

**EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE PROPOSED  
SECONDMENT OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER  
Commissioned by the Minister for Health,  
Stephen Donnelly TD**

17 October 2022

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Chartered Director

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## Terms of Reference

Determine learnings from the process related to the proposed secondment of the Chief Medical Officer and associated research proposal.

Make recommendations that could inform future such initiatives.

- This review was undertaken throughout based on the Terms of Reference as outlined.
- In order to arrive at the learnings from the process related to the proposed secondment of the Chief Medical Officer and associated research proposal, it was necessary to determine what happened in each process and consequently what learnings could be taken from this.
- The recommendations as outlined are based on these learnings and will hopefully inform future initiatives.
- The Report was sent to the Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly TD on 14 June 2022 in line with the agreed timeline for completion of my Review.
- On 1 July 2022, the Minister for Health asked that I give further consideration to statements made by the Secretary General, Department of Health, in a submission to me in the course of the review relating to the then Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach, and the Chief of Staff, Department of the Taoiseach. The Minister for Health advised that these statements had not been previously made, were new and unknown to him.
- I too had no knowledge of this prior to the receipt of the submission from the Secretary General, Department of Health, in June 2022, nor had these matters been raised with me by any party nor included or referenced in any of the documents provided to me for my review. I agreed to consider the matter further.
- This additional consideration is set out in Section 6 of this report.

*Maura Quinn, CDir*

## Section 1

### Background Context

#### 1.1 Public Health and Research

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the strong link between people's health, the capacity of our health and social care system and the economy. The Department of Health has sought to ensure that the lessons learned over the last two years are retained in their system and applied to the development of the next generation of thinking and practice in public health and the factors that influence it.

The third level sector will play a key role in providing thought leadership, critical analysis, research as well as the development of knowledge and skills to better support public health leadership, policy making and public health practice into the future. Every advance in health or healthcare depends on high-quality research. The well-being of our society depends, to a significant degree, on the quality of our health research system.

International evidence clearly shows that the countries which perform best in the face of major health challenges are those that invest in research, value access to reliable, timely data and base their decisions on robust evidence. As the lead funding agency for health research in Ireland, the Health Research Board, through the Department of Health, currently invests almost €50 million in health research each year to help ensure the Irish health research system is well positioned to inform better health and care.

Governments across the world and international organisations are investing in health capacity building, including pandemic preparedness. For example, the EU's health programme for 2021-2027, has a budget of €5.3 billion available to improve and foster health in the EU. Amongst the priorities is ongoing thinking in the Department of Health in finding new, different and innovative ways to refocus and strengthen Public Health capacity. A clear component of this is to develop leadership capacity in Public Health as we still need to strengthen and prepare in the event of future pandemics. The Minister for Health has established a Public Health Reform Expert Advisory Group under the chairpersonship of Professor Hugh Brady.

The Group will in the first instance:

- Identify key learnings from the public health response to the Covid-19 pandemic in Ireland with a view towards strengthening health protection generally and future pandemic preparedness specifically.

- Identify lessons from international best practice regarding reform and strengthening of public health functions.

The Memorandum to Government establishing the Public Health Reform Expert Steering Group referred to The Programme for Government: Our Shared Future which acknowledges that ‘the public health system responded well and played an essential role in reducing the initial impact of the pandemic but recognises that more work needs to be done in particular - as an immediate first step, we will examine international public health models, learning from best practice and reshape our public health system to ensure an agile and well planned response to future epidemics’.

In this context, the Department of Health has already made a clear investment in policy and research funding and engaged with universities about how it could work collaboratively to address these issues over the next number of years. The objective of this collaboration is to enable the university sector to make a leading contribution to strengthening the knowledge and practice of public health leadership in its application to public health protection, better informing policy making, understanding the role of public communications and behavioural change and research of relevance to these domains.

It is envisaged that this collaboration would include University Departments of Public Health, the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive (HSE) and others as appropriate to support research and its translation into practice, policy analysis and capacity building in respect of health protection, public health communications and behavioural change, public health leadership, public education and information and other aspects of the response to major public health threats including future pandemics.

It is clear from the above that there was an agreed and acknowledged focus in the Department of Health to seek ways in which this agenda could be advanced.

The Chief Medical Officer, Dr Tony Holohan, has been Chief Medical Officer for 14 years. He had begun indicating in August 2021 to both the Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach, and the Secretary General, Department of Health, that he was considering moving on from the role ideally to continue to contribute to public health policy. A possible post to an academic role in one of the universities in Ireland was mentioned by him. This type of move would have served both the Government and the Department of Health’s interest in, and focus on, public health collaboration.

## **1.2 Secondment Precedent**

DPER Circular 27/2021 (Secondment Policy for the Civil Service) refers. This was published in December 2021 and updated in January 2022. This is a living document and will be reviewed

as considered necessary by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER), Public Appointments Service and Staff Unions.

**Extract from DPER Circular 27/2021**

‘This scheme will be used to support the Civil Service Mobility scheme to fill time-bound positions. A key principle is that all secondments will be temporary in nature and in general for a period of six months up to a maximum of five years. In the event that a position becomes permanent in the receiving organisation, it should be filled through the agreed recruitment process including mobility, in accordance with relevant sequencing arrangement. Secondments provide staff members with opportunities to broaden their skills and continue their professional and personal development while retaining the right to return to their substantive post at the end of the secondment’.

I have reviewed all of the current Staff Secondments out of the Department of Health. All have clearly defined End of Secondment Dates, and they range from 1-5 years in duration. They represent a variety of Grades up to Principal Officer.

During the course of this review, reference has been made to the precedent set by the recent secondments of Secretaries General to the university sector as a precedent for this proposed secondment. The Secretary General, Department of Health, cited this in both his Briefing Note (into the proposed secondment of Dr Tony Holohan, Chief Medical Officer dated 11 April 2022 provided to An Taoiseach) and during the course of his appearance on this matter before the Joint Committee on Health on 4 May 2022.

This arrangement follows two Government decisions, one in 2011 and a further decision in November 2021 in respect of Secretaries General who have less than 40 years’ service in the Civil/Public Service.

There are currently two former Secretaries General on secondment to universities. In both these cases, the two secondments of former Secretaries General, are time finite, and linked to their expected retirement dates - one to August 2026 or 4 years in duration, and the other to June 2024 or 2 years duration.

## Section 2

### Process related to the Proposed Secondment of the Chief Medical Officer

#### 2.1 Initial Discussions

During the course of August 2021, the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Tony Holohan had a number of personal confidential conversations with the Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach, Mr Martin Fraser about his future plans. Conversations were also held between the Secretary General, Department of Health, Mr Robert Watt and Dr Holohan during this period.

