

7th April 2021

Deputy Róisín Shortall
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

PQ 15625/21 “To ask the Minister for Health if a company (Abtran) is involved in the recruitment of contact tracers or in the running of contact tracing centres; the role it plays in same; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Dear Deputy Shortall,

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 HSE's Contact Management Programme (CMP) was established in March 2020 as part of the HSE's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The CMP was initially resourced by HSE staff who were redeployed from other functions in early March 2020 and external partners such as third level institutes, the Defence Forces and other Public Bodies e.g. the Revenue Commissioners etc. This approach was put in place as part of a short to medium term response. However, given the on-going nature of the global pandemic a longer term and more sustainable approach to staffing has now been put in place. The recruitment of a dedicated full-time workforce has allowed previously redeployed HSE staff to return to their substantive posts, posts which were often patient facing. This longer term approach is based on a blended use of external and internal staff, engaged through a variety of external providers including organisations such as CPL and Abtran.

Through this workforce management process the CMP has now developed its own workforce and has put in place sustainable and effective arrangements with other organisations to support us in times of surge. Staff have mainly been recruited by CPL Healthcare on behalf of the HSE to provide Contact Tracing services. We now have over 800 people working as contact tracers across six Contact Tracing Centres (CTCs), and we have formalised relationships with the Defence Forces and our Environmental Health Service to augment our response as when needed.

As part of the arrangements in place to both augment capacity in CTCs, to provide contact tracing services at the necessary scale as we entered the third wave of this global pandemic in December 2020, and to support the CMP to develop a more robust, streamlined and efficient Contact Centre Management structure, the services of a number of external providers have been engaged. While CPL have been engaged to provide the majority of the staff for contact tracing, Abtran was engaged to provide a team (less than 50 at present) to support contact tracing services directly (making non clinical call 3s) on a short term basis (initial three month contract) to assist the HSE in responding to the unprecedented surge in cases of COVID-19 during the third wave of the pandemic.

Abtran have also been engaged to build specific call centre management capability and expertise and embed best practice across our CTCs. This includes, the delivery of specific work streams such as the design, development and deployment of a Workforce Management (WFM) System for our CTCs, which has brought clarity and robustness to capacity planning at a critical juncture in the CMP since it was introduced in December, a quality and training framework to ensure consistency of services and provision of experienced resources to quickly build capability and capacity, for example team leads,

quality and training leads and team coaches etc. This contract is for the period November 2020 - June 2021. There are 22 staff in place under this contract in CTCs at this time.

I trust this addresses your question.

Yours sincerely,



Niamh O'Beirne
National Lead Testing and Tracing