

IMPACT REPORT

2023



GAISCE
THE PRESIDENT'S
AWARD



GAISCE
GRADAIM AN
UACHTARÁIN

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IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

25,165

Award Registrations



6.5%

increase

143

Awardees from **Northern Ireland** through **Joint Award Initiative** partnership with **The Duke of Edinburgh's Award NI**

14,872 Award Completions



19%

increase

79%

of ALL post-primary schools delivering Gaisce

62%

of DEIS schools delivering Gaisce

85%

of Organisations delivering Gaisce retained from 2022

776

Organisations delivering Gaisce

8%

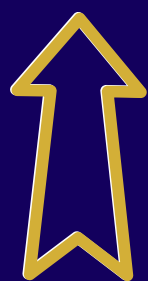
increase in Award Registrations in Disability Services



120%

increase in Youth Diversion Project participants

IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS



325,000

volunteer hours by
Gaisce participants
in their communities



Participants in all
26 counties

in Northern Ireland
through **Joint Award
Initiative**

1,301

**President's Award
Leaders (PALs)**

1,548

Young people supported through
Gaisce Bursary Fund
for young people
experiencing marginalisation



468

new President's
Award Leaders
(PALs) trained

54 PALs

attended free
Global Citizenship
training sessions

105

**Gaisce Gold
participants**

attended free workshops

37 PALs

attended free
Adventure Journey
delivery workshop

A FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIRPERSON



On behalf of the Council of Gaisce - The President's Award, I am pleased to present the organisation's 2023 Impact Report.

On behalf of the Council of Gaisce - The President's Award, I am pleased to present the organisation's 2023 Impact Report.

This report is being published just as a viral rap song by young people, 'The Spark', has attracted more than 350 million online views after just a few weeks. The rap, courtesy of an initiative in Cork, has been covered by media world over, and brilliantly captures the energy and spirit of this generation of young people in Ireland. That undeniable spark is evident too in the pages of this report, sparks when young people find their tribe through the LikeMinded Allies, sparks when young people are given second chances through Youth Justice initiatives, sparks when young people feel like they can influence their collective futures via the Future Generations – Climate Justice Project.

Those sparks of connection, empowerment, creativity, innovation are consistently converted into callings and clarity about what type of life young people want to lead, what impact they want to define for themselves, what role they can play in their own communities as conscientious citizens.

In Gaisce, we are resolute in our shared mission to "provide a positive youth development programme that encourages and guides young people so that their innate talents and abilities, sense of citizenship and social agency can be fully realised."

One of the legacies of the last three years has been Gaisce's ability to attract and empower young people in all their diversity. That strive for inclusion, diversity and fairness is a fundamental principle of Gaisce and an important goal of President of Ireland Michael D Higgins. Our outgoing chair John Cunningham, who I'm proud to take the baton from having served on the council for the last three years, leaves an incredible legacy after two terms in office when it comes to standards of excellence and impact.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend sincere gratitude to President Michael D. Higgins and his officials within Áras an Uachtaráin, and Minister Roderic O'Gorman and his team at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth for their continued support. My thanks also to new and former members of the Gaisce Council who are consistently generous with their time, expertise, passion and energy.

As a council, we passionately believe in the capacity of our young people to build an Ireland founded on the Gaisce principles of inclusion, equality, respect, excellence and empowerment. We are proud to serve and will strive for even greater impact.

Áine Kerr
Chair, Gaisce Council

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



In 2023, Gaisce - The President's Award continued to serve as a beacon of personal development for thousands of young people all over Ireland, leaving a profound impact on their lives, their communities, their peers, and their families.

Gaisce empowers participants to cultivate essential life skills and foster a sense of responsibility and resilience through a nationally and internationally recognised non-formal education framework. The programme's emphasis on self-improvement and goal-setting instils a sense of purpose and achievement, fostering confidence and a can-do attitude among young individuals across Ireland, including young people in Northern Ireland who can choose Gaisce Award certification through the Joint Award Initiative partnership with The Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Through a wide variety of collaboration with partners across a diverse range of youth settings the Gaisce Awards have provided young people with a non-formal education award that opens up so many positive pathways and opportunities. We therefore thank the numerous partner organisations who believe in young people and the value of working together to produce so many memorable experiences and positive outcomes for the youth in our society through their Gaisce Awards.

During 2023 we really saw the bounce back from the covid years with our highest registrations and completions since 2019. We also continued to increase the capabilities of our digital platforms and virtual engagement methods to ensure even greater reach as well as streamlining systems to improve efficiencies. Furthermore, Gaisce's efforts in promoting inclusivity and diversity through more youth led stories and content on our communications platforms ensured that the Award benefits reached a wide spectrum of stakeholders.

More importantly young people from all parts of our society can now see themselves in the Award and are inspired to participate.

Recognising our PALs was also heightened with the expansion of PAL Recognition Awards, which were presented at a special event in Farmleigh, as well as sharing regular stories on the work of various PALs. The more than 1,300 PALs who deliver the Gaisce Awards during the year are all amazing adults who believe in supporting young people to reach their potential. Their time and effort are invaluable, and without their commitment, the Gaisce programme wouldn't be the success it is for young people.

I would like to particularly thank the current and outgoing members of the Gaisce Council, who give so generously of their time and expertise, and of course the exemplar Gaisce Team for their care, dedication and commitment to their work by always striving to develop and deliver a strong collaborative organisational culture.

Finally, we look forward to delivering another groundbreaking year of activities and projects supporting and promoting Gaisce to ensure as many young people as possible can take on the President's direct challenge to participate in and achieve their Gaisce Awards in 2024.

Avril Ryan
Chief Executive Officer,
Gaisce – The President's Award

A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT MICHAEL D. HIGGINS



May I take this opportunity to extend my congratulations to the many thousands of young people throughout the country who have completed their Bronze, Silver and Gold Gaisce Awards over the past year.