As the course of the pandemic evolved, these discussions were not continued and paused as Dr Holohan, as Chief Medical Officer dealt with the pandemic and the outbreak of the Delta and then the Omicron variants. The Chief Medical Officer indicated that he had no intention of discussing leaving his role as Chief Medical Officer during this period.

In February 2022, these discussions recommenced as the pandemic abated. These more detailed discussions were conducted primarily between the Secretary General, Department of Health, and the Chief Medical Officer over a number of weeks in February and March 2022.

Following on from these, towards the end of February 2022 during conversations the Chief Medical Officer indicated to the Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach, that he was thinking of stepping down from his current role as Chief Medical Officer and considering a possible role in the university sector that could make a continuing contribution to improving public health capacity in Ireland.

The Chief Medical Officer suggested a secondment from the Civil Service to an academic post in a university, which would enable him to use his knowledge and experience to help strengthen public health leadership in Ireland and to deepen relationships between the university sector, State agencies and international organisations in the field of public health. As is common practice in the university sector, the Chief Medical Officer indicated that he envisaged that some research funding would support this work. The Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach, was supportive of the concept and contacted the Secretary General, Department of Health, who advised the Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach, that he had already been engaging with the Chief Medical Officer on the matter and details were being discussed.

The Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach, subsequently confirmed to the Joint Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and An Taoiseach that he had no



further involvement in the detailed arrangements as they were a matter for the Department of Health.

## **2.2 Discussions with Universities**

In February 2022, the Chief Medical Officer initiated detailed engagements with the third level sector with regard to a proposed role for him which would lead to strengthening the knowledge and practice of public health leadership having discussed and agreed this approach with the Secretary General, Department of Health. The Chief Medical Officer and the Secretary General were both conscious of the need to keep any discussions with the universities confidential because of concerns that inadvertent disclosures would distract from the response to the pandemic. Approaches were made by the Chief Medical Officer on this basis to University College Dublin (UCD) initially through known contacts in UCD and later by email to the Provost in Trinity College Dublin (TCD).

The concern about confidentiality and the fact that these were personal HR matters influenced the extent to which these discussions were limited exclusively to a small number of officials. These included the Secretary General, Department of Health, the Head of Strategic HR, Department of Health and the Chief Medical Officer.

The Chief Medical Officer indicated to those he spoke with in the universities that he was considering moving on from the role of Chief Medical Officer but also his willingness and desire to move on to a new challenge with his preference to remain in public service and, in particular, in the development of proposals to strengthen public health.

Discussions took place with University College Dublin and Trinity College Dublin up to mid-March. The Secretary General and the Chief Medical Officer say and both confirmed to me that it was always envisaged that any possible agreement with TCD would facilitate Dr Holohan pursue a visiting Professorship with UCD to underpin the envisaged collaboration between universities.

Trinity indicated its very strong support for the proposal, its interest in providing a leadership role on the matter but indicated from the outset of discussions it would not be in a position to fund the proposal. This was confirmed to me by the Secretary General, Department of Health, the Chief Medical Officer and the Provost, Trinity College Dublin. Over the course of these engagements/discussions in late February 2022, the proposal for a professorship at Trinity College Dublin for the Chief Medical Officer emerged.

On February 25, the Chief Medical Officer formally sought support for a secondment from the Secretary General, Department of Health, to Trinity College Dublin.

### **2.3 Internal Department of Health Discussions and Letter of Intent to Trinity College Dublin**

In early March 2022 (March 3) the Chief Medical Officer contacted the Head of Strategic HR, Department of Health, by email to formally advise her for the first time on discussions to date and to discuss a number of options including the possibility of a possible secondment to a university for a possible Professorship which was not yet agreed. The Chief Medical Officer shared a Draft Letter of Intent (dated March 1) which he had prepared which might facilitate progressing the discussions with UCD/TCD. This Draft Letter of Intent mentioned an annual ring-fenced allocation for the duration of the secondment but did not mention a figure. It also proposed that this allocation would be administered through the Health Research Board. It further proposed that the salary etc. would be paid to Dr Holohan by the Department of Health until his retirement in June 2032.

The Secretary General had seen this Draft Letter of Intent.

By March 10, the Chief Medical Officer confirmed in an email to the Secretary General, Department of Health, that Trinity College Dublin was happy to engage immediately so that a contract could be signed by the Chief Medical Officer. Discussions were not progressed with UCD.

There followed a number of internal communications between the Secretary General, Chief Medical Officer and Head of Strategic HR by email and discussions which involved amendments to elements of the Draft Letter of Intent.

By March 14, the Draft Letter of Intent included a provision for an annual ring-fenced allocation of €2 million a year for the duration of the secondment. The figure of €2 million evidently arose in discussions between the Secretary General and the Chief Medical Officer. A retirement date of June 2032 was not specified but described as *“to his retirement”*.

This Draft formed the basis for the Letter of Intent of 16 March 2022, which was issued by the Secretary General, Department of Health, to Professor Linda Doyle, Provost, Trinity College Dublin, detailed below.

The Secretary General was aware that the Government had recently endorsed particular secondment arrangements to the university sector for senior civil servants and believed that the precedent for secondment had been set.

### **2.4 Proposed Agreement to Secondment of Dr Tony Holohan: Letter of Intent**

The letter from the Secretary General, Department of Health, to Trinity College Dublin sets out that its purpose is to propose an agreement to the secondment of Dr Tony Holohan to

Trinity College Dublin. The letter recognises that the agreement is conditional on the approval of the appropriate authority within the university.

The letter confirms that *“some other preconditions to the proposed secondment agreement are being addressed by the Department of Health which relate to the superannuation arrangements and alignment with the contractual terms and conditions relating to the position of Chief Medical Officer. I anticipate that these will be finalised within the time frames set out below”*.

