

TITLE OF POST: Post-Doctoral Researcher (Physical Activity and Health)

LOCATION: University of Limerick

REPORTS TO: Principal Investigator

CONTRACT TYPE: Specific Purpose

SALARY SCALE: Salary: €33,975 - €37750 p.a.

POST DURATION: 2 years

JOB DESCRIPTION

QUALIFICATIONS:

Doctoral degree (level 10 NFQ) in Physical Activity and Health, Exercise Science, Physical Education, Health Sciences or other similar health related field/or equivalent relevant experience

OVERALL PURPOSE OF THE JOB:

Internationally, physical activity's role in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is recognised by the Council of the European Union (2013) ¹, the World Health Assembly (2004, 2008) ^{2,3} and the United Nations General Assembly (2011) ⁴. Strategic and policy documents including Health 2020: the European Policy for Health and Wellbeing ⁵, the Vienna Declaration on Nutrition and NCDs (2013) ⁶, and the European Physical Activity Strategy (2015) ⁷ all advocate for EU member states to have clear, consistent physical activity policies that require physical activity targets, with appropriate strategies and monitoring systems to address a 25% reduction in premature mortality from NCDs and a 10% reduction in physical inactivity (those not meeting physical activity guidelines) by 2025 ⁸. Ireland, as a member state of the EU, has signed up to these targets ⁶.

Two strategies that Healthy Ireland has endorsed to meet targets set in the National Physical Activity Plan are i) a Healthy Ireland Demonstration Project and ii) a National Exercise Referral Framework. Details on both projects are listed below. The successful candidate will assist the Principal Investigator in developing and running research programmes in these two areas.

Healthy Ireland Demonstration Project

Within the Healthy Ireland Framework⁹, 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. The project is being led by Professor Catherine Woods (UL) and Professor Donal O'Shea (UCD) and you will become part of a multi-disciplinary team from across Europe. The aim of this project is to develop and assess the feasibility of a Healthy Ireland Demonstration Project (HIDP) to enhance physical activity, improve health behaviours and health literacy in school-aged children, and to inform the development of a definitive randomized controlled trial (RCT). A full-time PhD student will also be assigned to this project.

Specific Objectives:

1. To develop the intervention model for the Healthy Ireland Demonstration Project based on evidence and theory of existing interventions designed to improve health behaviours and health literacy in school-aged children.



2. To collaborate with school-based, community-based and policy stakeholders to ascertain their opinions about the proposed project and best practice for implementing the intervention based on their specialist knowledge.
3. To assess the feasibility of the Healthy Ireland Demonstration Project in the Irish setting.
4. To determine the effectiveness of the Healthy Ireland Demonstration Project for modifying health behaviours, focusing on physical activity, and improving health literacy over an academic year.
5. Post intervention, to refine intervention content, delivery preferences, and recruitment and retention strategies.
6. Post intervention, to determine the most feasible primary outcome and procedures for the definitive randomised controlled trial (RCT).

National Exercise Referral Framework

Within the National Physical Activity Plan, the Health Services Executive proposes to fund a pilot evaluation of the National Exercise Referral Framework (NERF; Action 25). The vision of NERF is that 'those living with Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) or mental illness will enjoy more active and healthier lives'. Within NERF physical activity has a primary and secondary role in the prevention and the management of NCDs. Healthcare providers are seen as important influencers of patient behaviour and key initiators of NCD prevention actions in referring people to NERF service providers. Service providers, those working within the physical activity and sport sectors, are seen as important facilitators of this behaviour change. Through a multi-disciplinary team within and beyond UL (including collaborators from DCU), the aim of this project is to develop an evidence-based NERF 'programme' to enhance individual self-management of their disease. This project will build on lessons learned from PATHway (Physical Activity Towards Health; a five million Horizon 2020 project), it will investigate the use mhealth (mobile health) and other possibilities for providing real-time monitoring and feedback to people living with NCDs in order to enhance the likelihood of them adopting healthier active lifestyles. A full-time PhD student will also work on this project.

Specific Objectives:

1. To develop an intervention model for NERF.
2. To collaborate with stakeholders to ascertain their opinions about the proposed project and best practice for implementing the intervention based on their specialist knowledge.
3. To develop the research protocols and procedures for assessing the feasibility of a NERF programme.
4. To determine the effectiveness of the NERF programme for modifying physical activity and health behaviours over a 12-week period, with extended follow-up.
5. Post intervention, to refine intervention content, delivery preferences, and recruitment and retention strategies.
6. Post intervention, to determine the most feasible primary outcome and procedures for the definitive RCT.

