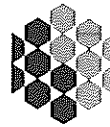


FROM THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY
Jim Wells MLA



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

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Mr Robin Swann MLA
Committee for Employment and Learning
Room 375 Parliament Buildings
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Our Ref: AGY/175/2015

Date: 19 March 2015

Dear Mr Swann

Thank you for your letter dated 5 March regarding waiting lists for individuals needing hearing aid support and asking about why there is a shortage of Audiologists in Northern Ireland.

Audiology services resources

Across Northern Ireland demand for audiology services exceeds the capacity that Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts have to deliver by 5 audiology posts. This is predominately in the Northern HSC Trust and the South Eastern HSC Trust. The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) has plans in place with both Trusts that will address these gaps and this will ensure that the audiology service across Northern Ireland is fully resourced to meet the demand for services.

It should be noted however that currently there is a recruitment and retention difficulty with audiologists across Northern Ireland and as a result HSC Trusts have a number of vacant posts, resulting in longer waiting times for patients.

Waiting times for audiology services

The Department currently publishes information on patients waiting for an audiology (pure tone audiometry) diagnostic service by weeks waiting. This information is published quarterly by Hospital Information Branch (HIB) in the 'Northern Ireland Waiting Time Statistics: Diagnostic Waiting Times' statistical bulletin and is available on the DHSSPS website at the following link:

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/statistics/hospital/waitingtimes/waitingtimes-diagnostic.htm>

My Department is currently assessing newly developed information on waiting times for hearing aids and when considered as being of robust quality, it will be published as official statistics

I trust that this information is helpful.

Jim Wells MLA

Minister for Health Social Services and Public Safety