



GAISCE  
THE PRESIDENT'S  
AWARD

Supporting young people to dream big  
and realise their potential



“  
It made you feel you had  
*self-worth*”



## About Gaisce

Gaisce – The President's Award is a self-development programme for young people which enhances confidence and wellbeing through participation in personal, physical and community challenges. Gaisce is a direct challenge from the President of Ireland to young people aged 15-25 to dream big and realise their potential.

Gaisce is non-competitive, participants are encouraged to choose their own activities and goals with the support of a trained, adult President's Award Leader (or PAL). The Gaisce programme is delivered by over 1,500 PALs working and volunteering in a variety of organisations across Ireland.

There are three levels of Gaisce – Bronze, Silver and Gold. The more time and energy participants give, the greater their reward.



## Introduction

*John Concannon*  
*Chairperson of Gaisce*

In 2010, the Gaisce Council undertook to explore the impact of participation in Gaisce on young people through supporting independent doctoral research. Now complete, the findings of this research are significant in highlighting the very positive impact participation in Gaisce has on young people with respect to a variety of competencies and psychological attributes.

In the five years since this journey began, significant and important developments have taken place, not least the publication in 2014 of the first overarching national policy framework for children and young people, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. Taking an all-government approach, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* identifies five national outcome areas for children and young people in Ireland: being active and healthy, physically and mentally; achieving in all areas of learning and development; being safe and protected from harm; economic security and opportunity; and being connected, respected, and contributing to society and community.



Gaisce is also an effective non-formal educational 'tool'. The more than 1,500 active President Award Leaders who deliver Gaisce within and across a variety of organisations that provide services or supports to young people know this: from youth services, cafés, and clubs to secondary schools, disability organisations, and community development projects; from sporting, uniformed, and C&V organisations to ITs, universities, Foróige and YWI, and so on and so forth.

In our new strategic plan, Gaisce recommits to first principles. Established to provide a non-competitive programme to young people especially those who could most benefit, the strategic priorities Gaisce has committed to for the period of this plan include ensuring that Gaisce is accessible to all young people in Ireland, and greater awareness of the value of the programme. Our vision is for an Ireland where young people dream big and fulfil their potential and our mission is to provide the opportunity for them to do so through the Gaisce Award programme.

*John Concannon*  
*Chairperson of Gaisce*

## Gaisce in 2015

2015 was a **record year** for Gaisce in many respects, below is a snapshot of our key outputs and highlights from last year:

# 22,962

Award applications

+ 2% on 2014

# 14,290

Award completions

+ 10% on 2014

*At least*

# 770,000

hours of helping communities, developing skills and achieving personal goals

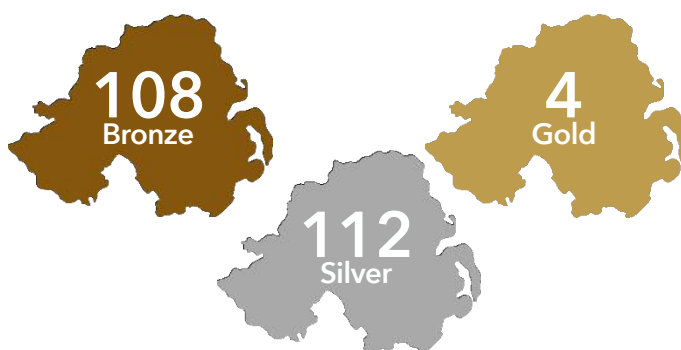


1,193 Silver Awards



56 Gold Awards

In Northern Ireland, Gaisce has a Joint Agreement with The Duke of Edinburgh Award which enables young people who complete the DoE Award programme to have a choice of Award certification: a Duke of Edinburgh's Award Certificate, a Gaisce - The President's Award certificate, or an International Award Certificate.



# 478

PALs trained in 2015

56% second-level  
education

44% non-second-  
level education

The Gaisce programme is delivered across Ireland by our team of incredible President's Award Leaders. A President Award Leader, or PAL, can be any adult (other than a family member) who is involved in supporting the personal development of young people. There are currently over 1,500 active PALs across Ireland.

