

# Northern Ireland Office

## Covid 19

### Situation Report **36**

New information in **RED**

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**All emails relating to Covid-19 should be copied to this address.**

**17:30 on 30 April 2020**

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# KEY ISSUES

Issue	Owner
<p><b>Social Distancing:</b> Sequencing of review points looking like: Ireland before 05 May; UKG w/c 04 May; Northern Ireland by 09 May. Focus on data being provided to the centre increases in the run up. Understanding is that the data used for the review point will be DA specific and then amalgamated at the centre. SoS is engaging fully with FM / DFM. COBR is due on Thursday (07/05) and FM/DFM would want to attend. Initial indications are that NI will not dramatically reduce restrictions, although there is concern over the increasing traffic on the roads.</p> <p><b>ROI:</b> Decision on easements/lifting some restrictions not expected before Friday and likely to be very minimal adjustments. Media coverage suggested concern about gap in ROI regs regarding enforcement of their measures where an individual had travelled from Northern Ireland - the Irish government has confirmed this is not an issue.</p>	Preparedness / International
<p><b>Health data</b> NI data in relation to hospitalisations and critical care beds now represented in the No 10 press briefing. Issue earlier in the week in relation to death reporting in the NI sitrep also resolved. There is also an issue on number for PPE, with MoD and DHSC having different numbers for the amount sent to DAs. CO are urgently chasing this. Robin Swann announced today that the DoH Dashboard is expected to be back online tomorrow.</p>	Health
<p><b>SoS Quad with FM, dFM, Tanaiste today:</b> They discussed the latest developments on a North/South and East-West basis on the efforts to combat Covid-19 and emphasised the importance of continuing the good engagement that has taken place to date between respective Health Ministers.</p>	International
<p><b>UKG border measures:</b> Paper considered last night by FSS on border measures, including health screening / possible 14 day quarantine. SoSNI attended the discussion to land NI points. Key for NIO today to be ready to brief partners, incl. NICS, on announcement and any (non)impact on NI/CTA.</p>	International
<p><b>Transport:</b> Announcement on airports will be Friday. Executive has agreed to fund 50% of short term support package for airports (through DoF) to secure Treasury agreement. Support will be for 3 months. Hauliers discussions are ongoing with evidence needed to submit case to HMT.</p>	Economy
<p><b>Track and Trace:</b> Public Health Agency began contact tracing pilot programme on Monday, focusing on cases in a number of care homes. On Track and Trace App, strong support for NI participation from FM. NIO coordinating engagement between DHSC/NHSX, NI Friday/Monday and Ireland on Tuesday to explore technical approaches and link to contact tracing strategies.</p>	Healthcare / International
<p><b>Reopening of Schools:</b> PM announcement anticipated after a deep dive on Friday.</p>	Preparedness
<p><b>UK-EU Ireland Northern Ireland Special Committee today:</b> The first of these meetings today will open up a new agenda around Transition which may set the political tone for the coming weeks in Northern Ireland. This could cause tension in the Executive. International team to monitor.</p>	EU Team
<p><b>Health Screening announcement:</b> Still waiting for feedback on outcome of the Borders Deep Dive, but understand no announcement this week. Important for Health/International/Comms Teams to keep in touch.</p>	International / Healthcare

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# Overview

## GB, NI & Ireland Updates

### Daily Covid-19 figures

#### Case Numbers

England **115,859** (114,456) - as of **29** April  
Wales **9,812** (9,629) - as of **30** April  
Scotland **11,353** (11,034) - as of **30** April  
Northern Ireland **3,536** (3,463) - as of **30** April  
**TOTAL UK 171,253** (165,221) - as of **30** April

Republic of Ireland cases: **20,253** (19,877) as of **29** April

#### Deaths

NI hospital **347** (338)  
NI care home (96) - as of 17 April  
**TOTAL UK 26,711** (26,097) - as of **30** April

### Government Announcements:

- Major home testing programme for coronavirus will track levels of infection in the community - 100,000 people will be sent self-testing kits to determine if they are currently infected.
- Around 900 more British travellers in New Zealand are set to return home on three additional UK Government-chartered flights.
- A Government charter flight to bring home around 100 Britons stranded in Guyana has been announced - with booking open today.
- More than 20,000 British travellers, on 83 Government charter flights, will return to the UK from across South Asia by 7 May.
- Daily death reporting now includes all positive COVID-19 deaths.

