

B.A. (Hons.)

# Early Childhood Education

The BA in Early Childhood Education is a taught programme leading to an academic and professional qualification in early childhood care and education. The early years are now well recognised as a critical period in children's development. To respond to the needs and rights of children and families receiving services in this period requires highly qualified professionals. In the DIT the formation of these professionals occurs through a taught programme which draws from current theory, research, policy and practice developments whose education and training is constantly being reviewed. Supervised placements are integral and vital to the programme and are used to develop professional competence in the student. The placement provides opportunities for progressive professional development where the students can reflect on, analyse and evaluate placement experiences. Placement also offers the student opportunities for putting into practice theories, ideas and activities generated and discussed on the taught programme. The following guidelines describe the respective roles of the placement supervisor (hereafter called supervisor), the student and the college tutor and summarise the expected learning outcomes of the practice placements across the three years of the BA (Hons) programme.

## THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR

The role of the supervisor is an important one. The student should be supervised by an experienced staff member who ideally has completed the DIT programme in early childhood education or equivalent. The supervisor's role involves the following:

- Induction of the student to the placement setting, familiarising student with placement aims and objectives, ethos of placement setting, placement policies, work practices and roles of different staff members and student's own role within the placement
- Planning a programme of work with the student so that she/he will have the opportunity to support developmentally-appropriate skills in working with children and adults in accordance with the expected learning outcomes of the Placement Report Form across the three years
- Ensuring that students are never left alone while working with and caring for children
- Providing adequate supervision time with the student to deepen her/his understanding of the philosophy, aims and function of the service
- Facilitating the student's own self-assessment with particular emphasis on the development of the capacity to
  - Be reflective as regards her/his own practice and those of others
  - Identify areas of strengths
  - Identify areas that require further reflection and work
  - Validate the student's own records of progress
- Completing the Placement Report Form following the college guidelines, the substance of which has been discussed in advance with the student, and which is submitted to the college tutor at the end of the placement.



## SUPPORT FOR SUPERVISORS

To aid the supervisors in their important work the college offers the following:

1. Visits of tutors to placements. These visits are arranged by the college tutor in collaboration with the supervisor. They provide an opportunity for the student, supervisor and tutor to meet formally to discuss the aims and objectives of the placement, the student's progress, the specific learning opportunities of the particular placement and how these can be fully exploited to achieve the objectives of the placement. Two such visits occur for students during the academic year. The number of visits can be increased in particular cases.
2. Supervisors' meeting. This meeting occurs annually. It takes the form of a seminar which provides an opportunity for supervisors to discuss any placement related issues. A guest speaker is invited by the college to speak on a topic of interest to the field of early childhood education. This meeting is also an opportunity for supervisors to meet each other and enables the college staff to express their appreciation to the supervisors for their vitally important contribution to early childhood education training.
3. Training for supervisors – The college offers short courses in student supervision to supervisors on an occasional basis. Such courses are very popular and supervisors are encouraged to attend these courses prior to having a student on placement.

## THE ROLE OF THE COLLEGE TUTOR

The tutor occupies a pivotal role between the college programme and the placement. Through visits to the placements, supervisors' meetings and placement report forms the tutor will endeavour to assess the student's progress in placement. Through regular tutorials the tutor will assist the student in integrating the different elements of the college programme, both across theoretical and practical components of the course. The college tutor's responsibilities include the following:

- Arranging all placements
- Identifying the student's prior Early Education experience and current learning needs

- Monitoring student's progress on placement through discussion, in tutorials and through reading placement journals/reflections as well as liaising with placement supervisor
- Observing students professional practice on visits to placement
- Facilitating three-way sessions between student, supervisor and college tutor to discuss progress when on placement visit and overall evaluation
- Discussion of the final draft of the Placement Report Form
- Collation of placement reports and assessment.

## THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT

Placements are designed to enable students to

- Take full advantage of all opportunities for learning and personal development available on placement
- Carry out placement-based assignments
- Plan and carry out activities and facilitate developmentally appropriate experiences as detailed in the placement report in consultation with the supervisor / co-worker
- Monitor own progress and prioritise learning goals with respect to learning outcomes identified in the placement report
- Keep weekly records of own learning
- Set appropriate learning goals in accordance with the guidelines of the Placement Report Form and in consultation with the supervisor
- Make positive use of supervision

A wide range of placements in services for 0-8 years are available and include crèches, playgroups, naíonraí, HSE nurseries, voluntary and community organisations, services for children with additional needs and Department of Education funded services. While most placements will offer students the opportunity to work directly with children under the guidance of the supervisor, where appropriate, a placement in an early childhood agency may be considered.

## SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

The college tutor facilitates regular meeting with students through regular tutorial sessions, where students can meet with their college tutor, on a one-to-one basis and in group sessions, to discuss their progress in placement. The college tutor works with the student in arranging the placement to ensure best learning opportunities for every student. Each student is required to complete three supervised placements ranging over a variety of settings during the programme. Students are offered placements which increase in level of difficulty in accordance with the student's increasing level of competence during the course of their professional training.

First year students spend a total of thirty five days on placement which is one day a week from mid October until the Easter break with three block weeks during this period. Three phases of placement practice can be broadly outlined. During the first few weeks of placement, the student role is largely an observational one through which they gradually familiarise themselves with staff, children, policies and routines of the setting. Students also assist the teacher/early years practitioner with the full range of activities available in the placement and begin to record daily notes/comments/reflections in assessment form during this time. During the second phase the student begins to plan, organise and lead developmentally-appropriate activities/experiences with small groups of children having discussed these activities with the teacher/early years practitioner. The student also assists with routine child management in accordance with the placement's policies. During the final phase of the placement experience in year one, students are encouraged to take the initiative and build on previous experience. On a regular basis (i.e. every placement day) students plan, organise and lead at least one age appropriate activity/experience with small groups of children in close consultation with the teacher/early years practitioner. Throughout the first year of placement experience, students record daily notes/comments/reflections in assessment form, discuss progress with staff and incorporate constructive feedback into practice.

Second year students spend a total of sixty days on placement, consisting of two days a week from September to April, with two block placements of one week's duration. After the initial setting in-in period, students are expected to move quickly from playing an assistant role to taking responsibility throughout their placement to plan daily activities and facilitate developmentally appropriate experiences for individual children and groups of children in



consultation with the staff. They will participate fully in the regular feedback sessions and will give due consideration to staff feedback on their practice. By the end of the first semester, second year students are expected to manage consecutive activities/routines and transitions and to participate in a range of interactions with the children, offering social, emotional and learning support. During the second semester, students will manage a half-day and full-day session in cooperation with the other members of the team, taking responsibility for planning, organising and facilitating the holistic development of the children. . Second year students are required to compile, present and discuss evidence of their own learning with their supervisors and college tutors throughout the year. Based on this ongoing process students will be able to select appropriate examples for the placement report forms at the end of semester 1 and 2, and take joint responsibility with their supervisors in the completion of the report forms.

Third year students complete a total of sixty days on placement spending two days each week and two separate block weeks on placement over the academic year. Following a short induction period, third year students are expected to show initiative in planning, carrying out and reviewing experiences for individual and groups of children where appropriate. There is a requirement in this year for students to share their planning and assessment experiences for children's learning with their colleagues in class. Furthermore they are expected to become involved in all aspects of the work of the services under supervision. Third year students are expected to contribute fully to the work of the team on an ongoing basis through actively applying and sharing (where appropriate) knowledge and skills from college-based modules to the work. Students are required to develop knowledge and skill in working with families either through direct or indirect work with families. A strong emphasis is placed on the importance of reflective practice and students are expected to make regular reflections, in a placement journal, on their placement learning. Students are expected to prepare for supervision and show how they have incorporated feedback into their practice. Final year students are responsible for compiling and presenting the evidence required to the supervisor for joint completion of the end of year report. By the end of their placement, students should be practising at the level expected of a newly qualified early years staff member.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS IN RELATION TO PRACTICE PLACEMENT

### **Q1. What should happen in the case of a student who may not be suited to the field of early childhood education?**

As in most professions, some students may present for training who may not be suitable for working in the field of early childhood education, perhaps due to personal difficulties or other issues that may come to light while on placement. It is desirable, where possible, that both college tutors and supervisors work together in these circumstances. Some students may just need more time, experience or training to deal with the personal issues and to help them reach the required levels of practice to work effectively in the field. Extended or repeat placements may be arranged for such students but only one repeat placement can be offered in any given academic year.

