

**9<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

Deputy David Cullinane  
Dáil Éireann  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**Re: PQ 31426/20**

**Question: “To ask the Minister for Health the number of additional staff for testing and for tracing that will be provided as a consequence of Budget 2021; 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 future 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. While not yet concluded the expenditure for testing and tracing is expected to be in the region of €450m for the current year with a projected annual budget of €700m in 2021.

The implementation of the service model for Testing and Trace is continuing 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. In the community today we have over 1,100 people deployed to swabbing. This includes 866 who are deployed from other community work and the remainder are newly recruited to the service. We have hired and on-boarded 269 community swabbers so far. There are in excess of 100 additional swabbers due to start next week. This is a brand new role and these staff are now working in our centres all around the country. We received 3,451 applications and 1,347 have been interviewed. We will continue to hire until we have at least 1,000 new people on-board and all 866 are redeployed back to their original community roles.

The HSE currently has access to 766 staff for contact tracing at present. This includes 417 persons who make up our new dedicated contact tracing workforce. This week an additional 50 – 60

dedicated staff will be hired and on-boarded. By 1<sup>st</sup> December 2020 we will have in excess of 700 dedicated contact tracing staff. We will continue to grow this 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,



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