

11<sup>th</sup> November 2020

Deputy Paul McAuliffe  
Dáil Éireann  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**Re: PQ 32751/20**

**Question: "To ask the Minister for Health his plans to increase contact tracing for Covid-19; and if he has considered asking volunteers to carry out the process".**

Dear Deputy McAuliffe,

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

The enhanced service model for testing and tracing is in the final stages of design with implementation underway for priority areas such as workforce recruitment and the test centre estate. This service model will aim to deliver a patient-centred service, accessible, consistent and be flexible to demand. This plan includes the recruitment of 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.

The service model for Testing and Trace is continuing to be implemented including recruitment to enable the staffing of the service model for community swabbing, labs and contact tracing and estate improvement in terms of a permanent and sustainable testing centre and contact centre footprint.

The HSE currently has access to approximately 700 staff for contact tracing at present which is sufficient to meet the current demand and achieve the target timeframes. These staff are made up of new dedicated staff, HSE redeployed staff and public servants. Contact tracing is a 7 day operation over 12 hours per day. What is most important is dedicated, experienced contact tracing staff to do this important work. To this end we are actively recruiting dedicated staff. Today we have 414 persons who make up our new dedicated contact tracing workforce (within the total 700). This week an additional 50 dedicated staff will be hired and on-boarded with a further 70 planned for next week and the week after. By 1<sup>st</sup> December, we will have an estimated 664 of these will be the workforce. We will continue to grow this workforce number until it gets to 800 WTE, this may be in excess of 1,000 people due to part time working. All staff redeployed to tracing will then return to their substantive roles.

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*

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**Niamh O'Beirne**  
**National Lead for Testing and Tracing**