

RGS DofE Expeditions: 20 Frequently Asked Questions

1. How many DofE expeditions do I have to do for each award?

Participants must pass a minimum of two DofE expeditions to earn each Award.

2. What are the pre-requisites to be allowed to join an RGS DofE expedition?

Those wishing to join an RGS DofE expedition must...

1. be fit and healthy for the expedition. Please report minor medical ailments to staff
2. be able to carry all their own kit from the outset of the expedition
3. complete all previous awards, if applicable
4. enrol in the current award
5. attend all planning sessions
6. meet planning deadlines
7. complete activity details on your eDofE page prior to expedition
8. acquire and present correct expedition equipment by KIT CHECK
9. pass "Traffic Light check" before expedition departure

3. How long are DofE expeditions? (cycle and canoe expeditions are different)

Bronze 2 days, covering approx. 15 miles.

Silver 3 days, covering approx. 30 miles.

Gold 4 days (5 days including travel), covering 50 miles.

Gold expeditions abroad are a week.

4. How are expedition groups organised?

Students choose their own expedition groups, which should be mixed, with guidance from staff.

5. What is the maximum and minimum group size allowed?

Minimum 5, maximum 7 (8 for canoe). Mixed groups.

6. Where are hiking expeditions located and how is transport arranged?

Bronze are local: parents drop off at RGS. Expeditions over the North Downs. Groups are divided between camp sites. Parents pick up from Reigate Hill car park or RGS (letter will explain).

Silver training: parents drop off at Rykas Café, Dorking. Expeditions over the Surrey Hills. Parents pick up at North Holmwood.

Silver qualifying: students travel independently by train to Lewes. South Downs, finishing at Arundel Station. Students go home by train.

Gold: South Wales training, Mid-Wales qualifying or Cumbria or occasional foreign destinations. Travel by coach or minibus or air.

7. How and when does expedition planning happen?

The term prior to expeditions is used for planning. Bronze students plan their expedition with help from their trained Gold Award leader and guidance from staff where needed. A deadline is set by which your expedition planning must be completed. Groups then present their plans to staff who either pass or defer their plans. Deferred plans must be improved immediately or groups will not be permitted to start the expedition. Groups failing to complete plans by the deadline will not be permitted to join the expedition.

It is compulsory for students to attend all sessions and comply with the activities. Students who do not attend sufficient sessions, persistently misbehave or fail to complete planning by the deadline can be deferred to an alternative date in the future.

8. What happens if I miss an expedition or cannot make one of the expedition dates?

You have to complete and pass a minimum of TWO expeditions to earn each award. Dates for these are advertised in advance on rgsdofe.wordpress.com. If you miss or don't finish an expedition for any reason you will have to do another one. This will probably mean the next year with a new year group. The alternative is to use an external approved activity provider for which we can provide details.

9. What pre-expedition checks take place to ensure you are ready?

Kit Check: students are required to bring to school some basic items of kit a few weeks before the expedition. This always includes waterproof jacket and trousers, walking boots and map case and compass. It may also include their tent. This kit check is to ensure they have adequate equipment to proceed safely with the expedition. Advice is given on upgrading any kit that is considered inadequate, for example shower proof sports jackets are not adequate and neither are light weight trainers. Walking boots are recommended for Bronze expeditions and compulsory for Silver expeditions.

Traffic Light Check: On the day of departure groups present themselves for a final "traffic light" check. This check is made by staff to ensure your basic kit is adequate and your group appears safe to leave. The "Traffic Light" check list is attached. Groups or individuals who are inadequately prepared will be withdrawn from the expedition and parents will be asked to pick them up straight away. An alternative expedition date will be made available in due course.

10. How do staff supervise groups on expeditions?

RGS expeditions are organised and supervised entirely by trained and experienced RGS teaching staff and external adults who volunteer to look after groups.

Whilst the point of DofE is for groups to operate independently, they are remotely supervised by adults. At Bronze, supervision is quite frequent but becomes less frequent and more remote at Silver and Gold.

