



8th July 2022

Deputy Róisín Shortall,
Dáil Éireann,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Issued via email to: roisin.shortall@oireachtas.ie

Re: PQs Number - 34426/22, 34427/22, 34809/22, 34810/22 & 34811/22

Dear Deputy Shortall,

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

Question: PQ 34426/22

To ask the Minister for Health the reason that contracts for experienced level 1 grade IV clinical contact tracers, currently employed by an agency (details supplied) will not be renewed, particularly in view of rising Covid case numbers; if level 2 grade III non-clinical contact tracers will be asked to carry out level 1 grade IV clinical specialised contact tracing in their absence; the rationale for only permitting level 1 grade IV clinical contact tracers currently employed by the agency to apply for grade III contact tracing positions on a lower pay scale; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Response:

The reduction in the prevalence and impact of COVID-19 has meant that our Test and Trace service is changing. Over the last number of months particularly since the change in testing requirements announced at the end of February, we have seen a substantial decrease in the demand for COVID-19 testing. That has obviously had an impact on the number of cases identified and the subsequent need for contact tracing. We expect that testing requirements will change further later this summer and ultimately our test centres will close and COVID-19 testing will only take place for the purpose of surveillance or if a clinician believes it is necessary for treatment purposes.

Many of our contact tracing staff had contracts which expired on 30 June 2022. Over the last number of weeks we have been working closely with other HSE services and indeed other government departments to identify what support our teams could provide to them after June 30.

The HSE has retained a centre in Dublin and Cork for the purposes of contact tracing requirements that may arise between now and the end of this year. We have also agreed that some of the team in Dublin will undertake other HSE related call-based work.



Contact tracing ceased in our Limerick and Galway centres on June 30. In Limerick we have worked with the Department of Foreign Affairs who have a requirement for staff to support their passport service.

This work is call-based and in the DFA's Limerick office. We have worked directly with the team in Limerick to agree the process to facilitate this transition for those who wished to be involved in the project.

We identified a need with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to support that Department's work in association with the Irish Red Cross with those who have arrived from the Ukraine. The teams carrying out this work will remain in our existing office in Galway.

The HSE will maintain a core team in both testing and contact tracing that will continue to respond to current public health advice. In addition we are developing a plan for future surges of COVID-19 or emerging variants of concern. Over the course of the pandemic the activities and functions carried out within the Contact Management Program (CMP) has greatly evolved in line with changing public health advice, this means many of the tasks originally undertaken by Grade IV contact tracers are now managed across all our contact tracing teams. As a result the roles remaining in the CMP are primarily at Grade III.

Question: PQ 34427/22

To ask the Minister for Health his views on the decision to ask experienced grade IV clinical contact tracers to reapply for lower grade positions once their contracts end at the end of June 2022; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Response:

Over the course of the pandemic the activities and functions carried out within the CMP has greatly evolved in line with changing public health advice this means many of the tasks originally undertaken by Grade IV contact tracers are now managed across all our contact tracing teams. As a result the roles remaining in the CMP are primarily at Grade III.

Question: PQ 34809/22

To ask the Minister for Health the reason that grade IV staff, employed by a company (details supplied) in the data processing department of the Contact Management Programme are being retained while employees on an equivalent pay scale in the contract tracing department are not being retained; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Response:

The Data Processing team carry out a number of complex processes which result in the notification of COVID-19 detected and not detected results. As a result of the transition this team will operate at a greatly reduced headcount. Unlike contact tracers those employed in the Data Processing team carry out highly complex excel and system based workstreams and are employed under a different job description.



Question: PQ 34810/22

To ask the Minister for Health if the contract tracing department in the Contact Management Programme will be reduced to 132 employees at grade III and 9 at grade IV; if grade III vacancies will be filled through an open recruitment campaign or from the existing staff pool in the Programme; if experience in contact tracing will be a requirement for these positions; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Response:

We have been working to fill 135 Grade III clerical officers and 11 Grade V staff officers to support CMP operations which is required 7 days per week. We continue to work with our recruitment partners CPL to fill vacancies within the CMP. These posts are openly advertised and require appropriate experience in line with other Grade III posts.

Question: PQ 34811/22

To ask the Minister for Health the funding that has been provided to the HSE Contact Management Programme since it was established; the breakdown of monies spent on staff by grade in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Response:

The CMP is part of the National Test, Trace & Vaccination Programme and there is no specific funding assigned to CMP as it is within the overarching financial governance of the Test & Trace programme. The funding allocation to Test & Trace in 2020, 2021 and 2022 is as follows:

Total Budget Test & Trace (incl sanctions)			
2020	2021	2022	
€292m	€716m	€157m	

In relation to breakdown of monies on staff by grade it is difficult to ascertain the breakdown of spend by Grade as invoices were not presented in this way for approval, however the CMP has spent the following on non HSE staff in 2020, 2021 and 2022 (YTD).

	2020	2021	2022	Total
CMP Total	€ 2,693,295	€ 47,118,423	€ 14,684,312	€ 64,496,030

The HSE is verifying HSE staff costs at present but we believe this is in the region of €1.5m for the period 2020 to date.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

Eileen Whelan
National Lead Test & Trace and Vaccination Programme