

Research Ireland Curious Minds Platinum Award



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Discover STEM

The Platinum Award is open to schools which have previously received Gold Awards and would like to undertake a school-wide development project to further enhance STEM practice while raising awareness of and interest in STEM throughout the school community.



The Platinum Award is a significant step up in terms of effort from a Gold Award - Applicants will be required to identify an area of STEM teaching and learning that they want to improve, make and implement a plan to achieve the desired outcomes, and demonstrate through reflections from learners, teachers and parents what has changed and improved for them i.e. the impact of the project.

As this is a school-wide development project, Research Ireland envisages that this is something schools would aim to do every few years, rather than each year. Annual applications for the Platinum Award will be capped at 30 schools, so sign up early to avoid disappointment.

Science Foundation Ireland offers three levels of achievement for the Research Ireland Curious Minds Awards as follows:

Level 1:
Silver Award

Level 2:
Gold Award

Level 3:
**Platinum Award
(Development Project)**

We recommend you review the requirements in full to ensure you can select the most suitable level of Award for your school.

The Platinum Award acknowledges schools that have previously achieved a Gold Award and have also demonstrated excellence in their efforts to raise awareness of and excitement about STEM among the following groups:

1. **Learners**
2. **Teachers**
3. **Parents and Guardians**

Who can apply?

To be eligible to apply for a Platinum Award the school must have achieved a Gold Award (or Plaque of STEM) at least once previously. All classes in the school must participate in the Platinum Award.

How do you register?

- From September 2024 you can register your school's intention to apply for a Platinum Award through the Curious Minds homepage www.curiousminds.ie.
- Please note that only **30 schools** can participate in the Platinum Awards on a first come first served basis. Research Ireland will provide all Platinum Award applicants with further details and support.
- Once registered, you will receive an automated email from Research Ireland with your log-in details. The application form buttons (Silver, Gold and Platinum) will appear on your profile for you to begin working on your application. Select the Platinum button to begin a Platinum Application. Each school should only select one type of Award.
- The deadline to sign up for a Platinum Award is 18 October 2024 (or before if capacity is reached). **Please note:** this is significantly earlier than previous years to allow more time for schools to carry out the implementation phase of the project.
- If the Platinum Application option is not available when starting your Award and the deadline for signing up has not passed, capacity has been reached for the Award. In this case, we invite you to apply for a Gold Award this year.

What do you need to do?

For the Platinum Award, schools need to design and implement a STEM development project in addition to completing the criteria for a Gold Award where they give evidence of the STEM learning carried out. The STEM development project starts with schools identifying an area of STEM teaching and learning that the school would like to improve, through research or self-evaluation. They then come up with a plan for how they want to boost awareness of and excitement about STEM in their school and identify specific outcomes for learners, teachers and parents. Next, schools will complete actions to achieve these outcomes. Finally, they will demonstrate what has changed and improved for each of these groups (i.e., the impact of what has been done) by presenting reflections from members of each group. As this is a significant undertaking, support and guidance will be offered throughout the process.

To achieve the Platinum Award, applicants will:

- Complete the pre-Platinum Award Application form online outlining the outcomes your school would like to achieve in relation to raising STEM awareness and why (details below). The deadline for submission of this element is **5pm Friday 25 October 2024**.
- Complete steps 1-5 in the same way as you would do if compiling your Log of Evidence for your Gold Award. **Please note: This year your log of evidence must be presented in the Curious Minds Log of Evidence Template and uploaded to SESAME in PDF or PowerPoint format.**
- Engage with the Research Ireland facilitator assigned to your school to support you in your application and attend relevant briefings; schools that do this are far more likely to be successful.
- Take action to achieve your selected outcomes.
- Gather reflections from the learners, teachers and parents about what has changed and improved for them as a result of the project undertaken.
- Complete the full Platinum application form outlining how your STEM work contributed to achieving your selected outcome(s) relating to raising STEM awareness in each target group.
- Present the reflections from each target group. Further guidance on this is available below.

What is an outcome relating to raising STEM Awareness?

