



**Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,**  
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Dear Deputy Tully,

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: 554783/22**

*To ask the Minister for Health the number of professionals (details supplied) who were based within a special school setting in each of the five years prior to the introduction of children's disability network teams; the number of these professionals who were based within a special school setting in the first quarter of 2021; the number of these professionals who are currently recruited and based within a special school setting, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

Details Supplied: Speech and language therapists, Occupational therapists, Physiotherapists

**HSE Response**

Prior to the establishment of Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs), the availability of services for children with disabilities varied widely depending on where the child lived, their diagnosis or where they went to school. Many services were provided by organisations for a specific type of disability or a specific age group. Some special schools that were historically linked to these organisations, received on-site health and social care supports.

The Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People Programme (PDS) was developed to address this risk. The objectives of this programme are to:

- Provide a clear pathway and fairer access to services for all children with a disability or complex developmental delay – EQUITY OF ACCESS.
- Make the best use of available resources for the benefit of all children and their families – EFFICIENT & EFFECTIVE USE OF RESOURCES.
- Ensure effective teams are working in partnership with families and with education staff to support children with a disability or complex developmental delay to reach their full potential - FAMILY CENTERED OUTCOMES & INTERDISCIPLINARY INTERVENTION



The restoration of pre-existing on-site health and social care supports for children for special schools has been identified as a Government priority. During 2021 and 2022, funding was provided for 221.3 whole time equivalent posts to facilitate CDNTs to restore the pre-reconfiguration on-site supports.

This figure is based on the level of service provided in each of the special schools prior to the establishment of CDNTs. The detail regarding the number of speech & language therapists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists is provided in the table below.

	WTEs for Special Schools	WTE filled Summer '22
Speech & Language Therapists	65.1 WTE	8.27 WTE
Occupational Therapists	46.7 WTE	12.46 WTE
Physiotherapists	40.2 WTE	14.2 WTE

Some special schools also received a level of support from psychologists, social workers, dietitians and nurses.

These additional posts are intended to support the newly established CDNTs to prioritise intervention for children with complex needs in special schools.

It was agreed that the HSE would reassign the equivalent of 44 WTE posts from CDNTs to provide on-site supports in special schools from September 2022 while recruitment of senior clinicians was progressed in parallel. Unfortunately, the September reassignments were delayed due to industrial relations issues. The HSE is continuing to engage with staff representative bodies with a view to addressing the outstanding issues.

## Recruitment

Most of the disciplines working in CDNTs are similar to those working in other areas of the health services including Primary Care Services, Mental Health Services, Older Person Services and Acute Hospitals. The HSE and the various Lead Agencies experience ongoing challenges recruiting staff across a range of disciplines and grades.

The HSE is operating in a very competitive global market for healthcare talent as there are significant shortages of qualified healthcare professionals across the globe.

The HSE continues to explore a range of options to enhance the recruitment and retention of essential staff across all aspects of the health services. In addition, the HSE Community Operations Disability Services is working collaboratively with the CDNT lead agencies at CHO level to promote CDNTs as a workplace of choice in a competitive employment market. Each lead agency is responsible for recruitment of staff on their CDNTs and is using a variety of approaches to fill funded vacancies.

Options to support the recruitment of staff for the CDNTs currently being explored include:

- Targeted National Recruitment for CDNTs
- Targeted International Recruitment for CDNTs with an agreed relocation allowance
- Sponsorship Programme for therapy grades
- Apprentice Programme for therapy grades
- Employment of graduates as therapy assistants as they await CORU registration
- Expansion of therapy assistants in the system with HSE supporting individuals to return to education to qualify as therapists.

Within the CHO areas, while recruitment is managed locally for all vacant posts, International Recruitment campaigns have been launched for qualified healthcare professionals. To support these international campaigns, the HSE is working in partnership with CORU, the regulator, and government departments to maximise this pool.



Some further points to note in relation to recruitment of CDNT staff include the following:

- There are panels in place for occupational therapists, psychologists, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists. These panels will be expanded further in November 2022.
- Community Operations Disability Services have requested that CHO Areas undertake exit interviews to establish the reasons why staff are exiting services.
- Community Operations Disability Services is currently reviewing the area of Assistant Grades.
- A comprehensive PDS national team development programme has been provided for CDNMs and cascaded to all team members. This programme, which was designed to support the establishment of the new CDNTs and to support the implementation of the new model of service, will also support staff retention.

Data for the 2022 CDNT Staff Census and Workforce Review is currently being collated. It is intended that this updated information will be available in December 2022 allowing for a 2021 / 2022 trend analysis.

Yours sincerely



**Bernard O'Regan**  
**Head of Operations - Disability Services,**  
**Community Operations**

