



UCD School of Education
& School of Nursing, Midwifery & Health Systems

NATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS

CERTIFICATE IN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL SUPPORT:

Information for Schools and
Students (Special Needs Assistants)



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton, T.D. requested the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to conduct a comprehensive review of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) scheme, as part of the movement towards a proposed new School Inclusion Model (SIM). This review was concluded in 2017 and a Report was issued in March 2018 (NCSE Policy Advice Paper No. 6), which outlines the findings of this review (see www.ncse.ie).

SNAs have been part of special education provision in Ireland for many decades. In the early days, special needs assistants were mostly deployed in special school settings. However, SNAs have also become an increasingly important part of special education provision in mainstream schools. A very notable increase in the numbers of Special Needs Assistants has resulted in almost 17,000 SNAs supporting approximately 37,500 students in various settings across the Irish education system (DES, 2020). Among the recommendations was a directive for the introduction of a national training programme for SNAs. This recommendation was approved by the Department of Education and Skills (DES), and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) are implementing this recommendation. UCD School of Education, in conjunction with UCD School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Systems, have been selected to deliver this important educational initiative. This programme will begin in January 2021 recruiting 500 special needs assistants in the first year. This programme will constitute a national training programme for SNAs working in the Irish education system, in primary, post-primary and special schools.

University College Dublin has a notable and longstanding expertise in delivering education and training within the areas of Education, Healthcare and Special Education. Significant research activity within the School of Education has focussed on Inclusive Education and reflects national and international movements towards an effective inclusive educational model. The School of Education and the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Systems are collaborating for the purpose of delivering this new training programme. The wide-ranging experience and expertise available between these two schools will enable the delivery of a broad-ranging and high-quality programme for this important and much-valued sector within Irish inclusive education.

The team engaged in the design and delivery of this online course includes top-class expertise in inclusive education, additional educational needs and disabilities, educational psychology, clinical and therapeutic support, complex medical conditions and ICT.

O V E R V I E W

This course consists of five modules of study (see pages 6 to 8). Each module consists of six two-hour, online sessions, over a six-week period, followed by two weeks of consolidation and tutorial support. The sessions will be delivered online through synchronous and asynchronous sessions, which will include a variety of learning experiences and opportunities for collaborative learning. A tutor will be allocated to groups of students in order to facilitate additional study support. A dedicated full-time educational technologist will advise, monitor and support the technological aspects of this course, in order to ensure a smooth and engaging delivery of the modules. Systematic and expert technological support will be available throughout the course, along with an initial induction which will include accessible information on the technological aspects of engaging with the course.

Each module will be delivered by expert tutors, in the particular area of study, from the School of Education and the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Systems. Students will be required to engage with each session and the associated learning materials and activities required in order to complete each module. Links to a vast array of resources will be provided and any support needed in order to access learning material will be provided by the team. Student-engagement with the course will be monitored by the educational technologist and administrative staff allocated to this course, within the School of Education. A student handbook will be provided which will contain details of the course along with important contact details for additional information or help with study.

MODULES

Modular Structure of SNA Training Programme

Module 1: Inclusive Education of Students with Additional Educational Needs

Topics	Lecturers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of theory and practice of Inclusive Education • Additional Educational Needs - range of conditions (e.g. SLD; GLD, EBD, Physical Impairment etc.): Aetiology, Characteristics and Interventions • The current Irish Model of Support for students with additional needs • School Support Structures: School Roles and Responsibilities. • The Development of the SNA System in Irish Schools – an evolving role. • Job Description and Profile of Special Needs Assistants. 	<p>Ass. Prof William Kinsella</p> <p>Ms Phyllis Clegg</p> <p>Dr Joyce Senior</p> <p>Prof Judith Harford</p>

Module 2: Language and Communication

Topics	Lecturers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language Development • Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication • Behaviour as Communication • Social Communication Skills Development • Adaptive Functioning • Communication with Hearing Impaired/Sight Impaired Students • Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) • Lamh/Sign Language (an Introduction) • Assistive Technology for Communication. 	<p>Ms Phyllis Clegg</p> <p>Dr Lelia Murtagh</p> <p>Speech and Language Therapist (External)</p> <p>Assistive Technology Expert (External)</p>

Module 3: Supporting Students with Autism

Topics	Lecturers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding the Aetiology and Impact of Autism on the student • Identification of Primary Care Needs for Students of Autism • Supporting Students with Autism in the Mainstream Classroom • SNA Role in Special Classes for Students of Autism • TEACCH Activity Centres and the Role of the SNA • Sensory Awareness and Support Structures. 	<p>Ms Phyllis Clegg</p> <p>Dr Joyce Senior</p>

Module 4: Supporting Students with Primary Care Needs, including Medical and Complex needs

Topics	Lecturers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding Primary Care Needs – Specific Support and Interventions; Holistic Support • Medical Interventions • Health and Safety within Schools • Emotional and Physical Wellbeing – Guidelines and Support Structures • Personal Hygiene –Support and Enablement of Independence • Mobility and Assistive Technology • Behaviour Support Models and Strategies for Behaviours of Concern and Critical Incident Management. 	<p>Prof Gerard Fealy</p> <p>Dr Suja Somanadhan</p> <p>Dr Claire Magner</p>

