

Higher Education Capacity Building Process 2026 – Health and Social Care Professions

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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A. Scope of the 2026 call

1. *Counselling Psychology is not listed among HSCP professions providing support for disability and health services. Graduates are specifically trained for the HSE and disability services. On this basis, will EOIs for Counselling Psychology be accepted under this call?*

The list of disciplinary areas / professions for the 2026 Expression of Interest (EOI) process, including psychology, was provided to us by the Department of Health, HSE, and NEPS on the basis of their assessment of skills needs.

On receipt of this query, we again sought clarification on Department of Health/HSE requirements. The Department of Health, and the Department of Children, Disability, and Equality, in consultation with the HSE, have reverted to confirm that Counselling Psychologists are required for the disability therapy sector.

Submissions in respect of Counselling Psychology can therefore be included under this EOI. An update in this regard was issued to HEIs on 7 May 2026.

2. *Are there plans for the inclusion of Dental Hygiene in future Expression of Interest calls?*

The list of professions included in the 2026 EOI was provided by members of the Interdepartmental Group, which was established with the support of the Cabinet Committee on Disabilities to expand HSCP professions in priority areas for the Health, Disability and Education sectors, and is informed by national and regional data in Health

on workforce planning requirements. The current call is limited to these professions, and the scope of future EOI processes has not yet been discussed.

3. *Would an EOI for a new MSc programme with a September 2027 start date be welcome?*

Yes, while additional capacity provision in 2026/27 is sought wherever feasible, it is appreciated that a longer lead in time may be required, particularly for new programme proposals. EOIs for new programmes or expansion of existing programmes commencing in academic years 2027/28 and 2028/29 are anticipated and welcome. Representatives from relevant Schools/Faculties in HEIs are encouraged to engage with the relevant employer/ placement provider and professional regulatory body with regard to planning for new programmes to understand the current and future capacity and demand, and other developments that may be relevant.

B. Placements

1. *Is the HSE moving away from use of Practice Tutors for placement supervision?*

The HSE has indicated that Practice Tutors are not a required element of placement supervision and may not be necessary or appropriate in all contexts. Tutors can be a useful resource for supporting Practice placement provision particularly where there are a large number of students on site.

2. *There is an acute challenge with Audiology placements, particularly in the Northwest. Can the HSE/DoH advise on how placements in this discipline can be secured or any update on how this capacity shortage is being addressed?*

The HSE National HSCP Office and the Regional HSCP Management Teams are working with partners and engaging with the HSE facilities within their regions to increase capacity for placements, particularly for those professions where HEIs have had challenges securing placements to date. This work includes establishing governance agreements with placement providers to provide assurances around quality and oversight. Work is underway to map placement provision across all HSE regions, and a placement data portal is in development to support the management of placement provision in future. In addition, the HSCP Office provides practice training for HSCP to support engagement with working with students.

3. Is a list of contact details for all HSE Regional Directors HSCP / Regional Integration Development Leads publicly available and/or can it be shared with HEIs?

Yes, a list of contact details for all HSE Regional Director HSCP, Regional Integration Development Leads is available on the [HEA website](#).

4. Will the contact details for the Educational Therapy Service at a regional level be provided in a similar manner to the HSE contacts in view of the fact that clinical placement shall be provided in these areas also?

Representatives from relevant Schools/Faculties in HEIs are advised to engage directly with the national Head of Therapy, Aine Lawlor, for Education Therapy Service placements in any region. Email: aine.lawlor@ncse.ie.

5. The HSE noted in its presentation at the briefing session on 18 May 2026 that payment for placements is not appropriate. Can any further guidance be offered in this regard?

The HSE has indicated that “payments and competitive approaches to ‘buy’ placements are not helpful overall and staff payments are not appropriate in a public funded work context”.

6. Regarding Section 1.3 of the EOI Template, for Educational Psychology can ‘details of student placement hours by year’ be provided in days rather than hours? This is currently the accepted format for Educational Psychology and also the format used on the slides presented at the Briefing session.

Yes, for Educational Psychology, when providing information on clinical placement requirements, details of student placement by academic year may be provided in days rather than hours as this aligns with CORU’s [Criteria for Education and Training Programmes for Educational Psychologists](#). Please see also FAQ C1 below.

C. Professional accreditation

1. We are aware that responsibility for accreditation of Educational Psychology programmes, currently managed by Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), is expected to transfer to CORU in the coming months. What is the timeline for this, and is there any advice for HEIs with regard to EOI submissions?

The national register for Educational Psychologists is expected to open next year. Responsibility for approval of Educational Psychology programmes is expected to transfer to CORU in the coming months. HEIs should ensure that any proposal via the EOI

complies with CORU requirements, as the accreditation process for any programmes commencing from 2026/27 onwards will be managed by CORU. For further information see: <https://coru.ie/about-us/registration-boards/psychologists-registration-board/>

D. Key considerations and guidance on EOI submissions

- 1. The creation or expansion of programmes will require HEIs to take on additional permanent/core staff. Given this financial commitment on the part of HEIs, what assurances can DFHERIS/HEA provide that additional student places provided by HEIs through this process will be supported into the future?***

Higher Education provision in these areas is a national priority and future workforce projections show clearly that this will continue to be the case over the coming decades. Budget proposals for EOI submissions require HEIs to outline if and when programmes will become self-sustaining via income from student fees and RGAM funding. The current funding model for Higher Education is under review, and it is expected that programmes will be self-sustaining over time.

