

IRISH ASSOCIATION OF SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPISTS



**HISTORY OF SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY EDUCATION IN
THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page.....	1
<i>Dligid é dteanga aimsir – Time to Speak.....</i>	3
The Education of Speech and Language Therapists.....	4
Move to a Graduate Profession.....	7
The Bacon Report 2001.....	10
The Educational Context of Speech and Language Therapy in Ireland, 2006.....	10
Undergraduate courses.....	10
Graduate entry course.....	11
Postgraduate study and development.....	11
International Teaching And Research Contacts.....	11

History of Speech and Language Therapy Education in the Republic of Ireland

Dligid édteanga aimsir – Time to Speak

History is an important aspect of all our lives, national history, family history, etc. The history/roots of our profession are important, not just to the present generation, but to future generations. It is important to document the early years, to know where we came from. It is only in this context that we can evaluate where we are and where we are (should be) going. What follows is an effort to document the early years of the profession of speech and language therapy in Ireland.

Communication disorders have existed since humans developed oral communication skills. Reference can be found in the histories of ancient civilisations attesting to this fact. In Ireland our attention has been drawn to the law of the 7th - 9th Century, which, in the Irish language, stated 'dligid édteanga aimsir'. This can be translated literally as 'tonguelessness is entitled to time' and implied that where a communication disorder existed the individual had the right to be afforded the time required to "make his case".

In Ireland, as elsewhere, individuals with an interest in communication skills, and concern for those with speech and language disabilities, worked to alleviate these problems prior to the arrival of qualified professionals. One of the best known of these pioneers was Father Seamus O'Flynn, a friend and pupil of Sir Henry Irving, who in the 1920s established the Loft, a legendary Shakespearean studio situated over a sweet factory in the city of Cork. In addition to teaching acting, Father O'Flynn worked with individuals with speech and language impairments, especially those with fluency problems. In Dublin, in the 1950s, through the now famous Christy Brown, a medical doctor became interested and involved in helping those with communication disorders. Her work was augmented by a very dedicated worker who developed a similar interest and worked in a centre for children with cerebral palsy. Also in the early 1950s two UK trained speech therapists came to work in private practice in Ireland. One worked in Dublin for a short period, the other worked in private practice in Co. Meath.

In the late 1950s the first full-time clinician, with a qualification from the College of Speech Therapists in the UK, (now the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists) commenced work in several of the Dublin voluntary institutions. At the same time many of the hospital consultants became interested to see a service established in the hospitals to which they were attached. This resulted in several individuals being sent to the UK to obtain a qualification in speech therapy. The hospitals and centres involved were voluntary institutions run by religious orders. Those sent to the UK for education were members of these same religious orders. In the 1960s and early 1970s a small number of UK therapists came to work in Ireland, together with an even smaller number of individuals who had received their education in the USA or Australia. By the year 1971 there were 20 therapists working in the Republic, 17 in Dublin, one each in Limerick, Kilkenny and in Clare/Kerry. Fifteen of these therapists qualified in the UK, one in Australia and one in USA.

The Education of Speech and Language Therapists

In 1959/60 the need for an education programme for speech therapists in Ireland was becoming evident to the government of the day and also to government agencies. It was proposed that a training programme be established similar to those pertaining at the time in New Zealand and in many European countries. Such programmes recruited teachers who were given a further year's training which was intended to equip them to work in the education system with school-going children with speech and language disorders. This proposal was rejected on several grounds: the disparity with the system in the UK, our nearest neighbours; the need to educate professionals to work with the full range of individuals with communication disorders; and the inexperience of the two therapists working in Ireland at the time.

In 1965, when the number of therapists had increased to approximately 10, the authorities at St Vincent's Group of Hospitals in Dublin approached the Department of Health with a proposal to establish a training school. A therapist from this group was, at the time, studying in Reading, England, completing a post graduate course designed for therapists involved in the education of speech therapists. At this time the same therapist was awarded a World Health Organisation Fellowship to enable her to evaluate the education of Speech Therapists in Europe. As a result of this study, it was agreed that the form of training best suited to Ireland was a programme similar to that available in the UK, which prepared clinicians to work

with individuals of all ages presenting with all types of communication disorders. Unfortunately the government's interest in the establishment of a training programme waned; other matters were exercising their interest. It was at this stage that eight Health Boards were established to serve the health needs of the country and to replace the local Health Authorities. Some officials in the Department of Health considered that recruitment of one therapist for each Health Board would adequately service the population requiring therapy for speech and language disorders, i.e. eight speech therapists for the whole country! It was accepted that it would be difficult to recruit therapists from the UK and that therefore suitable candidates would have to be recruited in Ireland and sent away for training. This scheme was never put into effect.

