

**National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC)
Note of the meeting held on 18 February 2021**

Members present:

- Professor Niall O'Higgins (Chair)
- Dr Sheelagh McGuinness
- Dr James O'Mahony
- Ms Martina Fitzgerald
- Ms Irene Regan
- Dr Susan Kent
- Dr Ellen Crushell
- Dr Paul Kavanagh
- Ms Jillian van Turnhout
- Professor Michael Rigby
- Professor Keelin O'Donoghue
- Mr John Gleeson
- Professor Ciaran O'Neill
- Dr Abigail Collins

Observers:

- Ms Fiona Murphy, CEO, National Screening Service
- Ms Louise Loughlin, National Manager, National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities
- Dr Mary Rose Sweeney, Irish Universities Association (IUA), Heads of School of Nursing and Midwifery Group

Secretariat:

- Evette Wade, Population Health Screening Unit
- Luke Kearney, Population Health Screening Unit
- Inese Freimane, Population Health Screening Unit
- Jane Hannon, Population Health Screening Unit

Department of Health:

- Dr Alan Smith, DCMO
- Kate O'Flaherty, Population Health Screening Unit

Apologies:

- Dr Mary Codd
- Professor Andrew Green
- Ms Anne Burke
- Dr John Ward
- Dr Velma Harkins

1. Welcome & Introductions

The Chair opened the meeting and apologies were noted. No new conflicts of interest were identified by the members of the Committee.

The Chair welcomed and thanked 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 attend meetings as observers.

The Chair expressed his gratitude to Dr Paul D'Alton who has stepped down from the Committee (effective January 2021). His contribution to the work of the Committee was very much appreciated and his expertise and experience was invaluable as the Committee established itself.

The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting which took place on 15 October 2020, which will be published on the NSAC website.

The Committee welcomed the recent announcement of the Diabetic RetinaScreen programme interval change for eligible participants which was recommended by the NSAC and approved by the Minister for Health.

Action: Secretariat to publish the minutes of the 15 October 2020 meeting on the NSAC website.

2. Process for approval and adoption

a) NSAC Application Process

Dr Alan Smith, gave a presentation, followed by discussion on potential application routes of submissions for consideration for new population screening programmes noting:

- applications would be submitted via an 'annual call' process that would be open to the HSE, professional bodies and the public
- the importance of identifying and proactively communicating to interested stakeholders in relation to making submissions to the NSAC via the 'annual call'
- consideration will be given to facilitating applications from other interested parties e.g. industry and considerations relevant to the Ethical Framework
- the importance of a standardised application process (including a standardised application form)
- topics for consideration extend beyond cancer and newborn screening and include antenatal and other adult programmes
- the importance of a clear, objective and transparent selection and prioritisation process
- that it should be made clear to applicants that assessment of topics selected from the 'annual call' for an evidence review evaluation will take time

- that it should be made clear to applicants from the outset that, should an application be ultimately recommended by the NSAC, it will take time, following approval by the Minister for Health, for the implementation of new screening programmes or modification to existing programmes
- the UK NSC Topic Review Cycle also provides an extra means for the NSAC to consider new conditions for screening programmes.

It is envisaged that a separate process would be required for modifications to existing programmes and this will be explored in more detail at a future meeting.

The Committee approved the NSAC Application Process and the Secretariat will publish the process on the NSAC website.

Action: Secretariat to publish the NSAC Application Process on the NSAC website.

Action: Secretariat to consider facilitating applications from other interested parties e.g. industry and considerations relevant to the Ethical Framework.

Action: DCMO to prepare presentation on processes for modifications to existing programmes for future meeting of the Committee.

3. NSAC 2021 Programme of Work

a) Topics for consideration under UK NSC Topic Review Cycle Application Route

Following on from agenda item 2a, Dr Alan Smith gave a presentation with further details on one additional application route whereby the NSAC could consider the evidence reviews conducted under the UK NSC Topic Review Cycle. To illustrate, the Committee was presented with several conditions that had been reviewed in the UK during the course of 2020. Further work is required before any decisions could be reached in relation to this possible application route.

Action: NSAC to review this agenda item at a future meeting in 2021.

b) Update on the HIQA Evidence Review Team

Ms Kate O’Flaherty updated the Committee on the status of the dedicated evidence review team from HIQA which is in place to support the work of the NSAC.

