation. This aligns with research on the importance of a sense of belonging, which helps pupils feel connected to their school and more likely to persist in activities. However, unequal access to opportunities prevents parity in participation, particularly for pupils who lack strong social networks. If they participate in fewer ECAs to begin with, they have fewer chances to meet new peers and expand their social circles. As a result, stepping outside their friendship group becomes even more challenging, making it harder to sustain engagement. To break this cycle, we must first address these initial barriers to participation.

Additionally, the study highlighted the failure to incorporate pupil voice into the design of the Award. This was partially attributed to the misrecognition of staff barriers would be mainly economic, but also because staffing constraints meant they did not have the time to undertake this important work. This lack of input has further widened participation disparities, as other significant barriers remain unaddressed, such as the challenges pupils face in securing volunteering placements, or their limited awareness of the Award, which might otherwise encourage greater uptake and retention.

6.1.2 What are disadvantaged pupils' experiences of the Award scheme in English schools?

This study found that pupils' experiences of the Award were shaped by a mixture of anxiety and uncertainty. While school leaders perceived the DofEA as transformative, fostering resilience and confidence, pupils' lived experiences did not align with these expectations. Structural challenges, such as difficulty securing volunteering placements, further complicated their engagement. Additionally, a disconnect between pupils' expectations and their actual experiences with the activities led to a sense of alienation from the Award.

While they initially saw the Award as a means to alleviate boredom, they ultimately found that the activities did not meet this expectation.

Emotional barriers were prominent, with many pupils expressing fears regarding unfamiliar social dynamics. The findings suggest that positive experiences were contingent on the presence of a strong peer support network. Therefore, schools must consider proactively facilitating group cohesion from the outset, to foster an inclusive environment where disadvantaged pupils feel secure in their participation.

6.1.3 What are the barriers that disadvantaged pupils face in taking up the Award scheme?

Economic barriers were recognised and systematically addressed by schools through subsidies and funding initiatives. However, cultural barriers, particularly the lack of familial familiarity with the scheme, remained significant. The absence of parental advocacy for the Award meant that pupils received little encouragement to participate or to remain on the Award.

From pupils' perspectives, the primary barriers were social rather than financial. Many found the scheme's activities misaligned with their interests, while concerns about social isolation and group dynamics were particularly pronounced. The DofEA's historical and cultural associations with privilege may have exacerbated these issues, as its emphasis on individual achievement overlooks the structural disadvantages that many pupils faced. For example, securing a volunteering placement was a significant challenge for some of these pupils. Additionally, the importance of group support may also be overlooked. In this study, pupils interviewed found comfort in belonging to a group, and without this, the fear of the unknown became a major barrier, often manifesting as anxiety. This, in turn, perpetuated cycles of exclusion, limiting the scheme's potential as a tool for social mobility.

6.1.4 Why do disadvantaged pupils drop out of the DofE Award scheme?

The findings suggest that social constraints, difficulty securing volunteering placements, and unmet expectations were the primary factors leading to dropout. A key finding was the heavy reliance on social connections which meant that when peers dropped out of the scheme, participation rates tended to decline for the whole friendship group.

Pupils who initially enrolled encountered unforeseen challenges, such as the demanding nature of the expedition or a lack of sustained support in completing required tasks. Logistical issues, such as rigid schedules and inadequate accommodation of personal circumstances, further contributed to disengagement. This is exacerbated by the lack of familiarity that pupils have with the Award scheme, which influences their initial commitment and long-term engagement.

In short, they do not value the Award for its wider, future benefits. This is then misrecognised by staff to some extent as a maldistribution issue around kit, or a lack of resilience and perseverance.

6.1.5 How can school leaders mitigate these barriers to participation?

The real issue at stake is the need for transformative action, an urgent reimagining of the cultural and structural norms that shape opportunity within our education system. Currently, middle-class practices are not only preferred but actively privileged and deployed as markers of merit and aspiration. In order to disrupt this entrenched dynamic, we must fundamentally rethink what we mean by ‘disadvantage’. This includes how we label, perceive, and engage with disadvantaged pupils. The findings suggest a persistent duality of misrecognition and misdistribution, both of which limit participation and lead to misrepresentation. This lack of engagement in schemes such as the DofEA may be symptomatic of broader exclusionary patterns in school life, patterns that can ultimately shape young people's long-term participation in society.

