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Gillian Martin MSP  
Convener Health, Social Care and Sport  
Committee  
Scottish parliament

25 January 2023

*Dear Gillian,*

### ***Redeployment of contact tracing staff to NHS 24***

In response to the question how many contact tracing staff have transferred to NHS 24 to bolster capacity, posed by Paul O’Kane MSP at the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee held at 10 January 2023, I undertook to write to you.

The Scottish Government is of course very grateful for the dedication and professionalism of the workforce across the entirety of the Test & Protect system for all they did to manage the impacts of the pandemic. Scotland’s Test and Protect programme was one of the key interventions in our response to Covid-19, the success of which has been due, in no small part, to its remarkable staff and volunteers from a range of organisations.

Following the publication of our updated Strategic Framework in February, we moved into a different phase of the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic – before we had the benefit of vaccinations and treatments – large scale infrastructure to test, trace and isolate on a population wide scale was required to reduce transmission, as were other widespread protective measures. We are now in a very different position with population levels of immunity and new treatments significantly reducing the direct harms of the virus. This meant that the over the course of spring 2022, the primary purpose of testing changed from population wide testing to reduce transmission, to targeted testing to support clinical care – and with that change came the end of the requirement for population level contact tracing.

Through active engagement with employers and trade unions, we have worked to ensure that all staff affected by the changes have been treated fairly and equally and in accordance with their contractual entitlements. Whilst intensively supported by the Scottish Government, the operational management of this process and considerations of individual staff contractual

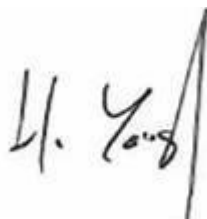
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arrangements, has rightfully been managed by the employers – in this case individual health boards, local authorities and the private contractors involved.

A dedicated group with representation from across the Test and Protect system was established to oversee the workforce transition. The group supported engagement with trade unions throughout its existence and helped to ensure equal treatment of staff through consistent messaging and worked collaboratively to identify opportunities to retain staff within the NHS, as well as supporting those individuals keen to pursue opportunities in other organisations and sectors at the end of their contracts. Partnership Action for Continuous Employment (PACE) was engaged in national discussions with a view to providing bespoke and individualised support for impacted staff – this support was adopted by numerous Health Boards.

As a result, NHS Scotland continues to benefit from the skills and experience of a significant number of those staff previously involved in Test & Protect. With regards those staff that were employed by Health Boards, returns prepared by said Boards indicate that in the region of 1,440 staff have returned to substantive roles. In addition, Boards have indicated that approximately 1,200 staff have secured permanent roles in NHS Scotland Health Boards. These numbers also include those Test & Protect staff that were not specifically involved with contact tracing as our data does not specify role.

Health Boards are individual employers, therefore it is not possible to simply transfer staff from one Health Board to another. However, during the course of the transition period, Health Boards did actively explore mutual opportunities for cross-Board redeployment of staff, as well as utilising adverts on the same vacancy platform to make it easy for staff to seek employment in other Boards. We do not hold numbers centrally on how many contact tracing staff have subsequently been contracted to work for NHS 24.



**HUMZA YOUSAF**

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