Seeing Gaisce participants prioritise their own personal development in pursuit of finding their true potential and making a difference is inspiring.

I particularly commend the positive impact young people contribute to their communities that very often leaves a legacy long after they complete their Gaisce Award.

I would also like to recognise the invaluable guidance and leadership of all the President's Award Leaders who provide such incredible commitment in their mentorship of Gaisce participants. That this work is done entirely on a voluntary basis is something that should be rightfully applauded and appreciated. The success of the Gaisce Awards wouldn't be possible without their selfless commitment.

Taking part in the Gaisce Award is widely seen as a rite of passage for a young person, but in reality it represents so much more. Gaisce plays a vital role in developing social and personal skills, empowering young people as they venture out into the world in future years.

Gaisce's CEO, Council and staff champion diversity and inclusion, ensuring that the Gaisce programme is available and accessible to as many young people as possible.

One of this year's highlights involved young people from Oberstown Children Detention Campus, and I was delighted to have had an opportunity to visit their award-winning Rise

Garden at the Bloom Festival with Sabina, and experience at first hand the wonderful garden created by young people from Oberstown.

It brought Gaisce's commitment to inclusion and diversity to life in a very real way. It was heartening to see so many visitors to the festival see the garden and hear about the story of the garden and how it reflected the experiences of the young people who created it.

It also brought me great joy to welcome 98 young people to Áras an Uachtaráin in July to present them with their Gaisce Gold Award medals, including young people from Northern Ireland. These young people, many of whom came through access and inclusion pathways, were honoured for their outstanding commitment to personal development and contribution to society, and I enjoyed celebrating this special occasion with them.

Finally, I would like to welcome the young people who are now embarking on their Gaisce experience. I wish them every success in their endeavours and look forward to hearing about their Gaisce Award activities and the outcomes of their participation.

Michael D. Higgins
Uachtarán na hÉireann
President of Ireland

ABOUT GAISCE

Gaisce – The President’s Award is Ireland’s national youth award and is a self-development programme for young people aged 14-25. It is a direct challenge from the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, to all young people to dream big and realise their potential.

The Gaisce Award programme has three Award Levels, starting with Bronze and progressing to Silver and Gold. For each award, participants must undertake Challenge Area activities in Personal Skill, Community Involvement and Physical Recreation, along with an Adventure Journey.

To date, more than

480,000

**young people have
registered for Gaisce**

250,000

**young people have
achieved a Gaisce Award**

Gaisce – The President’s Award was established in 1985 to mark the UN’s International Year of Youth and was launched in Áras an Uachtaráin by President, Dr. Patrick J. Hillery, Gaisce’s founding patron.

In 2005, prompted by the Good Friday Agreement’s commitments, young individuals in Northern Ireland gained access to the Gaisce Award through the Joint Award Initiative (JAI), a partnership between Gaisce, Duke of Edinburgh Award and Duke of Edinburgh International Award.

Gaisce Awards are recognised as valuable non-formal education certification in more than

130 countries

through our partnership with The Duke of Edinburgh’s International Award.

Central to the success and design of the Gaisce programme are the President’s Award Leaders (PALs) who deliver, guide and support the many thousands of young people undertaking their Gaisce journey each year, all on a voluntary basis. PALs play a valuable and vital role, driving participation, assisting with selecting Challenge Areas, award registration and completion, motivating and encouraging their participants, and organising the Adventure Journey.

Gaisce Award Partners (GAPs) are organisations where young people can register for Gaisce and receive support to help them complete their Award. GAPs play a pivotal role in the facilitation of Gaisce and providing further access points to young people throughout Ireland. GAPs include schools, the community and voluntary sector, disability services, youth diversion projects, prisons, prison schools and youth probation.

VISION

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

MISSION

To provide a positive youth development programme that encourages and guides young people so that their innate talents and abilities, sense of citizenship and social agency can be fully realised.

VALUES

- Empowerment
- Inclusion and Equality
- Respect
- Excellence

STRATEGIC PILLARS

The Gaisce programme of activities in 2023 is informed by our Strategic Plan 2022-2025 under three Strategic Pillars:



PILLAR 1 – BUILD ON ACHIEVEMENT

Gaisce in Global Citizenship

Gaisce – The President’s Award recognises the importance of Global Citizenship Education and is committed to encouraging Gaisce Participants to incorporate the themes within this including Climate Justice into their challenge area activities while undertaking the Award, through the support of their PAL.

A cornerstone of our work in this sector is the Gaisce Glas project, part of a two-year project funded by Irish Aid.

The key objectives of the Gaisce Glas project included raising the Gaisce organisation’s capacity to promote the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through staff training and awareness days. Staff training sessions in areas ranging from Environmental Awareness to Traveller Ethnicity Awareness took place and have laid the groundwork for more organisation development in the future.

PAL training and support was a key feature of the Gaisce Glas project. Gaisce conducted a series of PAL workshops that reached over 100 PALs in 2023. This training went hand in hand with our Bursary Fund (outlined later in this report) which was focused on ways of making Adventure Journeys more accessible. We hosted Going for Gold sessions for young people undertaking their Gaisce Gold Award, which also supported participants in being more conscious of the UN SDGs.

Best practice in our Global Citizenship Education work was also an important objective, and we used the support of the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) code of Good Practice to aid us in this work.

In May 2023 Gaisce ran our first global session on supporting best practice, with people from over five countries participating. The frame for this event was set by IDEA, showcasing the important elements of good practices.



This project is funded by Irish Aid at the Department of Foreign Affairs.



Gaisce is part of the Future Generations – Climate Justice Project, which seeks to explore and highlight the systemic and human rights issues related to the climate crisis.

Gaisce works with lead partner National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) and Macra na Feirme, Sphere17 Regional Youth Facility, YMCA Ireland, and 1Planet4All on promoting greater inclusion of seldom heard voices into the Climate Justice discussion, particularly supporting the work of the Climate Charter.

