

The Gaisce Awards

By Anna O'Donoghue

My Gaisce experience began in fourth year, when Mr. Coffey herded us all into T.Y.1 for another one of his "talks" as we thought but we were quickly mistaken. As all 64 of us squashed into the room chatting about the usual - the gossip from last Saturday night out, our next fourth year adventure & the fashion of the teachers - we were immediately interrupted by a loud outburst "THE GAISCE." All looked blankly and asked in a musical tone "Huh?" So he explained briefly.

For those of you who are not aware of what the Gaisce is or entails:

The Gaisce/Presidents Award is a national challenge award given by the President to young people in Ireland between the ages of 15 and 25 years. Recipients of the award get a medal in a presentation box, a certificate signed by the President and a lapel pin.

The purpose of the award is to reward young people who have set and achieved a demanding challenge for themselves in each of four different areas of activity:

- 1. Community involvement, e.g., helping the elderly*
- 2. Personal skills e.g., learning to play a musical instrument*
- 3. Physical recreation, e.g. swimming*
- 4. Venture activity, e.g., a four-day cycle.*

Once you have achieved your personal challenges under the guidance of a President's Award Leader, you will earn the award. There are three levels of awards: Bronze, Silver, and Gold and for each different level there is a different time length.

Community activity

Bronze - you must carry out the activity for one hour per week for 15 weeks

Silver - you must carry out the activity for one hour per week for 30 weeks

Gold - you must carry out the activity for one hour per week for 60 weeks.

Personal skill

Bronze - you must carry out the activity for one hour per week for 26 weeks

Silver - you must carry out the activity for one hour per week for 39 weeks

Gold - you must carry out the activity for one hour per week for 52 weeks

Physical recreation

Bronze - you must carry out the activity for one hour per week for 12 weeks

Silver - you must carry out the activity for one hour per week for 15 weeks

Gold - you must carry out the activity for one hour per week for 18 weeks.

Venture section

<u>Award</u>	<u>Foot expedition</u>	<u>Cycling expedition</u>
<i>Bronze</i>	<i>2 days 25 to 35 km</i>	<i>2 days -100 to 10 km</i>
<i>Silver</i>	<i>3 days - 50 to 79 km</i>	<i>3 days - 190 to 220km</i>
<i>Gold</i>	<i>4days - 80 to 110 km</i>	<i>4 days- 300 to 350 km</i>

So we all conversed about whether we will take on the challenge or what to do as part of the challenge. After a long week of repeating the same questions and hearing that familiar roar

"Who's taking on the Gasice?" we decided to do it (sure, if nothing else, we might end up in the "good books").

I decided as part of my personal skill sector to add another instrument to my list and take up guitar lessons. As part of my physical recreation sector, I decided to join the gym with a few friends and, as I was already a leader in the Youth Fest programme, I decided to use that as my community activity.

After a long 26 weeks, I finally reached the last activity of my bronze award, the venture section! Mr. Coffey had previously promised us an adventure we would never forget. On a cold Friday morning, a handful of us marched into a minibus and headed off into the unknown. Mr. Coffey was determined to keep the location a surprise. We arrived at the foot of what looked to me like a never-ending monstrosity of overgrown grass. I briefly glanced in my group's direction to witness their huge grins and wide eyes. Excited?? I know for a fact I wasn't!! After many hours of trekking and collapsing and more trekking and more collapsing, we finally reached our mark. I wasn't impressed and promised myself never again will I tackle such a challenge.

Until next year! As I began my start in fifth year, a familiar roar haunted me - "The Gasice." I tried my best to delete it from my vocabulary but I was constantly reminded by my former award leader, now my Year Head! After many, brief conversations, I decided once again to 'give it a go'.

The Silver Challenge was tougher than I thought. After reading over the application form once again, I decided to use my involvement in Siamsa Tire for my personal skill and physical recreation sectors. I decided, as part of my community involvement, to visit an elderly neighbour once a week. For my adventure section, I was determined to once again push myself to the limit by taking part in a four day camping and hill walking expedition.

After a long 36 weeks, I completed my silver award. The weeks were long but, I finally completed it and I am 110% glad I did it. I now know that I can achieve a lot in life once I put my mind to it. The topic of the gold award is on the tip of my tongue but I will have to decide whether I once again will take on the challenge as, "unfortunately", I will not have that familiar roar we all know and love. We will always remember "The Gasice".