



Dear Minister Donnelly,

I enclose for your attention a petition of over 2,400 signatories joining the Psychological Society of Ireland's (PSI) continued calls for the disparity in funding for psychology trainees in Ireland to be addressed by government to ensure the country has the psychological workforce it needs. I would also like to bring to your attention a number of issues in relation to the recruitment and retention of psychologists in the public service that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. As the only representative body for Psychologists in Ireland we are always happy to engage with Government/Departments to address issues of this nature in a positive and constructive manner.

Currently, trainee clinical psychologists have 60% of their fees paid and receive a student salary starting at €33,000, while counselling and educational/child trainee psychologists pay fees of between €12,000 and €15,000 per year and do a minimum of 300 hours unpaid work throughout the duration of their study. PSI has highlighted to government for several years (2021, 2020, 2019) in pre-budget submissions and direct correspondence to government ministers, including yourself, Minister Harris & the Taoiseach, that one of the greatest barriers to getting qualified psychologists into the workforce is the inequity that counselling and educational trainees must self-fund for the full period of their doctoral training as well as pay €14,000 per year in university fees. This results in many not being able to afford to enter the profession, or only a select few who can afford to self-fund, which risks the psychological workforce not being representative of the full socio-economic spectrum of the community they represent and support. We have advocated with Minister Harris to work with PSI to find ways to alleviate the burden of fees on trainee counselling and educational psychologists and address the glaring inequity which results in trainee clinical psychologists having 60% of their university fees being paid by the HSE but other trainees having to pay the full €15,000. PSI are again respectfully requesting a meeting with you and your officials to address this particular issue which we estimate would be addressed through 1.5m in funding per year.

For many years there has been a growing imperative to expand our psychological workforce in Ireland and this imperative has escalated because of the psychological impact that COVID-19 has had on our population. A HSE mental health workforce planning report, and more recently, the Disability Capacity Review to 2032 have identified that there is a significant shortfall in the number of psychologists meeting the needs of their respective areas. The disability capacity review estimated a minimum of doubling of the number of psychologists in child disability services alone

14 January 2022

would be needed to meet the demands which is directly relevant to the successful implementation of Progressing Disability Services (PDS), of which Psychology is a core discipline. You may also be aware that the number of psychologists in CAMHS, as recommended by A Vision for Change, only reached approximately 32% of the recommended levels. The 2021 HSE Psychology Project Team report (page 26) estimated an additional 321.8 psychologists were required in mental health services alone to meet demand. These areas do not take into account demand in other areas such as TUSLA, forensic, private services and education.

IN 2021 there were 66 funded HSE clinical psychology training places, and in addition, the counselling psychology training programme has an intake of approximately 14, with the two educational psychology training programmes having intakes of approximately 20-22 in total. Several government departments, as outlined above, are identifying significant increases in the number of professionally trained psychologists who will be needed, which is welcomed, but it is also a reality that they are competing within the same limited pool of trainees. To make the number of psychologists identified from capacity reviews a reality, several interrelated factors must be considered.

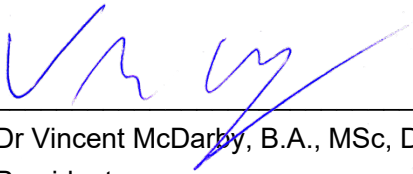
We know from research published over the past year, HSE statistics and our own experiences as clinicians on the ground that as a direct result of the pandemic demand has significantly increased, and is likely to continue to, so we must begin now to plan for how we increase training places and associated funding to the three professional training programmes to meet current and future demand. If significant additional funding was to be allocated in Budget 2022 for additional training places, and a lot of work happened in the intervening period, then at best an increased cohort could begin in September 2023 and that cohort would qualify in late 2026 to enter the workforce. There is added value to the public service during the period of training as the trainees are on site providing a service under supervision. So, each year of delay to additional funding being allocated to professional training programmes will add another 3 years to when they will qualify and enter the workforce. PSI are the only accrediting body for professional training programmes in Ireland and have specific criteria which must be met in relation to staff/trainee ratios, so an increase in training places would have to consider what additional resources the courses would require to maintain their accreditation and standards of training.

A further significant impediment, which has been highlighted to successive governments over the past 10 years, is that the greatest barrier in the successful recruitment of those psychologists who do professionally qualify, is the HSE's own national panel system of recruitment. Despite the very clear evidence from our members that it is the national panel system that impedes recruitment the HSE persists with its operation and has not been willing to engage with representative bodies to listen to or address these changes so that we can improve the efficiency of getting much needed psychologists in post in a timely fashion. I understand a copy of these findings was provided to you at your request by PSI Past President Mark Smyth.

As the only representative body for psychologists in Ireland, and the accrediting body for all the training programmes, PSI is a key stakeholder and willing partner with all of government to find constructive and practical ways to achieve all of the above. PSI is respectfully requesting a meeting to discuss the contents of this letter so that we might begin to collaboratively work towards

constructive solutions to increase the number of professionally trained psychologists who qualify each year and eliminate the inequity of funding for counselling and educational psychologists.

Yours sincerely



---

Dr Vincent McDarby, B.A., MSc, D.P.P.(Clin), PhD, C. Clin. Psychol., Ps.S.I.  
President  
Psychological Society of Ireland

14 January 2022