



MSc Studentship

Physical Activity and Health: Healthy Ireland Demonstration Project

Applications are invited for a 2-year full time MSc Studentship

In UL, we are committed to the all-round academic and professional development of our students. The successful candidate would become part of the Physical Activity *for* Health Research Cluster in the Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences. As such, you would have the full support and access to the resources and postgraduate laboratories within the Department. The expectation would be that you would enrol in a structured MSc programme. During this time, you would be trained in both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaire, accelerometry and physical health measures) research methods. You will also be given the opportunity to contribute to undergraduate modules, this will be agreed by your supervisor and managed to ensure that it provides necessary continuing professional development alongside the opportunity to meet your research requirements.

Project Background

Within the Healthy Ireland Framework¹, the Department of Health identified the promotion of health in children and the creation of healthy generations of youth as critical to the country's future. Adolescence is a critical time for intervention as it is a highly volatile stage in life where transitional periods can influence behaviour and where habits developed may persist into adulthood. This makes the post-primary school-aged population, currently ~339,000 children in Ireland, a relevant and meaningful target population for early disease prevention and health promotion. The school environment is an ideal setting for accessing children of all social backgrounds. This flagship **Healthy Ireland Demonstration Project** has already garnered support from the Department of Health and Department of Education and Skills. Within the HIDP, the development of the Active School Flag for post primary schools is a key deliverable. As part of this project the successful candidate will join a team of researchers assessing the feasibility of **Active School Flag Post Primary** (ASFPP).

Emerging evidence suggests that a physically active environment in schools needs to be centred around a whole-school approach. Active School Flag (ASF) is a whole-school initiative supported by the Department of Education and Skills that fits within the Healthy Ireland framework, promoting opportunities for physical activity in school. Prior to national roll-out of this all-inclusive two-year ASF programme, evidence of its feasibility within diverse post-primary settings is needed. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to carry out a mixed methods study on the implementation of the post-primary ASF (PPASF) programme.

Three post-primary schools with Principals' signed letter of commitment around Ireland have been recruited to this feasibility study. Data will be collected throughout two academic years with four time points. Randomly selected, representative sample, students (approx. 100 students per school) take part in comprehensive measures of physical activity behaviours, determinants and will participate in interviews. Teachers are interviewed, whole-school surveys and site visits for fidelity will be undertaken. The MSc student will be involved in data collection, analyse the quantitative data through multilevel statistics, nested at the school level, and the qualitative data through the lens of social cognitive

¹ Department of Health. (2013) *Healthy Ireland - a framework for improved health and wellbeing 2013-2025*. Dublin: Department of Health





theories. The expected outcomes from this study would guide the development of the ASFPP prior to its national roll-out.

Studentship Details

As part of the PAFH research cluster in UL you will become part of a team of post docs, PhD and MSc students, all working on various projects to do with the promotion of physical activity for health.

The studentship will be for two years and cover annual postgraduate fees and a stipend (€13,000 per annum). Depending on progress an opportunity to move to the PhD register would be evaluated towards the end of year 2.

Successful applicants will normally have an Upper Second Class Honours Degree in physical activity and health, psychology, exercise science, physical education or a cognate area. Experience of working with children is welcome and evidence of project management and scientific writing would be an advantage. You would need to be able to demonstrate your ability to work independently with support of a teaching or research supervisor and the enthusiasm to contribute to a stimulating research and teaching environment. A full clean driving license and access to a car would be desirable.

Informal enquiries should be directed to Professor Catherine Woods, Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, University of Limerick. Email: Catherine.Woods@ul.ie.

Please send a CV (full curriculum vitae with referee details) with a personal statement outlining why you would like to pursue this research opportunity and what you think you could contribute to this study to Professor Woods (via email to the address above). Closing date for receipt of application is **September 13th**. Short-listed applicants will be required to attend for interview (September 18th).

