

INSIDE TODAY

SCÉAL & CHANGE OF MIND



I've been looking at the internal messages Columbia University's leadership has sent staff in recent months to explain its attempts to appease the Trump administration

Fintan O'Toole
Opinion & Analysis



'DEMENTIA IS JUST ONE PART OF WHO HE IS'

Arlene Harris
Health & Family

Disability assessment waiting list set to reach 25,000

Huge rise in number of children awaiting assessments of need for autism services

Government to face pressure as activist (14) stages 50-hour Dáil protest

PAT LEAHY
Political Editor

The number of children awaiting assessments of need for disability or autism services for six months or longer will grow from 15,000 now to 25,000 by the end of the year, the HSE estimates.

Huge increases in the numbers of people seeking assessments of need due to their disability and/or autism have overwhelmed the system, with HSE projections showing the situation is expected to deteriorate significantly this year.

More than 15,000 children are now waiting longer than six months for an assessment of need, but that number is expected to grow to 25,000 by the end of the year, the HSE has told Labour TD Alan Kelly.

Under disability legislation, children are entitled to an assessment of need, a formal process that evaluates their condition and what services they require, within six months of applying for it.

The Government will come under intense pressure on services for children with autism this week with a 50-hour protest by a 14-year-old activist outside the gates of Leinster House and questions and a motion from Opposition leaders on the floor of the Dáil.

Cara Dardomy, a disability rights activist from Co Tipperary who has previously met the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and Minister for Children says she will begin a 50-hour protest outside Leinster House this morning to protest at delays in providing assessments of need to children.

Motion for debate

Opposition leaders will meet Ms Dardomy before putting questions to the Taoiseach in the Dáil. The Government has also allocated 3½ hours today for statements on the issue, while Sinn Féin has put down a motion for debate this evening.

Ms Dardomy campaigned last year for the government to allocate extra funding for assessments of need – leading to an allocation of €10 million in

the budget, which then taoiseach Simon Harris described as “Cara’s fund”.

Ms Dardomy also met the Minister for Children Norma Foley last week to discuss the issue and has tabled a number of “asks”: for the Government to declare a “national emergency for children”; increased funding to deal with waiting lists for assessments of need; the creation of a taskforce to address difficulties in the recruitment of staff; additional funding for services for children with autism; and that she be allowed to address the Cabinet committee on disability.

'National picture'

Ms Dardomy says her activism was initially motivated by the experiences of her two younger brothers who have autism and intellectual disabilities but that she is now focused on the “national picture”.

Her father Mark says that his two sons Neil (12) and John (8) “receive almost no services from the State”.

Government sources acknowledge that they are likely to come under extreme pressure on the issue this week, especially after making promises to improve disability services during the general election campaign.

In a statement, a spokesman for Ms Foley said: “We fully acknowledge that the waiting lists for assessments of need are far too long and that this has a significant impact on the lives of children and their families.”

The statement added that the Government will introduce a series of reforms to overhaul the entire system and that proposals have been repeatedly discussed by the Cabinet committee, including legislative change.

But Government sources admit that capacity constraints will continue to mean people are waiting for assessments. Meanwhile, some parents have resorted to legal action to force the State to provide services.

➔ **Disability services in plea to HSE over funds: page 2**



Pilots on parade Passing out

Air Corps cadets Thomas Bourgnon, Jack Verling, Dylan Behan Matthews, Claire McGinnity, Kim Lynch, and James Browne, during the class of 2023 commissioning ceremony at Casement Aerodrome, in Baldonnell, Co Dublin, yesterday.

Photograph: Dara Mac Dónaill

Trump praises ‘spirit’ of peace talks call with Putin

KEITH DUGGAN
in Washington

Donald Trump has expressed the belief following a phone call with Vladimir Putin that Russia will “immediately start negotiations towards a ceasefire and, more importantly an end to the war” in Ukraine.

The US president also spoke to Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy before and after his two-hour dialogue with Mr Putin yesterday.

While Mr Trump was optimistic about the conversation

and praised the “tone and spirit”, no definitive breakthrough was achieved, nor did Russia accede to the 30-day ceasefire proposed by the US.