### **Q2. As a supervisor, what should I do if the placement is not proceeding as well as expected?**

If the supervisor has any immediate concerns s/he should raise them as soon as possible with the student and also inform the college tutor, as the quicker the problem or issue is addressed, the sooner it can hopefully be resolved.

### **Q3. What if the student lacks motivation in the placement setting?**

All students are encouraged by college tutors, upon commencement of a placement, to ask questions and present themselves in a professional, enthusiastic and focused manner. If the student seems unmotivated, the supervisor should raise this with the student and aim to resolve any outstanding issues. If this persists, the college tutor should be contacted for further advice and support.

#### **Q4. What should happen if the student is arriving to the setting late or is not attending regularly?**

Punctuality and reliability are two core qualities required in the area of early childhood education and are, therefore, taken very seriously by the college. The supervisor should discuss with the student in the first instance indicating expectations in these matters. If the situation persists, the placement supervisor should contact the student and college tutor as early as possible. The college tutor will liaise with the student and, if necessary, the setting, to resolve any such issues. Any absence from placement should be notified to the supervisor as soon as possible and notified to the college tutor. Absences are treated as in the workplace and must be excused by a medical certificate or by submission of evidence that they are due to immediate personal or family emergencies.

#### **Q5. What if the student is behaving inappropriately?**

All students, prior to the commencement of each placement, are briefed by course tutors on placement expectations and appropriateness of behaviour and dress in the workplace. It is useful for supervisors to echo this upon placement commencement so as to clarify expectations of the setting to students in regard to their performance in the workplace and, more generally, to emphasise the importance of the student presenting themselves in a professional manner.



# Comments from Supervisors re. Early Childhood Education Students on Placement

*Each year we look forward to taking on the supervision of a DIT student. The unique aspects of our service provide a rich experience for the student to learn within and we encourage their participation and contributions greatly. Their enthusiasm and creativity add a new dimension to the programmes already in place and are beneficial to our team and the families and children we provide for.*

Lynda Stokes & Rebecca Finnegan, Baleskin Children's Service, Baleskin Reception Centre

*We were all once students and some of us experienced excellent placements which set us on the right path in our career and others experienced something less encouraging. I feel by taking the time to work with the future professionals in our service we are adding to the professionalism and enthusiasm for the early years and also hopefully planting a seed in our students' heads of practices they would like to aspire to when they are out managing a workplace*

Geraldine Brereton, One Family, Dublin 2

*In offering placements to DIT students I feel the service benefits in many ways. The children in the pre-school benefit from having a different person to learn, bond and play with.*

*For the staff it gives us a chance to keep in touch with DIT and developments in Early Education and also gives us the chance to support and help a student to learn and develop.*

*It is always a joy to see a student grow in confidence during the year. It is a pleasure to share our pre-school with students and to see their relationships with children and staff grow during the year.*

Geraldine Ryan, St. Anne's Primary School, Tallaght

*For the past fifteen years our Early Start setting has had the pleasure of providing work placement for D.I.T. students. Not only do the students bring fresh ideas to the setting they also provide variety in the classroom as a new face and voice for the children. The students come to us with a high standard of training and role model best practice in childcare. Their contribution to our setting has been invaluable and every year there are tears on the last day from children and staff members alike. Taking on a student requires time and commitment from the placements staff in the form of guidance and support for the students and through the completion of progress reports but it is more than worth it. One of the great benefits from taking on students is the formation of long lasting friendships.*

Helen McGrath and Mary Sheridan, St Finians Early Start Pre-School, Finglas.