While transforming systems at the level of government policy may be beyond the immediate reach of school leaders, Young (2006) reminds us that we still have a responsibility to act. It is not sufficient to claim the problem is too large or too embedded to tackle; rather, school leaders must reflect critically on their own practices and spaces of influence. Though the DofEA is just one component of school life, it serves as a microcosm of larger inequalities and can be a starting point for change. By making deliberate, reflective adjustments, affirmative actions that are well within the remit of schools, we may begin to open opportunities for broader participation in adult life. The recommendations that follow, while modest, are both practical and powerful in their potential to challenge dominant norms and contribute to a more equitable, transformative educational landscape.

Recommendations

a) Early Exposure to ECAs

Research shows that early exposure to extracurricular activities (ECAs) increases the likelihood of continued participation. Conversely, evidence suggests that pupils who have not engaged in ECAs during their early schooling years are less likely to take them up later, with participation rates declining over time.

To address this, school leaders should gather information on Year 6 pupils during the transition process and proactively target those with little prior ECA experience. Providing these pupils with enrichment and extracurricular opportunities from the outset may encourage uptake as they move up through the school.

b) Awareness Campaign centred around 'Future Self'

Introduce the Award's benefits early in pupils' educational journeys, ideally from Year 7. Transition programs could also inform parents about the scheme's advantages, particularly how the DofEA enhances employability. Highlighting endorsements from the well-known companies on the DofE website, may help

increase familiarity by proxy with parents and carers. This in turn may help them see the Award's value and increase engagement.

This messaging could be integrated into assembly programs as well as the school's taught careers curriculum, which could ask pupils to consider their future selves and link the Awards benefits to their personal goals and aspirations. Involving alumni could further enhance relatability, particularly for families who may have previously perceived the Award as being intended for 'others'. Consider introducing milestone-based incentives to sustain motivation, so Year 7s see a 'path' to DofEA.

c) Cultural Adaptation

Research shows that combining ECAs is the most effective way to maximise their value. Therefore, the structure of the Award's sections should remain intact, as the variety and exposure to different experiences are what create its overall impact. However, it is essential to consider activities that align with pupils' lived experiences while preserving the scheme's integrity.

While alternative expedition models may not fully achieve participation parity, they should not be dismissed outright. Staff should actively incorporate pupil voice to identify culturally relevant activities that could fulfil the skills section requirements. Expanding in-school activities that align with community needs could further improve accessibility.

Additionally, it is important to recognise that pupils have different needs in different contexts. Cultural capital is inherently subjective, and school leaders should feel confident in drawing from the best ideas and practices that suit their specific school environment.

d) Volunteering support

It is important to acknowledge that securing a volunteering placement can be a significant challenge for many pupils. Unlike their more advantaged peers, they

may lack the contacts or resources to find suitable opportunities. Identifying these challenges early, before pupils sign up, would be beneficial.

Schools could leverage the career aspiration data they already have to match pupils with volunteering opportunities aligned with their interests, increasing engagement. Additionally, grouping pupils with similar interests could foster participation by providing a built-in peer support network, making the experience feel less daunting. Establishing key volunteering partnerships willing to accommodate groups of pupils could also streamline the process for staff, reducing the logistical burden.

e) Adapting the Expedition

The expedition is both a major draw for pupils and a key reason for dropout. For those who enrol primarily for the expedition, it's essential to ensure that the preparatory sessions are engaging and supportive enough to keep them motivated. School leaders should look at the format of these sessions carefully. These sessions should be tailored to pupils' current levels of knowledge and resilience, gradually building their confidence rather than immediately pushing them too far out of their comfort zones, which can lead to anxiety and withdrawal.

Given the significant role of peer influence at this age, careful consideration should also be given to groupings. This helps prevent a domino effect where one dropout leads to others. Structured peer-bonding activities before the expedition can strengthen group cohesion, and allowing pupils to participate alongside friends or a familiar staff member can further reduce anxiety.

f) Parental Engagement

Targeted communication strategies are essential to improving parental understanding of the Award's benefits. Emphasising its role in developing employability skills and personal growth can encourage greater parental buy-in. Schools should consider hosting information sessions to address misconceptions about accessibility and actively challenge the perception of the

DofE as a middle-class initiative through diverse representation. These would be best placed at events that schools know already get strong parental attendance, such a school shows or parents' evenings.

Additionally, showcasing parental testimonials on the school website, where parents share the positive impact the Award has had on their child, could help increase engagement and familiarity.

g) Curriculum Integration

Embedding elements of the DofEA within the curriculum could reinforce its value beyond extracurricular participation. For example, the volunteering or skills sections could be scheduled as a timetabled lesson once a fortnight. Even if pupils do not complete the full Award, participation in these sections would still help develop confidence, resilience, and independence within a structured academic setting.

