



Oifig an Stiúrthóir Cúnta Náisiúnta,
Foireann Míchumais Náisiúnta,
An Chéad Urlár - Oifigí 13, 14, 15,
Àras Phlásóg na Rós, Coimpléasc Gnó na hOllscoile,
Páirc Náisiúnta Teicneolaíochta,
Caladh an Treoigh,
Luimneach.

Office of the Assistant National Director,
National Disability Team,
First Floor- Offices 13, 14, 15,
Roselawn House, University Business Complex,
National Technology Park,
Castletroy,
Limerick.

19th February 2025

Deputy Paul Murphy,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: paul.murphy@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Murphy,

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: 2546/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth if her attention has been drawn to the fact that due to the shortage of speech and language therapists and a hiring freeze, there is a growing number of children who cannot get the help they need, many of whom have been waiting on the list for years; if she will commit to ending the hiring freeze, providing these children with the specialists they need; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response

The transfer of functions of disability services from the Department of Health to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth in March 2023 was undertaken to enable a more direct focus on disability services, this includes a focus on Children's Disability Network Teams.

There is no "hiring freeze" on employing Speech & Language Therapists into Disability services, including Children's Disability Teams. Recruitment of Speech & Language Therapists is active and ongoing across Disability services throughout the country.

In 2024, within Disability services, there was an additional 963+ WTE on the 31/12/23 figures. Within Children's Disability Network teams (HSE, Section 38s and Section 39s), the workforce increased by 272 WTE in the period 16/10/23 to 16/10/24.

As of 16/10/24, 370 WTE are Speech & Language Therapists working in Children's Disability Network Teams. In the period 16/10/23 to 16/10/24 there was an increase of 19% (+ 60 WTE) in Speech & Language Therapists within Children's Disability Teams in a strongly competitive recruitment market.



To build on this growth, intense efforts are continuing in 2025 to continue to improve hire rates into Speech & Language Therapy roles, to provide the services that children and families need.

The HSE and its funded agencies are operating in a very competitive global market for healthcare talent. There are significant shortages of qualified healthcare professionals across the globe. Seven of the disciplines working in Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) have been included on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's Critical Skills Occupations List and this includes Speech & Language Therapists.

To address resourcing challenges, the HSE Resourcing Strategy '*Resourcing our Future*' was launched in May 2023 to ensure a sufficient domestic supply of health care staff. The strategy is being implemented to maximise the resourcing and delivery of publicly funded health services for the future. Children's Disability Services benefit from resourcing actions in the HSE Resourcing Strategy including increasing Health & Social Care Professionals training places, delivery of an apprenticeship programme for Social Workers and development of further apprenticeship programmes to support Health and Social Care Therapy delivery.

Health & Social Care Professionals training places in Higher Education Institutes have increased with a growth in clinical placements in Children's Disability Network Teams- this serves to improve recruitment of Health & Social Care Professionals into Children's Disability Network Teams. Tertiary programmes are also being developed for Health & Social Care Professionals to increase the pathways into Disability services.

Within recruitment, there is a particular focus on Irish trained overseas applicants and international recruitment with a relocation package marketed to Irish trained Health & Social Care Professionals who have travelled overseas.

The HSE and funded agencies are focused on identifying barriers to workforce growth and putting in place corrective retention and recruitment initiatives. These initiatives have led to a marked growth in CDNT staffing levels in 2024, particularly in Health & Social Care Professionals roles, including Speech & Language Therapists.

The HSE optimises multiple applicant engagement opportunities to encourage uptake of CDNT vacancies including recruitment fairs, outreach to third level colleges and secondary schools, presence at national events and virtual engagements.

To optimise recruitment into our funded agencies, the HSE have facilitated direct access for funded agencies to existing HSE HSCE panels (including Speech & Language Therapists) which will shorten the recruitment process for them and will provide direct access to competent and eligible candidates.

The HSE have also enabled our funded agencies to advertise their vacant Speech & Language posts through our advertisement channels which provides them with direct access to the substantial candidate pools registered on the HSE's CareerHub portal.

In 2025 the HSE and funded agencies will continue to focus on maximising recruitment potential and engagement within the current applicant market to achieve workforce growth.

These activities form part of an ongoing suite of initiatives to populate vacancies and increase retention on Children's Disability Network Teams, including the key role of Speech & Language Therapists.

Yours Sincerely,

Bernard O'Regan
Assistant National Director
Access and Integration,
Disability Services