The letter continues:

*“Under the proposed agreement, The Department of Health commits to:*

- i. Provide for the secondment of Dr Tony Holohan who will continue to receive a salary at his existing level (i.e. salary, terms and conditions equivalent to the position of Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Health) on the date of signing of the agreement including any improvements, awards or regrading that may apply to the position of Chief Medical Officer over the duration of the secondment.*
- ii. Make an annual ring-fenced allocation of €2 million for the duration of the secondment to be administered through the Health Research Board, a body under the aegis of the Department of Health, to support the development and activities of an inter-institutional collaboration led by Dr Holohan from his position in Trinity College Dublin. The annual allocation will provide Trinity College Dublin with funds to provide Dr Holohan’s salary (as per (i) above) until his retirement, superannuation contributions and relevant expenses such as professional membership, travel subsistence and legitimate professional requirements. This collaboration is to include University Departments of Public Health, the Department of Health and the HSE and others as appropriate to support research and its translation into practice, policy analysis and capacity building in respect of health protection, public health communications and behavioural change, public health leadership, public education and information and other aspects of the response to major public health threats.*
- iii. Appoint an officer of the Department of Health to work on details such that a final agreement is signed prior to March 31, 2022.*
- iv. Approve the attached draft press statement intended to convey the agreement to the terms contained in this letter.*

*In line with the discussions to date, it is proposed that Trinity College Dublin will:*

- i. Appoint Dr Holohan as a full professor with the title Professor of Public Health Strategy and Leadership for a period from July 1, 2022, to his retirement with duties to be specified in a contract of employment with Trinity College Dublin. These duties will*

*include a commitment to academic and research activities related to public health leadership and education commensurate in time and content with the institutional and international collaborations outlined earlier.*

- ii. Provide an office on the campus of Trinity College Dublin for Dr Holohan for the duration of his secondment while recognising that the place of work may vary from time to time to include other locations consistent with the requirements of the position.*
- iii. Provide administrative support to Dr Holohan in his role as Professor of Public Health Leadership.*
- iv. Facilitate and otherwise enable Dr Holohan to undertake work with other universities, agencies and international bodies such as WHO and agencies of the European Union.*
- v. Facilitate Dr Holohan to pursue a visiting Professorship with University College Dublin to underpin the envisaged collaboration between universities.*
- vi. Facilitate and otherwise enable Dr Holohan to undertake work (remunerative and voluntary) outside of the public service, which is not in conflict with his role in Trinity College Dublin.*
- vii. Recognise that academic freedom will apply to this post as would apply to other posts at Professor level.*
- viii. Appoint an officer of Trinity College Dublin to work on details such that a final agreement is signed prior to 31 March 2022.*
- ix. Approve the attached draft press statement, and agreed amendments, intended to convey the agreement to the terms contained in this letter.*

*You will understand the need for both our organisations to maintain strict confidence in relation to this matter, other than in respect of officers who are required to be involved in the finalisation of the proposed agreement.*

*I would be grateful if you would indicate acceptance of the terms of this letter by countersigning below at your earliest convenience.*

*At that point, it is proposed that the agreement will be communicated through our Press and Communications teams by means of the attached draft joint press statement.*

*I look forward to hearing from you.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Signed*

*Robert Watt*

*Secretary General*

Department of Health

**Date of Signature: 16/03/2022**

*I acknowledge receipt of this letter of intent and I agree to its contents on behalf of Trinity College Dublin:*

*Signed*

*Professor Linda Doyle*

*Provost*

*Trinity College, the University of Dublin*

**Date of Signature: 18/03/2022”.**

**The Signed Letter was returned to the Secretary General, Department of Health, on 22 March 2022.**

## **2.5 Correspondence between Department of Health and Chief Medical Officer relating to the Secondment of Dr Tony Holohan**

On 16 March 2022, the Secretary General, Department of Health, wrote to the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Tony Holohan confirming ‘Arrangements relating to Secondment of Dr Tony Holohan’.

This letter states:

*“In this context the Department supports the case for establishing a chair of Public Health Strategy and Leadership in Trinity College Dublin as provided for in the attached letter of intent which I will issue to the Provost”.* This is the letter detailed above.

The letter from the Secretary General to the Chief Medical Officer continues:

*“The letter of intent referred to above sets out the commitment the Department makes to ensure the programme of work to be undertaken in the context of this new role supports the development of public health leadership capacity within our system of higher education to position Ireland to respond more appropriately to major threats to public health including in relation to pandemics such as Covid-19”.*

The final paragraph notes the following:

*“If the terms of the arrangements do not proceed as intended by my letter of intent, then it is understood that you retain the right as a secondee to return to the Department of Health and to be assigned to a role, not necessarily that of Chief Medical Officer, until your retirement with terms and conditions as per the post of Chief Medical Officer.*

*Signed*

*Robert Watt*

*Secretary General*

*Department of Health*

*16/03/2022”.*

## **2.6 Correspondence and Agreement between Dr Tony Holohan and Trinity College Dublin**

The Chief Medical Officer, Dr Tony Holohan, signed an agreement with Trinity College Dublin on 23 March 2022. He did so on the basis it was conditional on the successful completion of Trinity’s internal processes (as referenced in the Letter of Intent of March 16 from the Secretary General, Department of Health).

The agreement sets out the Terms and Conditions for the post of Professor of Public Health Strategy and Leadership 2022, based within the Faculties of Arts/Humanities and Social Sciences, and Health Sciences, subject to the approval of his appointment by the University Council and the Board of Trinity College Dublin.

This agreement confirms that the secondment appointment was offered to the date of his retirement, 30 June 2032. This agreement does not reference any research funding being provided by the Department of Health.

During the course of this review it has been confirmed, at a late stage to me, by the Department of Health that there are no copies of any correspondence or emails in the Department of Health between the Department of Health and Trinity College Dublin pertaining to the discussions of the secondment and associated proposed funding. All discussions were carried out by the Chief Medical Officer with Trinity College Dublin through his personal email address which is external to the Department of Health.

## **2.7 External Communications of the Appointment**

On March 23, the Chief Medical Officer contacted the Head of Communications in the Department of Health, on a Strictly Confidential basis, with a view to setting in motion the announcement of his appointment to becoming Professor of Public Health Strategy and Leadership at Trinity College Dublin and providing her with the agreed joint Press Statement. Following contact with TCD Press Office, the initial plan was to issue this on the morning of 24 March 2022.

Coincidentally, also on March 23, a media query was received at the Department of Health from a journalist about the possible move of Dr Tony Holohan.

There was concern amongst the Secretary General, Chief Medical Officer, and the Communications Office in the Department of Health, that the story would be made public before an announcement could be made. The draft Press Statement had already been agreed between Department of Health and Trinity College Dublin, which was contained in the letter of March 16 and, with very small amendments, this was the Press Release that was ultimately released on Friday, March 25.

This release announced the move to Trinity College by Dr Holohan but did not include any of the detail on the secondment nor research funding. This was also not detailed in the approved Press Statement agreed by the Secretary General and the Provost, Trinity College Dublin.

