



10<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Deputy Ruairí Ó Murchú,  
Dáil Éireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

**PQ 12211/22 To ask the Minister for Health when the national pilot to establish the efficacy of the assistant psychologist grade as a paid grade will be completed; if the report will be published; and the expected timeframe for publication.**

- Ruairí Ó Murchú

Dear Deputy Ó Murchú,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question (PQ 12211/22) which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

The role initially referred to as 'Assistant Psychologist' is now titled 'Psychology Assistant' (PA), in line with best practice for grades which provide support services to professionally accredited health and social care professionals.

In 2017, funding of €5 million was made available for the recruitment of 114 paid PA posts within HSE Psychology Services on a pilot basis, and 22 staff grade psychologists to provide the necessary governance and oversight for the pilot initiative. This independently evaluated, time-limited pilot project collected evaluation data from July 2018 until the end of September 2021, with the project extended to allow full data collection, due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In October 2021, the University of Limerick submitted its final report on this project to the HSE and the Department of Health for consideration, and sanction was granted to extend the initiative until March 2022 in order to continue delivery of service to clients and giving an increased level of certainty to those PAs currently in post. The report of the University of Limerick was extremely positive regarding the impacts of the PA grade in enhancing the capacity of primary care psychology services (circa 15,500 more clients to be seen than would otherwise be the case between 2018-2021), freeing clinical psychologists to perform at their level of competency, and in improving service user's clinical measures. Further to this, the grade also extends opportunities for psychology graduates to gain professional experience whilst working in a paid capacity for the HSE.

In December 2021, following comprehensive engagement with the HSE, consideration and evaluation of the final report's conclusions, the Department granted sanction for the establishment of the PA grade on a permanent basis, and extended the contract term for the role to three years. There are currently 77 PAs either in post or at

recruitment stage. Further to this, a national campaign to target further recruitment to the grade will commence shortly.

There are no current plans to publish the final report of the evaluation.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Seán McArt'.

**Seán McArt**

General Manager Primary Care  
National Community Operations