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Oifig an Phríomhoifigigh Airgeadais
Feidhmeannacht na
Seirbhíse Sláinte
Seomra 125, Ospidéal
Dr. Steevens
BÁC 8

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Health Service Executive
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Dublin 8

24th March 2022

Deputy David Cullinane TD,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

Re PQ 13426 22: *To ask the Minister for Health the total value of payments made to agencies for agency nursing and healthcare assistant staff since 2016 separated into payment for fees, payment for pay costs and any other relevant category; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. Your PQ above has been referred to me for response.

Please see **Appendix 1 Table 1** below which shows the total HSE spend on agency staff for HSE Statutory services only for the years 2016 to 2020 and for the period January to October 2021 which is the most recent data currently available until completion of the 2021 HSE Annual Financial Statements. The breakdown provided is by the Department of Health staff categories i.e. Medical/Dental, Nursing, Management/Admin, Paramedical, Support Services and Maintenance/Technical staff. The data provided was sourced from the HSE Consolidated Financial Intelligence system and is for HSE Statutory services only. Please note that the 2021 data is draft only and is subject to change within the year end audit process. Please also note in view of the fact that there are still currently numerous ledger systems in operation in the HSE some differences in coding may arise.

The Finance systems capture agency costs under the Dept. of Health staff categories listed above. It is not possible to separately identify the agency costs for healthcare assistant staff specifically which are accounted for within the Support Services staff category.

I regret to inform you that it is not possible to separately identify payments for agency fees, pay costs and any other relevant categories as the financial systems do not capture that level of detail. The shortcomings in the HSE legacy financial systems are well acknowledged and their replacement by a single standard financial system for the Health Sector is at the core of the Finance Reform programme initiated by the Department of Health.

In 2020 and 2021 the HSE sourced additional agency staff primarily to support the expansion of the workforce in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and also to support service delivery and COVID-19 response due to increased staff absence due to COVID-19. Due to the immediate nature of the unprecedented emergency, coupled with the additional strain already being felt by the HSE recruitment services, it was necessary to engage outside agencies to assist in this work. Agency contracts are in place for Contact Tracing staff within the HSE National Contact Management Programme. The HSE*Live* service has been providing the COVID-19

helpline throughout the pandemic. In addition agency teams were engaged within the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OoCIO) primarily to commission the technology for new centres for both testing and tracing and also to support those users. These initiatives, among others, related to the HSE's response to the COVID-19 emergency have directly impacted on agency costs incurred in 2020 and into 2021 particularly in the Management/Administration staffing category.

Agency expenditure is under constant review and the reduction and control of agency costs continues to be a particular focus for the Health Service. The effective management of variable pay costs forms a major element of operational cost-containment plans and is subject to continuous review at the performance meetings held under the performance and accountability framework. However, it is important to note that in addition to the specific critical response to the COVID-19 pandemic there are a variety of reasons driving agency demand. Recruitment and retention of Clinical, Nursing and other key staff is a constant challenge and impacts adversely on the ability to maintain safe and effective services. The balance between high cost and high risk to service quality and safety is struck through agency and overtime use to provide/maintain necessary services. Agency staffing is also used for the replacement of short term illness and maternity leave and allows for flexible services designed to meet specific Service User needs, variation in activity and as required where there is a short term critical service need.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me at sarah.anderson1@hse.ie or tel: 087 9423319.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Anderson

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Appendix 1 to PQ 13426 22

Table 1

HSE Agency staff costs by staff category for the years 2016 to 2020 and for the period January to October 2021						
HSE Statutory Services Only						
Staff Category	**2016 €'000**	**2017 €'000**	**2018 €'000**	**2019 €'000**	**2020 €'000**	**Ytd Oct 2021 €'000**
Medical/Dental	106,312	105,525	93,881	95,236	94,653	78,720
Nursing	57,801	64,621	77,336	80,252	88,350	98,490
Management/Administration	12,546	15,904	23,896	29,583	44,047	88,439
Paramedical	15,576	18,239	23,231	27,748	34,453	49,061
Support Services	84,082	95,821	111,609	115,774	127,918	146,465
Maintenance/Technical	825	587	512	434	635	559
Total	**277,142**	**300,698**	**330,465**	**349,027**	**390,057**	**461,735**
***Source** : HSE Consolidated Financial Intelligence System (CFI)*						
***Note** : Please note in view of the fact that there are still currently numerous ledger*						
systems in operation in the HSE some differences in coding may arise.						