An outcome is the result of an action i.e. what has improved and for whom as a result of what you have done. In the case of the Platinum Award, we want you to select at least one outcome that will raise STEM awareness for each of the three target groups:

1. Learners
2. Teachers
3. Parents and Guardians

Then tell us what you did and how it contributed to an increase in STEM awareness and the achievement of your selected outcomes.

Selecting outcome(s)

Outcomes will be individual to each school and can relate to, for example; developing children's STEM skills (curiosity, creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking skills); enhancing informal STEM learning in different contexts, or you may choose to focus on enhancing a specific area like ICT or coding, more inquiry-based learning or promoting STEM to girls.

Here are some tips for selecting outcomes:

- Have you identified areas of STEM teaching and learning that the school would like to improve? Consider doing some research (surveys, focus groups) to establish a baseline of where you are now and what you want to improve.
- Now consider what outcomes you would like to achieve to address the needs you've identified.
- Make and implement a plan to achieve the outcomes.



Reflections

Towards the end of the project period, participating schools are required to gather reflections or feedback from **all three** target groups (learners, teachers **and** parents) about **what has changed or improved** as a result of the work undertaken.

Feedback and reflections can be gathered from learners, teachers and parents using a series of questions in surveys or interviews (written, recorded or filmed), or at open days or STEM showcases in the school. Some schools gather parents' reflections via email. Reflections can be presented in the form of written reflections/quotes and photos, videos, audio files, transcripts from interviews or before and after survey results (to include qualitative data outlining the target groups' experience).

Reflections will explore:

- What has changed for learners? What are they able to do now that they were not able to do before? How have STEM skills improved and been applied across the curriculum and in real life?
- What has changed for teachers? E.g. STEM teaching methods, teacher confidence, enthusiasm for STEM learning, increased collegial co-operation.
- What has changed for parents? More parental involvement in STEM learning, more enthusiasm for STEM learning, greater understanding of the relevance of STEM in real world context and/or possible STEM career pathways for their children.

Further guidance on gathering reflections will be made available to all Platinum Award participants.

Supports

Platinum Award applicants are appointed a facilitator who will offer advice on their application shortly after they sign up for the Award. There will also be a Platinum Award briefing session, online toolkit and guidance on how to gather reflections. Applicants are strongly encouraged to avail of these supports to guide them through the application process.

Is Platinum the right level of Award for your school?

The Platinum Award aims to benefit learners, teachers, and parents in the long run – in terms of exposure to STEM, development of critical thinking and communication skills, and enjoyment of STEM subjects.

The Platinum Award is a significant step up in terms of effort from Gold. While schools are encouraged to achieve a Gold Award annually to recognise continued commitment to STEM education, schools are advised to go for the Platinum level when there is a specific outcome they want to achieve to improve STEM education in the school in a particular year

As this is the highest Award level, submissions for steps 1-5 must be of a high standard to be considered for a Platinum Award. Assistance can be sought from assigned facilitators before submission however **reviewers will not go back to applicants for additional information after submission for a Platinum Award application.**

If a school does not meet the criteria to receive a Platinum, they may be offered the Gold Award on the condition that they meet Gold Award requirements. It is important to note that schools are required to demonstrate clear impact (changes/improvement) relating to raising STEM Awareness for each of the target groups.

How will this Award be recognised?

Every year, we publish a national press release and regional press releases to highlight the achievements of the schools that have achieved a Curious Minds Award in the media. We also host a celebratory online awards ceremony, which allows us to reach many schools across Ireland in an inclusive way. Schools are sent a plaque to display on a wall inside their school, a digital badge to be displayed on the school website and individual feedback on their application.

Where to go if you need help?

Please contact the facilitator assigned to you for support throughout the application process. For logistical support, please do not hesitate to contact us if you need help or have any questions.

Email: curiousminds@researchireland.ie



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Deadlines

- Platinum Award Sign-Up Deadline: **5pm Friday 18 October 2024**
- Submission of pre-Platinum application form: **5pm Friday 25 October 2024**
- Submission of full Platinum Award application: **5pm Friday 2 May 2025**

For queries please contact: curiousminds@researchireland.ie