



Deputy Duncan Smith TD
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2

08.07.22

Re: PQ 32591/22

To ask the Minister for Health how far below optimum levels of staffing of medical scientists in HSE laboratories across the country are; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Duncan Smith

Dear Deputy Smith,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Response:

Medical Scientists are an integral part of the provision of laboratory services across many disciplines. Laboratory services in turn are a significant element of hospital clinical services. Research shows that over 70% of clinical decisions are based upon some form of diagnostic test. The future direction of laboratory requirements is toward more testing and in particular the development of near patient testing. In the context, the laboratory workforce generally will become a more critical component of the hospital environment.

Medical Scientists (MS) work in the HSE in the diagnosis and research of disease in healthcare. Medical Scientist are involved in a diverse range of specialties across hospitals. These include

- Microbiology
- Clinical Chemistry
- Haematology
- Cellular Pathology (Histopathology)
- Molecular Pathology
- Virology
- Immunology
- Transfusion Science

At present, qualification / registration to become a MS involves a 4 year programme at undergraduate level at an accredited university. There are currently 105 training places across the universities in Ireland for graduates for recruitment within the public and private laboratories.



Table 1 presents information on the current WTE employments levels for all grades of Medical Scientists across HSE hospitals. It shows:

- There are currently 1,837 Medical Scientists WTEs employed across HSE hospitals at basic, senior or specialist grade.
- There has been a net decrease of 39 basic grade Medical Scientists employed by the HSE since 2019. There has been an increase of 77 Senior Medical Scientists across the system scientist posts.

Table 1 – Medical Scientist WTE 2019-2022

| Grade | WTE Dec 2019 | WTE Jan 2021 | WTE Dec 2020 | WTE Dec 2021 | WTE Jan 2022 | Net Change 2019-2022 |
|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|
| Medical Scientist | 1,113 | 1,142 | 1,145 | 1,078 | 1,074 | -39 |
| Medical Scientist, Senior | 612 | 629 | 623 | 688 | 688 | 77 |
| Medical Scientist, Student | 64 | 67 | 44 | 41 | 58 | -5 |
| Medical Scientist, Specialist | 42 | 55 | 53 | 76 | 75 | 33 |
| Laboratory Manager | 24 | 26 | 25 | 27 | 26 | 2 |
| Medical Scientist, Chief | 186 | 197 | 197 | 212 | 214 | 27 |
| Total | 2,040 | 2,116 | 2,087 | 2,122 | 2,135 | 95 |
| | | | | | | |

There are no currently no data available on “optimum levels” of staffing or vacancy levels as reported by the HSE. However, the HSE is aware that Laboratory Managers are currently reporting significant difficulties with the continued recruitment of Medical Scientists across many hospitals. Many hospitals continue to operate rotas based on a blend of overtime and agency staffing to ensure continuity of service. In addition, Laboratory Managers often report low applicant number for advertised posts.

The HSE has proposed a number of actions to assist hospitals to the Department of Health to facilitate the further training and registration of Medical Scientist staff. The HSE and Department of Health are working in close collaboration to progress these actions to assist laboratory services with on-going recruitment difficulties.

The HSE is also reviewing options to undertake a national recruitment approach to Medical Scientist recruitment to maximise awareness for national and international candidates about opportunities within the Irish public health system.

Yours sincerely

Ciaran Browne
Acute Operations – HSE