The Climate Justice Charter is a tool that supports youth organisations to contribute to the systemic change needed. By signing up to the charter, an organisation commits to uphold climate justice principles and work alongside others in the Climate Justice Charter community to promote climate justice principles.

Eight members of the Gaisce team took part in a Climate Charter staff training session in 2023. The training focused on building awareness of climate justice, as well as providing insight into the Climate Charter. The session was part of a wider development on Climate Charter training for board members in organisations who were willing to sign up for the charter. The attending group provided feedback from the session, which will inform the development of NYCI training for Board members going forward.

This activity is supported by funding from Irish Aid and NYCI.

PILLAR 1 – BUILD ON ACHIEVEMENT

Gaisce Bursary Funds

Gaisce – The President’s Award is committed to making the Award accessible to as many young people as possible, and the Gaisce Bursary Funds are an important way of facilitating this.

In 2023, 1,549 young people representing 41 organisations directly benefitted from Gaisce bursaries, with a total of €68,390 in Bursary funding given out through two funds – Irish Aid (€31,108) and Youth Justice (supported by a philanthropic grant) (€37,282).

The Irish Aid Gaisce Glas Bursary Fund allowed Gaisce to provide training and resources to President’s Award Leaders (PALs) under Global Citizenship Education by supporting young people from 22 organisations, ranging from DEIS schools, youth, disability and migrant services to alleviate participation barrier costs of the adventure journey for young people facing barriers and experiencing marginalisation. This included hiring of transport, helping with disability access needs, accessing adventure journey equipment and providing accommodation. A total of 62 organisations applied for the fund, demonstrating the need for support.

Gaisce was delighted to be able to provide funding for the 22 successful organisations to enable them to ensure that their Gaisce participants could experience the adventure journey.

The second Bursary programme targeted the area of Youth Justice. This bursary was set up principally to actively support the inclusion of young people in youth justice related projects and youth diversion projects to complete adventure journeys and other Award related activities.

The fund supported 19 separate youth justice projects in 2023, 14 of which were youth diversion projects.



PILLAR 1 – BUILD ON ACHIEVEMENT

Gaisce in Youth Justice

Gaisce – The President’s Award actively works with young people in the youth justice sector throughout Ireland, including prisons, detention, youth diversion projects and youth probation projects. Our work in the sector is an important part of our objective of ensuring that as many young people as possible have the opportunity to participate in the Gaisce Awards programme.

Gaisce achieved a major landmark in our work with Youth Diversion Projects in November, when James Browne, Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality, made a significant announcement at the annual National Youth Diversion Project Conference. He confirmed that, starting in January 2024, the Department will be supporting the cost of registration fees for Gaisce Awards participation in all Youth Diversion Projects. With 106 such projects throughout the country, and more coming on stream, this commitment significantly reduces the barriers to participation in Gaisce for these young people, allowing them the opportunity to undertake the programme. The announcement was the result of many months of meetings and conversations between the Gaisce team and the Department.

We also continued our successful Story Exchange programme in 2023, with projects taking place in Mountjoy Progression Unit and Wheatfield Prison. The programme, which brings together young people from the Maynooth Access Programme in

Maynooth University and young people from the Progression Unit and Wheatfield Prison, aims to build a level of empathy and understanding between the groups. This was done using the Narrative 4 Story Exchange methodology, which employs storytelling as a basis to create connection and increase empathy.

Our partnership with the Irish Prison Service is flourishing with the continuation of the National Steering Committee for the Award in Custody. This partnership brings together all the critical partners to ensure young people aged 18-25 in custody can access the Gaisce Award. Participating in the Award helps them in their personal development, and fosters a sense of achievement and self-worth, adding value to their CVs and making a positive contribution to their communities.

2023 also saw the establishment of Gaisce implementation teams, bringing together key personnel from different sections of the prisons. The teams, which consist of head teachers, PALs from Education Units, ISM Officers (Integrated Sentence Management), Chief Work Training and Governors, are critical in getting multi-disciplinary teams to work together to support the running of Gaisce. To date, implementation teams have been activated at the following prisons: Cork, Limerick, Mountjoy (Main, Progression and Womens), Castlerea and Wheatfield.

The Irish Prison Service have also provided Gaisce with a small grant to cover a part time consultant to support the growth of Gaisce across the IPS.



Emma McLoughlin, Project Officer with Gaisce; Minister of State for Law Reform, James Browne TD; and Karol Quinn, Head of Programme and Strategic Development with Gaisce at the Youth Diversion Project Conference at Croke Park in November 2023.

PILLAR 1 – BUILD ON ACHIEVEMENT

LikeMinded Allies

Gaisce is a proud ally of the LGBTQ+ community and every year we are delighted to welcome young people from the LGBTQ+ community to take part in the Gaisce Awards. We are committed to ensuring that these young people can see themselves in the Awards, and feel safe, supported and empowered throughout the experience.

We support the LGBT Ireland Strategic Plan 2023-2027, and are committed to making Gaisce as inclusive as possible for our LGBTQ+ participants and PALs.

In November 2023, Gaisce hosted LikeMinded Allies: A Gaisce PAL event in LINC, Cork, supported by Rethink Ireland. The event was exclusively for President's Award Leaders (PALs), and took place during the BELONGTO

Stand Up Awareness Week. It aimed to support PALs in the Munster area by creating a culture of allyship and inclusion of LGBTQ+ Gaisce participants.

In attendance were PALs representing schools and youth organisations in the Munster region, who enjoyed a creative workshop led by Sinead Moloney, a highly experienced Creative Psychotherapist and Group Facilitator. The evening also featured an interactive panel discussion with Kate Moynihan, CEO of LINC; Aaron O'Sullivan from the Sexual Health Centre in Cork; Pam O'Leary, Guidance Counsellor and Teacher of Ethics and SPHE at Cork Educate Together Secondary School; and Sinead Moynihan; facilitated by activist Síona Cahill.

