



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

Office of the Assistant National  
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3rd June 2025

Deputy Liam Quaide,  
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Dublin 2.  
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**PQ: 25749.25**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality for an update on the reinstatement of therapists from children disability network teams back to special schools since August 2024, and a breakdown of relevant figures including of recruitment attempts to backfill those posts within CDNTs following reinstatement of those therapists in special schools.*

Dear Deputy Quaide,

Thank you for your Parliamentary Question referenced above, which has been forwarded to me for direct reply.

The Health Services Executive, and the Lead Agencies it funds, have been working continuously to develop supports for children with Disabilities.

In line with the Progressing Disability Services model, 93 CDNTs, aligned to 96 Community Healthcare Networks (CHNs) across the country, are providing services and supports for children aged from birth to 18 years of age.

Each CDNT covers a specific geographical area and works to provide support for children with complex needs and their families residing in that area.

The model of service for all CDNTs is family-centred and based on the needs of the child. This includes universal, targeted and specialised supports and interventions, as appropriate to the individual child and family. It is based on the objectives of empowering and supporting parents and others who are with the child on a daily basis to facilitate the child's developmental needs.

The CDNTs are currently providing services and supports for 43,000 children and strategies and supports for urgent cases on the waitlist where staffing resources allow.

#### **Special Schools Therapists in Post and Hours provided onsite as of 31/03/2025**

- Of 136.57 whole time equivalent (wte) senior therapists allocated in 2022, 88.15 wte Health and Social Care Professionals (HSCPs) have been recruited.
- Of the 87.42 wte senior therapists allocated in 2021, 59.55 wte HSCPs have been recruited.
- 9 of the 15 wte Health and Social Care Assistants allocated to support delivery of therapy programmes in special schools have been recruited

All the above includes a level of turnover as staff leave. In Q1 2025, 17,272.9 therapy hours were delivered onsite in 82 specific special schools, an average of 5,757.63 hours per month, equating to 38.26 wte therapists. In addition, therapy hours were also delivered to;



- children attending these 82 special schools outside of the school premises, e.g. at home or in a clinic, including those focused on supporting children to participate in school and to access the curriculum.
- children in other special schools not in this list of 82 that did not have dedicated onsite therapy resources before the CDNTs were set up and who are now also receiving supports that enables them to optimise their participation in school and with their peers.

## Workforce

There are significant challenges for CDNTs including:

- Significant staffing vacancies
- Growth in numbers of children with complex needs as a result of their disability.
- Growth in demand for Assessment of Need, diverting further resources away from interventions

In 2023 there was a staffing vacancy rate of 29% across the HSE, Section & Section 39 led CDNTs. Intensive recruitment efforts throughout 2024 led to a reduction in the vacancy rate with a 22% rate across teams as of 16/10/24.

The collective recruitment actions and initiatives across CDNTs resulted in a workforce growth of 17%, from 1595 WTE in 2023 to 1866 WTE in 2024, with an additional 111 WTE at advanced on boarding stages. The overall WTE net uplift was 272+ WTE, of which 204 WTE were HSCPs.

Despite positive movement, the vacancy rate remains high and intensive work is planned in 2025 for continued CDNT workforce growth, for example;

- optimising access to relevant applicant pools: the opening of HSE panels, HSE advertising streams and candidate pools (CareerHub 38k+ registered applicant pools) to CDNTs in the Section 38s and Section 39s – this gives a substantial expansive boost in advertising and engagement into targeted applicant pools.
- improving the perception of working in Disabilities and CDNTs, there is sustained outreach and engagement: Multiple engagements to secondary schools, HEIs, international applicants representing wider HSE, Section 38s and Section 39s.
- further supporting service provision by Health and Social Care Professionals on the CDNTs, there is ongoing development of additional disciplines to expand skills mix and applicant pools. In 2024, the role of

Health and Social Care Assistant (Therapy Assistant) was developed for use by all CDNTs which is viewed as a major enabler by CDNT Health and Social Care Professionals.

- These activities form part of an ongoing suite of initiatives to populate vacancies, increase retention and improve the capacity to deliver services in CDNTs.

The HSE is 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 CDNTs have been included on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's Critical Skills Occupations List.

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.

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

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 the above-described marked growth in CDNT staffing levels in 2024, particularly in Health & Social Care Professionals roles.



Yours Sincerely,

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Dr. Aoife O'Donohue,  
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