Supervising staff arrange to meet groups at some check points. On Bronze expeditions this usually means meeting groups at road crossings or convenient path junctions at least once a day and at camp. Staff and students usually swap mobile numbers so that they can call if late or lost. These numbers must be deleted by all parties after the expedition.

On Bronze and Silver expeditions staff camp overnight with groups to supervise behaviour, monitor safety, and assess their camp craft and to ensure they leave no trace on departure.

On Gold expeditions staff hike out into mountains to meet groups at remote check points. For additional safety in places with no mobile reception, two-way radios are used.

11. Is drinking water available at camp and check points?

On Silver and Bronze expeditions all camp sites and farms have access to drinking water. Groups must carry sufficient water for their needs during the day, they must carry a 1-1.5 litre water bottle. Water is heavy so hydrating before leaving camp is important and will reduce the need to carry many litres of water.

On Gold expeditions groups must be entirely independent. Water-purifying tablets must be carried so that mountain stream water can be used if necessary.

Note that expensive hydration systems are not required for DofE expeditions and are not recommended. A simple water bottle tucked into a side-pocket is ideal.

12. What do groups do with litter and any food waste?

We teach a "leave no trace" policy to students. Groups are responsible for all their own litter. Groups must keep their camp tidy at all times and leave no trace of litter when they leave.

Usually, groups must bag, crush and carry all their litter out, if necessary to the end of the expedition where they can dispose of it. Small waste bags are recommended, not large bin liners. Waste bags must be packed into rucksacks and not carried or hung on the outside. Packing to minimise waste packaging is important. Toilet facilities and water supplies are often simple but must be treated with respect and left in a clean condition. Washing up should be done at designated sinks where available and not at water taps. Food waste should be scraped into plastic bags and not be dumped on lawns, left in hedges, trees, sinks, toilets, gutters or ditches.

Where no toilet facilities are available we sometimes hire Portaloos. On Gold expeditions wild camp sites have no facilities at all and students must use a trowel in an appropriate location well away from water courses for their toileting needs.

13. Are we allowed mobile phones and to use social media on expeditions?

We allow students to take mobile phones on RGS expeditions. Mobile phones can be an important safety tool. We encourage students to learn responsible use of their phones on expeditions. We tell them to limit use to just calling staff for assistance and vice versa **i.e. emergency use only**. Phones can also be used to confirm pick-up times with parents on the last day. We ask that parents and children avoid unnecessary calls to each other during expeditions. Parents should only contact staff during expeditions in emergencies.

Use of social media is not permitted during expeditions. Posting on social media can unwittingly cause alarm that can hamper the safe management of expeditions by staff.

Please note the following phone rules for the safety of everyone on expeditions:

- Do not bring expensive electronic items.
- Keep phones dry, in a bag.
- No calling / texting of friends or other groups.
- Limit unnecessary calling or texting home
- No loud music or headphones
- Preserve battery life by switching phones off at night; swap group "live-phone" each day.
- Use of social media is not permitted on expeditions

Breaches of the above rules can cause serious problems and lead to deferral from an expedition.

14. What equipment do they need and what can students borrow from the school kit store?

A full kit list is available from the RGS DofE website www.rgsdofe.wordpress.com. Students can borrow stoves, gas, maps, rucksacks and sleeping mats from the school kit store. These must be returned clean and dry after use. Students cannot pass their expedition until all school equipment has been returned. Regretfully, a charge can be made for lost or damaged kit beyond normal wear and tear. All students will need a map case for the map given to them at school. Map cases are not available from school but are cheap to buy. Tents and sleeping bags are not loaned by the school. Groups must acquire their own tent. Advice is given to students on appropriate tents.

15. Should students bring knives on expeditions?

No. Inappropriate items such as knives are not permitted on expeditions. Small Swiss-army type knives are also not encouraged for safety reasons. Small can openers are permitted.