- 2. Where HEIs are submitting multiple proposals to this EOI, or are submitting a proposal to this EOI and are currently in the process of rolling out additional capacity approved through a previous EOI process, how can institutions highlight or outline any synergies or economies between programmes in their submission?***

There are a number of areas HEIs can highlight synergies and economies within the EOI template in Section 1.3. Firstly, with regard to rationale, information should be provided on the alignment or complementarity of the proposed new programme or expansion with current programmes offered and/or research specialisms of the institution. Secondly, with regard to the institution's capability to deliver the new/expanded programme in stated timeframe, information on institutional readiness is required, including comment on existing infrastructure and resource to support the proposed additional capacity. Finally, there is an opportunity for HEIs to provide any further information relevant to the EOI. Institutions submitting more than one EOI should comment on their ability to manage multiple capacity building initiatives concurrently here, and this may include reference to synergies and economies with regard to expertise, partnerships, resource, infrastructure, etc.

3. Should HEIs aim to bring the maximum possible number of additional places onstream in the first year or is there a preference for gradual scaling up of additional places?

There is no preference; the urgent need for provision should be balanced against what is feasible and sustainable for the programme and the HEI. HEIs should set out their proposal for additional places per year to align with their own strategic assessment and in consideration of what is feasible in terms of required resourcing and placement provision. Representatives from relevant Schools/Faculties in HEIs should consult with relevant contacts around placement availability (e.g. HSE Regional Director of HSCP, HSCP Regional Integration Development Lead, ETS Head of Therapy, NEPS Assistant Director for Workforce Planning and Professional Learning).

4. Will the number of educational psychology bursaries increase to meet the number of students on programmes?

NEPs has indicated that bursaries are expected to grow in line with student places for Educational Psychology approved through this process, but this is subject to the estimates process. HEIs will be provided with further information as the process progresses.

5. Where there are multiple applications from a HEI, there should be commentary on the ability of the institution to manage multiple capacity building initiatives concurrently; noting how they align to institutional specialisms and strategy, and perhaps commenting on risks and central review of the budgetary asks. Are HEIs expected to include the same statement on ability to manage multiple initiatives within all proposals they submit?

With regard to the EOI Template (Word document), general statements on the ability of the institution to manage multiple capacity building initiatives concurrently may be suitable for inclusion within Section 1.3 of multiple submissions, for example, with regard to shared central services or overarching management or governance structures or mechanisms. EOI submissions may also make specific reference to synergies or economies with another proposal that would support concurrent management of both were both to be successful, e.g., shared resources or common actions between proposed undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in the same discipline.

With regard to the EOI Budget Proposal Template (Excel worksheet), each budget proposal should be discreet and capture the total estimated costs for the development and delivery of the relevant new programme/programme expansion were it to be approved by itself. Where proposed costs are applicable to the delivery of two or more programmes, total costs should be cited in full within each budget proposal and any

potential synergy/economy should be clearly highlighted in the 'notes' section (column L) for the relevant costs row.

6. *We would like to put in an EOI for a new programme now but we are concerned about the implications of this.*

Please note that submitting an EOI does not commit a HEI to delivering the programme or places proposed. This process may be followed by limited invitations to submit fuller proposals. This second stage may involve review of proposals by an external panel of experts. Following the review of EOI submissions and decision by Government on the recommendations arising from this review, funding offers will be made to HEIs to support the activation of places. Prior to issuance of offers for any new or expanded programme, written confirmation of the availability of clinical placements for that programme will be sought from the Department of Health/HSE or Department of Education and Youth/NEPS/NCSE Education Therapy Service as relevant. Please also see FAQ D1.

7. *What set up supports might be available for a new programme?*

The Higher Education Capacity Building Process 2026 will inform Government allocation of funding to support the activation of additional health and social care training places in the 14 professions identified in the call. Budget proposals should include development costs incurred before the first intake of students, staffing costs and other recurrent costs (outside of RGAM), and other one-off current costs. Where necessary, HEIs may propose capital costs. For example, any equipment costs relating to new/expanded programmes should be identified in the budget under 'capital costs'. Please note, however, that capital funding for this call is limited. See <https://hea.ie/policy/he-reform/higher-education-capacity-building-process-2026-health-and-social-care-professions/> for EOI and budget proposal templates which include further information and guidance on the EOI process. Please also see FAQs D1 and D4.

8. *Regarding a potential programme start date, and the inclusion of costs within Year 0 in the budget, is there a preferred earliest or expected programme start date for submissions that include a Year 0 in the budget?*

HEIs may incur development costs in the year prior to commencement of the new/expanded programme. These may be captured under Year 0 in the budget. For example, where a HEI proposes to commence a new programme in 2027/28, development costs incurred during 2026 should be included in Year 0 (e.g. curriculum development). Any costs, whether for development or delivery, incurred in 2027 (the year in which the programme is due to commence) should be captured under Year 1. However, where a HEI proposes to expand a programme in 2026/27, development costs for 2026 (e.g. recruitment of additional staff) should be included under Year 1 alongside delivery costs for 2026.

E. Other

1. Can you please clarify whether delivery of additional places supported by the Higher Education Capacity Building Process 2026 is deemed to be an Economic activity or Non-Economic activity under State Aid (in terms of compliance with State Aid)?

In the area of education, public education organised within the national educational system funded and supervised by the State may be considered as a non-economic activity.

The Court of Justice has held that the State: ‘by establishing and maintaining such a system of public education and financed entirely or mainly by public funds and not by pupils or their parents [...] does not intend to become involved in activities for remuneration, but carries out its task towards its population in the social, cultural and educational areas.’ In this regard, the European Commission considers that certain activities of universities and research organisations fall outside the scope of State aid rules. This concerns their primary activities, namely: (a) education for more and better skilled human resources; (b) the conduct of independent research and development for more knowledge and better understanding, including collaborative research and development; and (c) the dissemination of research results.