



**Trinity College Dublin**

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

## Rationale for Programme

A substantial proportion of children in Ireland experience disability or special educational needs (SEN). There is unequivocal evidence that children with disabilities or SEN benefit from quality early childhood intervention. Early Intervention is aimed at a societal level to improve the developmental outcomes of children in the home or education settings. The School of Education is uniquely positioned to contribute to international developments in Early Intervention as it forefronts academic excellence and service to the community.

## Overview of Master's Degree in Early Intervention

The Master's Degree in Early Intervention is guided by developmental, ecological, family and transactional systems theories and philosophies that emphasise the interactive nature of child development. The programme will address the need for additional training and supervision for professionals to adequately support children and families. It will draw upon a range of approaches that acknowledge the central role of the family in a child's life. It will also provide comprehensive knowledge and expertise in Early Intervention reflecting contemporary evidence based practice. It is designed to be academically and personally challenging. Students will be exposed to critical theoretical and practical frameworks as well as opportunities to reflect on existing practice.

## Interdisciplinary Nature of Programme

The programme will be interdisciplinary in nature. It will benefit from contributions from a range of disciplines including but not exclusive to Education, Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, the Social Sciences, etc. An interdisciplinary approach will integrate programme content emphasising optimal delivery approaches ranging from discipline-specific, to transdisciplinary frameworks required to support children with disabilities or SEN in the home, preschool, special class or school setting. Students will experience a team approach that reflects current best practice in the field.

## Programme Content:

The MEI will consist of four models and a thesis.

- **Module 1** will present an overview of the historical, contemporary, legislative and research frameworks regarding the development of Early Intervention. It will comprise elements that are foundational to key concepts underpinning early childhood development drawing on knowledge from the fields of Neuroscience, Psychology and Education to create a better understanding of how children learn and how we can create more effective teaching methods, curricula and educational policy.
- **Module 2** will focus on the screening, assessment and identification of children aged (0-6 years) at risk of disabilities and SEN. It will illustrate the integrative role of play in observation, linking assessment to quality intervention and interpreting strategies and outcomes to parents and other professionals.
- **Module 3** will emphasise the need for optimal intervention design, implementation and evaluation for children with specific SEN/disabilities, for example ASD. This module will

incorporate appropriate specialist concepts and practices supporting effective intervention and pedagogies focusing on inclusion where interventions may enrich environmental contexts and interactions, benefiting inclusive educational programming (at preschool, special class/unit and early primary level), where children with SEN are educated alongside their peers. It will also examine how professionals support family members at critical times of transition from one educational environment to another.

- **Module 4** will present content on effective individual, team and multi-agency approaches to Early Intervention. It will explore multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches, encouraging students' capacity to collaborate with other disciplinary professionals as well as family members. It will reconceptualise professional identity development and evaluate frameworks and models of professional adaptation and change processes while cognisant of the dual need for collaboration and practitioner self-reflection. It will critically reframe existing professional practices and evaluate perceptions, attitudes and values that influence and promote evidence based practice.

#### *Research Component (Thesis) Year 2*

- As reflected in the University Strategic Plan (2014-2019) a 'Trinity education is rooted in a curriculum inspired by current research and scholarship' (p.3). The Early Intervention professional will be encouraged to demonstrate knowledge of current research related to the profession. The thesis component of the programme aims to incorporate empirical research with an emphasis on the applicability of research methodology to enhance professional practice in Early Intervention and Educational settings.

### **Benefits for Participants**

Early Intervention professionals will develop competencies and skills to support children and families in line with evidence based practice.

- Participants will benefit from the attainment of specialist knowledge in the area of assessment/diagnosis as well as the opportunity to design and implement educational programmes and interventions for young children (0-6 years).
- Participants will have the opportunity to create and develop new partnerships through an emphasis on collaboration with other disciplines.
- An emphasis on the inclusive elements of educational programmes will highlight the need to design and support intervention to take place in naturalistic environments.
- Students' capacity to perform as knowledgeable experts will be nurtured throughout the course. Students will gain confidence and competence in their ability to respond constructively to the needs of children with disabilities/SEN and their families. Students will also benefit from opportunities to enhance their individual and professional capacities as well as having opportunities to reflect on their role as Early Intervention professionals.