Events such as LikeMinded Allies are an important way for Gaisce to highlight the supports and guidance that can be accessed for the LGBTQ+ community and demonstrate our on-going commitment to this community.



Speakers and attendees
at LikeMinded Allies: A
Gaisce PAL Event at LINC,
Cork in October 2023

This activity is supported by
funding from Rethink Ireland.

PILLAR 1 – BUILD ON ACHIEVEMENT

Learning Exchange with The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Finland

Gaisce – The President Award is a partner of The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award which operates in more than 120 countries and territories globally, with one million young people taking part in their programme each year. This partnership is an important example of the opportunities that we can develop for Gaisce PALs, Participants and Staff across the International award community through collaborations and learning exchanges.

One such opportunity took place in 2023, when Gaisce linked with The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Finland/Avartti for a shared learning exchange. Delegates including staff and board members from The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Finland visited Ireland in June 2023 and participated in a shared learning exchange with Gaisce Staff and Council, including site visits to a number of Gaisce Award Partners (GAPs).



Guests at the reception in the Finnish Embassy, hosted by the Finnish Ambassador to Ireland, H.E. Raili Lahnalampi in June 2023

We were also delighted to attend a reception in the Finnish Embassy, hosted by the Finnish Ambassador to Ireland, H.E. Ms. Raili Lahnalampi, to celebrate our bilateral relationship.

Welcoming the representatives from The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Finland demonstrates the close partnerships we enjoy with our fellow international partners, and we look forward to developing these relationships in future years.

This partnership is supported by Erasmus+ Funding to The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Finland.

PILLAR 2 – TELL OUR STORY

Rise Garden at Bloom with Oberstown Children Detention Campus

Gaisce is committed to working with young people experiencing marginalisation, creating opportunities for their voices to be heard.

Showcasing projects undertaken by young people gives us an opportunity to increase the visibility of their work, share their story and show the positive impact of Gaisce.

One of the highlights of the year was a ground-breaking collaboration between Gaisce – The President's Award and Oberstown Children Detention Campus at the annual Bord Bia Bloom Festival at the Phoenix Park in Dublin.

Working with the artist Joe Caslin and designer Eugene Higgins, the young people from Oberstown created the stunning Rise Garden, which was showcased at the festival.

The young people were centrally involved in the entire process, with the overall concept for the garden created and defined by 12 Gaisce Bronze, Silver and Gold Award participants from Oberstown.

They were heavily involved in the design of the garden itself, working with Joe and Eugene to bring their creative vision to life.

Bloom Festival had an attendance of over 100,000 people over the five-day event in the Phoenix Park. Among the visitors to the garden was Gaisce's patron, the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins and his wife Sabina.

The Rise Garden was awarded a Silver Gilt Medal at the festival; a fitting reward for this unique project.

While the young people who created the garden were not able to attend Bloom, the garden has been returned to Oberstown and now has pride of place on the Oberstown campus; testament to the continued work of Gaisce participants and PALs.



President Michael D. Higgins and his wife Sabina visit the Rise Garden at the Bloom Festival in June 2023



PILLAR 2 – TELL OUR STORY

Lá Gaisce

Throughout the year, thousands of young people throughout the country invest time in developing personal skills, improving their physical and mental health, and volunteering in their communities as they undertake their Gaisce Awards.

In 2023 alone, Gaisce participants invested a phenomenal 325,000 volunteering hours through the Community Involvement challenge area!

They are supported by a network of dedicated President's Award Leaders (PALs), who provide ongoing mentorship and encouragement to them, all on a voluntary basis, and by the support of the Gaisce Award Leaders.

Our annual day of celebration, Lá Gaisce, gives us an opportunity to highlight the reach and impact of Gaisce in the community and celebrate the efforts and achievements of participants, PALs and GAPs.

Lá Gaisce took place on Wednesday 25th October 2023, with Participants, PALs and GAPs actively engaging with us on social media throughout the day, sharing their stories and experiences through images, videos and messages.



A supporting media relations campaign was activated, resulting in a substantial national radio interview on RTE Radio 1 Drivetime, along with extensive regional print and broadcast coverage.

A themed mailshot campaign targeted at TDs and Senators took place, resulting in social media posts being shared from their accounts on the day, congratulating their constituents and supporting the Gaisce cause. Gaisce patron President Michael D. Higgins also shared a written message.

In a new addition to Lá Gaisce, the Irish Prison Service actively promoted the event, and the Director General of the Irish Prison Service, Caron McCaffrey, recorded video messages which were aired on internal channels as well as on Gaisce's social media channels.

Gaisce Challenge Partner parkrun Ireland organised a special Gaisce parkrun Challenge weekend, which took place over the Bank Holiday weekend following Lá Gaisce.

Highlighting the national impact of the campaign, #LáGaisce trended on Twitter throughout the day.



PILLAR 2 – TELL OUR STORY

New Gaisce User Portal

Improving the user experience for visitors to www.gaisce.ie was an important area of focus for 2023, as we recognised the importance of streamlining the visitor experience.

Gaisce developed a new user portal, which went live on Lá Gaisce. The new user portal was designed with our PALs and Participants at top of mind, and provides an accessible and improved user experience, with an emphasis on making the navigation journey as smooth as possible. The new portal also features a fresh new visual identity for Gaisce.

The new user portal is fully available in Irish as well as English.



