



Tackling deprivation 'must start with children'

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Education Editor

THE earlier the Government intervened for the benefit of children from socially deprived backgrounds the better, according to a Nobel prize winning economist.

While much attention was focused on getting disadvantaged young people through their Leaving Certificate to college, Prof James Heckman suggested last night that interventions should start when they were tiny tots.

One American study showed a 10-fold return on every dollar invested in 0-3 year olds, he said.

Research that Prof Heckman carried out shows that the early childhood environment has a direct influence on the subsequent economic success of that child into adulthood.

The professor, who has been appointed UCD professor of Science and Society, said early intervention reduced the cost of investment later on – such as the need for pupil-teacher ratios and public job training. He said, however, that investment in older individuals was still beneficial, adding that early intervention was best sustained by continued support.

Complimenting the Government on its policy of early child development, the professor said Ireland could be a leader in "what works" for improving the lives of young children. He said that "skills beget skills".

Prof Heckman received the Ulysses Medal from UCD last night for his contribution to research in economics and human behaviour.

The award and lecture form part of week-long visit during which he will also launch a collaborative research initiative into

intervention design between the UCD Geary Institute and the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago, funded in part by the Atlantic Foundation and the Irish Government.

UCD President Dr Hugh Brady described his appointment as exciting, not just for the university but for the country as a whole. Prof Heckman's work was at the frontier of economic science, he said.



Prof Heckman: urges investment in tiny tots