In 1968, almost 10 years after the initial proposal, it was eventually agreed to establish an education programme in Speech Therapy, similar to those existing at that time in the UK. This programme would be under the control of the Department of Health and administered by the National Rehabilitation Board. Negotiations were entered into with the professional body in the UK, the College of Speech Therapists (CST), now the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT). This body was most generous in the support and help afforded and agreed to foster the new programme. It was decided to admit fifteen students per annum, on the basis of Leaving Certificate results and performance at an interview. The students would be prepared for the examinations of the professional body leading to the Licentiate of the College of Speech Therapists (LCST), later amended to DipCSLT. It was further agreed that the professional body in the UK would accredit the course.

It should be stated that at this time, all eleven programmes in the UK had the same curriculum and took the same examinations, i.e. Part I taken after two years of study and Part II at the end of the third year. Examination subjects were Anatomy and Physiology, Phonetics, Speech Pathology, Psychology and Neurology. Students were also examined in their clinical placement with two clients and had to present case files on a further fifteen clients.

At the time of these negotiations a Dublin based hospital, St Vincent's Hospital (SVH), Elm Park, was nearing completion and some of the services had moved to this location from St Stephen's Green in the city centre. It was in this new site that the National Rehabilitation Board (NRB) 'borrowed' a hospital ward for the purpose of setting up the Dublin College of Speech Therapy (DCST). Adequate space was

provided for the initial intake of 15 students, the 2 full time members of staff, the secretary and visiting lecturers. At the end of the first year, a house in the grounds of SVH, became vacant, the College moved to these premises and flourished happily until 1979 when the move to Trinity College Dublin (TCD) took place.

It was difficult, initially, to recruit the lecturers required for the various subjects on the syllabus. The Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland obliged by providing the course in anatomy and physiology for the first two years. From 1971 the teaching of these subjects was undertaken by the staff of Trinity College. Phonetics (linguistics was only evolving in the field of speech therapy at this time) was taught by a lecturer who travelled from Cork each Saturday, supplemented by lectures from a member of the staff of TCD. In 1970 a part-time lecturer in phonetics and linguistics was appointed and in 1973 a full-time post was established. Lectures in medically related subjects were provided by consultants from a variety of hospitals, who gave generously of their time. Initially, psychology was taught by a lecturer from University College Dublin (UCD); from 1971 teaching in this area was provided from TCD. In 1977 a part-time psychology lecturer was appointed to the DCST, this was followed by the establishment of a full-time post in 1979.

An on-site clinic was a feature of the College from the earliest days, and this clinic provided some of the practicum for students in addition to providing staff with a facility to maintain their clinical skills. However, the bulk of clinical experience was provided by the small dedicated band of therapists working in Ireland at that time. Clinical block placements were also made available in hospitals and centres in the UK and the USA from the earliest days of the course, providing a much needed resource. Many students, throughout the years, have gained valuable experience at a speech camp for children with speech and language disorders in Ithaca, USA.

Many of the students at this time were sponsored by the Health Boards, with the students committing themselves to work for the Health Boards for a period ranging from one to three years following qualification. Thus, Health Boards throughout the country acquired qualified speech and language therapists. Prior to this time, several of the Dublin-based therapists provided a screening and advisory service to the Health Boards on a monthly basis. When the newly qualified therapists took up their posts in 1972 they were, in most cases, establishing a service single handed, a daunting task! In order to offer some support to these past students, staff of the College travelled to

their clinics and advised the young therapists on general management, seeing some of their clients for second opinions. Therapists were also brought back to the College during their first year post qualification to update their knowledge and to discuss problems which had arisen. A medical officer from the Department of Health came along to hear the problems experienced, and where possible to resolve them!

Move to a Graduate Profession

In 1972, following a government report in the UK (the Quirk Report), it was decided that all existing education programmes should move towards degree status. This report stated (p 102)

"The need as we see it, is for changes in the basic training which would end the present isolation of the speech therapy schools' staff and students..... provide for recognition of the complexity of the diagnosis, assessment and treatment of communication disorders, and open the way to advanced work and specialisation".

It further stated (p 103)

"the future training of speech therapy should be based in Universities with medical schools".

This move in the UK resulted in a search for an educational establishment in Ireland, with degree awarding status, willing to adopt the Dublin College of Speech Therapy. It is important to realise that, at this time, none of the Health Science courses (other than Medicine and Dentistry), were University-based, so new ground had to be broken. A number of avenues were explored including the National Council for Education Awards (NCEA) validated degrees, the Dublin-based College of Education which, at that time, were moving towards degree status, and the Universities. Fortunately, after much deliberation on both sides, the University of Dublin, Trinity College, agreed to incorporate the course into its institution. As previously stated some links had already been forged with TCD: the course in anatomy and physiology was already taught there, the Professor of Physiology was on the Board of Studies of DCST, and there were also links within the Department of Psychology. More importantly, the linguist from Cork, who gave such help in the initial year of the course, was by this time Professor of Irish in Trinity and a senior member of the academic administration of the College.