## **2.8 Communications with the Minister for Health**

The Minister for Health was advised by the Secretary General on 23 March 2022 before the announcement was made but said he was not informed of the details proposed with regard to the proposed secondment and research funding. The Minister had been aware the Chief Medical Officer was considering moving on from his role as Chief Medical Officer. The Secretary General, Department of Health, noted in his Briefing Note to An Taoiseach on 11 April 2022, *“The Minister was told several days before the announcement of Friday 25 March that the CMO was moving on to the third level sector. The Minister was informed of this move and supported the move. The Minister was not informed about the precise details of the secondment arrangement”*.

The only people in the Department of Health who were aware of the contents of the letter of 16 March 2022 were the Secretary General, Chief Medical Officer, and Head of Strategic HR, Department of Health.

Approval of the appointment of Dr Holohan was also confirmed on Friday, 25 March 2022 by the Academic Council of Trinity College Dublin following its usual internal processes.

On Tuesday 29 March, TCD Press Office advised they had received a media query as to the funding of Dr Holohan’s post. The Department of Health, Communications Office supplied TCD Press Office with information regarding the proposed funding of the role via secondment along with further information on the terms and conditions of the role, to be shared with media. Trinity College Dublin issued a Press Statement to that effect. The Department of Health’s Press Office confirmed the TCD statement when approached by journalists. Much media attention ensued on the matter.

On April 5, an initial Briefing Note was prepared by the Secretary General, Department of Health, and the Head of Strategic HR for An Taoiseach on the Secondment of Tony Holohan to Trinity College Dublin following media coverage on the story.

On April 5, following a request for further information from the Special Advisor to the Minister for Health in advance of a Morning Ireland interview by the Minister for Health, a further advisory note was prepared by the Department of Health with the input of Head of Strategic HR and the Secretary General.

The advisory note was prepared following consultation between the Head of Strategic HR and the Secretary General and focussed on the secondment element only. The Secretary General confirmed within the advisory note that he had signed off on the secondment.

Further detail on the proposed secondment was requested by and supplied to An Taoiseach by the Department of Health on April 6.

The Chief Medical Officer was due to make a scheduled appearance before the Joint Committee on Health on April 7 to provide an Update on Covid-19.

Prior to this, an Opening Statement was prepared in the Department of Health for the Chief Medical Officer with separate details on his secondment to Trinity College Dublin. No details on research funding were provided in this.

On the evening of 5<sup>th</sup> April, the Chief Medical Officer and the Minister of Health had a telephone conversation on an unrelated matter, but the Chief Medical Officer has recently indicated that the discussion included the proposed secondment to Trinity College Dublin.

On April 6, the Secretary General, Department of Health, provided by email, copies of the Letter of Intent of March 16 to Trinity College Dublin and the letter of March 16 confirming the 'Arrangements relating to Secondment of Dr Tony Holohan', to the Minister for Health and his Special Advisors. This is the first time the Minister knew of the €2 million research funding proposal.

## **2.9 Key Points in the Process**

- There appears to have been some awareness in 2021 that the Chief Medical Officer was planning to move on from his role.
- As a consequence of the pandemic, these plans were put on hold by the Chief Medical Officer, until February 2022.
- The Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach, had a number of private conversations with the Chief Medical Officer about such a move.
- There was acute sensitivity by the Chief Medical Officer and the Secretary General, Department of Health, that details of a possible move by the Chief Medical Officer, would not be leaked.



- The discussions on this matter were between the Secretary General, Department of Health, and the Chief Medical Officer, and all actions by the Chief Medical Officer were agreed with the Secretary General, Department of Health.
- The Chief Medical Officer approached University College Dublin and Trinity College Dublin.
- The Head of Strategic HR was involved in the discussions about the secondment element of such a move.
- We do not know why discussions did not proceed with UCD whereas Trinity College Dublin expressed keen interest in pursuing the matter of a possible secondment to the College and Professorship for Dr Holohan.
- The quantum of €2 million per annum in research funding to support the proposed move and detailed in the Letter of Intent was agreed by the Secretary General, Department of Health, and Chief Medical Officer, following discussions with Trinity College Dublin and committed to in the Letter of Intent of 16 March 2022.
- It was proposed that this funding would be administered through the Health Research Board.
- It was agreed that the secondment to Trinity College Dublin would be in place until the retirement of Dr Holohan.
- The Minister for Health confirmed he was not aware of the details of the proposed secondment and associated research funding until 6 April 2022.

## **Section 3**

### **Learnings from the Proposed Secondment Process**

#### **3.1 Secondment**

The Chief Medical Officer is at Deputy Secretary General level. It is not clear if the government decisions of 2011 and 2021 apply also to Deputy Secretaries General or solely to Secretaries General. This required clarification and might have been referred to DPER for such clarification before any action was commenced.

There is also clarity required on a Mobility Policy between the Civil Service and Public Service which might have been helpful in this instance. This should also be clarified with DPER.

#### **3.2 Stakeholder Engagement and Communications**

The proposed secondment as outlined was unusual and for this very reason, in my view, required a longer lead time to ensure that all the various elements had been considered, discussed and prepared for and to ensure that there was proper stakeholder consultation and communication throughout the process.

It is accepted that the Department of Health has come through an extremely difficult two years. It is clear that all staff have been under enormous pressure coupled with a demanding workload. Rather than trying to progress this proposed secondment in an extremely tight timeline, it required detailed consideration, review and discussion.

#### **3.3 Agreements and Timing**

The Letter of Intent was countersigned by the Provost of Trinity College on March 18, followed by an Agreement between Dr Holohan and Trinity College Dublin on March 23.

There was no subsequent Letter of Agreement provided to or signed by both parties after the March 16 letter.

Dr Holohan signed an Agreement with Trinity College Dublin on March 23 based, it would appear, on the agreement agreed by the Department of Health and Trinity College Dublin contained in the March 16 letter, subject to the successful completion of Trinity's internal processes.

The Draft Press Release was also approved in the March 16 letter and proved ultimately to be a very similar version of the Press Statement issued on March 25.

It is unclear why so much proceeded so quickly when additional time could have been taken to work on the detail. The window between February 25 (when the Chief Medical Officer, formally sought support for a secondment) and the Letter of Intent of March 16 provided ample time, in my view, for consultation and communication with the various stakeholders.

### **3.4 Quantum of Research Funding and Competitive Funding**

The letter of March 16 to Trinity College Dublin does not mention competitive funding at all. The Secretary General, Department of Health, subsequently included this in his Briefing Note to An Taoiseach on the matter on 11 April 2022.

