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 January - February 2021.

Summary of activity

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

* Progressing reframing of the business case for enabling an efficient digital workplace at NICE, in line with due diligence recommendations received in December;
* Completing the review of structured guidance authoring tools alongside business colleagues;
* Completing changes on the UK PharmaScan service to bring it in line with post EU Exit information requirements. The changes relate predominantly to fields within the regulatory information section of the technology record to reflect changes in regulatory process (new fields; re-labelling and re-positioning existing fields).
* Preparing to launch the 'beta' phase for a new tool to manage guidance development timelines information across the organisation;
* Completing design changes on the Clinical Knowledge Summary service based on user research - for example the A-Z function and specialities list were brought onto one page giving users more options without the need to scroll; Text size and line length were altered in line with best practice to improve the readability of the content; The topic landing page was altered, giving users quick access to some of the most used sections across topics.
* Holding discovery workshop to establish initial needs for a life sciences resources on the website. This was a goal from the NICE Connect business plan.
* Initiating work to establish master data management for contacts data.
* Initiating work to design a new homepage for our website.
* Initiating multiple large scale procurements regarding hosting, Microsoft licences and AV/VC equipment.
* Completing the infrastructure and move of the NICE London Office to a new location shared with other Arm's Length Bodies (ALB's). This included further work to specify AV/VC meeting room requirements and provision of onsite support when the office opened.

Notable issues and developments

Ongoing response to COVID-19

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

* Continuing the roll-out of laptops - the original batch of machines has been allocated and a new batch of equipment has been configured, ready for on-going distribution;
* Concluding the pilot for 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;
* 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.

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 12 roles with 10 further vacancies being actively recruited to. In the last two months, we successfully appointed a head of digital product design and a lead M365 specialist. We also recruited a programme manager for our digital workplace programme on a fixed term contract and have sourced external contractor support for our data management capability.

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

* 1. We worked 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 requested additional delivery management posts 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

Overall, sessions were up by 17% across all services in February 2021 compared with February last year. The BNF showed a substantial increase in February (+41%) which appears to be due in part to a more significant spike in traffic from examinations (here the Prescribing Safety Assessment) at the start of this month than was seen last year. The BNFc, CKS and the NICE website also continue to perform well with a continued upward trend.

Evidence Search has underperformed for the last several months (-33% compared to last February), with one potential reason being the degraded performance in Google search rankings since the release of accessibility improvements to the site. Discussions on how to improve this performance are ongoing.

Pathways also slightly underperformed this month compared with last year's figures (-6% compared to last February). This is consistent with a slow downward trend over the last year.

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