

18<sup>th</sup> July 2023

Deputy Pádraig MacLochlainn  
Dáil Éireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**PQ ref 34034/23**

**2 speech and language therapist positions, 2.5 occupational therapist positions, one physiotherapist position, 3 psychology positions, and one community facilitator.**

**To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth to confirm when the positions (details supplied) within the primary healthcare system in north Donegal will be filled; and if he is aware of the huge impact this is having on children with the full spectrum of disabilities and their families.**

Dear Deputy MacLochlainn,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth for response.

I refer to your recent correspondence in relation to the vacant positions within the primary healthcare system in North Donegal which has been clarified as being in reference to the Donegal North Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT). I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

The CDNT Manager has advised that staff shortages are posing a significant challenge in managing the CDNT waiting list in a consistent manner, impacting on assessments and interventions that can be delivered.

There is a high vacancy rate for staff qualified in the disciplines of Speech & Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Psychology in CDNTs across the country, however there is a nationally agreed process in place to support local CDNTs in their efforts to fill vacant posts. Additionally the Progressing Disability Services Roadmap with actions to support the recruitment and retention of CDNT staff is to be finalised in the coming weeks. This Roadmap is being progressed by the Department of An Taoiseach as the requirements to address the shortage of qualified workforce to staff CDNTs requires response from cross governmental departments and various sectors and agencies.

A number of actions are being taken locally in order to fill the vacant posts in each of the seven CDNTs in Community Health Care Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan, Sligo (CH CDLMS) by Disability Services and the HR department. There is a focus on the regrading of therapy posts within the existing services and national, international and bespoke panels are also being utilised in an effort to fill vacant posts.



Vacant posts have and will continue to be expressed out to panels and the service is currently awaiting the outcome of this process further to recently updated panels coming on stream. There are a number of positions continuing to progress through the recruitment process which involves reference checks, Garda clearance and Occupational Health checks. Any vacancy arising is dealt with as a priority in terms of submitting the required paperwork to replace and Disability Services have regular meetings with CH CDLMS HR to ensure these posts are ready for advertising as quickly as possible.

Disability Services management has examined alternative arrangements such as redeployment of staff and reassigning waitlists but these options are not currently feasible owing to a shortage of relevant staff in other HSE service areas. CDNT Managers are continuously reviewing processes and looking at areas where service improvements can be implemented to provide a timely service to every child waiting to access services.

Donegal North CDNT has successfully secured 1 WTE staff grade physiotherapist through an agency and this person is available to take up this position in September.

Minister for Disabilities, Anne Rabbitte and I met with the staff of the Donegal North CDNT and two parent representatives on Tuesday past when the Minister was in Donegal. The meeting was informative and solution focused. A number of learnings and actions will be progressed further to information provided at the meeting that may assist with recruitment of staff to the area. However it is clear that without significant additional investment in training courses in the aforementioned disciplines and a focus on international recruitment then staffing of CDNTs will remain a challenge.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edel Quinn'.

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**Edel Quinn**  
**Head of Service Disability CHO1**  
**Ceann na Seirbhíse Míchumas**  
**Eagraíocht Chúram Sláinte Limistéar 1**