The Secretary General wrote *“It was not explicitly stated but it was envisaged that this would involve competitive funding organised appropriately”* and again reiterated this when he appeared before the Joint Committee on Health on this matter on 4 May 2022.

The Letter of Intent is clear as it says that the Department of Health *“commits to”* €2 million a year for the duration of the secondment.

Equally, there is no mention in the Letter of Intent of it being subject to Government approval and/or the Estimates process.

The decision as to how the quantum of €2 million per year was arrived at is not based on any proposal nor costings. Both the Secretary General and Chief Medical Officer, confirmed to me it was considered to provide ‘a serious statement of intent for TCD as to the Department’s intent on the matter’.

### **3.5 Communications with Government and Senior Civil Servants**

It appears that the Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach, was aware of the main elements of the proposed secondment but not of the detail. It appears that the Minister for Health knew of the proposed move to Trinity College by the Chief Medical Officer, but not of the secondment details nor the research funding element. It appears that An Taoiseach had no knowledge of the proposed secondment and associated funding elements nor did other Members of Government. It also appears that DPER had no knowledge of the matter.

The Secretary General, Department of Health, notes in his Briefing Note to An Taoiseach of 11 April 2022, *“The Secretary to the Government was aware of the proposed secondment move (but not of course the precise details). I assumed that key decision-makers were aware of the proposal but of course not the precise details”*.

### 3.6 Conclusions

- The proposed secondment of the Chief Medical Officer was for a period up to his retirement and in his contract with Trinity College Dublin up to 2032.
- Guidance was not sought from DPER as to whether the Chief Medical Officer, a Deputy Secretary General, could be seconded to the university sector as per the Government decisions of 2011 and 2021, in respect of Secretaries General.
- DPER might have been consulted about the proposed secondment and research proposal which involved multi-year funding commitments and asked to consider whether it was permissible.
- There was a lack of formal consultation with An Taoiseach, Minister for Health, Government and DPER throughout this process.
- The quantum of €2 million in research funding committed to Trinity College Dublin, in the letter of March 16, is not based on any scope nor costings, but arrived at by the Secretary General and the Chief Medical Officer as an indication of serious intent by the Department of Health. There was no consultation with the Health Research Board.
- There is no mention of a competitive funding element in the Letter of Intent signed by the Department of Health and Trinity College Dublin which was indicated subsequently.
- The Letter of Intent does not include any conditions for approval by the Minister for Health, Government or DPER/Estimates process.

## Section 4

### Process related to the Associated Research Proposal

#### 4.1 Health Research Board

The Health Research Board (HRB) is an agency of the Department of Health and the lead agency in Ireland responsible for funding and commissioning research in the areas of clinical and translational medicine, population health sciences and health services research. Similar to other public sector agencies, the HRB submits requests for additional funding to deliver its strategic goals each June as part of the estimates process and HRB funding is provided by the Department of Health via an annual letter of allocation, received typically in Q1 of the subsequent year.

In 2022, the total recurrent allocation is €35.85 million and the total capital allocation is €10 million.

It is not unusual for some funding to be highlighted in the annual letter of allocation to advance themed or targeted initiatives in addition to a core allocation. Such targeted, time-limited initiatives are typically identified in prior discussions between the Department and HRB and aligned with the need for evidence to support policy priorities of the Minister for Health (or broader Programme for Government priorities).

Importantly, all funding received is disbursed by the HRB following rigorous international peer review of applications, based on strict criteria and principles laid down by the Board and in accordance with best international practices in research assessment and research management and governance.

As a funding agency of international repute and standing, the HRB has rigorous and transparent policies and processes in place in relation to both application for, and assessment of, research awards. All applications for HRB funding are subject to international peer review, and the outcome of any application process is never predetermined. Funding is never provided in a manner where it is directed at a pre-named individual. The HRB and resultant processes determines the when, the how and the successful co-applicant team and the lead hosting site for any award (typically, but not exclusively universities).

Transparency is a cornerstone of all HRB processes. Detailed guidance notes are provided for applicants for each funding scheme that set out the scope, objectives, eligibility and assessment criteria, the expected contribution of partners and co-applicants. Detailed guidance is provided on budget available (and requirements for co-funding where appropriate), award duration, governance requirements and requirements in respect of

knowledge transfer and dissemination, public patient involvement, open access to outputs/data and other matters as appropriate. These factors are assessed in a robust and systematic way throughout the review process.

There is a widespread view that public health research in Ireland is relatively underfunded and that the concept of a dedicated research programme to advance capability in public health strategy and leadership is desirable. This is both attractive and achievable if the funding is available, it has government support and, if considered appropriate, rigorous funding processes are in place.

#### **4.2 Process for Research Proposal**

The proposed research funding was not discussed with the HRB at any point by the Chief Medical Officer, or the Secretary General, Department of Health. There is no detail available as to how the quantum of €2 million was determined, in terms of research scope nor costings. The quantum of €2 million per annum in research funding to support the proposed move and detailed in the Letter of Intent was agreed by the Secretary General, Department of Health, and Chief Medical Officer, following discussions with Trinity College Dublin and committed to in the Letter of Intent of 16 March 2022.

In email communication on 8 April 2022, following receipt of a copy of the Letter of Intent on 6 April, the Minister for Health confirmed to the Secretary General, Department of Health, that *“the funding approach as laid out in the letter is problematic”*.

## **Section 5**

### **Learnings from the Associated Research Proposal Process**

#### **5.1 Proposed Research Funding**

It is clear, in my view, that the Health Research Board (HRB) should have been closely involved with and consulted by the Department of Health on any proposed research project that was being considered at the outset. It is clear that research funding decisions by the HRB are based on well known, recognised and accepted competitive funding processes. This provides quality assurance about the decision making of such research funding awards, and transparency and accountability for those seeking funding around the process.

Funding is never provided in a manner which is directed at a pre-named individual.

The possibility of administering the ring fenced allocation of €2 million through the HRB was raised for the first time in a revised version of the Letter of Intent drafted by the Chief Medical Officer, on March 14. This had not been previously discussed nor agreed with the HRB who knew nothing of this.

This amendment was then included in the Letter of Intent sent to the Provost of Trinity College Dublin on March 16.

It is wholly appropriate that there is and should be an independent, transparent and accountable process in place for the provision of research funding.

#### **5.2 Governance of the Proposed Research Funding**

The proposed funding of €2 million a year committed to by the Secretary General, Department of Health, in the Letter of Intent to Trinity College Dublin (to include University Departments of Public Health and others) until the retirement of the Chief Medical Officer, was a very significant commitment which by-passed all of the accepted protocols for research funding and was linked atypically to one named individual.