**UKG:** Air announcement on **Friday**. Coronavirus testing extended to all essential workers in England who have symptoms. NI system should link into UK system and this will be publicised towards the end of the week. The centre's focus is on testing, track & trace, supply chain vulnerabilities (e.g. PPE, essential medicines) and care homes. UK/EU special committee on NI meeting **today** which may raise political tension in NI. **FSS lead discussion on border measures yesterday - no announcement expected this week**. CDL meeting with DAs next week ahead of social distancing review point, COBR on 7/5 to review social distancing measures ahead of the bank holiday weekend. Possibility of a PM chaired deep dive on divergence within the four nations. **Quad meeting today - statement to be issued after meeting.**

**Update from NICS:** There has been some public debate on the relaxing of social distancing measures with Minister Poots stating publicly that bringing back "a little bit more normality" was needed. This appears to contradict previous messaging from his colleagues in the executive including the Health Minister. PPE was a key focus of today's Stormont Health Committee where it was highlighted that sixty million items of PPE have been distributed in NI since March. It was also noted that the 250,000 gowns previously diverted to GB have not yet been replaced. The Justice committee was also in session today, at which the Justice Minister highlighted her department was ensuring that services are maintained and that planning for the period following the crisis has commenced. It was also noted that over 90% of police officers are available for work.

**NI Economy:** DfE has today announced that eligibility for the COVID Small Business Grant (£10,000) will be further expanded to include businesses in rented property. This follows an earlier expansion of the scheme to small manufacturing firms. Meanwhile, the Finance Minister has urged landlords to show leniency to business tenants during the pandemic.

**Ireland:** There has been yet further expectation management by the Government that there is unlikely to be much, if any, easing of current social distancing measures which run until 5 May. The Government has said that a comprehensive testing and tracing process will need to be in place before any significant lifting of restrictions take place. The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) will review the data and evidence and advise the Government on Friday with the expectation of a phased approach from May to September that will see a gradual lifting of restrictions. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said he hopes to be able to set out the different steps to reopen the country and ease restrictions in due course with a growing expectation that he will make a TV address to the nation on Friday.



# Policy Challenges

**International** - HO are clear on the need to give the Irish Government notice of any announcement we make. A trilateral between senior officials in UKG, NICS and the Irish Government will take place on Friday ahead of the review of measures next week. A Quad meeting, involving SoSNI, the Tánaiste, the FM & dFM, and the respective Health Ministers, took place today where the latest developments on a North/South and East/West basis on the efforts to combat Covid-19 were expected to be discussed.

**Preparedness** - GPS MIG today discussed the early years sector and the reopening of schools. On the reopening of schools it is vital that UKG engages with the DAs. There is due to be a PM led deep dive on the issue tomorrow. We are expecting tomorrow's GPS MIG to cover a package of measures for the higher education sector. Diane Dodds is concerned the measures do not go far enough for NI and the NI universities could suffer financially. More widely, the team is coordinating engagement on the track and trace app, as DHSC and NHSX seek to understand how it could work on the island of Ireland.

**Health:** - The NI CMO stated that NI is past the peak with R number below 1 with the number of patients in ICU falling, however, NI is not through the first wave of this pandemic. NI sitrep reported that Minister Swann said that the Executive would be developing its own plan in response to how the pandemic develops specifically in NI, highlighting that NI was 7-10 days behind the London curve as an example of why it had to be different. UK-DA Forum met on 27 April to discuss testing, track and trace and NHS capacity. Preparations for Health MIG on Friday will consider shielding and track and trace. The NI Trusts and Ambulance Service have now come on board as members of NHS Charities Together and are in the process of receiving their first grants from the appeal.

**Comms-** A statement was issued by the Cabinet Office following the meeting of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Committee today and NIO comms facilitated a background briefing with BBC NI's John Campbell. The testing portal for NI is now live, with good engagement on the NIO tweet on the issue today and paid-for marketing in partnership with PHA NI due to start in the next few days to drive traffic.

**Economy:** Two major business groups have written to the governments in Dublin and Belfast to urge co-ordination in the recovery from COVID-19. The CBI and its Irish equivalent, Ibec, have said an economic reboot will need "the highest level of co-operation, co-ordination and joined-up thinking". They highlighted the nature of integrated supply chains across the border and the Irish Sea. Universities in Northern Ireland face multi-million-pound losses due to COVID-19. Queen's University (QUB) could lose up to £80m in a worst-case scenario while Ulster University (UU) could lose up to £64m over a three-year period. Following the Treasury announcement that VAT payments could be deferred for the next quarter to support businesses through COVID-19, a number of businesses had raised an issue, including at the Secretary of State's business roundtable, that the automated VAT system within HMRC was offsetting and therefore nullifying this announcement. After NIO officials spoke with both HMT and HMRC this issue has now been rectified and HMRC have confirmed repayments will not be offset against any deferred VAT, but they will be offset against existing debts.

