



Circular 0047/2026

**To: The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary, Secondary,
Community and Comprehensive Schools
And
The Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards**

**Graduate Certificate in Autism Education for
Teachers Working with Autistic Pupils in Special Schools,
Special Classes or as Special Education Teachers in
Mainstream Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2026/2027**

Introduction

This programme will aim to provide substantial theoretical and practical professional development for teachers working with autistic pupils and, thereby, contribute to the school's overall capacity in this area.

The Programme 2026/2027

In the school year 2026 - 2027 a Graduate Certificate in Autism Education will be offered in DCU Institute of Education, DCU St Patrick's Campus, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. The Programme will run from 7th September 2026 to early May 2027.

Please apply online via <https://www.dcu.ie/courses/postgraduate/institute-education/graduate-certificate-autism-education>

Deadline for applications **5pm on 10th June 2026.**

Eighteen places are available in the Programme year 2026/2027.

Funding

Funding for the programme is provided by Initial Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education and Youth.



Aim and Content

The aim of the programme will be to provide substantial theoretical and practical education for teachers working with autistic pupils and, thereby, to contribute to the school's overall capacity in this area. A qualification of Graduate Certificate will be awarded by Dublin City University. Participants will be assessed on the basis of **full attendance** and **full participation** in all elements of the course. Candidates are advised that recordings may be required for assignments. Further details on the course and data protection may be found on the following web page:

<https://www.dcu.ie/courses/postgraduate/institute-education/graduate-certificate-autism-education>

Duration and Organisation

This is a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level 9, one-year, part-time programme delivered from 7th September 2026 to early May 2027 and consists of five modules. These modules are assessed through practical and written assignments to a Level 9 standard. The programme requires that participants are released from their schools for three weeks of the academic year (7th-11th September, 16th-20th November and 8th-12th February – please note that these dates may be subject to change). There are evening lectures and tutorials (1-2 per month) normally held on Tuesdays and two observations of practice in your school, carried out by members of faculty.

The course is delivered in a blended model through on campus learning at DCU Institute of Education, St Patrick's Campus, and online synchronous and asynchronous activities.

Eligibility

Please note that all teachers must be registered in accordance with Section 31 of the Teaching Council Act, 2001-2015. Please refer to the Teaching Council's website www.teachingcouncil.ie for further information.

This programme is for registered teachers who **hold a post currently funded by the Department of Education and Youth and who are currently working with autistic pupils or who will be working with autistic pupils for the duration of the Programme in recognised Primary Schools, including Special Schools and recognised Post-Primary Schools.** The programme is designed specifically to assist teachers in teaching and meeting the learning



and teaching needs of autistic pupils. Potential applicants must therefore have a significant teaching role with autistic pupils.

Applications are invited from recognised schools/centres that have been allocated officially sanctioned special classes.

The person nominated:

- Must be a teacher, eligible to hold a permanent post in a recognised school.
- Must be timetabled for a **minimum of 11 autism teaching hours, per week**, with regular groups of autistic learners, which may include co-teaching/in-class support for autistic students.
 - This should be **direct teaching time** that does not include consultation/planning time.
 - The 11 hours cannot include mainstream class/subject teaching, even if autistic learners are present in the class.
 - Teachers who are unable to provide a timetable demonstrating a minimum of 11 hours of dedicated autism teaching time upon commencement of the course may be asked to withdraw from the programme at the discretion of the provider.
- Will need to deliver a range of programmes related to meeting the learning needs of autistic students, including *Communication and Language* and *Social and Emotional Learning* needs.
- For the duration of the programme these autism teaching hours:
 - Must include four class periods where the teacher is working with regular/consistent groups each week (i.e., regular autism teaching hours with the same groups of 4-6 learners.)
 - Will involve providing support across the learning domains of *Communication and Language* and *Social and Emotional Learning*.

