

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
BY SENATOR S.W. PALLETT
QUESTION SUBMITTED ON MONDAY 29TH NOVEMBER 2021
ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON MONDAY 6TH DECEMBER 2021**

Question

Will the Minister state –

- (a) the current waiting times to access children’s speech and language therapy services;
- (b) whether such waiting times have increased since the start of 2021 and, if so, why and how this is being addressed;
- (c) whether there are any staffing issues within the children’s speech and language therapy service; and
- (d) whether any current vacancies exist in the service and, if so, what is being done to fill them?

Answer

- a) As of 26 November 2021, 137 children are currently on the waitlist for initial assessment, with the next available appointment to be offered to a child triaged as low priority and referred to the service in April 2021. The longest wait time at present is 31 weeks for children who have been indicated upon triage to have low priority needs relative to clinical concerns documented by the referring party (i.e. teacher, health visitor, paediatrician, GP etc).

Once assessed, children are prioritised clinically from 1-4, with 1 being highest priority (greatest need) and 4 being lowest priority (mildest need) and seen for therapy according to assessment priority status. Therapy support is provided post-initial assessment for children assessed to have high priority needs within 8-12 weeks of their initial assessment, dependent on therapist capacity. Therapy is focused around a specific goal or target for each episode of care.

- b) As a result of the hard work of the paediatric speech and language therapy team, there has been a decrease in initial assessment wait times since January 2021, when there was a 12-24 month wait time. As of January 2022, the anticipated wait time is expected to have fallen to 4-8+ months. The appendix provides further information.
- c) All permanent clinical posts are currently filled after successful recruitment exercises, but the department is catching up on some delays as a result of past vacancies and retirements. The department is about to commission an external review to ensure the service is adequately staffed to meet the demands of Islanders.
- d) There are no permanent clinical speech and language therapist vacancies within the team at present. Efforts are being made to fill a number of temporary COVID recovery posts which will support the department’s waiting list recovery initiatives. Difficulties have been experienced in recruiting experienced staff to these posts via locum agencies (demand for such candidates is high in the UK), but potential candidates are now being actively sought internally and locally.

Appendix

Referral received/Triage RAG rating	July-December 2020	January 2021-July 2021	August 2021 – December 2021	January 2022-July 2022
Red	6 months wait	12 months wait	<i>7 months wait</i>	<i>4-6 months wait anticipated</i>
Amber	7 months wait	13 months wait	<i>8-10 months wait</i>	<i>6-8 months wait anticipated</i>
Green	12-18 months wait	18-24 months wait	<i>8- 12 months wait</i>	<i>8+ months wait anticipated</i>