

# Is Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) a Science?

## What Ireland's Department of Education says

*"You have asked whether Applied Behavioural Analysis is a science... The Report of the Task Force also frequently refers to Applied Behavioural Analysis as an approach and contains significant and comprehensive commentary on this approach. In the light of this, the Department continues to hold the position that ABA is an approach. I see no reason to reconsider this position."*

Mr. Jim Mulkerrins,  
Principal Officer, Special Education Section,  
Department of Education

Who on the Task Force advised that ABA is an  
"Approach" and not a "Science"?



## What the International Community of Experts Say

*"ABA is a Science... Applied behaviour analysis is the science in which tactics derived from the principles of behaviour are applied systematically to improve socially significant behaviour and experimentation is used to identify the variables responsible for behaviour change."*

William L. Heward, Ed.D., BCBA-D,  
Professor Emeritus, Special Education Program  
College of Education and Human Ecology  
The Ohio State University

*"Although there are several journals devoted to the science of behaviour analysis, the two primary journals are the Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behaviour and The Journal of Applied Behaviour Analysis. Both are highly rigorous and technical journals with strong citation indices. But all of this is well established fact and what surprises me is that any educated person would question it."*

Patrick C. Friman, PhD,  
Clinical Professor of Pediatrics,  
University of Nebraska Medical Centre

*"I view ABA as a branch of the science of human behaviour. It is a science. It may be called an approach, but it is not only or merely one."*

Oliver Mudford, PhD, BCBA-D,  
Director Applied Behaviour Analysis Programme,  
University of Auckland

*"Of course Applied Behaviour Analysis is a science. There exist decades of well controlled research documenting the benefits of ABA for a broad array of challenging behaviours and skill acquisition goals."*

Sandra L. Harris, PhD.  
Executive Director, Douglass Developmental Disabilities  
Center, Rutgers University , Board of Governors Distinguished  
Service Professor Emerita

*"I am extremely surprised and dismayed to hear that ABA is still viewed as an approach (one approach among many) rather than as the science that we know it to be and that ABA schools have been closed in Ireland based on what appears to be complete ignorance and misinformation. "*

Neil Martin, PhD, BCBA-D  
Applied Science Representative, European Association  
for Behaviour Analysis; International Representative,  
Behaviour Analyst Certification Board

*"The field of study that is behaviour analysis, and of which applied behaviour analysis (ABA) forms part, is a science."*

Professor Julian C. Leslie.  
Head of Research Graduate School, Faculty of Life and Health  
Sciences, University of Ulster

**Who Cares?** In 2011 the current government closed Ireland's last ABA schools for a school model that has no supporting research evidence.. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) provided no advice to the Department of Education on any aspect of educating children with autism in the period up to the closure of the ABA pilot schools (confirmed by recent FOI responses). The decision to close was influenced by our Department of Education either misrepresenting or ignoring the extensive international research literature that supports the effectiveness of the science of ABA in the treatment of children with autism. The National Standards Project, for example, when commenting on Established Treatments concluded, "The overwhelming majority of these interventions were developed in the Behavioural Literature" (<http://www.nationalautismcenter.org/nspl/findings.php>). I call on you to please question what is going on, to challenge the Minister, to not accept such poor practice. Our children deserve better!