HIQA are currently progressing two evidence review protocols:

(1) Evidence synthesis to inform methods and processes for national screening programme policymaking.

- The aim of this review is to identify evidence relevant to how different countries formulate advice on screening policy.

(2) Evidence synthesis to inform to inform advice on the expansion of the National Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme.

- The aim of this review is to identify evidence relevant to how different countries formulate advice on the expansion of newborn bloodspot metabolic screening programmes.

It is expected that this work will be completed and presented to Committee at the meeting that is scheduled to take place in May 2021.

c) Update on a Draft Ethical Framework [for Population Screening Programmes]

Dr. Sheelagh McGuinness provided the Committee with an update on her work in developing a Draft Ethical Framework for the NSAC. The Committee acknowledged the importance of such a framework, and it was noted that this work would provide the Committee with an opportunity to consider its role in respect of ethics and its impact on population screening programmes.

It was agreed that a working group would develop a discussion paper with the Committee, supported by the Secretariat, to develop a draft Ethical Framework for the NSAC.

Action: Secretariat will follow up with Dr McGuinness to progress.

4. Update - National Screening Services

a) Ms Fiona Murphy, CEO of the National Screening Service - Presentation followed by discussion

Ms Fiona Murphy provided a presentation to the Committee on the National Screening Service (NSS) which included an overview of its history, present situation, current challenges and future plans for the service. This was followed by a Q&A session where the importance of transparency and active communications and stakeholder engagement were discussed.

The Committee welcomed the proposal to receive regular updates on the NSS programmes, and the Secretariat will liaise with NSS in that regard. The Chair noted the importance of the Committee forming a collaborative and ongoing working relationship with the NSS.

Action: Secretariat to liaise with NSS with regard to receiving regular updates in relation to the NSS screening programmes.

5. NSAC Communications

a) Communications Strategy

Kate O’Flaherty gave a presentation on a communications strategy for the Committee. It was acknowledged that a collaborative approach between the NSAC, the Department of Health, NSS and other stakeholders was vital to ensure accurate and clear communication for all stakeholders.

Members were invited to express an interest to partake in a workshop to progress the strategy further.

Action: The Department will follow up with members and organise the communications workshop.

b) NSAC Draft Annual Report

Progress on the draft NSAC Annual Report 2020 was outlined, and the Chair requested that high level comments from members would be welcome ahead of publication, and that members could forward comments to the Secretariat.

The Committee noted the communications opportunity that the publication of the document would bring, and it was agreed to develop this proactive communications opportunity as fully as possible.

Action: Secretariat will follow up with members in seeking observations on the NSAC draft Annual Report 2020 ahead of publication.

Action: Secretariat to develop a communications plan for the publication of the NSAC Annual Report.

6. Administration

a) Correspondence Received

Correspondence received by the Committee in relation to newborn screening and requests in relation to applications for new population-based screening programmes was noted. The Chair will respond directly on behalf of the Committee as necessary.

The Committee positively noted the engagement and interaction with stakeholders. The Chair noted the recent publication of Europe’s Beating Cancer plan and referenced topics related to the work of the Committee including opportunities for future international collaboration.

Action: Chair to respond to the correspondence received.

b) Term of Office of the Committee

The Chair noted that the term of office of the Committee runs for 2 years (ending in July 2021 for the Chair and October 2021 for members). The term of office is renewable for a further 2 years up to a maximum term of 4 years.

Given that the activities of the Committee have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic members were asked to consider if they would like to extend their term of office on the Committee, if they are prepared to do so, or if they wish to finish in October 2021. Members can contact the Chair directly to discuss or contact the Secretariat to advise of their decision.

Action: Secretariat to liaise with members in relation to the term of office of the Committee.

c) Date of next meeting

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

The Chair thanked the members of the Committee for attending and concluded the meeting.

National Screening Advisory Committee (NSAC)

Chair's Action

Following the 18 February 2021 meeting

Notification of Chair's action on behalf of the NSAC

Action Number	Item to be addressed	Initial status	Reason for action	Decision
1	Chair to respond to the correspondence received.	Complete		Yes

I confirm that I have taken the Chair's action in relation to the decisions recorded above.

Signed:



Professor Niall O'Higgins

Date: 20 May 2021