

7th December 2020

Deputy David Cullinane
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

Re: PQ 32738/20

Question: “To ask the Minister for Health the number of staff available on the first day of each month for the months of May to October 2020, by testers, tracers and others categories; and if he will make a statement on the matter”.

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question which has been referred by the Minister for Health to the Health Service Executive for direct response.

I wish to apologise for the delay in issuing a response to your above question.

Due to the current demands of the Covid-19 pandemic and the numerous queries we have received to date it has taken longer than I would've liked to respond.

The previous Parliamentary Question (reference 24963) received in October requested similar information and we advised that due to the dynamic nature of redeployments to address changing requirements and the limitations associated with HR data collection processes, information is not available in the requested format. Although in that response we did outline the staffing levels from March within the Testing and Tracing Programme for your attention. We are currently recruiting a permanent workforce in addition to leveraging the clinical and operational expertise embedded in our community services and this work has already commenced. The operating model will take into account the evolving needs and future potential service demands in the context of Covid19 surges in disease transmission.

I would also like to now provide an update in relation to our recruitment for your information – both Community Swabbing and Contact Tracing.

Community Swabbing

Overall, we have c.976 people engaged in community swabbing. We have hired and on-boarded 565 new community swabbers so far and we have 411 staff redeployed to community swabbing. Of the 411, this includes 180 who are Allied Health professionals. We will continue to hire until we have at least 1,000 new people on-board and all redeployed staff have returned to their substantive posts.

Contact Tracing

The HSE currently has access to c.736 staff for contact tracing at present. This includes 675 people who make up our new dedicated contact tracing workforce. In addition, there are currently 61 staff redeployed to contact tracing, 38 are HSE staff, none of whom were involved in front line community work. There are also 23 staff redeployed from the Revenue Commissioners.

We will continue to recruit until we get to 800 WTE, this may be in excess of 1,000 people due to part time working.

We continue to build agility in our system to meet the increasing community demand, examples of this include a nationwide recruitment campaign for swabbers and contact tracers, standing up temporary swabbing sites and making process improvements to our end to end test and trace system.

I trust this addresses your question.

Yours sincerely,

Niamh O'Beirne

Niamh O'Beirne
National Lead Testing and Tracing