PILLAR 2 – TELL OUR STORY

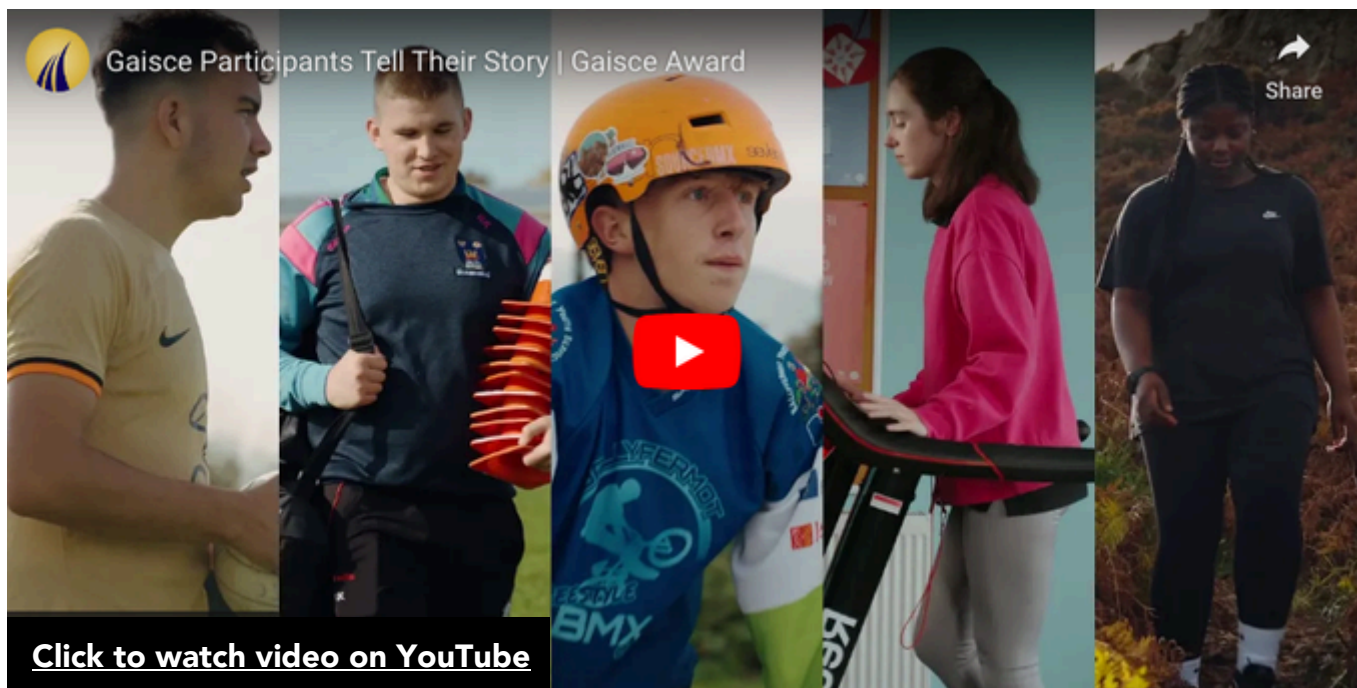
Gaisce Mission Video

An important part of Gaisce's communications strategy is to place the voice of young people at the centre of Gaisce, and our new Mission Video is a perfect example of how we are bringing this strategy to life.

The new Gaisce Mission Video was launched on Wednesday 25th October to coincide with Lá Gaisce.

The video is exclusively focused on the participant experience and features five Gaisce participants representing a diverse range of locations and stories.

The young people featured represent different geographical locations in Ireland (Ballyfermot, Glasnevin, Tullamore and Belmullet), as well as reflecting the diversity of young people who participate in the Gaisce programme.



PILLAR 2 – TELL OUR STORY

Gaisce in Schools

Post-primary schools are the environment in which the majority of young people first discover and register for their Gaisce Award, with 94% of all Awards completed taking place in schools.

Gaisce is active in 79% of all post-primary schools in Ireland, with 574 schools delivering the Gaisce programme in 2023. Gaisce is also in 62% of DEIS schools.

Our team of Development Officers invest huge amounts of time and effort building and maintaining relationships with schools and their President's Award Leaders (PALs), and the strength of these relationships is evidenced by the fact that Gaisce's schools' retention rate in 2023 was 92%.



Young people from Fingal Community College

Gaisce is now firmly recognised as an integral part of senior cycle education. What may be lesser known is that Gaisce is now available to students in their second year of post primary. Second year is widely acknowledged as a flash point when some young people disengage from formal education and extra-curricular activities. Enabling younger students to develop in the areas of self-motivation, resilience, and target setting, which the Gaisce programme does, cultivates personal growth and maturity and complements wellbeing in Junior Cycle.



Development Officer Siobhan Noctor presenting a Gaisce Info Session at Presentation College, Athenry, Co. Galway

And, of course, if a student undertakes their Bronze Gaisce Award in second year, they can progress to their Silver Award while in TY.

Likewise, many young people start or complete their Awards in fifth and sixth years.

Taking this approach can give young people a great way to balance their own personal development with their formal education.

The value of Gaisce as a non-formal education qualification cannot be underestimated. Gained alongside formal education qualifications, undertaking a Gaisce Award increases a young person's skills, confidence and resilience and fosters a greater sense of civic responsibility. It also gives young people extracurricular experience to include in their CV for work experience and future employment applications; giving them an advantage and helping them to stand out in recruitment processes. These findings are supported in research we conducted, demonstrating that Gaisce is a proven Positive Youth Development Programme.

The importance of President's Award Leaders (PALs) in schools is invaluable. As young people navigate their way through the Awards, balancing commitments with their academic demands, PALs provide them with support, mentorship and advice, helping them on their way.

PALs have also been instrumental in building connections between schools and other Gaisce Award Partners (GAPs) in the community. A great example of this can be seen in the community connection programme developed between St. Joseph's Mercy Secondary School in Navan and Prosper Meath's Leighsbrook service in 2023.

PILLAR 2 – TELL OUR STORY

14 students from St. Joseph's volunteered and committed to join and assist service users at Prosper Meath each week for the school year. The group took part in a number of projects throughout the year, including community art initiatives, attending the local future leaders' event in the school, and getting the TY students involved in Prosper's dance show over the summer holidays. One of the highlights of the year was the school's TY Christmas Cracker show, where they invited special guests from Prosper Meath to join the enter TY year group in singing 'Silent Night' with Lámh.