16. Are students allowed to go off-site at night?

No. Students must stay on campsites or farms once they have arrived.

17. What standard of behaviour is expected on DofE expeditions?

Reliable and trustworthy behaviour underpins the safe operation of expeditions. We like groups to enjoy their experience and DofE expeditions should be a time when they feel independent.

However, school discipline rules are strictly applied to ensure the safety of everyone on the expedition. Gross breaches of school discipline such as possessing or consuming alcohol, inappropriate interaction between students, smoking or possessing cigarettes or other illegal substances, unpermitted fires, damage to property and rudeness to or ignoring staff instructions are all examples of serious offences. Such incidents would result in parents being asked to collect students from the expedition. This would result in the student failing the expedition and further discipline sanctions back at school (see below).

18. What if students don't finish the expedition or start an expedition late or leave early?

Students must start and finish the whole expedition to pass. Completing the entire journey independently and carrying their own equipment is required to pass an expedition. They will not pass if they cannot complete the expedition independently. This could mean that they, or parts of their kit, have been transported during part or all of the expedition. They will not pass if they join late or leave early for any reason, including illness. Students unable to attend the full expedition will be offered an alternative expedition date in the future.

19. How are groups assessed?

Groups are assessed by qualified assessors on every aspect of their performance and progress before, during and after expeditions. Groups must reach a required standard to pass expeditions. The requirements to pass RGS DofE expeditions are outlined in the "PERKy" success criteria attached with more detail on our website rgsdofe.wordpress.com and including this information.

- **Before:** Achieving the required standard includes attendance and involvement in preparing and planning the expedition. Inadequate or late planning, poor behaviour or absence or lateness can lead to being deferred from starting an expedition. Prior to reaching this situation the group and parents would usually receive verbal and written warnings about their status. An alternative expedition date will be offered at a later time by which time they will be expected to have shown improvement.
- **During:** On the expedition assessors judge the quality of progress of each group observing their navigation, camp craft, behaviour, road safety and application of the country code. Assessors can appear anywhere to watch their progress. They also visit camp sites during and after groups stay to check the site is free from litter and how they treat facilities. Overall, assessors are looking for evidence to show that groups can be trusted to safely complete independent expeditions. A positive attitude to improve is a helpful indicator for those groups who struggle with some aspects of their expedition. It can make the difference between passing an expedition and being deferred.
- **After:** At the end of each expedition supervising and assessing staff make an assessment of each group and a decision is made to either qualify, defer or fail. Most groups qualify. A few groups are deferred each year especially at Bronze. It is rare for groups to fail an expedition.

20. How can groups qualify, defer or fail an expedition?

Qualify: participants satisfy the PERKy criteria and complete the expedition

Deferral: is quite common and not a punishment! It can be due to problems with camp craft, navigation or behaviour or because groups were unable to complete the expedition independently (e.g. carry all their own kit) or a combination of these. If groups or individuals are deferred they will be offered an alternative date to do another expedition, or part of it, to show improvement. Please note that it is usual for a group to be deferred together despite individuals possibly showing aspects of qualification standard. Groups take responsibility for their actions together.

Fail: is very rare indeed but could be due to a serious breach of school rules or discipline or behaviour that compromises the safety of the expedition by a group or individual. Depending on the severity and circumstance, failing an expedition could mean that joining future RGS DofE expeditions would not be possible. In this case, assistance would be available to help groups or individuals join an external commercial expedition through an approved DofE activity provider. The cost of any remaining future RGS expeditions covered by the enrolment fee would be refunded but the additional costs of joining a commercial expedition would not be covered by school.

The vast majority of groups complete RGS expeditions successfully and safely. They have a challenging and rewarding and memorable time. Note that RGS expeditions are risk assessed internally and the application of our risk and safety management policies may, in some circumstances, override other DofE rules.

These FAQs will hopefully should answer most of your queries about how RGS expeditions operate. Please check our website www.rgsdofe.wordpress.com or get in touch if you need more information.

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