Screening Matters

October, 2026

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Staff Profile - Frances Redmond Information Officer for the NI Breast Screening Programme



I work as an Information Officer for the Northern Ireland Breast Screening Programme, supporting the programme through the collection, analysis and interpretation of data.

My role involves producing and validating information that supports the monitoring of the breast screening programme, including activity, uptake, round length, screening outcomes and performance against national standards. I work with a range of data sources and systems, ensuring that information is as accurate and meaningful as possible.

Although my role is data-focused, it is very much a collaborative one. I work closely with my own team in PHA and with a wide range of health professionals and colleagues across the four breast screening units in Northern Ireland. This includes working with people who understand the day-to-day delivery of screening and can provide the context behind the figures. By sharing knowledge, asking questions and working together, we can build a more complete picture of how the programme is performing.

A key part of my role is translating complex data into clear and meaningful information that can be used by colleagues, managers and clinical teams. This includes developing reports, analysing trends and variation, supporting quality assurance and audit work, and presenting information in a way that helps identify areas of good performance as well as potential issues requiring further investigation.

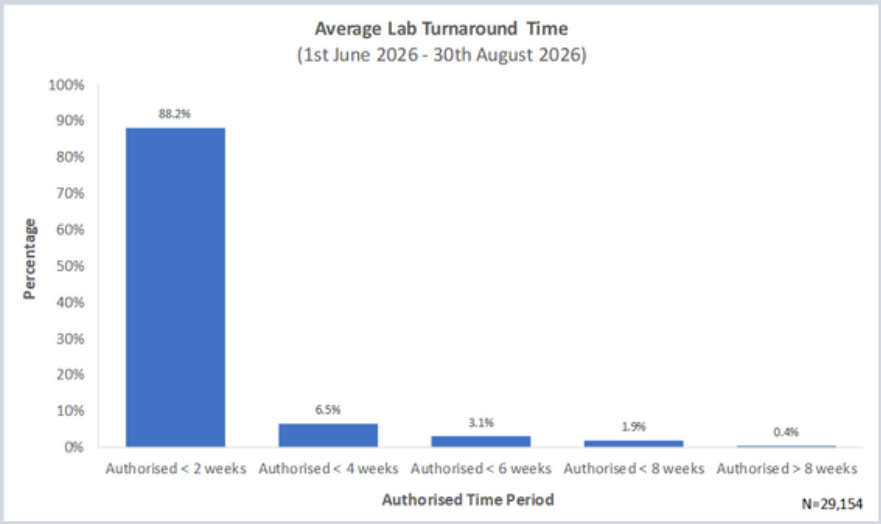
One of the current challenges for the programme is the significant change expected in the information systems used to support breast screening. There is a need to understand how essential reporting and performance measures will be maintained. I am particularly interested in working with colleagues to help ensure that important information continues to be available during and after this transition.

Ultimately, the Northern Ireland Breast Screening Programme relies on people working together. My role is to provide reliable information, but it is through collaboration between PHA Breast Screening Team, screening units and health professionals that the data can be understood, used effectively and contribute to the continued delivery and improvement of the programme.

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Cervical Screening Programme Current turnaround times

The majority of Cervical Screening results are issued and available to primary care within 2-4 weeks from the date the sample is taken.

Some samples may take longer to report, particularly those requiring cytology testing. The table below shows an overview of turnaround times for the period Jun-Aug 2026.

Age Extension within the Bowel Cancer Screening Programme announced

The Bowel Cancer Screening Programme in Northern Ireland is expanding to include individuals aged 50-74. This programme development aligns with UK National Screening Committee recommendations and will bring Northern Ireland in line with bowel cancer screening policy elsewhere in the UK.

Implementation will commence on 2nd November 2026, when people aged 59-74 years who live in Northern Ireland and are registered with a GP will be invited to participate in bowel cancer screening. The programme will be extended to include 58-year olds from April 2027.

The age extension will be implemented on a phased basis over 5 years. By March 2031, all eligible individuals aged 50-74 will be routinely invited to participate in bowel cancer screening. Further details of the implementation are as follows:

	Financial Year	Age
Year 0	2026/27	59*
Year 1	2027/28	58
Year 2	2028/29	56-57
Year 3	2029/30	53-55
Year 4	2030/31	50-52

*Note, while phasing commences in November, the logic within the Bowel Screening Information Management System is tied to birth year. This means that the majority of people who turn age 59 during the 2026 calendar year will be invited (i.e. a full year of the eligible cohort).

Any patient queries in relation to age extension should be signposted to the NI Direct webpage on bowel cancer screening for further information (www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/bowel-cancer-screening), or the Freephone helpline number (0800 015 2514).

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Promoting Screening at Belfast Mela

Screening staff, Lorna Hawe and Helen McCann, had the opportunity to attend the recent Mela event in Belfast Botanic Gardens on 30th August 2026. The event was highly successful and provided an excellent platform to engage with a diverse range of communities and ethnic groups.

We had many meaningful conversations with members of the new entrant population, some of whom were unfamiliar with the screening programmes available in Northern Ireland. The relaxed and informal setting encouraged attendees to ask questions openly and discuss any concerns they had about screening. This created a valuable opportunity to raise awareness of the screening programmes and reinforce the importance of informed participation, particularly among individuals who may previously have declined or not engaged with screening services.

