



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Phríomhoifigigh Airgeadais  
Feidhmeannacht na  
Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Seomra 125, Ospidéal  
Dr. Steevens  
BÁC 8

Office of the Chief Financial Officer  
Health Service Executive  
Room 125, Dr Steevens  
Hospital  
Dublin 8

27<sup>th</sup> March 2019

Deputy Brid Smith TD,  
Dáil Éireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

**Re PQ 5938 19:** To ask the Minister for Health the cost incurred in using agency nurses for the public health system in each of the years 2016 to 2018; and if he will make a statement on the matter. – Brid Smith TD

Dear Deputy Smith,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. Your PQ above has been referred to me for response.

Please see **Table 1** below which provides the HSE Nursing Agency Staff costs for the years 2016 to 2018. The data was sourced from the HSE Annual Financial Statements and is for HSE Statutory services only. Please note that the 2018 data is draft only and is subject to change within the year end audit process.

<b>HSE Agency Nursing Staff costs for the years 2016 to 2018</b>			
<b>HSE Statutory Only</b>			
	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>*2018</b>
	<b>€m</b>	<b>€m</b>	<b>€m</b>
Nursing Agency Staff	57.6	64.3	76.9
<i>Source: HSE Annual Financial Statements (AFS)</i>			
<i>*Note: Please note 2018 figures are draft only and are subject to change within the year end audit process</i>			

This expenditure should be considered in the overall context including increasing demand for services; the impact of earlier constraints on recruitment in the public service; ongoing challenges in relation to the recruitment and retention of clinical staff; actions necessary to support compliance with the European Working Time Directive and efforts to reduce expenditure on agency staff.

Agency pay cost is under constant review. Agency staff are used where there is a difficulty in recruiting and employing hospital staff and where there is a short-term critical service need. Agency is also used for flexibility to allow for variation in activity and as required to meet patient demand needs.

In certain services we are unhappy with the level of reliance on agency staffing and therefore the reduction and minimisation of agency costs remains an area of focus, including in our 2019 National Service Plan.

Our main focus is to reduce agency spend, but for example, until the supply of nurses willing to take up HSE contracts increase, agency nurses are being used to fill long-term vacancies and 'lines' rather than for short-term, temporary vacancies, which was the original purpose of having agency frameworks in place.

Together with Procurement a tendering process has just been completed for recruitment of International Nurses and the contracts are currently being issued to the successful Contractors. It is hoped that the recruitment of these international nurses, together with on-going local recruitment campaigns, will assist in reducing the number of vacancies and therefore subsequently reduce the overall agency spend.

Approximately 94% of our pay related spend each year is for directly employed staff and in certain cases, other than utilisation of agency, there are limited choices in terms of maintenance of essential services. In other circumstances, the flexibility, preferably as a short term measure (e.g. short term sick leave cover), offered by agency staffing makes it an appropriate choice. We are seeking to maximise the retention of graduate nurses on a cost neutral basis especially through the displacement of existing agency staff.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me at [sarah.anderson1@hse.ie](mailto:sarah.anderson1@hse.ie) or tel: 045 882559.

Yours sincerely

*Sarah Anderson*

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