

**Written evidence submitted by The Duke of Edinburgh's Award,  
relating to Reconciliation  
[RIN0021]**

**What examples are there domestically and internationally of spaces, symbols, or actions that have supported reconciliation?**

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Gaisce – The President's Award have taken a unique approach to reconciliation through ensuring that all young people in the North of Ireland can benefit from developing the skills they need to successfully navigate life and work, building their self confidence and self-esteem whilst gaining an internationally accredited and recognised Award.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Gaisce - The President's Award have worked together closely since Gaisce – The President's Award was established in 1985. Since 2000, the two organisations have worked together under a Joint Award Initiative Agreement. This Agreement, which was put in place by the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award (then the International Award) after the Good Friday Agreement, represents an innovative approach to working across boundaries to increase access to enrichment opportunities and recognise young people's achievements and dedication.

The Joint Award Initiative is administered by The Duke of Edinburgh's Award – Northern Ireland. However, the strategic development of the Joint Award Initiative is the responsibility of a Joint Advisory Committee which includes members from both Gaisce - The President's Award Council and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Network Ambassadors.

The Joint Award Agreement enables any young person who meets the conditions of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme within Northern Ireland, at any of its three levels, to have a choice of certification - from the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Gaisce - The President's Award, or the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award. The Joint Award is administered by the Duke of Edinburgh's Award – Northern Ireland.

The choice of certification is a matter for the young person themselves. Young people who choose a Gaisce - The President's Award certificate at Gold level are invited to have their certificate presented by the President of Ireland in Dublin. Young people who choose a Duke of Edinburgh's Award certificate are invited to receive and celebrate their Award achievements from HRH The Duke of Edinburgh either in London, Edinburgh or Hillsborough. Young people who are working towards their Awards in the same centre can choose to be recognised with whichever certificate they wish thus ensuring that the name of the Award programme is not a barrier through a flexible, young person-centred approach.

In order to promote the Joint Award Initiative, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award has also ensured that the main documentation for participants, the Joint Award Initiative Welcome Pack, clearly identifies Gaisce as a partner, is Tri branded, contains neutral language and imagery in relation to the programme and includes detailed information about the choice of certification for young people.

A separate website also exists for the Joint Award Initiative [www.theawardni.org](http://www.theawardni.org), and all the main resources are adapted for the JAI and held on this site. The site is available in Irish Language.

Overall, The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Gaisce – The President's Award has worked together to support reconciliation in a way that is visible, practical, repeatable and above all inclusive. By creating opportunities for young people from different backgrounds to meet on equal terms, we can help move reconciliation from an abstract aspiration to a lived experience through the power of enrichment.

### **Joint Advisory Committee**

The Joint Advisory Committee has responsibility for the strategic and operational aspects of the Joint Award Initiative. It was established to:

- Advise the Council of Gaisce – The President's Award and the Trustees of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (UK) on matters relevant to the Joint Award Initiative on the island of Ireland
- Uphold and promote the Joint Award Agreement and the Joint Award Initiative
- Agree and oversee the strategic direction and operation of the Joint Award Initiative on the island of Ireland with the aim of achieving significantly increased awareness of and participation levels in the Joint Award Initiative.
- Work together in areas such as training to develop mutually beneficial linkages with other organisations
- Make a meaningful contribution to the shared future agenda in Northern Ireland
- Encourage and oversee Joint Award Presentations (particularly at Gold level)

### **Membership of the Joint Advisory Committee**

Membership of the Joint Advisory Committee consists of six members: three nominated by Gaisce - The President's Award and three by The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (UK). In exceptional circumstances further individuals can be co-opted onto the committee for specific purposes, for example to carry out a specific and time bound piece of work, with agreement from all members.

The Chief Executive Officer of Gaisce – The President's Award and the Chief Executive Officer of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (normally delegated to the Director of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award – Northern Ireland) are ex-officio members of the Committee.