An additional highlight of the event was the opportunity to meet the Health Minister Robbie Butler who showed a keen interest in learning about the various screening programmes and the important role they play in improving public health outcomes.

Promoting Cervical Screening at West Belfast Womens Health Event



Gwen Thompson, a Nurse Colposcopist working within the Cervical Screening Programme in BHSCT recently attended a women's health event in West Belfast. Here's what she had to say:

"I had the opportunity to attend an event/drop-in morning to raise awareness about screening services available to women in BHSCT at St Comgalls. The event took place on the on Tuesday 3rd March in the morning (9am-12pm) to coincide with International Women's Day.

The local community groups, put posters up in GP surgeries, pharmacies and had put social media posts up inviting women to attend.

West Belfast historically has a lower uptake rate of women attending for their screening appointments. I got the chance to engage with women from the local community explaining to them about the importance of attending for cervical screening. It was an opportunity to explain changes in the screening system and why you would be referred to colposcopy. It was valuable and important to talk to the women openly and honestly helping to reassure them and talk through any fears and concerns that they had about screening.

Other services there such as Breast screening, HRT and Sexual Health also attended.
I hope that by reaching out to the local community I raised awareness about screening and encourage women to attend."

- **Every conversation counts:** brief discussions during consultations can help address concerns and encourage women to attend screening appointments
- **Trusted advice matters:** GP Practices remain a key source of information and reassurance for patients considering attending for screening appointments
- **Understanding reduces anxiety:** Clear explanations about cervical screening, HPV testing and colposcopy can help alleviate fears and misconceptions

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Are you using the right qFIT kit?

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Please read the following to ensure you are using the correct qFIT (quantitative Faecal Immunochemical Test) test kit. There are important clinical implications of using the appropriate test.

Bowel Cancer Screening qFIT (white cap)



✓ Offered to patients aged 60-74
Bowel screening tests are posted directly out to participants and returned to lab via freepost

✗ Do not use the **screening test** for patients with bowel **symptoms** or submit with a **clinical request form**

ℹ If a patient contacts the GP practice to request a replacement **screening test** please ask them to contact the **free screening helpline on 0800 0152514** where they can request a replacement test and/or envelope

ℹ **If a patient provides a completed bowel screening kit to the practice** they should be advised that the practice cannot accept the sample. **Such patients should be signposted to the screening helpline on 0800 0152514**

Symptomatic kit (blue cap)



✓ This test should be used for patients with **symptoms** and submitted with a clinical request form

✗ Do not return completed symptomatic kits to the lab in a screening return envelope

If there is any confusion as to whether a test was intended to be submitted/processed as a screening or symptomatic test, the test will not be processed, which may lead to delays for ongoing assessment.

Produced by the Public Health Agency, 12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS www.publichealth.hscni.net

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Updated Cervical Screening Invitation Letter

Please note that the cervical screening invitation letter has been updated with additional advice for patients who are currently attending colposcopy.

Patients are now advised:

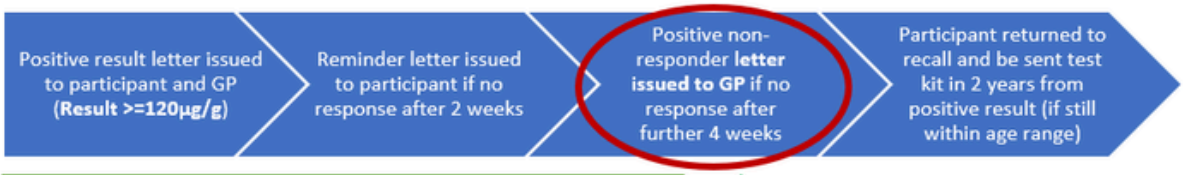
If you are currently waiting for an appointment at a colposcopy clinic, or are still under review by a colposcopy clinic, you should not attend your GP for a smear test. Any follow up smear tests will be taken at your colposcopy appointments until you are discharged from their care.

GP Practices should be aware of this change in order to address any queries if patients contact them following receipt of a screening invitation.

The updated wording aims to provide clearer information for patients and avoid unnecessary screening appointments for those already being managed within colposcopy.

BOWEL SCREENING PROGRAMME POSITIVE NON-RESPONDERS

N.I. Bowel Cancer Screening invites participants every two years, via post, to complete a home FIT test kit. Positive non-responders are participants who have **received a positive FIT screening result** (>=120 µg/g) **but have not contacted the freephone helpline** to arrange further assessment. A positive result identifies a participant as having an increased risk of having bowel cancer due to the detection of blood in the sample and warrants further investigation. Screening can detect cancer early, before symptoms, and can also detect polyps that can develop into cancer over time. Removing polyps can reduce the chance of developing bowel cancer in the future.



- **Early investigation is vital to ensure the disease is detected at the most treatable stage**
- **Your encouragement can help ensure participants in the bowel screening programme understand the importance of completing the diagnostic pathway and can help improve outcomes**
- **Participants can contact the freephone helpline at anytime to arrange an appointment with the Specialist Screening Practitioner (SSP)**
- **Approximately 7 participants in N.I. identified weekly as a positive non-responder**

Your input here could improve patient outcomes!

A **brief text message, telephone call, or opportunistic discussion** by GP or practice team may encourage participation and prevent delayed diagnosis.

Change of address



The PHA Screening Team have moved offices. We can now be found at:

Public Health Agency
3rd Floor
12-22 Linenhall Street
Belfast
BT2 8BS