This approach would also alleviate additional demands on staff, as it would be incorporated into their directed time. Furthermore, integrating a section of the Award into the curriculum would eliminate stigma by making participation the norm, ensuring that it is accessible to all. It would also prevent the common issue of mass dropouts, as there would be no opt-out.

h) Invest in Training for Staff and Volunteers

To effectively support disadvantaged pupils, staff running the program must be equipped to recognise and address social and emotional barriers to participation. They need dedicated time to engage with pupils, understand their challenges, and offer tailored support.

Schools should also ensure that staff feel valued for their efforts. While tight budgets may make monetary compensation unfeasible, alternatives such as time in lieu could be considered. Even simple gestures, such as letters of appreciation from the Headteacher or CEO of the Multi-Academy Trust, can go a long way in boosting motivation and recognition.

i) Pupil Voice and Co-Design

Schools should actively involve pupils in shaping the program's delivery through structured feedback mechanisms. Engaging parents in co-designing aspects of the scheme could further enhance its accessibility and appeal.

To maximise engagement, feedback should be collected at multiple stages:

- Before the rollout – Conduct pupil voice or use form-time feedback to understand potential barriers and interests.

- During scheme planning – Involve pupils in designing elements of the Award and expedition to ensure it aligns with their needs.

- After sessions – Gather ongoing feedback to assess engagement levels and make necessary adjustments.

j) Staff Awareness Training on Inclusive Language

School leaders should introduce targeted professional development for all staff that focuses on the language used to describe pupils and their backgrounds, with a particular emphasis on how terms such as 'disadvantaged', or 'hard to reach' can unintentionally reinforce deficit thinking and social hierarchies. This training should be grounded in an understanding of how cultural norms are often aligned with middle-class values and educate on how these shape perceptions of ability, aspiration, and success.

By raising awareness of the ways language reflects and reinforces assumptions about social class and disadvantage, staff can begin to recognise and challenge the subtle forms of misrecognition that may limit pupils' sense of belonging or self-worth. Such training should also encourage staff to reflect critically on how everyday practices, expectations, and how labels may inadvertently exclude or marginalise some pupils.

Additionally, schools should systematically track participation and dropout rates to refine their strategies and ensure sustained involvement.

6.2 Contribution to Knowledge

This research makes a multi-dimensional contribution to knowledge, combining practical, policy-based, evidence-based and theoretical insights.

My research challenges the prevailing assumption, within the case study MAT, that financial barriers are the primary obstacle to participation, instead demonstrating the significant influence of social and cultural dynamics. From this, I have drawn practical recommendations that school leaders could implement to adapt their practices in ways that foster greater inclusivity in the DofEA. My research also highlights considerations for school and MAT level decision-makers to address structural and cultural barriers to participation that go beyond financial support, through consideration and adaption of policy.

Through drawing on the voices of disadvantaged pupils to illuminate how belonging, peer relationships, and cultural recognition shape engagement, my research provides an original contribution to the growing body of evidence on the importance of ECAs and what may affect participation.

Furthermore, this research demonstrates the applicability of Fraser's tripartite theoretical framework in educational research. It highlights the interconnectedness of economic, cultural, and political barriers to participation, showing how existing school-based interventions often fall within the realm of affirmative remedies, addressing surface-level inequalities without challenging deeper structural injustices. While school leaders have implemented strategies to mitigate financial barriers, Fraser's lens compels us to consider

transformative remedies that tackle systemic inequities more fundamentally. This research demonstrates the value of Fraser's framework for future small-scale educational research projects.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations remain. One key omission is the absence of parent and carers' perspectives, which restricts a fuller understanding of how home influences shape participation decisions. Future research should incorporate parental voices to explore how cultural capital and prior familiarity with the Award affect pupil engagement.

Additionally, this study raises questions about the weighting of familiarity in decision-making about remedies. While findings suggest that a lack of exposure to ECAs in earlier schooling years affects participation, further research is needed to determine the extent to which school leaders should prioritise interventions aimed at increasing familiarity. Although recommendations have been provided, the precise degree of emphasis required remains uncertain.

A further methodological limitation relates to the challenge of establishing causation in ECA research. Much of the existing literature, including this study, identifies associations rather than causal relationships due to the absence of control mechanisms. This remains a broader critique of research in this field.

The study also focuses specifically on disadvantaged pupils within particular school settings, which may impact how widely the findings apply to other settings. Further research could explore whether the findings hold in different school contexts, such as institutions with lower proportions of disadvantaged pupils. In particular, investigating the role of peer influence in such settings could yield valuable insights. Similarly, future studies could examine whether schools with a long-standing tradition of running the DofEA, particularly those with established community connections, face the same challenges regarding volunteering placements. While this study assumes that such schools encounter fewer barriers due to stronger networks, this remains an untested

assumption, and there may be lessons to learn from schools successfully engaging large cohorts in the Award.