Much work was involved to effect the transfer, including the drawing up of a syllabus which would be acceptable to both Trinity College and to the CSLT. The course would be validated by Trinity College and professional accreditation of the course would come from the College of Speech Therapists (UK) until 1992 when the responsibility for the accreditation of training courses was taken on by the Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists (IASLT).

The process of accreditation entitles the professional body to set the standards for professional education, to determine and evaluate the academic knowledge base, the clinical competencies, the professional and therapeutic qualities that undergraduate and post-graduate courses need to engender in students who are to become therapists and life long learners.

In the European Union, professional education courses are required by law to be accredited by each country's representative professional organisation. Since 1992, the Irish Association of Speech & Language Therapists (IASLT) has been the licensing body using power invested by the Irish Government through the Department of Health & Children to accredit qualifying courses for speech and language therapists in the Republic of Ireland. The courses go through a formal accreditation process every five years, and there is continuing co-operation between the IASLT and its UK counterpart, the RCSLT as RCSLT members are invited by IASLT to be external accreditors.

The School in TCD was initially titled The School of Remedial Linguistics: this title arose in part from the association with Centre of Language and Communication Studies (CLCS), which was in the process of being established in the College in 1979.

Negotiations regarding the transfer to TCD and the awarding of a BA in Remedial Linguistics were completed between the Department of Health, the National Rehabilitation Board and Trinity College in time for the 1978/79 academic year. However, the transfer was delayed until negotiations with the Higher Education Authority/Department (Ministry) of Education were completed. This did not take place until December 1978. In January 1979 staff of DCST became staff of Trinity College, students became full-time students of TCD and in August 1979 the physical move to 184 Pearse Street took place.

It was agreed that the initial course would be of three years duration, leading to a BA Ordinary Degree. Students who obtained a stated

level in this examination, together with graduates of the Dublin College of Speech Therapy who had acquired a stated standard in the Diploma examination, were eligible for admission to a fourth year leading to a BA (Honours Degree). A total of 27 students availed of this opportunity. This provision was to ensure the smooth transition from Diploma to Degree status in the profession in Ireland.

The School of Remedial Linguistics was assigned to the Faculty of Arts Letters. As time progressed, it became increasingly obvious that the rightful home for the School was in the then Faculty of Medicine and Dental Studies. Thus, in 1985 the School changed Faculty, the Faculty changed its name to Faculty of Health Sciences and shortly afterwards the School of Remedial Linguistics became the School of Clinical Speech & Language Studies (SCSLs).

Professional recognition of the course was granted by the College of Speech Therapists. It was accepted that the students who commenced the course in 1977 and in 1978 (the last two cohorts of students prior to the transfer) would study for the Degree of BA in Remedial Linguistics. It had been agreed to increase the intake of students from 15 to 20, in anticipation that the improved provision of on-site clinical facilities, would provide the additional clinical placements required – (numbers admitted to the School are dependent on availability of clinical placements). The number was increased to 26 in 1992 at the request of the Minister for Health and with the provision of additional staff.

A further major step, also facilitated by the Minister for Health, was the appointment of an Eastern Health Board clinician to the School's clinic. This post had been long sought and its establishment has proved a very great asset to the School and the clinical education of students.

In 1980, the Degree of BA (Remedial Linguistics) was awarded for the first time. Students entering the course from 1981 were registered for a four year Honours Degree, which in 1985 was the BA (Mod) Degree and from 1986 onwards the Degree awarded was a BSc (Clin Lang). The move to Trinity College made it possible for students to proceed to post graduate degrees, allowing students to register for the degrees of MSc and PhD by research. The School remained the sole establishment for the education of Speech and Language Therapists until 2003 when further undergraduate courses were established in the Universities of Cork and Galway and a two year graduate-entry programme was established in the University of Limerick.

The Bacon Report 2001

There are not enough speech and language therapists in Ireland to provide the level of service that is required to meet the needs of the numbers of people who have communication disorders (the same is true in relation to occupational therapy and physiotherapy, although not to the same extent). In 2001, the government commissioned a report on current and future supply and demand conditions in the labour market for certain professional therapists (SLT, OT & Physio). The subsequent Bacon Report indicated that there was a need for a 328% increase in the number of speech and language therapists in Ireland, and recommended the establishment of additional training courses in the universities. Following the publication of the Bacon Report, the Department of Health and Children and the Higher Education Authority invited bids from the universities to establish courses in speech and language therapy. Three universities were successful in their bids – the National University of Ireland, Galway and University College Cork were authorised to establish four-year honours undergraduate courses, and the University of Limerick was authorized to establish a graduate-entry two-year fulltime course in speech and language therapy. All three universities engaged very closely with IASLT as the accrediting authority in the planning and development of the courses which began in 2003.