Module 5: Professional Development of Special Needs Assistants

Topics	Lecturers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative Practice – the Teacher/SNA Relationship; Teamwork; Working under the Direction of the Teacher. • The SNA within a Whole-school Collaborative Model • Boundaries, Respect, Confidentiality • Conflict Resolution • GDPR, Data Protection • Role of SNA in supporting Positive Behaviour • Child Protection Procedures– the Role of the SNA within this System • Classroom Management and Structures for SNAs • Observation and Recording of Incidents and Activities • Reflective Practice for SNAs • Continuing Professional Development • Management of SNA Teams. 	<p>Ms Phyllis Clegg</p> <p>Child Protection Expert (External)</p>

Library (online) services are extensive in UCD and readily available to all students. Should students require additional support as a result of a hearing or sight impairment, literacy difficulties or other learning impairment, support services are available through UCD services. Students may also avail of support from an Access Officer if required. UCD promotes an inclusive learning environment and this will be reflected in the design and delivery of this particular course. Students will be invited to inform the Course Director or Programme Co-ordinator if they have special requirements regarding engagement with study.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Module	Learning Outcomes
Module 1 Inclusive Education of Students of with Additional Educational Needs	Following completion of this module, participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically discuss the development of inclusive education within the Irish context, with reference to legislative influences and international influences • Understand the differences between integration and inclusion • Discuss diversity within pupil populations, with reference to social, ethnic and marginalised influences • Understand the characteristics and impact of the main conditions within special educational needs, including developmental, neurological and physical disabilities • Discuss the impact of various conditions on academic and social functioning • Outline the structure of the current support system for inclusive education, with particular reference to the role and responsibilities of the SNA within a multidisciplinary team model • Show awareness of the individualised planning process and the possible contribution of SNAs to this process.

Module	Learning Outcomes
Module 2 Language and Communication	Following completion of this module, participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show an overall understanding of communication, verbal and non-verbal • Understand the cycle of language development and methods to support language-based communication • Understand the nature and purpose of speech and language therapy interventions • Discuss the development of social communication and the importance of social skills development within a holistic support model • Understand the connection between communication and behaviour • Choose appropriate interventions, responses and strategies to support students when they are displaying behaviours of concern • Demonstrate a basic understanding of communication support systems for hearing-impaired, speech-impaired and sight-impaired students • Outline a range of technological supports to enhance communication skills for students with language impairment, sensory impairment and other communication-based difficulties • Support students in the development of communication for independent living skills, using modelling and role-play.

Module	Learning Outcomes
Module 3 Supporting Students with Autism	<p>Following completion of this module, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline the aetiology and impact of Autism on individual students • Understand the nature of the various support structures and contexts for students with Autism in the Irish education system • Recognise and support primary and complex needs associated with Autism • Apply communication support strategies which are pertinent for individuals with Autism, with particular reference to visual stimuli and PECS • Outline the structure and process of setting up and monitoring activity centres based on the TEACCH method • Promote social interaction and the building of peer-relationships for students with Autism, through an exploration of various social skills programmes • Understand the importance of classroom organisation and routines as an important element of support for students with Autism • Support and enable students to manage incidents involving stress and anxiety, through the promotion and use of de-escalation and relaxation techniques • Support the safety of students with Autism through the promotion of independent safety awareness.

Module	Learning Outcomes
Module 4 Supporting Students with Primary Care Needs, including Medical and Complex Needs	<p>Following completion of this module, participants will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate an understanding of Primary Care Needs – Specific Supports and Interventions; Holistic Support • Show familiarity with relevant medical Interventions • Demonstrate knowledge of Health and Safety procedures within schools • Show awareness of guidelines and support structures in relation to student emotional and physical wellbeing • Show knowledge of personal hygiene standards and procedures • Support students with disabilities with a focus on enablement of Independence • Use mobility aids and Assistive Technology to support students.

Module	Learning Outcomes
Module 5 Professional Development of SNAs	Following completion of this module, participants will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate a full understanding of the role and responsibilities of the SNA, with reference to guidelines, boundaries and possibilities • Work effectively as an SNA within a collaborative school context • Incorporate effective communication, flexibility, empathy and collaboration within the role of the SNA • Show awareness of current developments within inclusive education and student support structures which influence the role of the SNA • Demonstrate understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the members of multidisciplinary teams, including clinical support staff • Show knowledge of data protection, privacy and GDPR guidelines • Demonstrate a secure knowledge of Child Protection procedures and practice, with particular reference to the role of the SNA • Demonstrate a broad knowledge of the role of the SNA in various contexts and show awareness of the value and need for continuous professional development for SNAs • Reflect on, and evaluate, one's performance, in order to continue with professional development and become increasingly effective as an SNA.

The content of this programme is very comprehensive and pertinent to addressing the complex needs of today's inclusive learning environments. We, at UCD, are delighted to welcome you as students and look forward to engaging in this most exciting and important inclusive educational initiative. Special Needs Assistants are highly valued within the Irish education system and we are delighted to have the privilege of delivering this professional development programme for SNAs.

Please see <https://www.ucd.ie/education/>
for further course details and details on applying

Please email programme queries to sna@ucd.ie