



An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta Scagthástála
National Screening Service

23 November 2022

Deputy Róisín Shortall
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

PQ55765/22: To ask the Minister for Health further to Parliamentary Question No. 710 of 17 May 2022, if he will provide an update on the National Cervical Screening Laboratory at the Coombe; the date it will be operational; the specific work that will be undertaken there; the number of staff required and the number recruited to date; the qualifications and grades of recruited staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

National Cervical Screening Laboratory (NCSL)

The NCSL is being developed by the HSE and the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital (CWIUH) to become a national centre of excellence for cervical screening. It will be commissioned by Ireland's cervical screening programme CervicalCheck to process women's cervical screening samples. It is expected to be operating by year end.

The building works are finished, and it has passed all required building inspections. A building and clinical equipment fit-out phase is complete. The laboratory equipment has undergone rigorous testing, validation and verification and final external quality assurance inspections will soon be under way. Once these inspections are complete, required changes will be made and the NCSL will be ready to begin operations.

The new laboratory is designed to become CervicalCheck's main provider of cervical screening laboratory services. However, recruitment of skilled staff will be a top priority for several years as the NCSL increases the number of CervicalCheck samples it receives. A workforce plan is in place and essential roles in cytopathology, virology and medical scientists have been identified. As these key roles are filled, the NCSL will work towards becoming the main provider of laboratory services for CervicalCheck over the coming years.

At present, the NCSL has recruited 2.5 consultants; 1 fellow; 2 molecular biologists, 2.6 medical scientists, and 4 lab aides. We have opted to not provide qualifications and grades of recruited staff because, in light of the small numbers involved, this could make individuals identifiable, which would breach data protection regulations. I trust you are agreeable with this approach.

A secondary laboratory contractor will remain necessary at all times to ensure resilience in the system. All cervical screening samples go to a quality-assured laboratory provider. The quality assurance requirements and standards for the cervical screening programme are based on European guidance, as set out in the European guidelines for quality assurance in cervical cancer screening, and our Standards for Quality Assurance in Cervical Screening.

Two quality-assured laboratories process all CervicalCheck tests. They are Quest Diagnostics in the US, and the CWIUH in Dublin. They perform HPV primary testing with reflex cytology.

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AN CLÁR NAISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CERIBHEACS
THE NATIONAL BREAST SCREENING PROGRAMME



AN CLÁR NAISIÚNTA SCAGTHÁSTÁLA CERIBHEACS
THE NATIONAL CERVICAL SCREENING PROGRAMME



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Pútlóige
The National Bowel Screening Programme



An Clár Náisiúnta Scagthástála Riatróil do Dhiabéiteigh
The National Diabetic Retinal Screening Programme



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Cervical screening

CervicalCheck - the national cervical screening programme, plays an important role in preventing cervical cancer in Ireland. Our most recent data shows a continued decreasing incidence in the number of women who develop cervical cancer, with a 2.8% annual percentage decrease from 2010-2018. In the first ten years of the programme it provided almost 3.2 million cervical screening tests, and detected over 115,000 abnormalities (including 64,000 high grade abnormalities), many of which could have developed into cervical cancer if not detected through screening. I trust this information is of assistance to you, but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Murphy
Chief Executive

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