



Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,
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2nd May 2023

Deputy Francis Noel Duffy,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: francisnoel.duffy@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Duffy

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: 18777/23

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the measures being taken to alleviate the high rates of vacancy across children's disability services which is affecting the role of the children's disability network teams.

HSE Response

Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs)

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.

CDNTs are teams of health and social care professionals, including nursing, occupational therapy, psychology, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, social work, dietetics and others. The team works closely together in a family centred model, focusing on the child's and family's own priorities.

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 (see attached report).



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.

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.

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 of staff for the CDNTs currently being progressed include:

- Confined competition to fill all vacant senior posts across all disciplines on CDNTs
- Targeted National Recruitment for CDNTs
- Targeted International Recruitment for CDNTs with an agreed relocation allowance
- Sponsorship Programme for therapy grades

In addition, the following options are being explored:

- Apprentice Programme for therapy grades
- Employment of graduates as graduate therapists as they await CORU registration
- Expansion of therapy assistants in the system with HSE supporting individuals to return to education to qualify as therapists.
- Increase in the number of clinical placements on CDNTs.

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. There are also national panels in place for occupational therapists, psychologists, physiotherapists, and speech and language therapists.

To sustain 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 the 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. This programme of learning is focused on competency gaps identified and prioritised by the teams.

In addition, 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bernard O'Regan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a distinct loop for the letter 'R'.

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

