



12th July 2022

Deputy Robert Troy,
Dáil Éireann,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Issued via email to: robert.troy@oireachtas.ie

PQ Number: 34354/22

Question: To ask the Minister for Health the status of Covid Swabbers in view of the increased number of positive Covid tests. (“I am aware some employed on a temporary specified purpose contract were extended for 9 weeks, until August 31st 2022. Other contracts are due to expire at on June 30th 2022. What is the plan for these employees”?)

Dear Deputy Troy,

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

Due to the high levels of protection against COVID-19 in the population resulting from vaccination and natural infection, the level of harm caused by COVID-19 has significantly reduced. As the disease moves from pandemic to endemic status there is a gradual transition from widespread testing and contact tracing for active cases towards a more targeted individual testing model similar to other respiratory illnesses, based on Public Health guidance. During this transition period a much smaller workforce is required as the volume of testing is significantly reduced from the peak earlier this year.

Staff members in Community Testing were asked to complete a survey to evaluate potential suitability and interest for roles within the HSE beyond Test & Trace. Individual meetings were then held with staff, as part of transition planning to the new model. Managers worked with staff to try to identify suitable re-assignment opportunities and signpost other roles for which the person may wish to submit an application.

Staff were invited to submit an expression of interest to continue in a swabbing role in July and August and the agreed process was that the longest serving staff who expressed interest would be selected for the continuing roles.

Opportunities for re-assignment were identified across the Community Healthcare Organisations and testing staff were encouraged to send in a CV if interested. Out of the 936 WTE who were in post on 1st June in Community Testing, just under 215 WTE were retained on extended Specified Purpose Contracts to the end of August with 48.5 WTE returning to their substantive post in the HSE and 282 WTE were successfully reassigned to another post in the HSE. Just over 100 staff voluntarily resigned meaning the remaining 288.5 WTE had their contracts terminated on 30 June.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Eileen Whelan
National Lead Test & Trace and Vaccination Programme