



Action Community and Enterprise CLG

Annual Report and Financial Statements

1 January - 31 December 2023

Supporting Community Through Enterprise Since 1995

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The Origins of Ace Enterprise Park

Action Community and Enterprise CLG was established in 1995 by a dedicated group of local volunteers who recognised the urgent need to foster enterprise and create employment opportunities in disadvantaged areas. The organisation's first facility opened in Neilstown, Clondalkin, but its rapid growth soon necessitated an expansion to a larger space. A few years later, a second facility in Bawnogue, Clondalkin — four times the size of the original site — was developed, with the goal of incorporating a Community Childcare Centre as a cornerstone member of the new premises. In 2010, Bawnogue Enterprise and Clondalkin Enterprise merged to form Action Community and Enterprise CLG, which now proudly operates as Ace Enterprise Park.

Ace Enterprise Park is a member of two prominent national networks: Connected Hubs, under the Department of Rural and Community Development, and the Community Enterprise Association of Ireland.



As a social enterprise, Ace Enterprise Park is committed to staying active across both the business and community sectors. We are also involved members of the South Dublin Chamber of Commerce, The Wheel, and the Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland (SERI).



A Note from Our Chairperson

It is with great pride that I deliver this statement on behalf of Ace Enterprise Park. Since our founding in 1995, Ace has remained steadfast in its mission to support community development, nurture local entrepreneurship, and create sustainable employment opportunities. Our commitment to good governance, ethical leadership, and innovation is at the core of everything we do, and it is a privilege to share our 2023 journey with you at the Good Governance Awards.

At Ace, we believe that effective governance is the backbone of success. Our key values of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity are embedded in our organisational culture. These principles not only guide our day-to-day operations but also ensure that we remain aligned with our long-term vision of fostering a thriving and inclusive business ecosystem in South Dublin County.

Over the past year, Ace has made significant strides in measuring our impact through the identification of relevant key performance indicators (KPIs). In coordination with our new and improved 2024 - 2028 Strategic Plan, these KPIs will enable us to track the real-world effects of our initiatives, ensuring that we are not only creating opportunities but also breaking down barriers for underrepresented areas. With these newly defined metrics, 2023 and 2024 will act as our baseline for closer quantitative analyses moving forward.

Our diverse and skilled Board of Directors plays a crucial role in driving our governance excellence. Each board member brings a wealth of unique experience, expertise, and varied perspectives, ensuring that our decision-making is well-rounded and responsive to the complex challenges we face. This diversity strengthens our ability to innovate, manage risk, and respond effectively to the evolving needs of our members and stakeholders.

In addition to the Ace Board, we have established sub-committees focused on critical areas such as finance, risk management, strategic planning, and community engagement. These committees help Ace maintain a clear focus while delivering our Mission, Vision, and overall goals. By breaking down specific governance and operational challenges into manageable tasks, our sub-committees allow us to achieve greater clarity, accountability, and efficiency in our work as a social enterprise.

One of our proudest achievements in 2023 was Ace's involvement in the Microsoft Community Tech Skills programme, which brought essential digital training directly to local business leaders. This ongoing partnership has empowered our entrepreneurs and SMEs to upskill and stay competitive in an increasingly digital landscape. Through collaborations like this, we continue to break down barriers — both locally and globally — creating new opportunities for all.

Looking forward, Ace remains committed to delivering on our strategic goals through targeted initiatives that reduce unemployment, support local enterprise, and foster innovation. Our focus on sustainability, diversity, and community empowerment will continue to shape our future efforts as we adapt to new challenges and seize emerging opportunities.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to our CEO Lisa Rowntree and the entire Ace Enterprise Park team. Their unwavering dedication, hard work, and passion are truly the driving force behind our success. Their efforts ensure that our governance model is not only effective but also reflective of our deep-rooted commitment to the community. Finally, I extend heartfelt thanks to our Ace partners, stakeholders, and the wider community for your ongoing support of Ace Enterprise Park. Together, we are creating a brighter and more inclusive future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Justin Mulhern". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Justin" and "Mulhern" being capitalized and prominent.

Justin Mulhern
Ace Enterprise Park
Chairperson



Chief Executive Officer Statement

2023 marked another year of growth and transformation for Ace Enterprise Park, with increased turnover and expanded services that reinforced our dedication to serving the local community with excellence. As we move forward on this positive trajectory, it felt timely to pause, reflect, and refine our Strategic Plan. With valuable input from the Ace Board and sub-committees, we updated our Mission, Vision, and organisational goals to ensure they remain aligned with the dynamic future we are shaping for Ace.

