



National Director, Community Operations  
Dr. Steevens Hospital, Dublin 8, DO8 W2A8  
Tel: 01 6352596 Email: [communityoperations@hse.ie](mailto:communityoperations@hse.ie)

Stiúrthóir Náisiúnta, Oibríochtaí Pobail  
Ospidéal Dr. Steevens' Baile Atha Cliath 8, DO8 W2A8  
T 01 6352596 R: [communityoperations@hse.ie](mailto:communityoperations@hse.ie)

21<sup>st</sup> July 2020

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore,  
Dáil Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

**PQ 14471/20 - To ask the Minister for Health the recruitment plans in place to address the staffing crisis in child psychology teams; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

**-Jennifer Whitmore**

Dear Deputy Whitmore,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for response.

Recruitment of child psychologists is dependent on many factors including availability of already qualified suitable clinicians, numbers of newly qualified clinicians emerging from training courses and availability of psychology posts within children's services. Recruitment can be challenging in some geographically rural/isolated areas as there are currently more posts in Ireland than there are psychologists available to fill these. There are several University based courses that are working in partnership with the HSE to provide newly trained psychologists each year. The National recruitment service recruits child psychologists through national competitions. These competitions are run periodically and generate panels of psychologists for different care groups, including children. Available posts are offered to psychologists on these panels when the posts become available.

A new competition is scheduled to be run in late 2020 to recruit psychologists to child psychology post. In addition, bespoke local competitions may also be run this Autumn, as required, to ensure newly graduating psychologists can be employed as soon as possible. Services may also seek to fill child psychology posts on an agency basis, where this is required. We will also continue to pursue other initiatives including the prioritisation of child psychology posts for filling, the provision of additional HSE funding for more trainees and the potential employment of other therapists under the governance of the Principal psychologist managers.

It should be noted that the COVID 19 pandemic has led to the HSE reviewing and delivering some of our services in a different manner. This has led to a significant reduction in face to face clinics in some of our services. While this change has been implemented to reduce the risk of the spread of COVID 19 among staff and service users, it has also impacted on waiting times for some children to access services. This may have been experienced by families as an effective reduction in access to services. We are presently implementing the requirements of the national guidance "Return to Work Protocol" which will see the gradual return of normal services using an agreed framework to ensure that all risks are managed effectively. We expect that this will be implemented in all services over the coming weeks. This will mean that we can start to increase the delivery of services to

children back to previous levels and this will lead to an increase in the number of children who can attend for psychological assessment and treatment

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,



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Yvonne O'Neill,  
Interim National Director,  
Community Operations