



Press release – 29.01.2019

Statement from the Psychological Society of Ireland regarding the Oireachtas Joint Committee of Health 2019 *Report on the New Standard Operating Procedure for Assessment of Need under the Disability Act 2005*

Following the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) written submission and verbal evidence provided to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health in 2018, the PSI welcomes the publication of the *Report on the New Standard Operating Procedure for Assessment of Need under the Disability Act 2005*.

The PSI wishes to formally endorse the recommendations of the Joint Committee and, in particular, to comment as follows:

Recommendation 1:

The Committee, while acknowledging the benefits of early intervention, recommends that the Government allocates sufficient resources to support this programme. The Committee also acknowledges the societal and financial benefits of early intervention as well as the potential positive developmental outcomes for children with additional needs.

It is universally recognised and acknowledged that early intervention is essential in order to maximise the potential for positive outcomes, especially in young children with additional needs. The PSI strongly supports the recommendation that early intervention programmes be adequately resourced to meet the needs of this vulnerable population in a timely manner.

Recommendation 3:

The Committee recommends that further consideration be given to the drafting of the Standard Additional Information Form. The Committee notes the concerns of stakeholders regarding the ability of such a process to adequately determine whether or not a child has a disability. The Committee also notes the concerns of parents as to the complexity of the form. The Committee recommends that the HSE consult with front-line therapists and parents to discuss the matter further.

The PSI asserts that while a Standard Additional Information Form is a useful adjunct to the assessment process it cannot provide sufficient information for an assessment officer to determine with any degree of certainty whether a child may or may not have a disability.

Recommendation 4:

The Committee recommends that the new Standard Operating Procedure is not brought into use before consultation with front-line therapists and parents. Such a consultation process should involve discussions regarding specific concerns of stakeholders as well as informing all parties of the requirements and specification for the new SOP. The Committee welcomes the HSE's commitment to engage with assessment officers and instruct that the current AON process should be in use. However, the Committee is concerned that, at present, communication between the HSE and assessment officers is not effective.

The PSI welcomes the recommendation for a delay in the implementation of the proposed SOP to allow for meaningful and continuous consultation regarding the concerns expressed by professional bodies and parent advocacy groups. The PSI notes the existence of the HSE *National Framework for developing Policies, Procedures, Protocols and Guidelines* (2016) and National Clinical Effectiveness Committee *Standards for Clinical Practice Guidance* (2015), and contends that these documents may provide helpful guidance as regards this process.

Recommendation 5:

The Committee recommends that the HSE give further consideration to the testimony of stakeholders and their concerns regarding the Preliminary Team Assessment. The Committee has concerns that the proposed Assessment does not prioritise the child's best interests and may further delay access to services. The Committee recommends further consultation between the HSE, parent advocate groups and the therapists.

The PSI retains a range of substantial concerns in relation to the Preliminary Team Assessment, as described in the Society's position paper of March 2018.

Recommendation 8:

The Committee has grave concerns regarding the current waiting lists on the Assessment of Need process. The Committee is of the view that in order to address these waiting lists, the following must be achieved without delay:

- (i) reconfiguration of CHOs,***
- (ii) recruitment of additional therapists for Disability Teams***
- (iii) provision of adequate resources to Disability Teams.***

The PSI shares the concerns of the Joint Committee, professional bodies and parent advocacy groups about the extent of existing waiting lists for Assessment of Need and agrees that adequate resources must be provided without delay to address this issue. Given the complexity of presentation of many young children with additional needs, the PSI asserts that not only should additional therapists be recruited for Disability teams but adequate numbers of senior clinicians should also be placed on such teams to provide supervisory supports within team structures.

Recommendation 9:

The Committee recommends that the recruitment process for hiring staff is reformed to ensure a quicker, more efficient system.

The PSI would welcome a review of the current recruitment process and would be happy to participate in such a review with a view to improving the efficacy and timeliness of the existing process.

ENDS.

For further information and/or to arrange an interview, please contact:

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Note to editor:

- The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) is the learned and professional body for Psychology in the Republic of Ireland. Established in 1970, the Society currently has almost 3,000 members.
- The PSI is committed to maintaining high standards of practice in psychology and also to exploring new and innovative ways of furthering psychology as a real and applied science.