Primary:

Teachers will be required to upload a copy of their Registration Certificate¹ from the Teaching Council when submitting their application form. If the “Route” field is blank, teachers will be required to provide evidence that they have qualifications suitable to teach in either the mainstream primary sector or to teach pupils with Special Educational Needs.

¹ Certificates of Registration are available to download by logging into the My Registration Section on the Teaching Council website www.teachingcouncil.ie



Applicants from Primary Schools should have successfully completed a recognised induction process in accordance with the requirements as set out by the Teaching Council in their publication Post-qualification Professional Practice and hold a position in a sanctioned post in an area of special education or be taking up such posts in September 2026.

Post-primary:

Teachers will be required to upload a copy of their Registration Certificate (see footnote below) from the Teaching Council, when submitting their online application form. If the “Route” field is blank, teachers will be required to provide evidence that they have qualifications suitable to teach in either the mainstream post-primary sector or to teach pupils with special educational needs in the post-primary sector.

Applicants from Post-Primary Schools should have successfully completed a recognised induction process in accordance with the requirements as set out by the Teaching Council in their publication Post-qualification Professional Practice Procedures and Criteria.

Special Schools:

Teachers will be required to upload a copy of their Registration Certificate ² from the Teaching Council, when submitting their application form. If the “Route” field is blank, teachers will be required to provide evidence that they have qualifications suitable to teach either in the mainstream primary or post-primary sectors or to teach pupils with special educational needs in the primary or post-primary sector or to teach in special school settings.

Applicants from Special Schools should have successfully completed a recognised induction process in accordance with the requirements as set out by the Teaching Council in their publication Post-qualification Professional Practice Procedures and Criteria: [The-Teaching-Council-Practice-Procedures-and-Criteria.pdf](#)

Deployment of Teachers Undertaking the Graduate Certificate Programme:

While teachers are completing this programme and for a reasonable period of time following completion of the programme, it is advised that school management in all types of recognised schools make every effort to ensure that

² Certificates of Registration are available to download by logging into the My Registration Section on the Teaching Council website www.teachingcouncil.ie



autistic pupils continue to benefit from the teacher's knowledge and expertise in this area, through assigning the learning and teaching of autistic pupils to the teacher concerned. Collaborative practices, such as team-teaching, can also form a part of these arrangements.

In nominating a teacher to participate, the school principal must give a commitment that the teacher will be allocated a significant role in teaching autistic pupils (as outlined above) for the duration of the programme, and for a reasonable period into the future, in accordance with the needs of the pupils in the school. This significant special education teaching role should be reflected in the way the teacher is deployed/timetabled.

In order to participate in the programme, teachers will need access to a computer and the Internet.

Candidates should note that evidence of having completed Garda vetting is required for participation in the course.

Applications and Selection

Applications from eligible candidates nominated by their school authorities are via online submission at <https://www.dcu.ie/courses/postgraduate/institute-education/graduate-certificate-autism-education>

Closing date for applications is **5pm on 10th June 2026**.

Normally, applications will be accepted from not more than one teacher per school who meets the requirements outlined in this Circular.

Applicants for this programme are not required to attend for interview.

Fees

No fee or registration charges will apply for applicants eligible under the terms of this Circular.

Extra Personal Vacation

No extra personal vacation (EPV) days will be allowed in respect of participation in this course.



Substitution

Substitution, which must be approved by the managerial authority of the school/ETB, will be allowed. The substitution must be deemed necessary to cover the approved periods of absence of the teacher from teaching duty for attendance at the course. Documentation from the college specifying the absence details must be retained by the school. **It should be noted that paid substitution cover will not be provided by the Department of Education and Youth where a teacher takes personal leave during the block release element of the Programme.**

Salary Arrangements

All teachers on release from their school under the terms of this Programme will continue to receive their salary in the usual way.

Please note that successful completion of this Programme will not result in any entitlement to additional remuneration from the Department of Education and Youth.

**Noreen Finnegan
Principal Officer**

13th May 2026