

28th August 2024

Deputy Thomas Pringle
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

PQ ref 29158/24

Students have been informed that they will have to do the placement with a private OT. This means that some students will have to travel as far as Dublin to do this placement which is part of the course

“To ask the Minister for Health the reason trainee student occupational therapists who are attending ATU Letterkenny and have to do an eight-week placement have been told that they cannot do the placement with the HSE (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Dear Deputy Pringle

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

Having examined the matter, the following outlines the position.

The Donegal Primary and Social Care Occupational Therapy (OT) Department has a long history of engaging in the practice education of OT students. There is an OT Regional Placement Facilitator post aligned to Donegal, Sligo and Leitrim affiliated with the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG). This Regional Facilitator post is subject to the provision of OT practice education placements to NUIG students as a priority, and is aligned to the HSE National Health and Social Care Professions (HSCP) Office policy for practice education in Ireland.

It is the National HSCP Office recommendation to prioritise placements to CORU-approved undergraduate OT degree programmes in the first instance, i.e. NUIG for Co. Donegal. If required, it is the instruction of the National HSCP Office to offer placements to postgraduate CORU-approved OT programmes from Ireland next. CORU's role is to protect the public through regulating the health and social care profession of OT. CORU ensures that the relevant educational bodies deliver qualifications that prepare professionals to provide safe and appropriate care and approve courses attesting to the standard of proficiency required for registration as OTs.

The Regional Placement Facilitator has liaised with the National HSCP Office and informed the Atlantic Technological University (ATU) directly of this commitment and recommendation on a number of occasions. The ATU programme was developed without consultation with local HSE services and did not as a result clarify any expectations or capacity locally in relation to practice education placements.

The HSE Donegal OT Department have been experiencing significant staff shortages since early 2023. This has been compounded by the recent HSE recruitment embargo, which has resulted in limited capacity within the service to offer OT practice education placements to students. In 2024, the service has provided one eight-week 3rd Year NUIG placement, one week-long 1st Year observation placement from NUIG and one eight-week 4th Year NUIG placement.

There is a significant increase in workload for OTs when agreeing to engaging in practice education placements and it is difficult for staff to commit when they are currently dealing with a high service demand and vacancy rate which outweighs capacity significantly. This means there is limited capacity within the service at present to facilitate any practice education placements and it is planned that any capacity that emerges will have to be allocated to NUIG students, in the first instance, as per the above aforementioned commitments.

In an effort to develop pathways regarding the possible provision of practice education placements to the students from ATU, OT Management within Donegal Primary and Social Care have met with the Course Director and lecturers of the Health Science with Occupational Therapy Studies in ATU, Letterkenny. This was imperative as there was a number of direct requests from students on this course.

The Health Science with Occupational Therapy Studies course is not currently CORU approved, and consequently, there is no guarantee that students will continue their training in Coventry and advance to become fully qualified OTs. ATU has been advised by OT Management regarding the requirement of the service to prioritise NUIG students, which is a fully CORU-registered course and is in line with National HSCP Office guidance. ATU has also been informed regarding the reduced staffing and limited capacity to facilitate placements at regular intervals. However, in an effort to work collaboratively and positively in the interest of the students and potential recruitment opportunities in future, an agreed pathway has been developed by the OT service and ATU.

The current process indicates that all requests for practice education placements come via ATU directly to OT Managers, as is standard policy from all other Universities. This ensures that the request can be considered in the context of the workforce and demands within the OT service. This process will continue in the future.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Mandy Doyle
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An Cabhán, Muineachán, Sligeach, Liatroim & Dún na nGall

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