



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,
31-33 Sráid Chaitríona, Luimneach.

Office of the Head of Operations,
Disability Services/Community Operations,
31-33 Catherine Street, Limerick.

T: 00353 (0) 61 483369

Suíomh Gréasáin/Website: <http://www.hse.ie>

24th September 2020

Deputy Sean Haughey
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: sean.haughey@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Haughey,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

PQ 25369/20

To ask the Minister for Health if the practice of redeploying speech and language therapists and other allied health professionals to Covid-19 testing will be ceased; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the practice will have implications for students studying to be speech and language therapists and their requirement for student placement in view of the fact that there could be a lack of available speech and language therapists to act as practice educators; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response

In preparing for and responding to COVID-19 and to fully align with Public Health guidance as recommended via the NPHET, the HSE and its partner service providers put in place a range of measures. These included the prioritisation of vital residential and home support services whilst curtailing or closing certain services such as day services, as well as certain clinical supports in order to; a) prioritise essential public health services at CHO level and b) ensure continued delivery of the referenced residential and home supports provision.

Effective redeployment of health service employees was a core element of the response in the HSE to COVID-19. Hospital groups and Community Health Organisations (CHOs) temporarily redeployed staff to support their business continuity plans, emerging services developing in direct response to COVID 19 and in response to the health and availability of staff in their own organisations.

Having said that, some services continued with therapists including speech and language therapists working with service users and their families remotely and using technology in new and effective ways.

In the same way, corporate and national services, together with Tusla, also made staff available to support the overall HSE effort during this time.

The HSE's National HR-Strategic Workforce Planning and Intelligence Unit collects information regarding the redeployment of some grades of staff. Many grades and categories of staff including speech and language therapists were redeployed to other services such as the helplines, contact tracing, testing, public health, service support and other areas.



The HSE has recently commenced a recruitment campaign for staff to support community testing facilities for COVID-19. The recruitment of staff for these roles will support the return of speech & language therapists and other clinical staff to their substantive roles.

In the interim Speech & Language Therapy Managers are working with academic institutions to ensure that, notwithstanding the demands of COVID-19, appropriate clinical placements are provided.

Resumption of Disability Services

In respect of the provision of Disability Services and in the context of the Governments Resilience & Recovery Framework (2020 – 2021), the HSE regards the provision of disability services as essential to maintaining a response to people with a disability. All disability services must follow public health guidance in this area, including the prevention and management of covid related infection. The HSE and its funded disability partners will continue to provide disability services in line with public health guidance and direction and having regard to the availability of staffing resources.

This must be supported by way of assurance and oversight from the HSE's Chief Clinical Officer along with the NPHT, so that we can do so in a safe manner. This means that therapies including speech and language therapy, whilst being delivered in new ways, will gradually be re-introduced to children with disabilities. Therefore speech and language therapists will be required to revert to their substantive assignment as part of a planned and co-ordinated approach in each CHO.

Reference is drawn to the following HSE weblink which provides updates and guidance for disability service providers, including 'service resumption planning guidance'.

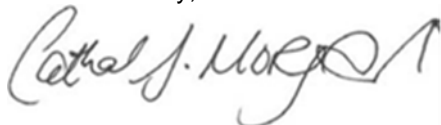
<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

Attention is also drawn to the following important web links which provides up to date information resources in respect of covid.

www.hspc.ie

<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/>

Yours sincerely,



**Dr. Cathal Morgan,
Head of Operations - Disability Services,
Community Operations**