The Secretary General, Department of Health, in his Briefing Note to An Taoiseach of 11 April, confirmed this research would be by competitive funding.

This is not explicitly stated in the Letter of Intent from the Secretary General to Trinity College Dublin.

The proposed funding mechanism and absence of any detail on the governance of same, do not, in my opinion, meet accepted norms of scrutiny, transparency and accountability.

### **5.3 Avoidance of Potential Conflict of Interest**

I am of the view that the Chief Medical Officer should not have been exclusively personally involved in the negotiation of potential University Partners nor should any possible research funding have been linked to his possible secondment to a university.

There should have been a complete decoupling of a proposed secondment for the Chief Medical Officer, to a university and any research funding discussions.

These are separate matters and should not have been combined.

### **5.4 Conclusions**

- The proposed secondment of the Chief Medical Officer, to Trinity College Dublin and the associated research funding commitments should not have been linked together.
- The Chief Medical Officer should not have been exclusively personally involved in the negotiation of research funding linked to his possible secondment.
- The absence of any consultation with the HRB, from the outset, on the proposed research funding element is a deficit as is the lack of detail on the governance over the proposed funding to Trinity College Dublin.
- The substantial proposed funding commitment of €2 million a year until the retirement of the Chief Medical Officer, by-passed all of the accepted protocols for research funding and was linked atypically to one named individual.
- The 'commitment' to Trinity College Dublin by the Department of Health of €2 million per year for research funding (to include University Departments of Public Health and others) and the subsequent declaration that this would be subject subsequently to competitive funding is unusual and outside the regular HRB processes.



## Section 6

### Additional Consideration Requested by the Minister for Health

A number of submissions on the Draft External Review Report were received in June 2022 from the following:

- Minister for Health.
- Secretary General, Department of Health.
- Chief Medical Officer.
- Head of Strategic HR, Department of Health.

Contained in the submission received from the Secretary General, Department of Health, were the following statements:

*“The Secretary to the Government knew that the CMO was proposing to move to a university on a seconded basis and as part of an enhanced research programme. This was included in a written email from the CMO on February 24 to the Secretary of Government which states that there would be a secondment arrangement and there would be a research budget of €1m”.*

The Secretary General went on to say that the Secretary to the Government confirmed that *“he told the Taoiseach’s Chief of Staff, Ms Deirdre Gillane”* and that *“the facts indicate that the Secretary to the Government knew all the critical details regarding the proposed secondment and the proposal to increase research funding. And that the Chief of Staff was informed”.*

The Secretary General went on to say, *“based on the facts it is not accurate to suggest that Government or key players were not told. Principal Advisers to the Head of Government were told. I was subsequently instructed to finalise the arrangements to give effect to this. All the findings and conclusions regarding people/Government not being informed should be removed from your Report. They are assertions based on factual inaccuracies and incorrect interpretations and they have no basis”.*

I had not been provided with a copy of the email of 24 February 2022 to which the Secretary General, Department of Health refers at any point during the course of my review, nor had it been mentioned or referred to by either the Secretary General, Department of Health, or the Chief Medical Officer or indeed anyone else during the course of my meetings with them.

The Chief Medical Officer had forwarded a copy of his email of 24 February 2022 to the Secretary to the Government to the Secretary General, Department of Health, on 25 February 2022.

This was new information and had not also been advised to the Minister for Health nor referred to in the Committee hearings.

As a consequence, the Minister for Health asked me on July 1 to consider this matter further, by seeking a copy of the email and interviewing the Secretary to the Government and the Taoiseach's Chief of Staff in relation to the comments made by the Secretary General, Department of Health.

The Chief Medical Officer retired from the Department of Health on July 1, 2022.

### **Responses from Mr Martin Fraser, Former Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach, and Ms Deirdre Gillane, Chief of Staff, Department of the Taoiseach (July 2022)**

**Mr Martin Fraser, Former Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach, provided the following responses on Thursday, 21 July 2022:**

**MQ: Can you indicate what level of knowledge and detail you had on the proposed secondment and associated research funding?**

*"I addressed these issues in detail in my letter to Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and in my evidence at the public hearing of the Committee on April 27<sup>th</sup>.*

*I was aware of the main elements of the proposal that was being put forward by the CMO at the end of February, i.e. it was being proposed that Dr Holohan would be seconded to a university in Dublin (UCD or TCD) on the same terms and conditions as his present post as a full-time member of the academic staff until retirement age and that research funding (€1m) would be made available.*

*I was supportive of the proposal. I was aware that there was a precedent for secondments from the Civil Service to a Higher Education Institution.*

*However, I was not aware of the details of the processes for allocation of health research funding, or of the potential sources of such funding.*

*I had no involvement in the internal Department of Health discussions, correspondence, discussions with TCD, decisions, approvals or implementation measures relating to either the secondment or the allocation of research funding. I also had no sight of any of the relevant official documentation.*

*I was therefore not aware of all the details regarding the secondment and research funding as they were dealt with the Department of Health".*

**MQ: Can you indicate the timeline of the above?**

*"I had a number of private conversations with the CMO about his personal situation over the course of the pandemic. While I would always be willing to give advice or support to any colleague, this was of course an exceptional situation given the enormous impact of the pandemic on the entire country as well as the whole of Government, Dr Holohan's essential role in the national response and not least the fact that he had recently suffered a personal bereavement.*

*In terms of the specific secondment proposal, I had a phone conversation with the CMO on the afternoon of Thursday February 24<sup>th</sup> in which he outlined his thinking. While I don't have access to phone logs for that period, my recollection is that I called the Secretary General of the Department of Health directly after that call on February 24<sup>th</sup> to discuss the proposal (the reason for my recollection is that both calls took place while I was in London).*

*The Secretary General indicated that he would deal with the matter, which is of course the appropriate course of action as it was a matter for the Department of Health.*

*Later on February 24<sup>th</sup>, the CMO sent me an email which set out the proposal as he had outlined it to me in our phone conversation. It also included some confidential personal information. He told me that this was a personal and confidential email and I therefore treated it as such. I did not share it with anyone or take any other action. However, I did set out the substance of the contents of the email in my letter and evidence to the Joint Oireachtas Committee.*

*It was an outline proposal at that stage – for example, the possibility of exploring options with either UCD or TCD remained open, while the details of the secondment and the source of research funding remained to be determined.*

