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Epsom Teen Selected as Duke of Edinburgh's Award Youth Ambassador

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A young woman from Epsom is amplifying young people's voices after being chosen as a UK Youth Ambassador for The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE).

Kalina Hristova, 17, joins a select group of 35 DofE Award holders aged 16-24 from across the UK. These Youth Ambassadors will advocate for young people by sharing their insights on key issues, speaking at events, meeting decision-makers in Parliament, and contributing to the DofE charity's direction.

Originally from Bulgaria, Kalina has lived in the UK for ten years and credits the DofE with helping her socially. She began her DofE journey at the Silver level when she joined a new school, finding it a great way to meet people outside her classes.

Kalina said:
"Starting a new school in Year 10 is quite daunting, so I joined DofE to make new friends and learn new skills. I'm glad I did, as I've met some of my best friends through DofE, and I've been able to dedicate my time to something I want to achieve."

For her Volunteering section, Kalina coached netball, leading sessions for younger students, running drills, and planning fun games. This not only improved the students' skills but also enhanced Kalina's communication abilities.

For her Physical section, she focused on fitness, tracking her progress through her Apple Watch. An avid sportswoman, she joined a gym to start weightlifting. *"Sometimes I found it a bit intimidating, as it can be a male-dominated environment, but the more I progressed, the easier it became,"* Kalina added.

She also participated in the London Vitality 10K race, raising awareness and funds for the DofE. *"I would never have run a distance like this if not for the DofE. I was not a runner before, but with all the work I put in for my Physical section, I knew I could do it,"* she said.

As part of her Gold Volunteering, Kalina became her school's DofE ambassador, supporting Bronze and Silver participants, organising expeditions, and teaching skills like map reading and food planning.

For her Residential section, Kalina attended a three-week summer programme in Pennsylvania called Leadership in the Business World, which inspired her to consider studying Economics or Finance at university. "*DofE has been so much fun, and it's way more than just an Expedition. I applied to be a Youth Ambassador to apply the skills I've learned through DofE to the real world,"* she explained.

Empowering Young Leaders
Funded by The Gosling Foundation, the Youth Ambassador programme places young people at the heart of shaping the DofE's work. Ambassadors have met Ministers, spoken at high-profile events, represented the DofE at international forums, and influenced key decisions across the charity.

Ashley Williams, UK Youth Engagement Manager at The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, said: *"Kalina is one of many young people who have achieved incredible things through their DofE. As a charity, we're determined to put young people at the heart of everything we do and give them opportunities to make a positive impact on the issues they care about."*

"It's not an easy time to be a young person, with the after-effects of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Opportunities like the DofE allow young people to have fun, grow in resilience and self-belief, and develop vital skills they can't always get in the classroom."

Young people aged 14-24 who participate in the DofE choose activities in four sections: Physical, Skills, Volunteering, and Expedition. Along the way, they gain confidence, discover new talents, and work toward a highly respected award.

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