National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

Digital, Information and Technology progress report

This report provides an update on key issues and developments in the Digital, Information and Technology (DIT) directorate in the period March - April 2021

Summary of activity

In line with the agreed digital and IT delivery roadmap and Connect plans, key project activity in the period included:

* Completed the transition of IT services from our long-standing managed service provider into the in-house DIT team. This followed a phased process over multiple months including the preparation of hand-over documentation, skills assessment, training and recruitment, and a series of structured hand-over sessions.
* Launch of the organisational commenting feature on the Comment collection tool. This allows organisations who comment on NICE consultations that are published using this tool, to have multiple people add comments and for these to be collated reviewed and combined into a single response by the organisation. This removes the need for organisations to download and manually gather comments offline before submitting them to NICE meaning they can do this within the tool.
* Initiation of the 'beta' phase for a new tool to manage guidance development timelines information across the organisation.
* Completed an objective in the NICE Connect business plan to undertake a discovery to inform a new 'life sciences' resource on our website. This work is now being taken forward as part of a roadmap looking at our website navigation and design needs for the future, in line with the NICE strategy.
* Launched a new NICE website homepage to coincide with the launch of our new NICE strategy.
* Continued with work to establish master data management for contacts data.
* Received confirmation from the Department of Health and Social Care that they will equip the external meeting suite in our Redman Place office in line with the requirements we specified to support hybrid committee meetings in future.

Notable issues and developments

Ongoing response to COVID-19

Teams continue to support NICE's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Notable activities in March and April included:

* Agreeing the adoption of an online collaboration platform designed for distributed teams working remotely. The tool has been highly effective for conducting workshops and presentations in the current virtual workplace;
* Preparing for new cyber security training to be launched in 2021. This was initially planned for January but was delayed due to capacity and prioritisation of team activity.

Governance and assurance activities

In addition to key delivery activity, the following governance and assurance items have also progressed:

* Submission of a strategic case for change paper to the board in April and the ongoing work to reframe the business case for "building an efficient digital workplace at NICE" to be presented to the board in May.
* Preparation of a board paper providing an update on our cyber security activity and plans following the transition of this responsibility to the in-house team away from the managed service provider.
* Completed multiple large scale procurements regarding hosting, Microsoft licences and AV/VC equipment. Launched a large procurement for an implementation partner for our Digital Workplace programme.
* Participated in an audit to assure the roll out of web conferencing tools to NICE in 2020. This audit has resulted in a 'substantial' assurance rating with two low priority recommendations.
* Contributing to the completion of the mandatory Data Security and Protection Toolkit submission that is required from NICE by June 2021.

Recruitment into the integrated DIT teams

Following the creation of the DIT directorate, a number of priority vacancies have been launched for recruitment. Since September, we have appointed to 17 roles with 11 further vacancies being actively recruited to. In the last two months, we successfully appointed two senior service delivery managers, a permanent head of software engineering, an infrastructure engineer and an IT helpdesk technician. We also initiated recruitment for several new roles for our Digital Workplace programme.

Key risks

The principal risks that we are monitoring and working to mitigate in DIT relate to the following:

Existing pressure on capacity from DIT to support business as usual digital work alongside the transformation agenda.

* 1. We worked with the Connect Steering Group and the Executive Team to re-prioritise activities in Q4 2020/21.
  2. We are continuing with staff recruitment. Whilst this is progressing well, it places additional pressure on the existing team who support recruitment and on-boarding.
  3. Looking into 2021/22 and beyond, and to support the emerging strategy, we have identified opportunities for external expert input as part of the on-going transformation budget to support our capacity and expertise.

The second risk we are monitoring in DIT relates to capacity and capability in our IT infrastructure and operations team. The team is making progress on a number of fronts, but demand remains high and recruitment is progressing slowly in some areas. We are considering new approaches to support recruitment to specialist roles and may supplement the team with temporary specialist contractor resource.

NICE web services - usage statistics

Overall, sessions were up significantly across all services combined in April 2021 compared with April last year, with an increase of 37%. In particular, CKS, the BNF and BNFc continue to show very strong performance with estimated sessions up by 69%, 62% and 46% respectively. The NICE website was slightly down against the figure for April 2020, with a drop of 2% however this may reflect the higher relative usage of the NICE website in the early days of the pandemic.

Evidence Search appears to have recovered after an extended period of poor performance. Estimated sessions for April 2021 are up 1% against the total for April 2020.

Pathways has also performed well this period. After slightly low year-on-year performance in January and February this service has returned to positive growth with April 2021 showing 25% increase over the total estimated sessions for April 2020.

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