National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

Digital, Information and Technology progress report

1. This report provides an update on key issues and developments in the Digital, Information and Technology (DIT) directorate in the period November - December 2020.

Summary of activity

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

* Concluded a due diligence of the business case prepared in September 2020 for enabling an efficient digital workplace through the use of SharePoint Online and the Microsoft 365 (M365) suite of products. This resulted in agreeing an alternative approach to progressing the work during the rest of 2020/21;
* Following the National Guideline Alliance decision to approve the use of EPPI Reviewer, both collaborating centres will now use the service to undertake future systematic reviews;
* NORMA (NICE ONS recommendations matching algorithm) was handed over from the ONS and is now hosted by NICE. It can now be used to support guidelines surveillance and updating;
* Comment Collection tool: development work continued to enable multiple people from the same organisation to submit comments;
* Completed 8 week 'alpha' exploring the use of a new tool for managing guidance development timelines information. The 'beta' phase will involve piloting the tool in multiple teams;
* Completed the delivery of the NICE Connect goal to bring the stakeholder registration processes into one place. The information gathered from the statistics around this new page will inform longer term work on stakeholder registration and a hub.
* Shared architectural diagrams and other artefacts to support the creation of an agreed digital and technology strategic roadmap for NICE;
* Continued with preparation for the move of the NICE London Office to a new location shared with other Arm's Length Bodies (ALB's). This included relocation of the NICE London datacentre to an external site, supporting the implementation of a testing plan for the shared LAN and WIFI infrastructure, mitigating contractual risks identified in the shared network solution, further work to specify AV/VC meeting room requirements, and continued engagement with DHSC to seek to resolve issues identified with the Main Equipment Room (MER) facilities.

Notable issues and developments

Ongoing response to COVID-19

Teams continue to support NICE's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Notable activities in November and December include

* COVID marking for website content navigation: the ability for users to filter by COVID-19 as an 'area of interest' was added. This gives NICE users the ability to see all types of information NICE has produced that is classed as COVID-19 together. We also delivered the ability to mark Medtech Innovation Briefings as COVID to enable the development and publication of briefings on COVID-19 tests.
* Continued the roll-out of laptops - the original batch of machines has been largely allocated but additional equipment has been purchased for roll-out in 2021;
* Trialled the use 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;
* Completed piloting of the Zoiper softphone application which will be rolled out in January 2021;
* Preparation of a new cyber security training to be launched in January 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 11 of our 22 vacancies. In the last two months, we successfully appointed content engineering specialists and user researchers. We also added to our IT helpdesk and portfolio management capacity. We are struggling to recruit to our data management and architecture posts and will seek external contractor support in this area for the rest of 2020/21.

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 is further exacerbated by the current COVID-19 context with some staff illness and the impact of school closure.

* 1. We are mitigating this risk by working with the Connect Steering Group and the Executive Team to re-prioritise activities in Q4 2020/21. This will allow key work to continue to move at pace, which staff want to see, whilst managing morale and pressure levels.
  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 requested some additional delivery management capacity as part of the 2021/22 business plan. We have also identified budget for external expert input as part of the on-going transformation budget.

The second risk we are monitoring in DIT relates to capacity and capability in our IT infrastructure and operations team. The team is under pressure to manage challenges in the delivery of the shared IT solutions for Redman Place, to prepare for the transition from our long-term managed service provider whilst continuing to support the organisation to operate remotely and preparing NICE offices for the days following the peak of the pandemic. Again, immediate mitigation is to prioritise between the important and the urgent. We are considering training and development plans for the existing team. We are also increasing team capacity with on-going recruitment to the help desk, the infrastructure team and to a new IT project management role.

NICE web services - usage statistics

Summary: a new cookie banner and policy was published on core NICE services in October in order to be compliant with privacy legislation. This has an impact on the data we can collect and analyse going forwards and means that some metrics, including the session totals referenced below, will be estimated from the subset of users who consent to cookie storage.

Overall, sessions were up by 18% across all services compared to December last year. CKS and the BNF/BNFc in particular showed strong performance against last year, with increases of 29%, 28% and 20% respectively compared with December 2019. This is an even stronger performance than in September and October 2020.

Pathways and HDAS by contrast show continued low traffic compared to last year's figures. HDAS is not being actively developed due to the services scheduled decommissioning. Evidence search traffic dropped further in November and December, after a sustained period of good performance through most of 2020. Traffic is now down 46% against the figure for December 2019. In the past, such a drop in the Evidence Search performance was explained by a change in Google's indexing policy in favour of primary sources of information.

Figures 1-2: December 2020 sessions for all NICE web-based services

Note: A session is a period of activity by a user on a website. Session totals from Oct 2020 onwards are estimated from a sample and are rounded to the nearest 1,000 to reflect this reduced accuracy.

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| Total sessions in December 2020 across NICE web-based services | 5,832,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | 18% |
| % change from previous month (seasonal) | -12% |
| Total sessions for the full year ending in December 2020 across NICE web-based services | 67,996,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | 8% |

Figures 3-6: Performance of web services providing access to NICE guidance and advice

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| Total sessions on NICE.org in December 2020 | 1,623,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | 17% |
| % change from previous month (seasonal) | -16% |
| Sessions on NICE.org in year ending December 2020 | 20,450,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | 4% |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Total sessions on Pathways in December 2020 | 187,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | 5% |
| % change from previous month (seasonal) | -20% |
| Sessions on Pathways in year ending December 2020 | 2,410,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | -12% |

Figures 7-12: Performance of services that provide access to other forms of evidence

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| Total sessions on Evidence Search in December 2020 | 222,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | -46% |
| % change from previous month (seasonal) | -28% |
| Sessions on Evidence Search in year ending December 2020 | 4,350,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | 4% |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Total sessions on CKS in December 2020 | 1,029,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | 29% |
| % change from previous month (seasonal) | -8% |
| Sessions on CKS in year ending December 2020 | 11,343,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | 11% |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Total sessions on HDAS in December 2020 | 20,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | -13% |
| % change from previous month (seasonal) | -23% |
| Sessions on HDAS in year ending December 2020 | 285,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | -13% |

Figures 13-16: Performance of services providing access to the BNF content

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| Total sessions on BNF site in December 2020 | 2,494,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | 28% |
| % change from previous month (seasonal) | -9% |
| Sessions on BNF site in year ending December 2020 | 26,338,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | 12% |

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| --- | --- |
| Total sessions on BNFc site in December 2020 | 257,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | 20% |
| % change from previous month (seasonal) | -12% |
| Sessions on BNFc site in year ending December 2020 | 2,820,000 |
| % year-on-year variance | 31% |

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