*On Friday February 25<sup>th</sup>, the CMO informed me that he had spoken to the Secretary General of the Department of Health, that the CMO would work up a paper the following week along the lines of what we had discussed and as set out in his email, and that the Secretary General of the Department of Health would then discuss the matter with the Secretary General of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. I responded to say I would leave the matter with the Department of Health. Again, this is perfectly normal and appropriate".*

**MQ: The Secretary General references an email from the Chief Medical Officer to you on February 24. Can you provide me with a copy of this?**

*"This is presumably the email that I refer to above. I have no objection to providing a copy of this email but given that I received it on the basis that it was personal and confidential, I believe it would be appropriate to seek Dr Holohan's consent".*

**MQ: Did you ‘instruct’ the Secretary General to implement the details and to finalise the arrangements to do this? If so, is there a written record of this which I can have to assist me in my Review?**

*“No. Indeed, I had no authority to give an instruction to the Secretary General of another Government Department in respect of human resource and financial issues which are clearly his/her responsibility.*

*I did express my personal support for the proposal, but it was a matter for the Department of Health to decide on whether and how to implement the proposal, in accordance with the rules and procedures that govern such matters – in this case regarding secondment and research funding – and to ensure that the Minister was informed, as appropriate”.*

**MQ: Did you inform the Taoiseach’s Chief of Staff, Ms Deirdre Gillane about the proposed arrangements? If so, did you do so in writing? If so, can I have a copy please?**

*“No. I did not discuss the matter with anyone except the Chief Medical Officer and the Secretary General of the Department of Health, until there were media reports about the matter towards the end of March. I respected the confidentiality of the process and I was aware it was being dealt with by the Department of Health, as was appropriate.*

*In a brief conversation towards the end of March, Ms Gillane informed me that the media had raised a query about a secondment proposal involving the CMO. Given that the matter seemed likely to become public, I informed her that I was aware that such a proposal was under consideration in the Department of Health. As far as I can recall, this brief conversation took place on the evening of March 23<sup>rd</sup>. The Minister for Health announced the CMO’s secondment to TCD on March 25th.*

*I note what the Secretary General has stated about what he inferred from our conversation in February and that is of course a matter for him. But I did not tell him that this proposal was agreed by the Taoiseach, because I had not discussed it with the Taoiseach (or Ms Gillane). Nor did I express it to be the clear wishes of the Head of the Government.*

*I also note that The Secretary General states that he understood he was implementing the wishes of the Government. While this may be a technical point, for the avoidance of doubt, the matter was not considered by the Government”.*

**MQ: Do you wish to add anything further which might assist me in the finalisation of my Review?**

*“No”.*

**Copy of Email from the Chief Medical Officer to the Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach (24 February 2022):**

“Martin

*As promised, I am writing to set out the proposal we discussed earlier today.*

*I have been CMO in Ireland since December 2008 and during that time have had the opportunity to lead on many and varied aspects of health and public health policy. I have developed skills in public health leadership and gained insights into the operation of political and administrative decision making including in moments of crisis. I have learned to use those skills and insights to inform and influence decisions for the protection of the health of the population.*

*I now wish to apply these lessons and capacities in developing the next generation of thinking and practice in public health and the factors that influence it. I intend to do this by supporting the development of public health leadership capacity within our system of higher education to position Ireland to respond appropriately to major threats to public health including in relation to pandemics such as COVID-19.*

*My objective will be to enable the university sector to make a leading contribution to strengthening the knowledge and practice of public health leadership in its application to public health protection, better informing policy making, understanding the role of public communications and behaviour change and research of relevance to these domains. I will seek to use the opportunity of any such tenure to deepen relationships and collaborations including among the universities and relevant agencies, with the WHO and with HERA and the various agencies of the EU.*

*I therefore seek support to be seconded on terms and conditions attached to my current post (including any benefits as may accrue to that post during the term of my secondment) as a full-time member of the academic staff at full Professor level in a Dublin University with a role relevant to the needs of public health and the health system as outlined above. I am contracted in my current role with the Department of Health until retirement at age 65 which will be in June 2032. Any such arrangement as may be agreed would commence on a date such as 1 June and run until retirement.*

*Additionally, I propose that a specific funding allocation of €1m is made available to enable a collaboration between universities in relation to public health leadership and preparedness and response as one key area which requires strengthening at research, practice and policy levels. I would propose to facilitate this collaboration and capacity building from my Professorial position.*

*I have also been examining my superannuation status with a view to regularise my service from my time as a junior doctor and to understand how professional added years will be*

*reckoned for me upon retirement, including if I choose to seek early retirement. This of course will fall to be progressed through the Department of Health.*

*Thank you for the support and advice you have given me in advancing this proposal. I am available to discuss further at any stage.*

*Regards*

*Tony”.*

**Ms Deirdre Gillane, Chief of Staff, Department of the Taoiseach, provided the following response on Tuesday, 26 July 2022:**

*“I acknowledge receipt of your email on July 18<sup>th</sup> in relation to the External Review of the Proposed Secondment of the CMO. I apologise for the slight delay in replying as I have been away on official government business with the Taoiseach in Japan and Singapore.*

*I wish to provide you with any assistance that I can in your important work.*

*As you know, I am not a key party in the external review of the proposed secondment of the CMO. I have not been provided with any of the documentary material circulated or generated, in the course of the review. I am also unaware of anything that may have been said to you by the key parties you have interviewed.*

*I have not been provided with any draft report and I am concerned at the reference to a ‘final’ draft report at a point where information is requested from me for the first time.*

*In your email you have included an extract of comments made by the Secretary General of the Department of Health after you had circulated a Final Draft of your Report to key parties. These comments appear to be part of a broader submission to you on behalf of the Secretary General, presumably in respect of provisional findings you have made as part of your review.*

*I want to be absolutely clear. The assertions made by the Secretary General of the Department of Health as outlined in your email are, in terms, grossly inaccurate and unwarranted. The comments suggest, without any justification, that particular conclusions should be drawn about my knowledge of the proposed secondment of the CMO.*

*While he does not explicitly acknowledge it, the Secretary General to the Department of Health never spoke directly to me about any aspect of the proposed secondment in the relevant time period, and it is impossible to understand how he can make the broad assertions that he does. I also fail to understand why these assertions are made by him for the first time after it appears he has seen a draft report.*

*The first time that I heard any suggestion that the CMO was moving from his current position was when I received a media query towards the end of March. I was asked whether reports about the CMO moving to Trinity College Dublin were true. I had heard no such reports and knew nothing about the matter, and I responded to the query in those terms. I had no further*

*discussion in relation to the matter nor was any further information revealed to me. Clearly, whatever was then proposed was known in some media circles but was unknown to me.*

