



**Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,**  
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,  
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21<sup>st</sup> April 2023

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Dublin 2.  
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Dear Deputy Cairns,

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

**PQ: 17216/23**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the steps he is taking in response to the finding in the National Report of Children's Disability Networks Team Staff Census and Workforce Review for 2022 that there are 707.32 vacancies across the 91 CDNTs; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

**PQ: 17217/23**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the steps he is taking in response to the finding in the National Report of Children's Disability Networks Team Staff Census and Workforce Review for 2022 that the total therapy hours provided decreased by 6% in 2022 compared to 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

**HSE Response**

The HSE has rolled out ninety one Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT) across the country in partnership with HSE funded voluntary organisations to provide equity of access for all children with complex disability to specialised services and supports as close to a child's home as possible. These teams provide for approximately 5.6% of the total child disability population, i.e. over 70,000 children and their families nationally.

Since 2019, more than 610 development posts have been allocated to children's disability services across the country. These posts have been assigned to teams based on a number of factors, including the existing ratio of staff to the number of children with disabilities in each area. This figure includes 190 posts provided in 2022 as well as an additional 136.3 WTEs to restore pre-existing services in 104 special schools.

The HSE completed its second annual Children's Disability Network Team Staff Census and Workforce Review in October 2022. The resulting report was finalised in February 2023 and has been circulated to relevant stakeholders.

An overall analysis of the data from 2021 and 2022 demonstrates an increase of 11% in the number of approved posts and a 2% increase in the CDNT workforce.



This increase has been achieved in a context where there is an average turnover rate 9.6% in health and social care professionals each year.

The census indicates over 707 posts vacant out of 2103 at this time across all CDNTs. Disability services, similar to all other areas of the Irish health services are experiencing enormous challenges in recruiting Health and Social Care Professionals (HSCP) at this time.

The HSE will be working with Lead Agencies to implement a ratio of 5:1 therapy / clinical to administration / management between 2023 – 2024 to reduce the time spent by clinicians / therapists on administrative duties thereby maximising the therapy hours available for direct service provision with children and their families.

In addition, the HSE has secured funding of approximately €11m for a waiting list initiative to facilitate additional assessments through a range of measures. This additional allocation will facilitate the Children's Disability Network Teams to focus on the provision of intervention for children on their caseloads.

## **Retention and Recruitment**

The HSE and Lead Agencies are operating in a very competitive global market for healthcare talent as there are significant shortages of qualified healthcare professionals across the globe. In partnership with our CDNT Lead Agencies, the HSE continues to explore a range of options to enhance the recruitment and retention of essential staff into CDNTs. In addition, the HSE Community Operations Disability Services is working collaboratively with its partnering Lead Agencies to promote CDNTs as a workplace of choice in a competitive employment market.

The lead agencies and the number of teams they lead are: HSE (41 teams), Enable Ireland (20 teams), Avista (formerly Daughters of Charity - 4 teams) Brothers of Charity (6 teams), Central Remedial Clinic (5 teams), St. Michael's House (4 teams), Cope Foundation (3 teams), St. Gabriel's (2 teams), St. Josephs Foundation (2 teams), Stewarts Care (2 teams), with CoAction West Cork and KARE leading 1 team each.

Each lead agency, is responsible for recruitment of staff on their CDNTs and is using a variety of approaches to fill funded vacancies. Each agency has on-going rolling recruitment to address a range of vacancies including short term temporary posts, full time permanent posts, development posts, part time posts etc.

Options to support the recruitment and retention of CDNT staff currently being progressed include:

- Targeted National Recruitment for CDNTs
- Targeted International Recruitment for CDNTs with an agreed relocation allowance
- Confined senior grade recruitment competition to promote retention of experienced CDNT staff

In addition, the following options are being explored:

- Apprenticeship 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
- Sponsorship of eligible staff to complete their Masters to qualify as therapists
- A Return to Work incentivised programme for therapists
- Sponsorship Programme for therapy grades

The HSE has launched International Recruitment campaigns 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. In addition, some of the CDNT Lead Agencies are also progressing International Recruitment.

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

- At this time, there are panels in place for occupational therapists, psychologists, physiotherapists, and speech and language therapists at both staff grade and senior grade.

National HSE is currently reviewing the recruitment process and pathway for opportunities to streamline and optimise efficiencies.



Within the CHO areas, recruitment is managed locally and the recruitment time from point of vacancy and point of job offer can vary. The pre-clearance stage to appointment time frame can take a number of weeks and is heavily candidate dependent. It is dependent on a number of factors including - the candidate returning documentation in a timely manner, the requirement in some cases for overseas clearances or visas, return of references and notice period to be worked. Pre-clearances can take a minimum of 2 weeks (if all documentation is submitted as requested), however it can take significantly longer if provision of the aforementioned documentation is delayed. It should also be noted that some candidates may be available for an immediate start with other candidates having to provide notice to a current employer. This can significantly impact the time to hire timeframes.

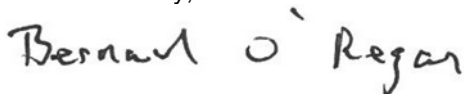
Another key focus of HSE Disabilities is staff retention. A comprehensive Team Development Programme 2020/2021 was provided for Children's Disability Network Managers (CDNMs) and cascaded to all team members. The programme, designed to support establishment of the new teams and implementation of a child and family centred model of services, will also support staff retention. All resources from this programme are now accessible online for CDNT staff. A further CDNT Training and Development Programme 2022/2023 has been launched, with dedicated funding and based on competency gaps identified and prioritised by the teams. A secure online site has been set up for CDNMs and their staff to facilitate sharing of training and development resources as well as clinical and service good practice models in place across the country. The HSE and partner Lead Agencies are committed to providing ongoing training and development for CDNT staff supporting their professional development and retention, and promoting CDNTs as an attractive place to work.

Filling the current staffing vacancies will take time. In the interim, the HSE continues to drive a number of initiatives to reduce waiting times for children and families. These include sourcing therapy assessments and interventions externally via private service providers. This will facilitate the Children's Disability Network Teams to focus on the provision of intervention for children on their caseloads.

The HSE acknowledge that waiting times for CDNT service at this time are not appropriate and particularly stressful for children and their families, and will continue, with its Lead Agencies, to explore and implement progressive strategies to address current recruitment challenges.

The HSE remains committed to the delivery of appropriate services for children with disabilities and will continue to work with families and staff to develop services that meet their needs.

Yours sincerely,



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

