

Action 6: Expanding & Protecting our health workforce and essential workers

The Health Sector Workforce Subgroup is working to deliver on **Action 6, of Irelands National Action Plan in response to COVID-19**. The group is working to ensure that the Health Sector Workforce is supported to meet the increase in demand associated with the response. To date this group has had eight full member meetings and regular HSE teleconferences.

HSE Workforce Expansion in response to COVID 19

On 2nd June, HSE provided an update on recruitment activity at a point in time. Below is a summary table of the information provided. The numbers change daily and in some cases are indicative as HR systems across the service are not compatible and it can take weeks for confirmed numbers. Data continues to be validated.

Table 1 HSE Recruitment at a point in time, as at 2nd June 2020

Category	Total	Comment
National Recruitment	1,458	
Temporary Assignment Scheme -Staff from across civil and public service reassigned		
- <i>Staff in redeployed role</i>	51	In place
- <i>Staff due to be redeployed</i>	388	Not yet in place
- <i>Total number that is expected to be required</i>	413	
Be on Call for Ireland		
<i>Successful at interview</i>	1,954	
<i>In clearance</i>	1,195	
<i>Completed clearance and job ready</i>	759	
<i>Awaiting assignment</i>	171	
<i>Awaiting service acceptance</i>	782	
Candidates placed	137	
Student Nurses & Midwives		
- <i>Community</i>	449	
- <i>Acutes</i>	732	
Other		
Medical Scientists (final year students)	80	Hired for clinical laboratory departments
Rehired retirees	98	
Interns	926	

Training update on 2nd June

Since 23rd March 2020, there have been 24,900 new registrations to the HSE e-learning platform. There have been 143,516 completions of COVID related courses, with 3,087 completions having taken place in the four days preceding 2nd June 2020.

Issues raised by ICTU in respect of Mental Health and Burnout of Frontline Workers

Issues around stress and long-term exposure being experienced by frontline workers were raised in discussion with ICTU. Current OH/EAP measures are not viewed as sufficient. The HSE EAP will review international guidelines on the preventative measures needed, and will revert directly to ICTU.

HSE advised that OH/EAP supports have increased and guidance has issued to staff advising on importance of taking leave. The National EAP Team has provided counselling/psychosocial support to 243 HSE staff in the period between the 25th and the 31st of May. During this period, the National

EAP Team spent a total of 123 hours in Covid-19 related activity. Of this, 39 HSE Staff benefited from structured telephone counselling sessions provided by contracted external providers of EAP services - StaffCare.

HSE Occupational Health (OH) Update

Issues have arisen in piloting the central electronic Contact Resource Management system to increase the efficiency of contact tracing. Some complex calls failed to be forwarded to OH, and there are complications around OH governance. OH will need to remain in their duty in carrying out Call 3 of the process. The automation of this is likely to be 6 months away.

Due to the backlog in updating the NIMS system with HCW COVID cases, the SCA took over the data entry. All documentation has been agreed and the process has been mapped out. The NIMS data contains public, private and HCW service user information, so a Data Privacy Impact Assessment (DPIA) was submitted to the Data Protection office, and it has been approved. It is anticipated that SCA will have all staff COVID cases on the system by 15th June.

Workforce requirements in returning to non-COVID care

There is a large focus on workforce projections into the medium term. As non-COVID care restarts, redeployed HCWs may be required to return to their previous role. HSE has confirmed PAS redeployment and Social Care are being considered.

Extension to waiver of abatement and temporary contracts

HSE is examining whether the pension abatement waiver should be extended beyond the end of June. HSE are engaging with services who rehired retirees, and the data will guide whether the extension is needed. PRU confirmed that the legislation provides for an extension.

Temporary HCA contracts that commenced in mid-April are due to end mid-July. HSE will engage with all services on the types of work carried out by HCAs and the staffing requirements, and will submit a business case for consideration of retaining these students until their return to college.

Industrial Relations

HSE has continued to engage with all health service unions at once or twice weekly meetings concerning matters of concern relating to COVID-19 workforce matters.

HSE has advised that there have been positive outcomes from these engagements concerning measures to assist with the delivery of care during this public health emergency. They have referred to the redeployment agreement as an example of the positive outcomes from these engagements. These engagements have also assisted with the implementation of PER FAQs and public service guidance in the HSE. The forums also have been very useful in clarifying and resolving union concerns during this period and as a forum for Q&A concerning occupational health matters.

In recent weeks, while these engagements have continued to focus on workforce matters arising from COVID-19, the first tentative steps to resume normal IR engagements are being discussed and are being planned from mid-June.

The Department has maintained ongoing engagement with HSE IR on those matters raised on these forums and in the provision of guidance and assistance where requested.

Outside of the above, the Department has continued to engage with health sector unions on matters they have raised concerning COVID-19.

Recent engagement have included a focus on infection levels in HCWs. A positive meeting took place between representative bodies and the HSE Public Health and HPSC on 5th June and with the Minister for Health on 8th June and the actions from these meetings are being followed up through existing governance structures between the DOH and HSE.

Progress report on Action 6

This subgroup is preparing a report on the progress made on Action 6 of the National Action Plan, and aim to present it to NPHEH this month.