Young people from Calasactius College, Oranmore, Co. Galway



Young people from St. Joseph's Mercy Secondary School in Navan, Co. Meath and young people from Prosper Meath's Leighsbrook service sing 'Silent Night' with Lámh

Both St. Joseph's and Prosper Meath have benefitted from the programme. Aideen O'Sullivan, Deputy Principal (acting) at St. Joseph's outlines the benefits to her students: "For the TY students, their involvement really helped grow confidence and social skills, encouraged togetherness and inclusivity of all ages and abilities, and above all, helped students recognise that they can make a real difference in their communities by getting involved with local groups.

The benefits enjoyed by the young people at Prosper Meath were also valuable. Kellie Cuniffe, Service Manager at Prosper Meath - Leighsbrook explains: "For the individuals supported by Prosper Meath, connection in the community is one area that is vital for everyone to feel as though they have a valued role.

The Gaisce program helped us to link in with the Mercy school, and what we got out of this experience was amazing. We built friendships, made community contacts and introduced the school to our disability awareness program, all while having great fun and achieving our Gaisce Award. It was a raging success and we already cannot wait to get involved with the school again next year!"

Community involvement fosters a sense of belonging, enhances social connections and empowers students to make a positive impact in their local area, and Gaisce encourages schools throughout Ireland to build connections and partnerships with other GAPs in their community.



Young people from St. Joseph's College, Lucan, Co. Dublin

PILLAR 3 – EXCELLENCE IN WHAT WE DO

Gaisce Gold Award Ceremony

The pinnacle of the Gaisce experience for our participants is achieving the Gold Award. Completing this Award requires a huge time commitment and effort from young people, each spending over one year undertaking their Challenge Areas, Gold Residential and Gold Portfolio. In 2023 alone, Gaisce Gold participants invested a total of 4,576 hours accomplishing their Award.

Not only is this a significant achievement for the young people, their accomplishments are also being recognised by more and more employers, who value and recognise the dedication, resilience and perseverance invested by them.

On 7th July 2023 President Michael D. Higgins presented 98 young people with their Gaisce Gold Awards in a ceremony at Áras an Uachtaráin. The ceremony recognised the outstanding commitment to personal development and contribution to society by these young people.

This year's participants took on a range of activities and projects, from Meals on Wheels, to playing the bagpipes, learning a new language, participating in parkruns, and refining their leadership skills.

The 2023 recipients represented the broad range of young people across Ireland, which was a testament to Gaisce's dedication and focus on ensuring no young person is left behind when it comes to participating in the Awards. The event was MC'd by Irish actress and writer Tara Flynn and the keynote speaker was psychologist and author of Poor, Dr Katriona O'Sullivan.

The Gaisce Gold Awards Ceremony received significant coverage across national broadcast, print and regional media. Paramount to this coverage were key messages including Gaisce's emphasis on accessibility and inclusion as well as highlighting the young people's achievements. Leading this coverage was a 2-minute packaged feature on Virgin Media news at 5.30, along with pieces in the Irish Independent, Irish Examiner, RTE Online and FM104.



PILLAR 3 – EXCELLENCE IN WHAT WE DO

Gaisce Award Ceremonies

One of the most enjoyable occasions in the Gaisce year is to get to celebrate the achievements of all the young people who complete their Gaisce Bronze and Silver Awards.

From Belmullet to Bray, from Dingle to Drogheda, from Adare to Armagh, members of the Gaisce staff and Council regularly attend Award ceremonies in schools, youth clubs, sports clubs, disability groups, migrant groups, youth diversion projects, probation services, prisons and partner organisations all across Ireland during the year, hearing the stories about the challenges young people did to achieve their Award, and sharing in the celebrations with them.

We also occasionally welcome Award participants to our HQ at Ratra House in Dublin's Phoenix Park to present them with their medals and certificates and congratulate them on their achievements.

Well done to everyone who achieved their Gaisce Bronze and Silver Awards in 2023. We hope many of you will continue on your Gaisce journey and progress to your next award level!



Young people from Ulster GAA receiving their Gaisce Bronze and Silver Awards



Young people from Mount Mercy College in Cork meet the Lord Mayor of Cork, Kieran McCarthy



A young person from St. Mary's Secondary School, Edenderry, Co. Offaly receiving her Gaisce Award



Gaisce Awards ceremony for young people from Ukrainian Action in Ireland

PILLAR 3 – EXCELLENCE IN WHAT WE DO

Defence Forces Challenge

Gaisce has worked with the Defence Forces from the early days of the Award. Partnering with them offers the opportunity to collaborate on special events that offer unique experiences to Gaisce participants that fulfil the requirements of their Award.

Every year the Defence Forces hosts the Gaisce Defence Forces Challenge. The four-day challenge, which meets the criteria for the Adventure Journey element of the Award, is a brilliant opportunity for young people to challenge themselves, build resilience and connect with other Gaisce participants. Young people are offered the chance to apply for places on the challenge, with a small number selected to take part each year.

The 2023 Gaisce Defence Forces Challenge took place in June. 20 current Award participants aged between 15 and 17 took part in the four-day event, which involved outdoor pursuits, aerial runways, zip wires, river crossings, obstacle courses, hiking and survival skills. The Challenge involved 4 days and 3 nights of activities led by the Defence Forces.



The 20 participants represented 17 Gaisce Award Partners (GAPs), coming from Louth, Dublin, Limerick, Wexford, Cavan, Kildare and Leitrim. The Challenge covered the Adventure Journey requirements for Gaisce Bronze and Silver participants.

A massive thank you to our long-standing and dedicated partners at the Defence Forces for once again hosting the Challenge and providing such brilliant support, in particular the team at Custume Barracks in Athlone.