The social enterprise sector as a whole is also evolving rapidly and plays a vital role in cementing forward-facing government policies. In late 2023, Enterprise Ireland introduced the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme (SREIS), and Ace was proud to pledge our active participation in this important initiative. In 2023, we successfully completed the Feasibility Test on a Food Ecosystem, funded by Enterprise Ireland and South Dublin City Council (SDCC). This marked the initial groundwork for the SREIS, with plans for implementation throughout 2024 and 2025. Ace is excited to collaborate closely with Enterprise Ireland to address the gaps identified in the local enterprise ecosystem in the near future.

Our commitment to sustainability has also taken centre stage. In 2023, we submitted a dedicated application to the Dublin Community Climate Action Fund. I am thrilled to share that our success as a recipient will allow Ace to adopt a more holistic approach to sustainability across our operations,

businesses, and facilities. Additionally, sustainability is a core pillar of Ace's new 2024 - 2028 Strategy. We have appointed a dedicated board member to work directly alongside the CEO on this initiative, and we are collaborating with South Dublin County Council and SEAI to form a Sustainable Energy Community (SEC) that includes our site and members. Together, we are taking proactive steps at Ace Enterprise Park to meet national climate targets, including the training and establishment of a Green Team. Additionally, throughout 2023, Ace Enterprise Park led the Climate Group within Connected Hubs, advocating for the inclusion of our sector in key discussions with the Department on achieving national climate targets.

Our people remain at the core of everything we do. In 2023, we were pleased to welcome Celine, our new housekeeper, to the team. Additionally, plans were set in motion to bring Stephen, a valued member of our Facilities Team, on board as a full-time employee following the completion of his time in the Community Employment (CE) programme. These labour activation schemes play a vital role in helping Ace grow and thrive, as we are dedicated to nurturing local talent. We are especially grateful to have the South Dublin County Partnership (SDCP), a key contributor in addressing employment gaps, as a member in our Ace Bawnogue community.

Ace also stands firm in its dedication to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). Our comprehensive Employee Handbook, which is reviewed annually with an external Human Resources consultant, reflects our strong commitment to fairness, the Employment Equality Act, and addressing the gender pay gap. All staff are compensated according to their qualifications and responsibilities, and we continue to adopt new work practices and policies to stay ahead of national recommendations.

Despite infrastructural challenges posed by a fire on-site in late 2022, disrupting one-quarter of our real estate at Bawnogue, we maintained 100% occupancy at both our Neilstown and Bawnogue locations. In fact, the demand to be part of Ace remained strong, with a waiting list of high-potential new members. I am particularly excited about our new Training Studio, an accessible and flexible space that has quickly become a central hub for local organisations and sole traders offering workshops, educational sessions, and wellness activities.

This past year, we also hosted our first Art Exhibition in collaboration with Connected Hubs and the Contemporary Irish Arts Society. It was an incredible event that brought nearly 100 attendees to celebrate local creativity, and Ace looks forward to more opportunities to engage with artists and the community through future exhibitions.

Looking ahead, Ace is fully supporting South Dublin City Council's plans for the Bawnogue Village Enhancement Scheme, which will transform our site's road frontage into a welcoming plaza. We are actively working with local residents to ensure this project benefits everyone and enhances the vibrancy of the area as a whole.

As we continue to evolve and grow, our dedication to our Mission remains stronger than ever. Ace Enterprise Park is more than just a business hub — it is a community, and I am incredibly proud of the progress we have made together thus far. I look forward to what lies ahead, confident in our shared vision for a sustainable, inclusive, and thriving future.



Lisa Rowntree

Ace Enterprise Park

Chief Executive Officer



2023 Achievements and Performance

Our impact at Ace Enterprise Park is measured in two key ways:



Business Environment



Community Engagement

1. Business Environment

In 2023, we continued to strengthen our relationships with the South Dublin Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and the South Dublin Chamber. Several Ace members were honoured with prestigious innovation awards from both the LEO and the Chamber throughout the year. To continue spreading the valuable resources on offer through the LEO, we also hosted a representative at our Bawnogue site for a coffee event and informational session mid-year, giving Ace Enterprise Park members the opportunity to learn and network in close proximity to their own offices. Both new and established businesses in our community connected, explored potential collaborations, and learned more about the support available to grow their brands, both domestically and internationally.