Key Accountabilities:

Reporting to the Principal Investigator, Professor Catherine Woods, the Postdoctoral Researcher will:

- Conduct a specified programme of research under the supervision and direction of the Principal Investigator.
- Assist in identifying and developing future research and funding initiatives.
- Engage in appropriate training and professional development opportunities as required by the Principal Investigator, School or Faculty in order to develop research skills and competencies.
- Liaise with both internal and external project stakeholders including industry and academic partners/collaborators.
- Engage in the dissemination of the results of the research in which you are engaged, as directed by, with the support of and under the supervision of a Principal Investigator.
- Engage in the wider research and scholarly activities of the research group, School or College.
- Interact closely with other postgraduate research personnel working with other research

partners/PI's within the group

- Carry out administrative work to support your programme of research.
- The employee will be expected to carry out any additional duties as may reasonably be required within the general scope and level of the post.

Research

- Proficiency in conducting intervention-based research in adults or children, and in understanding determinants of physical activity and theories of behaviour change in these populations.
- Experience in using both quantitative and qualitative research methods.
- Experience in contributing to research programmes under general guidance of a Principal Investigator.
- Ability to define research objectives and proposals for own (or joint) research in line with research strategy.
- Track record of conducting individual and/or collaborative research projects with a variety of research partners including multivariate data analysis.
- Assess research findings for the need/scope for further investigations / exploitation.
- Translate knowledge of advances in the subject area into research activity.
- Proficiency in writing for publication, research reports and conference presentations.

Research Management

- Plan, co-ordinate and implement research project (to include management and coordination of the project research activity from a national perspective with collaborative partners in other institutes).
- Manage own personal and research resources (including where required, specialist training) appropriately.
- Manage research budget, and keep records as directed and in line with Funder/University policy as appropriate.

Research Outputs - Write Up and Dissemination

- Write up results from own research activity in the form of annual reports and peer-reviewed publications.
- Contribute to the research project's dissemination, in whatever form (website entry, social media, reports, scientific papers, chapters, book)
- Present information on research progress and outcomes e.g. to bodies supervising research; conferences, steering groups; other team members, as agreed with the Principal Investigator.

Policy & Standards

- Knowledge and understanding of recent policy, practices and procedures, relevant to the research program, which include broader University/ sector/ external sponsor or funder (e.g. Population-level demographic change, Health-care costs/burden, Industry Opportunities, Educational/research knowledge gaps, Commercial Awareness, Research Ethics, Knowledge Transfer, Intellectual Property Rights).

Supervision

- Experience as a supervisor/co-supervisor or having been a member of a supervision panel.

Income Generation / Funding

- Experience of identifying sources of funding and pursuing the process of securing funds.

Essential Criteria:

- Doctoral degree (level 10 NFQ) in Physical Activity and Health, Exercise Science, Physical Education, Health Science or other similar Health related field/or equivalent relevant experience.
- Experience in running intervention-based research programmes.
- Must have experience of conducting statistical analyses using SPSS/other appropriate statistical

- software.
- Experience in publishing papers, writing reports/papers/conference presentations.

Desirable Criteria:

- Demonstrate a capability of working within a project team to achieve results.
- Demonstrable a record of success in appropriate/equivalent leadership and management role(s).
- Good organisation skills.
- Good communication and interpersonal skills.
- Demonstrate a commitment to gaining practical experience working on a research project.
- Ability to relate to staff and work in a team.

Enquiries should be directed to Professor Catherine Woods, Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, University of Limerick. Tel: 00353-87-9670610; 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 Prof. Woods (via email to the address above). Closing date for receipt of application is November 22nd. Short-listed applicants will be required to attend for interview on November 30th.

References:

1. Council of the European Union. Council Recommendation on promoting health-enhancing physical activity across sectors. (2013).
2. World Health Organisation. ResolutionWHA57.17. Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity, and Health. in Fifty-seventh World Heal. Assem. Geneva, 17-22 May 2004 (2004).
3. World Health Organisation. 2008–2013 Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases. (2008).
4. United Nations General Assembly. Political declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases. (2011).
5. <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-policy/health-2020-the-european-policy-for-health-and-well-being>.
6. World Health Organisation Europe. Vienna Declaration on Nutrition and Noncommunicable Diseases in the Context of Health 2020. in WHO Minist. Conf. Nutr. Noncommunicable Dis. Context Heal. 2020 (2013).
7. World Health Organisation: European Physical Activity Strategy (2015).
8. World Health Organisation. Global Status Report on Noncommunicable Diseases 2014. (2014).
9. Department of Health. (2013) *Healthy Ireland - a framework for improved health and wellbeing 2013-2025*. Dublin: Department of Health.