

National Training Programme for Special Needs Assistants

Frequently Asked Questions

How long does the programme run?

The programme will consist of five modules, delivered online over a 10-month period with a two month break during the summer period.

The programme starts in January 2021 with an anticipated 500 applicants. There is provision for a further 1,000 places in each of the following 3 years with the programme commencing in September of each year.

What is the course content?

The five modules include:

1. Inclusive Education of Students with Additional Educational Needs
2. Communication and Language Difficulties
3. Supporting Students with Autism
4. Supporting Students with Primary Care Needs, including Medical and Complex Needs
5. Professional Development of Special Needs Assistants

There will be opportunities for programme participants to engage with tutors and other colleagues in a supported and professional environment.

How do SNAs apply?

Application forms and further information are available on UCD School of Education website <https://www.ucd.ie/education/>

Do SNAs have to pay?

There is no cost to serving SNAs working in schools. This course is fully funded by the Department of Education and Skills.

Why should SNAs engage with programme?

The programme is high quality and was developed by University College Dublin (UCD) which has a long standing international reputation in education and healthcare.

This is a major educational initiative, which will enhance the knowledge, skills and expertise of SNAs whose work is central to the inclusion of students with additional care and complex needs in school life. For some SNAs, this programme may present the first opportunity in recent times for them to engage with the theory and research based best practice underlying their role. Completion of the programme may serve as a stepping stone to further education opportunities in the area.

This is an online programme which is flexible in terms of delivery.

Is it only serving SNAs who get to enrol of the programme?

The programme is open to all SNAs employed in all recognised schools, primary, post-primary and special free of charge. SNAs employed in the School Inclusion Model (SIM) pilot schools will be given priority. Training and capacity building are central features of the SIM.

Does programme lead to a qualification?

Yes. Completion of the course will result in students being awarded a Level 6 Diploma in Inclusive School Support by UCD. The accreditation of the course was announced on 8 December 2022 by Ministers Foley and Madigan.

The accreditation of the 2022/23 student and the previous two student cohorts has been approved.

Should school management encourage SNAs to participate?

Schools are asked to encourage their SNAs to enroll in this new and innovative training programme. It is open to schools to use some of the current training time allocation to facilitate participation in the programme.

School Management should consider using some of the 72-hour provision as set out in Circular 71/2011 for this training course. This Circular provides for training (nationally or school mandated) as a use of the hours which is undertaken outside of normal school hours.

Do SNAs need permission from the school?

SNAs do not need permission from school to participate in this course. However, they should consult with their school management as it is open to schools to use some of the normal training time allocation to facilitate SNA participation in the programme.

Format of the programme

Each module consists of six two-hour, evening online sessions, over a six-week period, followed by two weeks of consolidation and tutorial support. The sessions will be delivered through synchronous and asynchronous sessions, which will include a variety of learning experiences and opportunities for collaborative learning.

Each module will be delivered by expert tutors, in the particular area of study, from UCD School of Education and UCD School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health System. Students will be required to engage with each session and the associated learning materials and activities required in order to complete each module.

Progress through the programme will be monitored and there will be an assignment to be completed at the end of each module.

Do students need a computer and broadband?

Course will be run online and each student will need to have access to the use of a laptop and a broadband internet connection for the duration of the programme

An induction session will be held at the beginning of the programme in order to familiarise participants with the technological requirements and other aspects of the programme.

Are the modules run as live training events?

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 through synchronous sessions, which will also be recorded and will be uploaded online. The sessions will include a variety of learning experiences and opportunities for collaborative learning.

If so, at what time of day?

It will be in the evening time outside of school hours with a day and time to be confirmed. This information will be made available on the UCD School of Education website in the coming weeks.

Can SNAs access modules at a later date if they miss one?

Students will be able to access recordings of lectures and other relevant course material on the UCD Brightspace platform. Information on this will be provided during the induction.

What supports are available to SNA participants who experience challenges during the course?

Student will have access to a vast array of resources and any support needed in order to access learning material will be provided by the UCD 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.

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. There will be tutors allocated to groups of students to provide additional support, where required.

Who decides who gets a place if programme is oversubscribed?

SNAs can access information on the programme (<https://www.ucd.ie/education/>) and applications are made and checked by UCD.

UCD will provide NCSE with a list of students and their school addresses at the start of the programme for verification purposes.

In the event that the programme is oversubscribed, priority will be given to SNAs from SIM Project schools, it will then be on a 'first come-first served' basis for SNAs employed in DES schools. A waiting list will be operated for entry into next phase of the programme, if applicable.

If programme is undersubscribed, what happens?

In the event that the number of available places on the programme is not filled, the contractor may fill the places with self-funded applicants with no additional cost to the Department of Education and Skills.

Will the programme be evaluated?

The programme will be independently evaluated as part of the School Inclusion Model.

What is the budget?

€2.45m will be allocated to this programme over a four year period, assuming full uptake of places. The Department of Education and Skills is providing funding for places for all currently serving SNAs who partake in this course.

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