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19th September 2022

Deputy Roisin Shortall,
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

PQ 44080/22 – “To ask the Minister for Health the number of vacant posts in public health nursing, by CHO and LHO, in tabular form; the number of student public health nurses expected to be appointed to each area in 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Dear Deputy Shortall,

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.

Confirming the number of vacancies is very complex, the data is often out of date before the ink dries.

There is no agreed definition of a vacancy.

From a HR perspective, my definition of a vacancy is that it is a funded, approved post that is not filled by direct or indirect employment, agency, overtime, secondment or any other means.

The vacating of a position does not in itself create a vacancy as the work of the position may be covered through redeployment, restructuring or reallocation. In addition, where a post has been approved for filling, the duties may be covered by agency or overtime in the meantime.

A funded approved position where an employee on paid Maternity Leave or paid sick leave is not a vacancy as the organisation is paying that employee; whereas if you ask a manager in the front line they could identify any post that a person is not working on that day a vacancy. Many posts pending approval or filling are filled by other means for example Agency or overtime this is using the costs associated with the approval for short term cover.

Staff in the Public Service are entitled to avail of the Shorter Working Year Scheme or periods of Special Unpaid leave and many avail of this leave during the summer months, this can impact of the Staffing data during the summer months. There is also the approval by government of the reduction in Nursing Hours from 39 to 37.5 from July 1st 2022. This is currently in the approval process.

I can confirm the number of approved vacancies for Public Health Nurses is gathered once a year for the Student PHN Sponsorship Scheme and in April 2022 the total number of vacancies to be filled via the Sponsorship scheme were 237. The 237 includes new development posts and routine replacement posts.

All our employment data is available on the HSE Personnel Census website [here](#).

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

Jacqueline Nix

Assistant National Director, HR Community Operations