**Gaisce PALs in Colleges and Universities**

Each organisation that offers the Gaisce programme must have at least one President’s Award Leader (PAL). A PAL is somebody over the age of 18 who recognises the value of the Gaisce programme and is passionate about supporting young people to reach their full potential, develop their self-confidence and facilitate participants to get involved in personal, physical and volunteering activities.

**PALs’ role**

PALs main role is to mentor and support Gaisce participants. They meet with them before they begin to ensure that the activities chosen meet Gaisce requirements and are sufficiently challenging while also being attainable. Together they decide how they will communicate with each other and how often. PALs support participants to address any obstacles they encounter, encourage them to persist if they lose motivation, acknowledge their efforts and answer any questions they have in relation to Gaisce. When participants finish their award, they show their Bronze or Silver Record Sheet/ Gold portfolio to their PAL and each PAL will inform Gaisce (via Gaisce’s online system) that a participant is eligible for an award.

**Who are PALs?**

PALs come from a variety of backgrounds and areas of expertise. Currently, Third Level PALs include:

* Administrative staff

I have had students …. tell me that doing Gaisce introduced them to things which had a very beneficial effect on their lives…. both professionally and recreationally. I find that very satisfying. Gaisce PAL

* Campus Engage Officers
* Lecturers
* Students (who already have a Gaisce Award)
* Students Union Officers

**How do you become a PAL?**

There are 4 steps to becoming a Gaisce PAL:

1. Complete a PAL Application form ([www.gaisce.ie](http://www.gaisce.ie))
2. Attend a PAL training session (9.30 – 3.30)\*
3. Provide names of two referees (referees must be 18+

 and not a relative)

1. Complete Garda Vetting process

**Supports/Resources for PALs**

**Development Officers** provide PALs with support and are available to answer any questions you have about any part of the programme - from appropriate activities or programme requirements to Adventure Journeys and online queries. Development Officers’ contact details are available on [www.gaisce.ie](http://www.gaisce.ie). There are also a number of **online supports** such as the Gaisce website, and a Facebook page for PALs ‘Gaisce PALs’. A **pack** specifically created for PALs in Third Level is also available; contact mail@gaisce.ie if you would like to receive one. Gaisce has lots of organisations called **Challenge Partners** that facilitate participants to complete one part of the programme; see our website for an up-to-date list.

There are also a number of resources available in colleges that can be very useful to participants – Sports clubs and Clubs and Societies offering volunteering roles and opportunities to develop skills. Campus Engage Officers facilitate student engagement within the college and with the local community. The website [www.studentvolunteer.ie](http://www.studentvolunteer.ie) lists lots of volunteering opportunities nationwide for students.

**PALs in Third Level**

* There is no limit to the number of PALs an organisation can have.
* PALs mentoring those under 18 are required to supervise them on their Adventure Journey; PALs working with 18+ are not required to supervise any part of an Adventure Journey.
* PALs who work with 18+ are there to mainly offer support and advice; these participants are adults and choose to do a Gaisce Award voluntarily. Participants will take responsibility for their own award (but will require ongoing contact with their PAL and some encouragement from time to time!).
* Gaisce asks PALs to commit to being a PAL for at least two years.

**One PAL’s suggestions**

* Peadar Ó Lamhna is a PAL in UCD. He is a member of the Gaisce Alumni Network (GAN) and he is also a Gold Awardee.
* ‘I became a PAL after receiving my Gold Award in 2013 and began to act as an Award Leader in UCD for students who are completing their Silver and Gold Awards. Operating as a PAL in a university is quite different from a school setting, where students may see their teachers every day. As a PAL in a university, I try to meet with my participants at least once a term and avoid assignment and exam weeks. Erasmus years can also be difficult to work around. University calendars generally only leave 8 weeks per term to meet and as some of my participants spend their summers abroad, a lot of virtual contact via Skype or email is needed.’
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**Some useful tips for university students that work:**

**ACTIVITIES:** Try to pick activities that can be easily done away from college as well as in college - especially useful for the Physical Recreation section. Realistically the student will only have 20 weeks in an academic year (exam weeks excluded) to do activities and that's if they have 100% attendance. If they pick something specific to the university, it may take 2-3 years to complete the section and the student may lose motivation to complete the section. If they choose something that they can continue to do during the summer, it increases their chances of completing the section and gives them a realistic goal to work towards.

**RESOURCES:** Use University Societies to help with sections for the Award. There are a wealth of them in universities and colleges and may also encourage others to take up the Award challenge. On the downside, personnel within Societies change year on year so ensure your participant keeps their record sheet up to date so that the next supervisor can take up where the previous one left off should that supervisor leave the university.

**ADVENTURE JOURNEY:** Participants at Gold level (if on their own) find the Adventure the hardest part to organise. Try to meet with your participants as a group at least once to see of any want to partner up with each other for the Adventure Journey.

**PARTICIPANTS:** Participants generally approach me by word of mouth or they get my email from one of my participants. In these cases, they already know about the Award and have already their Bronze and Silver and will have an idea what to do for the various sections. For participants brand new to the Award, I explain the Award to them, show them my portfolio and what I did. I ask them what they are currently involved in, to think about what they would like to do and then I follow up in a week or so to talk through their activities and goals and register them online.

**BREAK IT UP:** For Gold participants, I ask them to break their sections up into 13 week sections and to set goals for each 13 week block. This allows them to set mini challenges within each challenge area and also helps chart their progress. For example - if they are learning a musical instrument, by week 13 they should challenge themselves to be able to play 4 tunes, by week 26 they should aim for 8 pieces, in week 39 they might aim for 12 and a final goal of 16 at week 52. Breaking the sessions down also works around term times and doesn't make the 52 weeks in each section too daunting.