10,600 social media followers **+41% on 2014**

117,000 unique website visitors



“  
I gained so much  
more from it than I  
put in, and would  
recommend the  
award to anyone  
”

~ Tommy Monahan,  
2015 Awardee



“  
The trip taught me to be  
more open and it  
reminded me that time  
is an important resource  
that everyone may share  
with others if they wish  
”

~ Julie Patterson,  
2015 Awardee



“  
Gaisce has been  
crucial in pushing me  
towards the areas that  
I plan on focusing my  
career in the future  
”

~ Avril Buttle,  
2015 Awardee





## Does **Gaisce – The President's Award** act as a catalyst in the enhancement of the psychological attributes of: hope, self-efficacy, self-esteem, happiness, and psychological well-being in its participants?

On April 22nd 2015, Gaisce launched new research on the impact of participation in Gaisce for young people.



“

I am a firm believer in evidence based policy, and this research demonstrates what many already knew: that Gaisce carries out invaluable, important work, with young people, and for that I commend all involved and offer my heartfelt thanks and appreciation ... Gaisce is playing an important role in shaping tomorrow's leaders. Through the Gaisce experience, young people today are learning the skills vital for tomorrow, and we will all benefit from their development and accomplishments.

”

*~ Minister James Reilly speaking at the research launch.*

“

What my youth service and Gaisce gave me was an opportunity to do something I otherwise wouldn't have done. My journey through Gaisce has been a life changer ... From Gaisce I now feel more included in my community and feel respected. What sticks with me as a young person [from] when we were on top of a mountain is: if you can do Gaisce, you can do anything.

”

*~ David Murtagh, Gold Awardee from Brú Youth Services, speaking at the research launch*



## Executive Summary

Gaisce - The President's Award is a three-tiered personal development programme for young people aged 15 to 25. Combining self-directed challenges and structured supervision by an adult volunteer, young people set and achieve a series of personal, physical, and community challenges at Bronze, Silver, or Gold level. In addition, they undertake an adventure journey and, at Gold level, a residential project is required. The patron of Gaisce is the President of Ireland and the

programme is a challenge directly from the President. It is estimated that more than 300,000 young people have taken up the challenge since it was established in 1985. More than 20,000 young people currently register for the programme each year. These young people come from a variety of backgrounds. Application of the Pobal Index to a five-year cohort of Gaisce participants in 2013 revealed that 46% were marginally disadvantaged, disadvantaged or very disadvantaged.



## Aims

In 2010, independent research towards a PhD degree in Psychology was undertaken by Niamh Clarke-MacMahon. The aims of the research were to determine, first, if Gaisce - The President's Award acted as a catalyst in the enhancement of positive psychological attributes of hope, happiness, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and psychological well-being in its participants and, second, to investigate whether Gaisce met the necessary criteria to be termed a 'Positive Youth Development' programme. A positive youth development programme is one that, through building protective factors, has the potential to act as a buffer against psychological distress and assist young people to take control of their lives in a meaningful and pro-active way.

## Methodology

The research, which took a positive psychology strengths-based approach, combined both quantitative and qualitative research methods and involved a mixed-gender group of participants (647 in total) at Bronze and Gold level, at two points in time: pre-participation and post-participation. Comparison was also made with a control group of non-participants. Questionnaires assessed participants' pre- and post-participation levels of hope, self-efficacy, self-esteem, happiness, and psychological well-being. Interviews captured the personal perspectives and feelings of young people regarding their experience of participation in Gaisce.

## Findings

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative components of the research confirmed and corroborated each other. They were as follows:



The quantitative results confirmed clinically significant **enhanced levels of hope** (pathways) **thinking and self-efficacy** for both Bronze and Gold participants when compared with a control group.

The quantitative results also found significantly **improved levels of hope** (pathways), **self-efficacy, self-esteem, happiness and psychological well-being** for Bronze participants who had scored in the lowest quartile of the group in pre-testing against their control counterparts. This suggests that those with greater psychological needs benefitted most from participation in Gaisce.

