

**8<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

Deputy David Cullinane  
Dáil Éireann  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**Re: PQ 24965/20**

**Question: “To ask the Minister for Health the opening hours and staffing levels by occupation for each swabbing centre in each week since 1 April 2020; 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 HSE Covid-19 Community Testing Service is committed to the timely provision of safe, accessible, quality swabbing services within the community setting. In order to respond to the pandemic it was necessary utilise existing staff through redeployment.

Statistics regarding staff redeployment have been captured in September 2020, however 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.

In order for the HSE to respond effectively to Covid-19, in September 2020 a total of 866 community staff were redeployed nationally. This figure includes all community based staff and is inclusive of Allied Health Professionals. In March, the HSE redeployed current staff into swabbing roles. Today our sites are open 7 days a week and up to 12 hours per day. About 800 staff are engaged in swabbing, with about 350 roughly working per day. Staff have been redeployed from other community work into community swabbing. We are actively recruiting for a dedicated workforce of community swabbers and currently mid-way through interviews and making job offers. The recruitment campaign for community swabbers closed on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> September with just under 3,500 applications received and interviews commenced immediately. It is anticipated that these new staff will be available to commence swabbing shortly, which will also allow many Allied Health Professional staff to return to their posts. To date over 500 people have passed interviews and are going through compliance checks, garda vetting etc. The first new cohort of staff start on 8<sup>th</sup> October.

In contact tracing today we have over 300 staff. Many of the staff initially redeployed to tracing have returned to their substantive posts as we have been recruiting for the last few months. Some

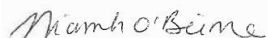
staff do remain in tracing who will return in the coming weeks. These staff come from Human Resources, Community Health Organisations, Environmental Health Officers, and some management admin staff. The largest group are Environmental Health Officers, with up to 80 people involved in contact tracing at present. There are approximately 25 Health and Social Care Professionals involved in contact tracing.

The HSE is creating standing capacity for contact tracing with over 500 contact tracers currently being recruited. The first new recruits have commenced training, and as soon as they are fully operational, staff redeployed from other parts of the HSE will return to their usual roles. Over 400 people are through the interview process and moving through to compliance stages. The first 65 will commence this week with a further 70 expected next week.

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 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.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,



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