

**Chairperson's note of the virtual meeting of the
National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC)
18 February 2021**

The NSAC held its first meeting of 2021 on Thursday 18 February which marks the start of another busy year for the Committee as it continues to build on the important work carried out in 2020.

Observers

I was pleased to welcome Ms Fiona Murphy, CEO of the National Screening Service (NSS), Ms Louise Loughlin, National Manager of the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities, which provides the Patient Advocacy Service and Dr Mary Rose Sweeney Irish Universities Association (IUA) Heads of School of Nursing and Midwifery Group, for accepting the Committee's invitation to attend meetings as observers. I anticipate that their willingness to observe and provide feedback on how the Committee is functioning will bring an extra dimension to the work of the Committee.

New pathway within the Diabetic RetinaScreen Programme

The Committee noted the implementation of the new pathway within the Diabetic RetinaScreen Programme in the HSE.

At the October 2020 meeting we considered and approved a formal application from the Diabetic RetinaScreen Programme to extend the interval between screens from 1 to 2 years for people with diabetes who are at low risk of developing sight-threatening diabetic retinopathy, and recommended to the Minister for Health that he approve the modification to the Programme. The Minister approved this change which was announced by the HSE on 16 February 2021. Please see a link to the Programme announcement here: [HSE press release](#)

We would like to acknowledge the support given to us by HIQA in reviewing and analysing the evidence and assisting us in reaching the decision to recommend the change. A link to the Extended Interval Screening by the Diabetic RetinaScreen Programme report is accessible here: [HIQA Report](#)

Presentation from Ms Fiona Murphy, CEO of the National Screening Service

The Committee welcomed Ms Fiona Murphy who made a presentation to the Committee on the National Screening Service (NSS) including an overview of its history, present situation, current challenges and future plans for the four population screening programmes. The Committee welcomed the proposal to receive regular updates on the NSS programmes, and the Secretariat will liaise with NSS about these. I consider a collaborative working relationship with the NSS to be most important.

NSAC Application process

The Committee approved a formal Standardised Application Process and procedure for new population-based screening programmes. Potential programmes will extend beyond cancer and newborn screening to include antenatal and other adult and childhood programmes. This will be known as the 'Annual Call'. The Secretariat will progress publication of the process and supporting documentation on the [NSAC website in the near future](#).

A separate application process will be developed for modifications to existing programmes and this process will be discussed further at our next meeting.

Ethical Framework

Dr. Sheelagh McGuinness discussed progress on her work in developing a Draft Ethical Framework for the NSAC. The Committee acknowledged the importance of such a framework as ethical issues are important considerations in all population-based screening programmes.

Communications Strategy

The Committee discussed the development of a communications strategy for the NSAC. It was acknowledged that a collaborative approach between the NSAC, the Department of Health and NSS and other stakeholders is necessary to promote public understanding and trust in screening programmes. Members were invited to participate in a workshop to progress the strategy further.

Annual Report 2020

The draft NSAC Annual Report 2020 was circulated to the Committee and members were invited to provide high level feedback to the Secretariat. The report will be published on the NSAC website in the near future.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 20 May 2021 from 11am to 2pm.

Professor Niall O'Higgins

Chair, National Screening Advisory Committee