The qualitative results verified that participation in Gaisce enhanced participants' personal strengths and psychological attributes, with the following key themes emerging:

**Enhanced positive relationships:** participants felt they were better able to develop friendships and team relationships with others, and that their communication skills had improved.

**Increased empathy and altruism:** participants felt more compassionate towards others and that their patience and understanding of other people had improved. Also, that they would be more likely to volunteer or help others.

**Greater mental fortitude:** participants felt they were more resilient, and had developed a greater sense of commitment and enhanced capacity to challenge themselves, to be self-motivated, to push themselves and to persevere.

**Increased positive emotions:** participants expressed feelings of enjoyment, fun, and happiness.

**Self-efficacy:** participants gained a sense of accomplishment and greater confidence and belief in their own ability to set goals and achieve them.

**Personal growth:** participants felt a greater sense of maturity and recognition of the opportunity to learn and change.

**Positive thought:** participants felt more positively about themselves and generated greater levels of confidence and an improved sense of self-esteem, self-worth and self-belief.



Other themes to emerge included: the opportunity to mentor others; an enhancement of pre-existing skills and the development of new skills; and improved fitness levels.

Finally, the Gaisce programme, through its structure, operation and outcome goals, was found to successfully meet the inclusion criteria to be classified as a Positive Youth Development programme.

“  
More widespread participation in programmes such as Gaisce would have  
*positive implications for the psychological health*  
of young people in Ireland  
”



## Conclusions & Policy Implications

The research concluded that more widespread participation in programmes such as Gaisce would have positive implications for the psychological health of young people in Ireland and, in turn, a positive effect on demands for mental health services. For this reason, the researchers recommended that further research should be done into programmes, such as Gaisce, that promote the physical and mental health of the well-being of adolescents and young people.



“

I liked looking back at  
the year and saying  
that I actually  
achieved something  
new.

”

~ Bronze Gaisce Awardee





## Participating in Gaisce: What Young People Said

'I helped in the local nursing home ... I'd never really had contact with the elderly before, so it was **a new experience** for me.' ~ *Bronze Participant*

'Doing the walking alone [was] massive 'cause it'd nearly kill me to walk to the shop. It just **shows you what you can do**, if you want to.' ~ *Bronze Participant*

'I just think the challenge and the fact that **if you set your mind to something you can do it**, if you make yourself do it, really.' ~ *Gold Participant*

'I **believe in myself** - as corny as that sounds! The harder the challenges, the more determined I am to finish them and to complete them.' ~ *Gold Participant*

'**Gaining confidence** and stuff like that so, to me that was the most beneficial part and the thing I learned most about myself.' ~ *Bronze Participant*

'I can now get my point across without shouting. I think it's **patience** really [that I've learned]. Patience, and then listening.' ~ *Gold Participant*

'Because you're in a team, you push yourself more 'cause you wanna **show your team that you can do it**.' ~ *Bronze Participant*

'It's a **lifetime achievement**: to challenge yourself, to see how far you could push yourself, ... and [to discover] where your limits are.' ~ *Bronze Participant*

## Strategic Plan 2015 - 2018

### Vision 2030

Ireland - where young people dream big and fulfil their potential.

### Mission

Provide opportunities for young people to realise their potential through personal challenges, facilitating the transition from young person to young adult and enhancing their potential and contribution as active participants in society.

### Values

Everything we do is driven by our core values:

#### Respect

for all those we work with and aim to serve:  
we respect people and believe that we  
should all be treated with dignity.

#### Striving for excellence

in the standards we set ourselves and expect  
from others: we go about our business with  
integrity, in an ethical and transparent manner  
in the pursuit of excellence in all that we do.

#### A commitment to inclusion and equity

in engaging with all young people: we believe  
that all young people have immense potential  
that can be developed through Gaisce, and  
that every young person is entitled to equal  
opportunity to participate and discover their  
potential.

#### Participation by young people

in directly shaping Gaisce, achieving their  
awards and contributing as active participants  
in society: we believe in the unique and  
inspirational creativity of young people and  
their vital role and contribution as active  
participants in society.