PILLAR 3 – EXCELLENCE IN WHAT WE DO

President's Award Leader (PAL)

Recognition Awards

Gaisce would not be the successful non-formal education programme that it is without the work and dedication of the President's Award Leaders (PALs), who provide so much support and mentorship to participants, all on a voluntary basis. They have made a tangible difference to the lives of so many young people through their involvement with the Gaisce Awards.

It is vital that the work that our PALs do is acknowledged and honoured, and every year we invite a group of them to the prestigious and unique setting of Farmleigh House in Dublin's Phoenix Park to celebrate their commitment. At this event, we honour PALs who have supported young people in the Gaisce programme for five years or more, those who are retiring and those who have mentored a Gold awardee.

The 2023 PAL Recognition Awards took place on Saturday 28th January.

73 PALs who have been active for five years or more received a Civic Merit Award in 2023, with 10 of these presented in person at the PAL Recognition Awards. 64 PALs received a certificate recognising their exemplary work as a mentor for a Gold Awardee, and 10 of these were presented in person at the event.

The event was MC'd by comedian, writer and podcaster Julie Jay, and the guest speaker was author and world-renowned immunologist and Professor of Biochemistry Professor Luke O'Neill.



PILLAR 3 – EXCELLENCE IN WHAT WE DO

Learning Hub:

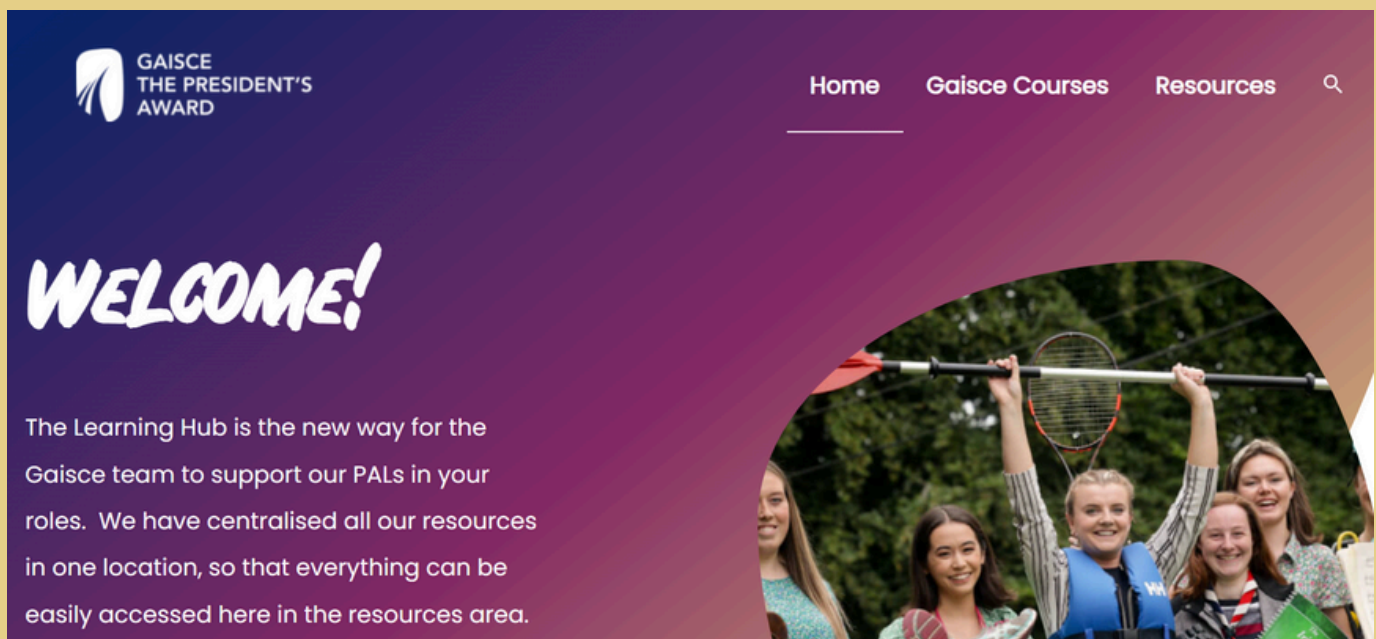
Gaisce is invested in ensuring that our President's Award Leaders (PALs) are supported by the organisation in their day-to-day work with participants.

We identified that creating a central location where PALs can access a variety of resources and e-learning opportunities would be beneficial, offering a more effective and streamlined experience for them.

The Learning Hub is the new way for the Gaisce team to support our PALs in their roles.

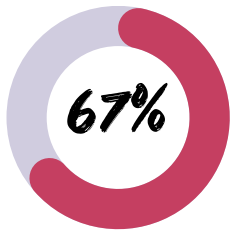
We have centralised all our resources into this new location, so that everything can be easily accessed. We will also be creating new resources, videos and courses that PALs will be able to access in this location.

As well as being the new home for PAL resources, the Learning Hub is an active space where we are encouraging and embracing online or on-demand learning.

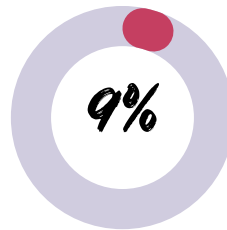


FINANCIAL INFORMATION

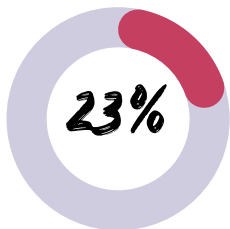
Income



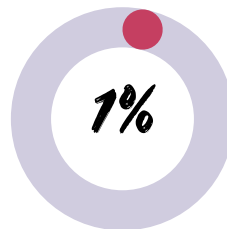
**Statutory Funding
& Grants**
€935,153



**Non-Statutory
Philanthropic
Donations and Grants**
€127,000

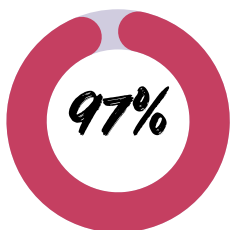


**Participant
Registration Fees**
€328,867

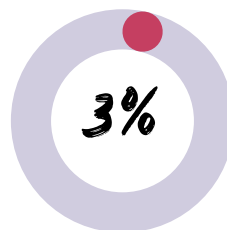


Other
€8,495

Expenditure



**Charitable
Expenditure**
€1,314,704



**Cost of Raising
Funds**
€39,734

2023 Financial Statements

Gaisce – The President's Award prepares its accounts in line with the Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP). Please note that the financial statements of the most recent three years are available on our website. Gaisce's 2023 Financial Statements can be viewed at www.gaisce.ie.

