



29<sup>th</sup> March 2021

**Deputy Paul McAuliffe**  
**Dail Eireann**  
**Leinster House**  
**Kildare Street**  
**Dublin 2**

**PQ 13987/21 Question: “To ask the Minister for Health the number of persons working on genome sequencing of Covid-19 variations in the HSE to date; the way in which Ireland compares to other EU countries; if he is satisfied that these numbers are sufficient; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”**

Dear Deputy McAuliffe,

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 SARS-CoV 2 national surveillance programme is in the process of being established by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre. The National Virus Reference Laboratory (NVRL) at UCD is the primary laboratory partner for the programme. As the NVRL works to build up sequencing capacity within the national testing programme for the HSE, it is, in the interim, being supported by colleagues in UCD, Teagasc (lead organisation of the Irish Coronavirus Sequencing Consortium), Eurofins (an existing HSE laboratory partner for the national testing programme) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

As the HSE is working collaboratively across a range of bodies with genome sequencing expertise to support ongoing work in this area we do not have exact figures. Although I wish to advise the national surveillance programme is currently sequencing between 15% and 20% of cases each week, thereby exceeding the ECDC & World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendation of 5% to 10%. At present, the on-island/off-island split is in the region of 50:50, but the off-island work will be repatriated in the coming weeks as ongoing procurement and recruitment processes are completed. The medium-term aim is to reach an on-island public sector capability of 1200-1500 sequences per week.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

*Niamh O'Beirne*

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**Niamh O'Beirne**  
**National Lead Testing and Tracing**