Our values are reflected in the Irish language saying:

*Ar scáth a chéile a mhaireann na daoine*  
*We live in each other's shadow*



## Strategic Priorities and Planned Outcomes

# 1

### Provide an innovative and challenging Gaisce programme

- A programme that young people choose to participate in and complete at each level.
- A programme that organisations that engage with young people aged 15-25 wish to deliver at each level.
- Quality standards in programme delivery.
- Evidence of outcome/impact.

### Make Gaisce accessible to all young people and programme delivery effective and sustainable

- Diversity of access points into Gaisce.
- Reduction in barriers to participating in Gaisce.
- Best in class PAL and volunteer programme that attracts and retains volunteers in achieving Gaisce's mission / vision.
- Model of delivery that is effective and efficient and can respond to demand

# 2

# 3

### Raise awareness and recognition of Gaisce and its contribution throughout Irish society

- Awareness of Gaisce amongst young people.
- Awareness of Gaisce amongst organisations that engage with young people aged 15-25.
- Awareness of Gaisce amongst potential sponsors and stakeholders.
- Awareness of the value / impact of Gaisce amongst young people, within the youth / youth work / youth empowerment sector and amongst policy makers.

### Ensure Gaisce's sustainability to deliver

- Robust and transparent financial, legal, HR and governance systems/ processes.
- Diversified and sustainable revenue streams that complement strategic priorities.
- Adequately resourced with respect to human resources, financial resources and technological resources.
- Staff, volunteers, Council and supporters take pride in being part of Gaisce.

# 4

“  
The independence is  
brilliant: there is no  
feeling like it, knowing  
that you can pull  
something off.

”

*~ Bronze Gaisce Awardee*





## Thanks

The CEO and staff of Gaisce would like to extend our thanks to:

### President Award Leaders

Over 1,500 volunteer President Award Leaders support young people across Ireland to participate in Gaisce. We are forever grateful for the remarkable help and support of our volunteers and we wouldn't be where we are today without them.

### Gaisce Council

Gaisce is governed by a board of volunteers, appointed by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, that agree the strategic direction for the organisation and ensure that Gaisce has a sustainable programme. Thanks to all the 2012-2015 Council members for their hard work and dedication; Michael Broderick, John Concannon (Chairperson), Brian Collinge, Donal Óg Cusack, Majella Killeen, Allyson Lambert, Andrew Madden, Caroline McCamley, Ruairí McKiernan, Ellen O'Malley-Dunlop, Martin O'Rourke, Aonghus Sammin and Norma Smurfit.

### The Research Team

Huge thanks to the researchers Dr Niamh Clarke McMahon, Dr Gary O'Reilly, UCD School of Psychology and all the young people that took part in the research study for helping us capture the positive impact of participation in Gaisce.

### Our Supporters:

Thanks to our valued supporters for helping the Award programme to reach as many young people as possible. These include: the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, DFS, MMI Group, Central Bank of Ireland, Irish Life, The Ireland Funds, Norma Smurfit, Royal Sun Alliance and Cornmarket Group Financial Services Ltd.



## Organisations Delivering Gaisce Include

Catholic Guides of Ireland	Irish Red Cross	Schools Completion Programme
Community Training Centres	Irish Water Safety	Secondary schools
Cope Foundation	Irish Youth Sailing Club	Scouting Ireland
Cork Life Centre	Job Centres	Special Olympics
Crosscare	KARE	Special schools
Dyspraxia Association	Lakeview	St. Aidan's Services
Enable Ireland	Le Chéile	St. Andrew's Resource Centre
Educational Training Boards	Local Development Companies	St. Cronan's Association
Exchange House	Macra na Feirme	St. John of God's
Family Resource Centres	Matt Talbot Community Trust	St. Joseph's Foundation
Foróige	Merchants Quay Ireland	St. Vincent de Paul
GAA	National Learning Network	Sunbeam House
Garda Youth Diversion Projects	Oak Lodge	The Bridge Project
Home Again	Order of Malta	Higher Education Institutes
Irish Defence Forces	Parish groups	WALK
Irish Girl Guides	Pathways Project	Women's Community Projects
Irish National Sailing School	RACE	Youth Work Ireland
Irish Prison Service	Rathmore Social Action Group	Youthreach
	Rehab	

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