### **Chairmanship of the Joint Advisory Committee**

The Committee is jointly chaired with Chairs drawn from the membership of the Committee, one nominated by Gaisce - The President's Award and one by The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (UK). The Chair for meetings alternates between Gaisce - The President's Award and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, irrespective of where the meeting is held.

### **Further background on The Duke of Edinburgh's Award**

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award enables young people to explore who they are, grow in confidence and develop the skills they need to successfully navigate life and work. We help them build lifelong belief in themselves, supporting them to take on their own challenges, follow their passions, and discover talents they never knew they had.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is a voluntary, non-competitive programme of activities for anyone aged 14-24 available in 130 countries around the world. Young people create their own programme by choosing a volunteering, physical and skills activity, going on an expedition and, for their Gold only, taking part in a residential activity. Doing the programme gives young people the opportunity to experience new activities or develop existing skills. There are three progressive levels of programme which, when successfully completed, lead to a Bronze, Silver or Gold Award.

### **Gaisce – The President's Award**

Gaisce – The President's Award was set up in the Republic of Ireland in International Youth Year in 1985 under the patronage of former President Patrick J. Hillery. The programme operates with a Memorandum of Understanding with the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award to deliver the Joint Award Initiative (JAI) in Northern Ireland.

### **What does reconciliation in Northern Ireland mean today?**

In Northern Ireland, understanding of and attitudes towards reconciliation are strongly shaped by people's lived experiences. Factors such as place, class, religion, age, gender and ethnicity influence how people understand the past, who they trust, and what kind of future they want.

At the heart of the Award programme is ensuring respect for all different identities and traditions. For example, one of the conditions of the Award's Residential section is that young people must work with other young people that they would not traditionally work with.

The Joint Award Initiative ensures that the Award programme is inclusive to all, creating practical, shared experiences for young people in a way that moves beyond political debate. Young people are able to achieve their common goals of an internationally recognised Award, avoiding identity labels. It enables young people from different backgrounds to work together and to then choose how they individually wish to be recognised for their endeavours. We have also ensured that young people are able to access resources which respects different identities, language and culture.

Organisations such as Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association, Catholic Guides of Ireland and many cross-community programmes and organisations are able to utilise framework the Award provides to enhance existing programmes and ensure young people are able to achieve more.

Other examples are a number of schools which work to bring young people together to complete the expedition section and is an excellent vehicle for breaking down stereotypes and divides and enabling young people to forge lifetime friendships. For some young people

this may be the first opportunity they have had to interact or work with someone from another community.

## **What are the current social, economic, and/or political factors helping to shape or constrain reconciliation in Northern Ireland today?**

Whilst much progress has been made in relation to Integrated Education and a number of schools now have a greater mix of school populations, the fact that Northern Ireland is still one of the last parts of Europe to have a segregated education system constrains reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

The Joint Award Initiative contributes to reconciliation in Northern Ireland by creating practical, shared experiences for young people from different backgrounds, especially in ways that move beyond political debate and into real friendships and the achievement of common goals. It enables young people to work together working together through experiential learning to solve problems, volunteer, travel and achieve.

For many Award participants, involvement in the Award may be the first meaningful contact they have had with someone from a different community background. It provides a neutral space and allows trust to develop gradually.

The volunteering and residential elements of the Award encourages participants to engage with communities which are different from their own. This can increase understanding of other perspectives and reduce fear or suspicion.

The Joint Award also builds a shared civic identity, helping participants see themselves not only through traditional identities/boundaries, but also as teammates.

**Case study:** For example, one of our Youth Ambassadors, Eoin said: DofE, especially volunteering, inspired him to 'give back' to his community and commit to continually developing himself. The Awards taught him teamwork but, crucially, independence, trusting in his own ability. He's keen to see the awards offered in every school in Northern Ireland so that no student misses out as, he believes, DofE/JAI is so much more than a badge.

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