Beyond school-based recommendations, this study also raises broader policy considerations. Future research could assess the long-term impact of targeted interventions on sustained participation in ECAs, as well as comparative analyses across different extracurricular programs. Participatory research approaches centering disadvantaged pupils' voices could further enhance the development of co-designed solutions.

Finally, this study highlights the tension between school-based interventions and systemic social inequality. While Pupil Premium funding (PPG) is often considered a legitimate means of supporting disadvantaged pupils, its use in addressing participation disparities raises critical questions. Fraser's framework is particularly relevant here, as it highlights how redistributive policies alone cannot address deeper structural injustices. The reliance on school-based initiatives to counteract systemic inequities risks shifting responsibility from government to individual institutions, reinforcing the notion that schools must 'fix' social disparities beyond their remit. Given the volatile economic landscape, accurately measuring the impact of PPG on extracurricular participation is complex, further limiting the ability within this thesis to determine whether such spending is truly effective. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the barriers to participation are not problems created by schools, nor are they within schools' full capacity to resolve. Without broader systemic change, school-led interventions will remain limited, piecemeal solutions to entrenched social inequalities.

6.4 Final Reflection

Throughout this study, my commitment to educational equity has driven my exploration of extra-curricular activities as a means of addressing systemic disadvantage. My research highlights the significant value of ECAs, particularly for the most disadvantaged pupils, and underscores the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards potential as a transformative programme with employability benefits.

This is particularly relevant in the context of Kurt Hahn's original vision in addressing the declines of modern youth, which, despite its somewhat pessimistic undertones, remains pertinent in today's society.

However, this study has also challenged my assumptions about whether the DofEA is inherently a force for good or whether, in promoting it, I may be inadvertently reinforcing inequities. A persistent concern remains; if we cannot even get disadvantaged pupils to the starting point of participation, are we simply perpetuating the very barriers we aim to dismantle? This research has illuminated both the DofEA's potential as a tool for social justice and its structural limitations, which, without meaningful interventions, risk reinforcing existing class divisions. Unless the scheme is adapted to be more inclusive, it will continue to serve those already positioned to succeed rather than those it purports to support.

Engaging with Fraser's framework has deepened my thinking about what constitutes a meaningful remedy in this context. While I maintain that allocating Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) funding to the DofE is justifiable, Fraser (2000) compels us to question the very act of categorising pupils under broad labels like 'PP.' Doing so risks oversimplifying deeply entrenched societal inequalities and fails to recognise the complexities of their lived experiences. True social justice demands not just economic redistribution but also cultural recognition and political voice.

Furthermore, I have reflected on the systemic constraints that limit school leaders' ability to enact meaningful change. Given the high-stakes accountability system they operate within, making bold adaptations to the DofEA, particularly in ways that challenge dominant notions of cultural capital, requires courage. There is a real concern that Ofsted and other regulatory bodies may fail to recognise these adaptations as legitimate, reinforcing Fraser's (2005) argument about the political dimension of justice; who gets to define what counts as 'valuable' participation? Who holds the authority to say which cultural experiences matter?

For the DofEA to serve as a genuine vehicle for social justice, it must embrace Fraser's principles of redistribution, recognition, and representation. Only by ensuring that disadvantaged pupils have equitable access, that their cultural experiences are valued, and that they have a genuine voice in shaping the program can we move beyond superficial inclusion and towards meaningful transformation.

Appendix 1

Confirmation of Ethics approval.

This email originated outside the University. Check before clicking links or attachments.

Dear Dr Tuesday Humby,

Please note that this is an automated e-mail (Please do not reply to this e-mail).

Name: Tuesday Humby

Supervisor: Jonathan Vincent

Department: Ed Res

Ed Res **REC Reference:** EdRes-2023-3918-EdAp-1

Title: Exploring participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme in English schools

Thank you for submitting your ethics application in REAMS. The application was recommended for approval by the Ed Res Research Ethics Committee, and on behalf of the Committee, I can confirm that approval has bee granted for this application.

Glossary and/or List of abbreviations

COVID -19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DfE	Department for Education
DofEA	The Duke of Edinburgh's Award
ECA	Extra-curricular activity
eDofEA	The digital system where participants record their DofE progress on the scheme
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
ESFA	Education Skills and Funding Agency
FSM	Free School Meals
IDofEA	International Duke of Edinburgh's Award
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
MIS	Management Information Software
OAs	Organised Activities
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation
PP	Pupil Premium
PPG	Pupil Premium Grant
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service

TLR	Teaching and Learning Responsibility

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