



21 February 2022

Deputy Kathleen Funchion
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Our Ref: GM/Communications

PQ5837.22: To ask the Minister for Health the number of full-time staff by job title that will be required to work in the new National Cervical Screening Laboratory, in tabular form.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the above Parliamentary Question.

A strategic decision was made (arising from recommendations of the Dr Scally Report) in 2018 for the HSE to develop Ireland's National Cervical Screening Laboratory (NCSL) in conjunction with The Coombe Hospital, Dublin.

The NCSL began processing CervicalCheck programme samples in December 2022. The laboratory, which is on the grounds of The Coombe Hospital, is being led by interim director Dr Cillian De Gascun, and lead pathologist Dr Aoife Doyle.

The laboratory is being developed to become a national centre of excellence for cervical screening. It will provide an opportunity to expand the training and development of staff related to cervical screening in Ireland.

While the plan is that the laboratory becomes the main processor of CervicalCheck samples, reaching that point will take some time. Recruitment of skilled staff will be a top priority for several years as the NCSL increases the number of CervicalCheck samples it receives. The ongoing recruitment of staff, from administration assistants to histopathologists is a priority.

A key factor for the immediate and long-term success of the NCSL is the availability and recruitment of cytopathology staff, namely consultant cytopathologists, in the face of increased market demand and the continued decline of the cytology industry in Ireland and globally.

The current staffing level at the National Cervical Screening Laboratory is appropriate given the throughput of samples being processed. The Coombe Hospital has recruited 11.9 additional Whole Time Equivalent (WTE) staff for the laboratory, including the role of director, lead pathologist for cervical cytology, medical consultants, medical scientists, quality assurance, IT and administrative staff. We have 5.3 WTE posts under recruitment.

Engagement is taking place with stakeholders across the health service to ensure that the NCSL will have a suitable supply of qualified staff to facilitate its increasing workload in the years ahead. This includes engagement with the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland's Faculty of Pathology to introduce a post-Certificate of Satisfactory Completion of Specialist Training fellowship, and to include cervical cytology in the histopathology training curriculum.

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National Screening Service

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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