GAISCE COUNCIL

Our sincere thanks and appreciation to all members of the Gaisce Council, who give their time to support Gaisce - The President's Award work and governance in a voluntary capacity.

- **Shane Bergin**
(Appointed October 2023)
- **Megan Berry**
(Appointed February 2023;
Retired November 2023)
- **Samantha Briody**
- **Dr. Norah Burns**
- **John Cunningham**
(Chairperson – Term Completed 15/5/2024)
- **Pauric Dempsey**
- **Denis Duggan**
(Term Completed October 2023)
- **Emma Farrell**
(Term Completed October 2023)
- **Jennifer Gannon**
- **Lydia Gratis**
(Appointed February 2023)
- **Áine Kerr**
(Appointed Chairperson 7/6/2024)
- **Ali Khan**
- **Adam Peerbux**
(Appointed May 2023)
- **Aoife Prendergast**
(Appointed October 2023)
- **Paul Sweetman**
(Term Completed October 2023)
- **Vincent Teo**
- **Anna-Marie Turley**
(Appointed October 2023)
- **Emily Whelton**

Gaisce - The President's Award, Ratra House, North Road, Phoenix Park,
Dublin 8, Ireland, D08 YD62 t: +353 1 6171999 | e: info@gaisce.ie | w: www.gaisce.ie

@GaisceAward Gaisce - Gradam an Uachtaráin, The President's Award is a company limited by guarantee (CRO 251020) and with a CHY and RCN number (8482 and 20020903 respectively). Our registered address is Ratra House, Phoenix Park, Dublin D08YD62.

GAISCE TEAM

Chief Executive Officer

Avril Ryan

Leadership Team

Sarah Gallagher, Head of Communications and Engagement (from September)

Karol Quinn, Head of Programme and Strategic Development

Business Support Team

Louise Place, Business Development Manager

Alex Davis, Governance and Business Support Officer

Deirdre Phelan, Administrator

Operations Team

Paul Darby, National Development Manager

Marion Irwin Gowran, Project Manager

Eve O'Brien, Learning Manager

Ger Brady, Development Officer

Kate Kelly, Project Officer

Emma McLaughlin, Project Officer

Siobhan Noctor, Development Officer

Stephen Peers, Development Officer

Joy Winston, Development Officer

Mary Yore, Development Officer

Communications Team

Shane Barr, Digital Media & Social Content Officer

Hannah Dempsey, Communications Officer (from October)

Emily Wolfe, Communications Officer (until May)



Members of the Gaisce team enjoying a 10km hike in the Dublin Mountains as part of our annual Staff Wellbeing Day.

SUPPORTERS IN 2023

Primary Funder



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



Thank you to Minister Roderic O’Gorman and
the officials in the Department of Children,
Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Project Funders



Seirbhís Phríosúin
na hÉireann
Irish Prison Service



Irish Aid
Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

**RETHINK
IRELAND**

THANK YOU

GO RAITH MAITH AGAT

Our special thanks to President Michael D. Higgins and the staff of the Office of the President.

Thank you to Kate Thompson, Director in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award/Joint Award Initiative in Northern Ireland and her Team – a highlight in 2023 was the staff shared learning day between both organisations.

Thank you to all our fantastic President's Award Leaders and Gaisce Award Partners and all the young people who register for and complete their Gaisce awards, and all those who support us throughout the year, including our philanthropic supporters and key support staff for our grants.

Many thanks to all our many programme partners and collaborators in 2023 including: Duke of Edinburgh's Award Northern Ireland, The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, Minister of State at the Department of Justice James Browne and Department of Justice officials, Caron McCaffrey and the Irish Prison Service team, Suvi Viljanen and Mikko Varesmaa from The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Finland, Thomas F. Meagher Foundation, John Smith and the team at Oberstown Children Detention Campus, Narrative 4, Mountjoy Progression Unit, Wheatfield Prison, Maynooth Access Programme, The Defence Forces and Staff in Custume Barracks Athlone, Mary Cunningham and Team at NYCI, Lorraine Tansey, Tusla Participation Awards, European Parliament, LINC, Ulster GAA, parkrun Ireland, our Dual Award Partners in Scouting Ireland, Irish Girl Guides and the Catholic Guides, Beacon Company Secretaries, Cliodhna Barlow, Donnacha Walsh and Ciara Kearney.

Thank you to all our Approved Adventure Journey Providers for hosting so many Adventure Journeys for Gaisce participants in 2023: Achill OETC, Ballyhass Adventure Group, Baltinglas OETC, Birr OETC, Burren OETC, Delphi Outdoors Limited, East Coast Adventure, Fastnet Marina (Schull) OETC, Funkytown Adventure Centre, Galway Outdoor Education / Achill Surf, Gartan OETC, Kilfinane OETC, Killary Adventure Co., Kinsale OETC, Petersburg OETC, Shannon River Adventure Ltd., Shielbaggan OEC, Tanagh OETC, The Cavan Centre and West Cork Secret Adventures Ltd.

And finally, thanks to all our Official Challenge Partners for providing inspiration to our participants on the activities they can do when undertaking their Gaisce Awards.



GAISCE
**THE PRESIDENT'S
AWARD**



GAISCE
**GRADAIM AN
UACHTARÁIN**

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