Soon after, we were honoured to host Minister Neal Richmond and TD Emer Higgins at a Townhall Event in June 2023, which brought together over 60 attendees from the wider business community. This successful gathering reaffirmed our commitment to supporting growth in local enterprise, providing members with a platform to share their challenges, goals, ambitions with key community leaders, and influence future local developments.



100% Occupancy
Across Both Sites



61 Total Members
19 New Ace Members
17 New Shared Space Users



234 Jobs Supported
Directly & Indirectly by Ace

We maintained 100% occupancy throughout the year, with our revitalised shared spaces thriving. 2023 marked a key milestone as the first cohort of shared space members expanded their businesses to the point where they moved into their own standalone units and offices at Ace Enterprise Park. This highlights the effectiveness of our shared space model for start-ups, which eliminates the burdens of overhead costs that can be challenging for early-stage businesses.

As of 2023, Ace Enterprise Park offers five shared spaces for members: the Training Studio, a classroom-style Training Room, a Hybrid Conference Room, Shared Therapy Suites, and a Shared Commercial Kitchen. Our enhanced risk-free monthly membership model has provided entrepreneurs with the time and space to refine their business vision, mission, and operations, positioning them for sustainable growth.

In Q3 2023, we began integrating the Connected Hubs online booking platform, developed by Baseworx specifically for coworking hubs, into the Ace Enterprise Park website. At the same time, we partnered with the Irish digital marketing agency Guerilla Marketing to revamp our website, enhancing its user-friendliness and visual appeal for our growing member base. As a result, members can now manage bookings and payments entirely online, providing them with greater autonomy.

Testimonials from Ace Enterprise Members:



“An amazing place for start-ups like us. The management team are very friendly and extremely supportive. Great community spirit. Staff here is amazing. Fantastic for local businesses and entrepreneurs alike. I highly recommend Ace Enterprise Park to any start-up company out there!”

- Krystyna Wittbrodt
Business Owner, K Factory



“Superb shared training facilities at very reasonable rates. In the terms of ‘bang for your buck’ for my business, having such a modern and professional environment to work in, away from home, is hard to put a value on.”

- Andy Lee
Trainer, Capital CPC



“I couldn’t recommend Ace Enterprise Park more to anyone looking to host an event locally. The team couldn’t have been more welcoming, and they went out of their way to make sure my event ran smoothly start-to-finish. The facilities are top notch and everyone involved thoroughly enjoyed being at Ace site.”

- Seán Dunlea
Foróige Youth Entrepreneurship Programme NFTE

2. Community Engagement

In 2023, we continued to support the South Dublin County Public Participation Network (SDCPPN) by hosting meetings on-site for their various linkage groups, particularly the Community Safety Forum.

Ace Enterprise Park also held its first Annual Coffee Morning in honour of Our Lady's Hospice and Care Services. This event showcased locally made treats from Ace food producers, offering a chance for the member community and the wider public to come together in support of the Hospice's invaluable work in rehabilitation and end-of-life care.

The opening of our new accessible Training Studio created a versatile space for both community events and our own gatherings. It also became an affordable venue for local wellness programmes, such as yoga, meditation, and mindfulness classes, which have positively impacted the Bawnogue community by promoting healthy lifestyle changes, improving physical and mental well-being, and reducing stress.

This space also serves as the central meeting point for monthly 'Learning in the Hubs' sessions for Ace staff and members. In collaboration with the Technological University of Shannon (TUS) and Connected Hubs, Ace Enterprise Park is recognised as a valued participant in the TUS Learning Gate Initiative, which is dedicated to advancing education and fostering innovation within our community. These sessions include tea, coffee, and lunch, encouraging further discussion and networking after the informational presentations.

As part of the strategic work undertaken by the sub-committees, new KPIs and metrics were developed, which will be evaluated in 2024. In terms of investment, Ace allocated €230k in capital expenditure across the site in 2023.

This included converting the Old Bawnogue Café into two commercial-grade food units, transforming underutilised space into an Ace Admin office and staff canteen, and beginning an insulation project on our largest building, the Community Hub. At the same time, plans were completed for works to commence on refurbishment in Neilstown for Q1 2024.

Looking ahead, 2024 will be focused on expanding both our footprint and services, with exciting growth projects in the pipeline.

