

Media release from IMPACT trade union

TO: News editors, education, industry and health correspondents

Educational Psychologists call on Government to implement commitments on recruitment

Concern that capping education psychology service is 'stalling' commitments

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The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) branch of IMPACT trade union has called for the immediate recruitment of at least 94 psychologists to meet current needs. The union is seeking further commitment from the Government to recruit an additional 17 psychologists to meet expected demands on the service by 2021.

The union branch made the call for the Government to meet its own commitments on the expansion of Ireland's educational psychology services at a special briefing for Oireachtas members and education partners taking place this evening (Wednesday 7th December 2016) in Buswell's Hotel in Dublin.

IMPACT official Tony Martin said that NEPS has provided a quality service to schools nationally since 1999, but had been subject to restructuring and restrictions on recruitment since 2008.

"The education commitments outlined in the Programme for Government, including the commitment to increase the number of NEPS by 25%, have been welcomed by all who work in our education services. It is vital now that this commitment is implemented in order to ensure the service can meet the needs of a growing school population.

"We've been working with the Department of Education and Skills toward realising that commitment, and tonight's event is designed to inform Oireachtas members of the pressing need to build the capacity of this vital service," he said.

Educational psychologist Richard Egan said the union branch had produced a report in 2015, [*The Way Forward: A School Psychological Service for ALL Children and Young People*](#), in order to outline the specific need for increased investment in the NEPS.

"Ireland ranks 26th in the world in terms of the pupil to psychologist ratio of its educational psychology service, while one in four Irish pupils have special educational needs, and up to one in five are experiencing emotional or behavioural disorders.

"Based on current demographics, a total of 250 psychologists is needed to achieve the internationally accepted psychologist-to-student ratio of 1:3,500. Based on current projections, this figure would have risen to 267 psychologists by 2021. These figures do not include the additional 20 to 30 psychologists needed to provide a service in the Early Years and Youthreach settings," he said.

Educational psychologist Sorcha O'Toole said the additional recruitment is vital in order to build capacity and ensure the service was in a position to respond to the needs of vulnerable children in need of support.

"We are at an important crossroads now where the Government is planning the delivery of services in a post-crisis environment. Both the Programme for Government and the Education Statement of Strategy & Action Plan commit to increase NEPS by 65 Psychologists, to a total of 238 Full-Time Equivalence," she said

Ms O'Toole added, "The commitments to expanding the NEPS service contained in the Programme for Government are a welcome and progressive measure. Our concern is that the process of implementation isn't allowed to stall at this crucial stage. While this commitment was recently reiterated by the Minister for Education and Skills in the Dáil, he stated that the current sanction remained capped at 173," she said.

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Notes to the Editor

- There are currently 162 Full-Time Equivalence (FTE) psychologists (with sanction for 173 FTE) providing a school psychology service to all primary and post-primary schools in the country.
- Based on a student population of 814,800 in 1998, the Report of the (DES) Planning Group concluded that a staff complement of 200 psychologists would be required. The student population has increased by 8.3% since then, and an increase of 15% is predicted by 2021.
- Based on current demographics, a total of 250 psychologists is needed to achieve the internationally an acceptable accepted psychologist-to-student ratio of 1:3,500. Based on current projections, this figure would have risen to 267 psychologists by 2021.
- The most recent information from the DES Personnel (27th October 2016) is that none of these additional posts have, as yet, been sanctioned and that Budget 2017 has not made provision to go above the existing threshold of 173 WTE psychologists.
- NEPS currently endeavours to provide a service to every school in the country, which has placed an additional demand and excessive stress on educational psychologists.
- This has limited the ability of NEPS to provide the comprehensive school psychological service required for a modern Irish society, with educational psychologists engaging most frequently with students who have special educational needs, either by working directly with the student, or through working with parents and teachers to develop a programme to maximise the student's potential.

- There is a growing awareness of the need to support the mental health and wellbeing – 15-20% of students now have significant emotional or behavioural needs and are reliant on schools to help meet their needs (ESRI).
- NEPS provides support and advice to school communities where there has been particular trauma as a result of critical incidents, and also works proactively with schools to prepare for and prevent critical incidents through policy development and staff training. Educational psychologists in NEPS support schools in developing systemic ways of meeting the needs of students, based on best practice models.