The Russian president was more circumspect and ambivalent in an interview with state television yesterday, describing the conversation as “very informative and very frank”.

“I for my part also noted that Russia also supports a peaceful settlement of the Ukraine crisis,” Mr Putin said. “We must simply determine the most effective paths toward peace.”

He said Russia was ready to deal with Ukraine with a view to establishing “a memorandum regarding a possible future peace treaty defining a number of positions such as, for example, the principles of settlement, the timing of a possible peace agreement, including a possible ceasefire for a certain period”.

Mr Trump, in a social media post, suggested the Vatican as a suitable and willing host for the negotiations.

Mr Putin’s foreign policy adviser, Yuri Ushakov, said a po-

tential nine-person mutual prisoner swap had been discussed and that both presidents had addressed one another on an informal, first-name basis. According to the Russian state agency Tass, Mr Ushakov said neither leader “wanted to end the conversation”.

Speaking in Kyiv after the conversation, Mr Zelenskyy suggested that “a meeting of all teams at a very high level” may be imminent, while reiterating the position that his country will never withdraw its forces from Ukrainian territory, nor

yield to Russian ultimatums.

Mr Trump spoke to several European leaders after his phone call with Mr Putin.

Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president, thanked the US president for “his tireless efforts to bring a ceasefire to Ukraine” in a social media post.

Pre-empting the phone call yesterday, US vice-president JD Vance emphasised the potential economic benefits for Russia of working out a peace treaty.

“I think the [US] president is

going to say to President Putin: look, are you serious? Are you real about this?” Mr Vance said.

“Because the proposal from the United States has always been: look, there’s a lot of economic benefits to thawing relations between Russia and the rest of the world. But you are not going to get those benefits if you keep on killing a lot of innocent people.”

➔ **Trump steps back from mediator role in Russia-Ukraine ceasefire talks: page 7**

Planned EU-UK deal a ‘good day for Northern Ireland’

FREYA McCLEMENTS
Northern Editor

The announcement of a commitment by the EU and UK to work towards a deal that would remove most checks on agri-food products moving between Britain and the North has been hailed as “a good day for Northern Ireland”.

Speaking following the announcement by British prime minister Keir Starmer and European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen yesterday, Tánaiste Simon Harris said it was “very important that the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland be taken into account, and that has been done.”

“A broad-based SPS [sanitary and phytosanitary] agreement would bring significant benefits for Northern Ireland business and consumers, and for the efficient operation

of the Windsor Framework,” he said.

The commitment regarding SPS checks was part of a wide-ranging agreement announced following an EU-UK summit, and includes increased co-operation in areas including food, fishing, defence and passport checks.

Dynamic alignment

According to the text of the agreement on a “renewed agenda” for EU-UK co-operation, London and Brussels have committed to “work towards establishing a Common Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement”, which would result in dynamic alignment on SPS products between the EU and UK.

“This would result in the vast majority of movements of animals, animal products, plants and plant products between Great Britain and the European Union being undertaken

without the certificates or controls that are currently required by the rules,” the agreement stated.

This would also apply to Northern Ireland through the “interplay of the Windsor Framework and the SPS Agreement, so long as the SPS Agreement is fully implemented” and will “provide for Northern Ireland maintaining its privileged unique dual access to both the European Union Single Market and the United Kingdom internal market,” it said.

It is not clear how long it will take to implement this deal, but it will require detailed negotiation of the legal text and the process could take some time.

➔ **All smiles and bonhomie as Starmer and von der Leyen clinch trade deal: Mark Paul, Business, page 14**

Weather

Generally dry start but rain will soon develop, some of it heavy. Highs of 16-20 degrees.

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Business + Your Money

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Revolut: The fintech plans to file for a banking licence in France to make Paris its western European HQ: page 18

Sports Tuesday

Soccer: Premier Division pace-setters Shamrock Rovers made short work of Stephen Kenny’s St Patrick’s Athletic in Tallaght last night: page 19

Gaelic Games: Offaly came out on top in their Leinster U17 football championship final against Louth: page 23



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