Ace 2024 - 2028 Strategic Plan



Governance Structure and Sub-Committees

Ace Enterprise Park is governed by a board of 10 dedicated volunteer directors, each balancing their professional and personal commitments alongside their board duties. The board convenes every six weeks in a hybrid format, with each member required to attend at least three meetings in person annually. Sub-committees manage their own check-ins between these sessions, while the Chair and Deputy Chair meet with the CEO fortnightly. Since adopting the hybrid model, we have achieved 100% attendance.

Directors serve three-year terms, after which they may stand for re-election if they choose, with a maximum of three terms (nine years in total) before stepping down.

Ace Enterprise Park 2023 Board:

Mr. Justin Mulhern

Chairperson

Board Skills: Organisational & Project Management, Stakeholder Engagement

Mr. Paul O'Brien

Deputy Chair & Chair of Governance Sub-Committee

Board Skill: Corporate Governance

Mr. Paul Tuhill

Member of Finance, Audit & Risk Sub-Committee

Board Skill: Information Technology

Ms. Gemma Shine

Chair of Finance, Audit & Risk Sub-Committee

Board Skill: Finance (Audits)

Ace Enterprise Park Board Continued ...

Mr. Michael Kazio	Company Secretary & Member of Finance, Audit & Risk Sub-Committee Board Skill: Accountancy
Ms. Sarah Owens	Member of Governance Sub-Committee Board Skill: Property Management
Mr. Shane Moynihan	Member of Strategy Sub-Committee Board Skills: Community, Human Resources, Organisational Development
Mr. Ronan Crosson	Chair of Strategy Sub-Committee Board Skills: Sustainability & Investment
Ms. Alison Delahunt	Bank Signatory Board Skills: Learning & Development, Human Resources, Public Relations
Mr. Peter Connolly	Member of Strategy Sub-Committee Board Skills: Community & Enterprise

Each board member undergoes a comprehensive induction, including a review of the Directors Handbook. This covers the register of interests, conflict of interest protocols, and Ace Enterprise Park's best practices. At the start of every meeting, a conflict of interest call is made, and if any conflicts arise, the respective director is required to step out during related decision-making processes.

While the CEO attends all board meetings, they are not a board member. The Board operates with a clear distinction of roles: the CEO is responsible for day-to-day operations, while the Board focuses on developing and approving policies for the CEO to implement.

The Three Sub-Committees of the Ace Board:



Strategy



**Finance, Audit,
Risk & Remuneration**



Governance

Each sub-committee has their own board-agreed terms of reference. Ace Enterprise Park regularly rotates the Board of Directors between the sub-committees to ensure optimal learning across the organisation.

Ace Enterprise Park Board Recruitment:

We utilise Boardmatch, the Volunteer Network, and our own business and community networks to recruit new board members, as necessary. Our goal is to ensure a balanced diversity of skills, professional experiences, and forward-thinking perspectives, with an emphasis on building the Board around skillsets.

The review process begins with the prospective Director's CV being shared with current board members. If the application is accepted in principle, the CEO meets the candidate off-site for an informal coffee and discussion. Following a positive introduction, the candidate visits the Ace site for a more in-depth conversation with the Chairperson.

If these meetings go well, the candidate is invited to attend up to three board meetings to ensure a mutual fit for all involved. Once agreed, they are formally proposed and seconded at the next meeting. We believe co-opting the new director onto a sub-committee is the most effective way for them to quickly gain a deeper understanding of the organisation.

Decision Making and Delegation:

Operational management is the sole responsibility of the CEO and Senior Management Team, while the Board focuses on policy development and assessing the impact across various areas of the organisation and its stakeholders.

Prior to Board meetings, relevant documents and data are circulated for review. Specific topics, such as depreciation, are examined by the Finance, Audit, and Risk Sub-Committee, which then presents recommendations to the Board. Broader topics are categorised on the agenda as either "for discussion" or "for decision." Should new information emerge, or if consensus is not reached, a topic may revert to "discussion." All directors are encouraged to actively participate in these discussions, and any matters requiring further consideration are deferred to the next meeting.

Risk Management:

The Finance, Audit, and Risk Sub-Committee have the responsibility of reviewing the Ace Enterprise Park Risk Register on an annual basis. Once completed, they are the ones responsible for bringing it to the Ace Board for a full review and approval.

The Risk Register operates under the following headings:



Current Risks to the Organisation and Approach:

A slowdown in the economy would have a direct impact on our income, as we are fully reliant on trading revenue to cover operational costs. While we can sustain operations at 70% occupancy, we aim to maintain 100% occupancy to enable continuous reinvestment into our facilities. However, should the start-up economy slow, we have the ability to quickly adjust our expenditure. Our anchor members, representing 33% of our income, come from the community sector, providing a reliable revenue stream to meet our financial commitments.