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# NIO

Resource	Critical Business
<p><b>NIO Figures for 30 April</b></p> <p>Working in the office / travelling 7(7)  Working at home 177(178)  Self Isolating - symptoms - still working 0(0)  Family Isolating - no symptoms - still working 1(1)  Self Isolating - confirmed - still working 0(0)  Sick - Covid 0(0)  Sick- other 3(3)  Special Leave 0(1)  Other leave / NWD 6(5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revised new starter arrangements are now in place</li> <li>Vetting process is being restricted to business critical staff; staff are able to have existing clearance extended 1 year. Essential cases are being progressed - please engage early with security colleagues</li> <li>Email to staff has requested colleagues speak to their line manager or DD if they think they have symptoms (or if a householder has symptoms) and need to be tested</li> <li>Testing is now offered to all Civil Servants</li> </ul>	<p><b>Human Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HR has received CSHR guidance on Covid-19</li> <li>Business Impact Assessment completed and prioritisation underway.</li> <li>Process to move staff into priority areas is continuing,</li> <li>All DDs have completed an assessment of critical business, along with those tasks where office requirement remains</li> <li>Keyworker guidance issued in NI, and process underway</li> <li>Homeworking DSE assessment link sent out by Estates w/c 13/4</li> <li>Home working L&amp;D Hub has been launched</li> </ul> <p><b>IT/Networks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Network capacity will continue to be monitored with IT Assist to ensure business continuity; network capacity has increased fivefold to 5Gbps</li> <li>IT kit continues to be rolled out to households, high demand on suppliers, next tranche released on 20/4</li> <li>Guidance has been prepared for use of Zoom VTC /Hangouts; advice remains to use Hangouts as default</li> </ul> <p><b>Emergency Response Team</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ERT full will continue to meet weekly alongside two BDG-specific sub meetings</li> </ul> <p><b>Estates</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HG is closing one entrance; guidance on building access now on intranet</li> <li>Guidance on other departments using SH is now on NIO Intranet</li> <li>Home-working e-learning has been released as of w/c 20/4</li> <li>Staff have been asked for requests for chairs as on 23/4</li> </ul>

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# Forward Look

## Sequencing for social distancing review

Our current understanding is that there will be a series of key meetings although there is little expectation of a significant change in approach at this point. This is all TBC as it is currently with Cabinet Office seniors before going to No.10 and this may need to happen over a more compressed timescale if No.10 want an earlier COBR:

- Thursday - Cabinet to meet
- Friday - official level 'warm up' call with DAs (potentially to be chaired by Helen Williams, DD UKGG)
- Monday - senior official level call with substantive discussion (potentially to be chaired by Lucy Smith, DG UKGG);

The PM Strategy deep dive on intra-UK divergence is back on for Monday. This will consider the short-term risks of divergence across the UK and also from Ireland (particularly in light of the social distancing review point). It is likely that this will be followed at a later date by a discussion of longer-term risks of divergence. The commission is still making its way through clearance processes in No.10 but UKGG will be commissioned to produce this paper with support from TOs, DAs, and OGDs.

- The paper is due 9am Sunday so there will be a very short turnaround time, however, UKGG will be basing the paper on a table on UK divergence around social distancing measures which TOs have regularly reviewed
- Tuesday - CDL meeting with DAs
- Thursday - COBR to decide next steps on social distancing ahead of the bank holiday weekend.

## Healthcare MIG:

Friday 1 May: : Shielding - process for managing people who have already been notified as being extremely clinically vulnerable but are no longer considered clinically in need of shielding; Track and Trace - discuss NHSX app trial on the Isle of Wight.

## Public Services MIG:

Friday 1 May: : Update on higher education [DfE] will be taken tomorrow as it was not taken today. Update on media [CO] to update on the status of the £30m fund for local media outlets, and broader media/ critical national infrastructure considerations as needed. Death management [CO] to provide an update on local planning, and to make recommendations on bereavement support, covering financial and non-financial support. Exams [DfE] to understand OfQual's (i) approach (ii) early intel from the consultation process, and (iii) methodology.

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