

25 February 2026

Third Party Providers – Cellular Pathology Samples

Information relating to the use of third-party / private sector / independent sector providers for the technical and professional activity with regards cellular pathology samples (histopathology and/or cytopathology) which are not managed by your laboratory services. Specifically, I am requesting the following information for the most recent financial year 2024-25, or if more appropriate, the last 12 months:

1. A list of clinics/theatres/other services; that have been undertaken in the specified timeframe where cellular pathology samples taken are not sent to or reported by the local Trust laboratory. Please indicate the medical specialty and include the cost for each clinic and provider. (Activity should be grouped by clinic)

| Clinic/ theatre/other | Third party provider (of clinic) | Third party provider of pathology services | Medical Sub- speciality of clinic | Pathology Number of samples & cost (total volume and spend for provider over stated timeframe) | TOTAL contract spend of clinic (medical and pathology activity) |
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Trust response:

Belfast Trust do not have systems which could be easily interrogated to establish cellular pathology testing in the Independent Sector. Belfast Trust would not know which laboratory the sample was sent to without approaching each Individual Sector Provider and establishing who they sub-contract with. If this information was held it would take more than 18 hours to collect and compile.

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This is exempt under the Section 12 of the FOI Act which relates to fee limit.

We estimate that compliance with this element of the request for information would exceed the appropriate costs limit. Under Section 12 of the Freedom of Information 2000, the limit has been specified as £450 and represents the estimated cost of one or more persons spending 18 hours in determining whether we hold the information, locating, retrieving and extracting this information.

2. For each third-party pathology provider please state how the pathology report is managed and recorded within Northern Ireland Medical Records (e.g. encompasses, etc).

Trust response:

The Belfast Trust does not currently receive individual pathology reports from Independent Sector Providers. However, where the result is referenced in the documentation required for return to the Trust this will be uploaded onto Encompass, (the regional Electronic Patient Record) as part of the suite of documents returned to the Trust.

3. For each third-party pathology provider please state if the contract includes any of the following; IT interfaces directly to NI HSC systems, Pathology / Pathologist support for Multi-disciplinary team meetings, additional clinical advance post reporting.

Trust response:

IT interfaces directly to Northern Ireland Health and Social Care systems:
This is not referenced in the Contract.

Pathology/Pathologist support for Multi-disciplinary team meetings/additional clinical advance post reporting:

Please see below clauses included in the Contract Specification to address unexpected findings and the actions required of Independent Sector Providers re same.

Xx Unexpected Findings

Xxx Where the outcome of any biopsy finding at time of procedure is normal findings (Annex 1A refers) the report on results should be sent to the patient's GP within two weeks of the procedure.

Xxx If an unexpected serious medical condition is suspected at the time of procedure (Annex 1 B refers), the IS Provider will;

- Discuss the findings with the patient and the need for further investigation within the Secondary Care setting.

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- Send an urgent sample to the Pathology Service, requesting an urgent report ensuring a report of the results is sent by the Pathology Service to secondary care and a copy of the report is received back by the IS Provider.
 - Complete an initial report document detailing the findings and subsequent discussions with the patient. Send this to the referring Trust [insert speciality] Consultant and the GP either electronically or via safe haven fax within one working day of the procedure taking place. Request that they refer the patient to the relevant speciality team
 - Send a copy of the initial report, including any photographic images to the referring Trust [insert speciality] Consultant and copy to the IS Office in a format to be agreed with the Trust.
 - Ensure that the Nominated Consultant who carried out the procedure is available to discuss the case either in person or by telephone at the relevant MDT meeting, if required.
 - Ensure that the patient is fully informed of the outcome of the surgery and the Consultant suspicions and that contact numbers are shared if there are any queries.
 - Advise the Trusts referring [insert speciality] Consultant (copy to the IS Office) of the referral.
 - If the pathology report reveals serious pathology, (Annex 1 B refers) the IS Provider will:
 - Complete a procedure final report document detailing the findings and subsequent pathology report. Send this to the referring IS team and GP either electronically or via safe haven fax within one working day of receipt of the pathology result. In addition a verbal contact must be made with the IS team to ensure they are aware of electronic communication so that they can ensure the patient is referred back to the relevant Consultant so they can be added to MDT meeting.
 - A Consultant to Consultant discussion regarding the findings is essential within 24 hours for onward management of the patient.
 - Ensure that the Consultant who carried out the procedure is available to discuss the case either in person or by telephone at the relevant MDT meeting, if required.
 - The IS Provider must work closely with the referring Trust and ensure appropriate systems and processes are in place for onward referrals or urgent transfers.
- Xxx The use of histo/cytopathology will be in keeping with Royal College guidelines. Where histo/cytopathology is required the IS Provider must contract through a service level agreement with a histopathology service accredited by UKAS. The following time standard from sample requested to histopathology reporting is expected:
- Xxx The report should be returned to the Trust within 7 days of the procedure.
- Xxx Samples should be returned to the Trust within ten working days of the procedure in line with the relevant transport legislative/regulatory requirements.