1. Ongoing Energy Costs

The ongoing Energy Crisis, now in its second year, has led Ace to implement measures such as insulation improvements, lowering thermostats, and introducing service charges where appropriate. We have also engaged with the Sustainable Energy Authority Of Ireland (SEAI) and developed a Sustainable Energy Community (SEC). In 2024, we will install our first Solar PV system to further track, manage, and reduce energy costs at Ace Enterprise Park.

2. Rising Insurance Costs

We continuously review our Risk Register, provide quarterly staff training, and ensure our premises remain a safe environment for staff and members alike, all as part of our efforts to manage rising insurance costs.

3. External Political Risks

We carefully monitor external political risks and strive to align our organisational strategy with both local and national policies as they unfold.

Reserve Policy:

The Ace Board of Directors, along with all of our other stakeholders, recognises the importance of maintaining adequate reserves to ensure the continuity of our services in the event of unforeseen circumstances. These reserves also provide funding for capital expenditure, repairs, and the development of new initiatives, in line with our mission to deliver high-quality, affordable enterprise support tailored to the needs of our community.

To date, we have established two reserves:

1. Contingency Reserve

Funded by trading surpluses, this reserve can be drawn upon if Ace were to experience a shortfall in trading income, which may, in turn, impact daily operations. It is currently maintained at €30,000, which covers our essential operating costs for three months.

2. Capital Expenditure Reserve

Also funded by historical and ongoing trading surpluses, this reserve is designated for new capital projects or significant refurbishment work necessary for maintaining and / or enhancing our Neilstown and Bawnogue facilities. Smaller capital projects are financed through this reserve.

For larger capital projects, we explore potential grants, with the capital expenditure reserve used to provide matched funding where necessary.

As we do not currently hold investment funds, there is no requirement for an Investment Policy at this time.





Remuneration and Performance Management:

- Remuneration is reviewed by the Finance, Audit, and Risk Sub-Committee in conjunction with the Chairperson. The CEO is not present for these discussions.
- There was no pension scheme in place at Ace Enterprise Park for 2023, however, Ace will be enrolling staff in a PRSA pension scheme by Q3 2024.
- The CEO is also held to a close performance review on an annual basis by the Chairperson.
- It was agreed in 2023 to link the salary increase of the CEO to the same increase scale as the public service, which gives clarity to the CEO for the immediate future.
- The CEO remuneration is declared in the 2023 Financial Statements, included later in this Annual Report.
- The CEO performance manages the Senior Team on an annual basis and makes the recommendations to the Finance Sub-Committee at budget time for appropriate salary increases.

Meet the Ace Enterprise Park Team



Lisa Rowntree | Chief Executive Officer

Lisa joined Ace Enterprise Park in late 2018, bringing with her over 30 years of experience in the Irish business sector, having previously worked in the private manufacturing industry. A qualified food scientist and management accountant, Lisa's diverse expertise is instrumental in leading the organisation's success.



Kaitlin Brozek | Marketing & Community Manager

Kaitlin is the newest member of our senior team, bringing fresh perspective and high professionalism to Ace. With an MSc in Digital Marketing Strategy and experience leading marketing for an emerging drink business in Galway, she understands the challenges SMEs face in their early stages. Kaitlin works closely with all our members to foster collaboration and support their early-stage business growth.



Mick Gaffney | Facilities Manager

Mick joined us in October 2022 and brings over 10 years of experience in facilities management. With a strong background in construction, his expertise has been invaluable as we look forward to undertake an ambitious refurbishment project in 2024. Mick's extensive experience and practical knowledge are key assets to our team during this significant phase of growth.



Mary Durkan | Accounts & Admin Executive

Mary joined Ace in October 2021 and works fully remote. She manages our day-to-day finances and handles all member administration, ensuring compliance across the park while keeping everyone up to date.



Celine Smith | Housekeeping

Celine joined the team in Summer 2023 and is responsible for the cleanliness and functionality of the entire Bawnogue site, maintaining the highest standards across all of our work spaces on offer.



Stephen Lyons | Caretaker

Stephen joined Ace as a full-time employee in February 2024, having previously completed the CE Working Scheme with Ace over the last three years. Through this training, he now works closely with Facilities Manager Mick to ensure all refurbishment projects are completed on time and within budget.

