



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

26th September 2025

Deputy Paul Lawless,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: paul.lawless@oireachtas.ie

PQ: 48387/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality if she will provide information in relation to the contracts awarded to private companies to conduct assessment of need for children; and to outline the scope, duration, and regional coverage of the contract and the providers in each region.

PQ: 48388/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality if she will outline the professional qualifications and disciplines required under HSE contracts for individuals conducting autism assessments; and if these requirements include the involvement of psychologists, psychiatrists, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists.

PQ: 49390/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality if all contracted companies are using professionals who meet the qualification standards set out in HSE contracts for autism assessments; and if she will provide details of the oversight mechanisms in place to ensure compliance with these standards.

PQ: 49391/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality if any concerns or complaints have been raised regarding the qualifications or practices of professionals employed by any private provider contracted to conduct autism assessments; and if so, the nature of these concerns and the actions taken by the HSE.

PQ: 49392/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality if she will publish the compliance and monitoring framework used by the HSE to ensure that contracted providers adhere to clinical standards and multidisciplinary assessment protocols in autism diagnostics.

Dear Deputy Lawless,

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

The Disability Act outlines the statutory timelines under which Assessments of Need under the Act must be completed. In summary, the assessment report must be completed within 6 months of the date the application was received. While the HSE endeavours to meet its legislative obligations under the Act, it has struggled to achieve compliance with these timeframes.

The number of applications for Assessment of Need (AON) under the Disability Act, 2005 has risen steadily since its implementation in June 2007, largely driven by the High Court ruling in 2009 which confirmed that eligibility for AON applies to persons born on or after 1st June 2002. In 2008, the first full year of the implementation of the Disability Act, we received 2,535 applications for Assessment of Need; we could receive as many as 13,000 applications in 2025 (based on 6,613 in first half of the year) representing a five-fold increase.



Commissioning Private Contractors/Assessors for AON

In recent years, the HSE, with Government support, has been commissioning private providers/assessors to undertake AONs under the Disability Act. For example;

- In 2020, the HSE secured €7.8m under Slaintecare funding to address overdue Assessments of Need (AON). This was utilised to provide additional assessments through a range of options including overtime for existing staff and private procurement.
- In 2023, approximately €11m was allocated to address waiting lists for clinical assessments identified through the Assessment of Need process. Much of this funding was utilised to procure diagnostic ASD assessments from the private sector.
- In 2024, €6.89 million was allocated by the Government for a targeted waiting list initiative that commenced end of May 2024. This was in addition to €5m non-core funding allocated to assist with sustainably addressing the Assessment of Need (AON) backlog.
- In 2025, €4.5m (in addition to a further €5m in non-core funding) has been allocated in Budget 2025 to continue to address the Assessment of Need (AON) backlog through the commissioning of AONs from private providers/assessors.

In commissioning private providers/assessors to undertake AONs under the Disability Act, the HSE ensures that all contracted providers are appropriately qualified, registered with professional bodies, where appropriate, and garda vetted and that the contracted providers are appropriately qualified.

In addition, all aspects of the Assessment of Need (AON) process, including assessments and interventions, must be operated within all legislation and regulations relevant to AON, as well as the iHIQA Standards and the HSE Standard Operating Procedure.

The HSE is not aware of any concerns or complaints regarding the qualifications or practices of professionals contracted by the HSE to conduct assessments.

National Bespoke Panel Arrangement for the Provision of Autism Diagnostic Assessments for Children and Adolescents

On the 21st July 2025, the CEO of the HSE announced a new initiative to launch a National Bespoke Panel Arrangement for the Provision of Autism Diagnostic Assessments for Children and Adolescents.

Please see MEMO attached dated 21/07/25.

As set out in CEO Memo, the HSE undertook an expedited procurement process to establish a process to reset the framework for procurement of private sector capacity in respect of backlog clearance of assessment of need (“AON”).

This involved the establishment of a framework for Autism Identification/ Assessments for Children and Adolescents, at a price set by HSE for a defined period. In the time available, the view of the Procurement Evaluation Group (“PEG”) was that focussing on one multidisciplinary (Psychology, OT & SLT) diagnostic ASD assessment would allow for the biggest impact on the waiting list for clinical assessments under AON.

With regard to the questions concerning the contracts awarded to private companies to conduct assessment of need for children and the scope, duration, and regional coverage of the contract and the providers in each region, the closing date for receipt of applications from private providers is the 3rd October 2025 and the initial requirement is for 12 months, with an option to extend the arrangement for a further 12 months, subject to demand and budget approval.

In commissioning private providers/assessors to undertake AONs under the Disability Act, the HSE will continue to ensure that all contracted providers are appropriately qualified, registered with professional bodies, where appropriate, and garda vetted and that the contracted providers are appropriately qualified.

In addition, all aspects of the Assessment of Need (AON) process, including assessments and interventions, will continue to be operated within all legislation and regulations relevant to AON, as well as the iHIQA Standards and the HSE Standard Operating Procedure.



Where assessors are subject to statutory registration with a professional body such as CORU or the Medical Council, they will be required to include their registration number on all Assessment of Need reports. For example:

- The tender responders will be required to show that staff employed to provide the service are suitably trained, qualified and supervised. There is a clear expectation that Clinical or Counselling or Educational Psychologist will have specific training and experience of autism identification, and will have the same standard of qualifications as that required by the HSE for employment.
- The Occupational therapists and Speech and Language Therapists must be CORU registered.

When securing private assessments, each Healthcare Area will ensure compliance with procurement regulations and will ensure that appropriate indemnities are in place. Key performance indicators and oversight mechanisms will be put in place to monitor the delivery of these services and ensure quality standards are met.

Privately commissioned reports for AON will be reviewed by an appropriately qualified clinician at local level to ensure they meet adequate governance standards.

It is important to note that children do not require an Assessment of Need as defined by the Disability Act (2005) in order to access a CDNT, Primary Care service, Child and Adolescent Mental health Service or any Health or Social care service. They can be referred by a healthcare professional or parent/carer to the CDNT for children with complex needs as a result of their disability, or to Primary Care for children with non-complex needs.

Yours Sincerely,

Tom McGuirk,
General Manager, Disability Services, Access & Integration