*The Secretary General refers in his comments to a conversation he had with the Secretary to the Government 'subsequent to my briefing note at a Dáil Committee'. I was not a party to any such conversation, and I see from your email that you are also in the process of requesting information from the Secretary to the Government. However, I can provide you with a vital piece of context in this regard.*

*After the media query referred to above, I mentioned the matter to the Secretary General to the Government in a brief conversation. He said that he could confirm, privately, that the CMO was stepping down from his current position and was looking at a public health role in the university sector more than likely in Trinity College. There were no further details given to me at that time.*

*The Secretary General did not outline or elaborate on any of the details of the proposed secondment to me at any stage. In so far as the Secretary General of the Department of Health had a conversation with the Secretary to the Government, there could never have been any confirmation that I had discussed matters which were unknown to me.*

*On 25<sup>th</sup> March 2022 while the Taoiseach was in the EU Council Chamber in Brussels the CMO rang me to make the Taoiseach aware that he was stepping down from his role and that TCD had just confirmed that he would be taking up a public health role with the university.*

*The CMO said he wanted the Taoiseach to be aware before the media broke it in Ireland, and that a statement would issue later that day. In fact, this press statement is on the Department of Health web site on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2022, and you will observe that it does not mention a 'secondment'.*

*I was not informed of any of the details of the proposed secondment of the CMO to TCD until the Minister for Health met with the Taoiseach on April 7<sup>th</sup>. The Minister for Health had the letter of intent with him at this meeting where it was discussed. This letter (as published) outlined the specific details of the HRB funding proposal. This was the first time I had become aware of any of this detail.*

*I also wish to address the fatuous reference by the Secretary General of the Department of Health to An Taoiseach being my 'principal'. I am the Chief of Staff at the Department of the Taoiseach. For the avoidance of any doubt and contrary to what is clearly insinuated, I did not, and could never have, informed the Taoiseach of matters of which I was unaware.*

*I hope this clarifies the matter.*

*As you can appreciate I am deeply concerned about the circulation or publication of any report containing the comments of the Secretary General of the Department of Health, in so far as they concern me, where such comments are wholly without foundation.*

*Please do not hesitate to contact me further if you so wish".*

## **Section 7**

### **Recommendations for the Future**

#### **Proposed Secondments**

1. It is clear that there is greater clarity required from DPER/Government with regard to the scope of the 2011 and 2021 Government decisions and whether these apply to others below the grade of Secretaries General, such as Deputy Secretaries General.
2. There is clarity required on the duration of such secondments for all grades.
3. There is clarity required on the Mobility Policy between the Civil and Public Service, with clearly defined mechanisms and processes for same. It would be helpful to review best practice in other countries to inform this.
4. Existing Secondment Policies/Circulars should be reviewed.
5. In all cases, these secondments should include appropriate and clearly defined processes for approval and sign off.
6. It is recommended that future secondments for grades above Principal Officer or equivalent should be scrutinised by DPER or subsequently by the Comptroller and Auditor General to ensure all processes and procedures have been properly followed.

#### **Avoidance of Potential Conflict of Interest**

7. No one individual should be personally and exclusively involved in any negotiation with third parties which involves the disbursement of state funds in which they have a potential personal interest.
8. The proposed secondment of an individual should not be dependent upon or conditional on associated research funding being proposed as part of the terms of secondment. Research funding should not be provided on the basis that it is to be directed to a pre-named individual.

#### **Research Funding**

9. There are clearly defined processes and protocols in place for the distribution of Research Funding which involve the Department of Health and the Health Research Board. These are in place to ensure that equity, transparency and accountability exist throughout the process and to provide assurance to all the stakeholders engaged in the process. It is clear that there is a requirement for greater clarity on and adherence to the process protocols in terms of how such funding proposals are managed by the Department of Health and the Health Research Board.



## **Consultation, Decision Making and Communication**

10. It is clear that a small number of people were involved in planning and decision making. The short timeline involved meant that decisions were being made in a reactive rather than a reflective manner or following appropriate consultation and consideration. Decision making of this magnitude should have involved a range of stakeholders to provide inputs and enhance the process. It is therefore appropriate and desirable that proper stakeholder consultation and communication should inform such decision making in future.
11. It is recommended that in the future where departmental business matters are being conducted that Civil Servants do not use personal email but rather confine themselves to their official email. This will ensure that in the future there will be clear, transparent and complete records of all correspondence and also meet GDPR and audit requirements.
12. The proposed secondment and associated research funding proposals should, in my view, have been fully discussed at an earlier stage by the Secretary General, Department of Health, with the Minister for Health. Equally, it ought to have been formally discussed with the Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach, and views sought. DPER might also have been consulted about the proposed secondment and associated research funding. This should all have taken place prior to any approaches having been made to Third Parties and should not have included the Chief Medical Officer. It is important, in my view, that timely, appropriate consultation and communication with relevant Ministers, DPER and the Government, where appropriate, should inform such decisions in the future.
13. Wider consultation and stakeholder involvement might have identified other possible options and could have identified potential risks and mitigants. Wider stakeholder consultation might have identified the problematic elements of the proposed secondment and associated research funding at an early stage.
14. The manner in which the external communication was handled in terms of the Press Release that was issued on March 25 requires reflection. The Press Release, issued under pressure, contained incomplete information and detail. The process of how press statements are formulated, prepared, reviewed and signed off within the Department of Health requires further consideration. The management of the external communication should have been carefully considered and planned at an earlier stage.

In conclusion, I would like to thank and acknowledge everyone who agreed to meet and review this matter with me and for the provision of the background detail. I hope that the

Learnings and Recommendations will provide assistance on how such initiatives might be enhanced in the future.

## **APPENDIX 1: List of Meetings/Conversations held as part of External Review**

1. Minister for Health
2. Mr Robert Watt, Secretary General, Department of Health
3. Dr Tony Holohan, Chief Medical Officer
4. Ms Gráinne Duffy, Head of Strategic HR, Department of Health
5. Ms Susan Mitchell, Special Advisor to the Minister for Health
6. Mr John Kinnane and Ms Niamh Callaghan, DPER
7. Professor Linda Doyle, Provost and Mr Tom Molloy, Director of Public Affairs and Communications, Trinity College Dublin
8. Dr Mairéad O’Driscoll, CEO, Health Research Board

### **Additional Telephone Conversations and Formal Responses Sought (July 2022):**

9. Mr Martin Fraser, Former Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach
10. Ms Deirdre Gillane, Chief of Staff, Department of the Taoiseach.