



Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,
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6th June 2023

Deputy Pauline Tully,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: pauline.tully@oireachtas.ie

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: 18615/23

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth his plans to increase the number of senior therapy staff within Children's Disability Network Teams to enable an increase in the number of student placements; 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.

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.



The largest allocated grade on the CDNTs are Senior Grade Therapists where there are 616.37 filled WTE and 331.43 vacant WTE positions (947.80 total). This represents a current senior to staff grade ratio per Census 2022 at 1:0.7 in approved and in currently filled posts.

Under the leadership and direction of the Children's Team Network Manager students on placement within CDNTs are assigned to and supervised by staff deemed competent to do so, based on their knowledge, experience, and competencies. For example, a staff grade of 3-5 years working on CDNTs would have these competencies and skills and be supported by their senior.

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.

Childrens Disability Network Team Roadmap

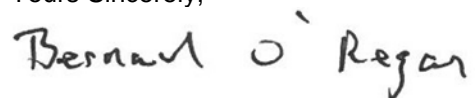
The CDNT Roadmap is currently awaiting government approval and includes an increase of CDNT staff as follows:

- 2024: 180 HSCP and Admin
- 2025: 180 as above
- 2026: 180 as above

The disciplines and grades are not broken down any further than this currently.

The CDNT Roadmap also includes the action "*All teams will provide student placements on a pro rata basis to the number of filled posts on their teams*".

Yours Sincerely,



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