The Educational Context of Speech and Language Therapy in Ireland, 2006

There are now four courses leading to a qualification in speech and language therapy in the Republic of Ireland. Three of these are full time four-year undergraduate programmes, leading to an honours degree.

Undergraduate courses

The three undergraduate courses are located in the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG), Trinity College Dublin (TCD), and University College Cork (UCC). Entry to each of these courses is competitive. Traditional entry students apply through the Central Applications Office, and places are awarded on the basis of points achieved through performance on the Leaving Certificate Examination, the final state examination in the secondary school cycle. Universities differ in their recruitment procedures and requirements for non-traditional access students (mature students, students with disabilities,

and students from areas of social disadvantage). Most courses retain a proportion of places for non-traditional access students, broadly in line with the specific policies of individual universities. In line with equality legislation, students who meet entry requirements in terms of overall points and subject specific requirements must be offered an opportunity to pursue their undergraduate course of choice.

Graduate entry course

A two-year full time graduate-entry course is offered at the University of Limerick (UL). Entry to this course is competitive, and the selection process includes an interview and assessment phase.

Both undergraduate and postgraduate courses currently receive many more applications than can be accommodated within each course. All four courses are accredited by IASLT. At present, there are no part-time education opportunities for students.

Postgraduate study and development

All four universities offer opportunities for continuing professional development, including postgraduate degrees. Graduates can apply to undertake either a Master's level or a Doctoral degree by research in each of the four universities.

Taught MSc programmes are offered in a number of universities. TCD currently offers part-time two-year taught MSc courses with specialisms in either Dysphagia, Child Language or Acquired Communication Disorders. The University of Limerick offers a taught MSc in Clinical Therapies. UCC offers an MSc in Advanced Healthcare Practice, with specialist courses for SLTs. In addition, therapists can access a wide range of related graduate degrees, such as, for example, an MPhil in Applied or Theoretical Linguistics; MSc in Health Service Management; or MPhil in Speech Processing. New opportunities for graduate study are constantly evolving across the university sector, and it is likely that this will continue as a significant area of growth.

International Teaching And Research Contacts

Staff at the four universities involved in the education of speech and language therapists, have a number of international links for teaching and research purposes. Representatives from each of the universities participate in the work of CREST (the Committee of Representatives

for the Education of Speech-Language Therapists, within the RCSLT). This involvement derives from the historical context of the education of speech language therapists in the Republic, and the liaison link has been maintained and fostered over many decades. Other diverse teaching and research links are:

EUROPEAN UNION

Aphasia

University of Malta
Newcastle University, UK

Cleft Palate

International Working Party, includes USA, UK, Hong Kong and South Africa, Great Ormond St, London

Curriculum

De Montfort University

Eating, Drinking and Swallowing

Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester

Fluency

University of Leeds and University of Gent
Hadassah University Jerusalem
Master's Fluency Programme

Language Acquisition /AAC

Universities of Gothenburg, Berlin, Oulu, Manchester and Barcelona
London, and Amsterdam

Motor Speech Disorder

University of Newcastle
Queen Margaret University College

PBL

University of Newcastle

Reading

Universities of Gothenburg, and Grenada

SLI

Newcastle University

One of the universities is involved, with 14 other European universities, in an EU sponsored programme which students and staff attend annually for an intensive programme of workshops and lectures.

USA

AAC/Language Acquisition

Universities of Utah, North Carolina,

Discourse

Universities of Rhode Island, California (Fullerton), Buffalo,

Eating, Drinking and Swallowing

New Visions, Charlottesville, Virginia
Medical College of Wisconsin

Fluency

University of California (Fullerton)

NEW ZEALAND

Dysphagia

University of Canterbury

AUSTRALIA

Phonology

University of Queensland

PBL

University of Queensland

ASIA

Aphasia

Sophia University, Tokyo

Instrumental analysis of resonance disorders

University of Hong Kong

Language Acquisition and impairment

University of Hong Kong

PBL Curriculum

University of Hong Kong

Staff of the universities have been involved in the development of programmes in Malta and Jordan and give visiting lecturers in Egypt.

Many lecturers are members of RCSLT and of ASHA and are involved with professional associations such as IALP, ISAAC, and IFA. The Presidency of these organisations has been held by Irish Members.

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