

# Northern Ireland Office

## Covid 19

### Situation Report **21**

New information in **RED**

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

**17:30 on 8 April 2020**

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# KEY ISSUES

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Owner</u>
<b>Transport: Freight/Airports</b> Discussions are ongoing between the NIE and UKG on how best to support and protect NI's three main airports in light of the unique and unprecedented challenges they are currently facing. Critical Belfast-London routes remain open (though Heathrow flights will now be operated by Aer Lingus only, following BA rationalisation). UKG and NIE are also working collaboratively to ensure critical freight and haulage routes are prioritised and that they have minimum service levels protected through adequate financial assistance.	<u>Economy</u>
<b>Death management:</b> Preparedness team to work with BE Dublin to help monitor any potential divergence on Death Management. <b>Advice being prepared for SoSNI to update on death management preparations, to include capacity, work with funeral directors and comparisons with Ireland and Great Britain.</b>	<u>Preparedness</u>
<b>Supply Forum:</b> Devolution team in CO (Zainab Agha) attending a UK supply forum bringing together UK, DAs and Crown Dependencies. To be chaired by Jonathan Marron on Thursday and will cover PPE, ventilators and oxygen, Medicines, testing, Non-clinical goods and supply.	<u>Preparedness</u>
<b>Ventilators loans:</b> These will be distributed on a loan basis to DAs and NHS Trusts in England (owned by DHSC, with the label 'National NHS Loan Stock') with the expectation that they are returned at the end of the pandemic.	<u>Healthcare</u>
<b>Testing</b> - DHSC are currently working on a cross-Government system to prioritise forthcoming supplies of tests that identify whether key workers currently have Covid-19. <b>DoJ leading on Prioritization of Key Workers. They have recommended testing kits be made available by UKG on a per capita basis and DHSC seem to be on board with this. Await FM and dFM clearance. No significant disparity with the approach being taken by UKG. Will be discussed at HMIG on Thursday.</b>	<u>Preparedness</u>
<b>Quad meeting [tomorrow]:</b> will cover updates on latest developments in terms of COVID-19 response, including PPE, Testing, Social Distancing and Frontier Workers.	<u>International</u>

# Overview

## NI Update

### UK Position

Case Numbers - as of 8 April  
England **50,796** (45,968)  
Wales **4073** (3790)  
Scotland **4565** (4299)  
Northern Ireland **1339** (1255)  
**TOTAL 60,773** (55,242)

Deaths (NI) **78** (73)  
Deaths (UK) **7097** (6159)

Republic of Ireland cases: (5709)

### Government Announcements:

- UK airlines to save millions as navigation charges deferred - charges for air navigation services in European airspace deferred for up to 14 months.
- Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Alok Sharma, has written letters of thanks to all those working in UK manufacturing and also to all those working in UK retail.

**Update from NICS:** The NI modelling data is currently being revised and a paper will be brought to Ministers by the end of this week at the latest. It is not expected that the number of projected deaths will be revised upwards; there was even an indication that they may be revised downwards. The NIE is working to ensure consistent messaging is in place to focus the public on the importance of adhering to the distancing measures, particularly as the Easter weekend approaches. A paper is due to be submitted from DoF to HMT in the next day outlining what is needed to secure the financial viability of NI's airports.

**Update from Irish:** The Irish Government will provide financial support of up to €15m for ferry companies servicing some of the IE-UK and IE-EU shipping routes, including Rosslare-Fishguard and Rosslare-Pembroke. Dublin Port – UK routes (Liverpool, Holyhead and Havesham) are currently still deemed to be viable without state intervention.

**UKG:** We understand that the CCS has established a new unit (the Operational Analysis Centre) which will pick up a number of issues which are not being addressed by various MIGs. This will be data-driven with a layer of policy work. Potential policy areas the OAC will pick up include: situation reporting over Easter weekend and impact on decision-making; hate and cyber crime; supply chains for recycling plants; mental health and loneliness data; security of medium-term CO2 supply.

**NI Economy:** HMRC is aiming to have its website for applications for the Job Retention Scheme operational by 20 April with the first payments to employers and businesses by 30 April. Minister Dodds has offered support to people looking for alternative work due to the impact of the COVID-19, as NI currently experiences high demand for labour in sectors such as health, retail and agri-food. These valuable opportunities, for those seeking alternative employment, can be accessed using the JobcentreOnline web link, with the Department for Economy's careers advisers offering additional support in matching workers skills and experience to those opportunities currently in demand.



# Policy Challenges

**International** - No IMIG so far this week; first meeting scheduled for Wednesday (covering OTs, so no NI interest). A joint Health MOU has been published today between the Ireland and Northern Ireland departments of health with the endorsement of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government. The MOU focuses on facilitating existign co-operation on areas such as: public health messaging, research, programmes of behavioural change, ethics, evidence based modelling, and public health and non-pharmaceutical measures. Other areas will be considered, such as procurement, where this is of mutual benefit. The Irish system remains under significant pressure as work is being stepped up to form a Government. This means that there is limited bandwidth in the Irish system to accommodate a BIC and they are keen to have a Trilateral coordination meeting between senior UKG, IG and NIE officials first (for which John Callinan confirmed today he will find a diary slot). A BIC with the current government remains a possibility with a BIIGC delayed until the new government is established.

**Preparedness** - SoSNI attended the GPS MIG meeting today, on the agenda was death management, prioritisation of connectivity, and offers of support for business. Death management is a key issue for NI and the Executive has focused on it from the start of the crisis. Measures have been put in place to respond to an increased number of deaths (a new temporary resting place); to ensure clarity for funeral directors, including on social distancing (guidance - to be updated this week to bring it closer to PHE guidance; a 'dignity forum' for engagement). The main concern is ensuring that funeral directors have enough PPE. On the prioritisation of connectivity item, the DfC provided briefing to note that it does not have a supply of the Surface Pro laptops needed to enable staff to process and pay benefit claims while working from home. This means only 5% of operational staff can work remotely.

**Health** - 5.5 million PPE items will be delivered to Northern Ireland this week. Robin Swann has confirmed he is content that NI has sufficient supply for the current demand. At present, there are 197 mechanical ventilators available in NI with work ongoing to increase capacity. Number of hospital admissions are increasing. 96 hospital admissions on Monday and 55 covid patients in critical care as of Tuesday. Northern Ireland patients are being recruited to play their part in NHS clinical trials on Covid-19. The NI healthcare Workforce appeal resulted in 15,985 expressions of interest - 9037 formal applications - 230 applicants are already appointed or waiting appointment. NIE are working with a consortium with UUP / QUB / C-ITRIC & FSNI to ramp up testing.. UK PPE strategy shared with DAs with view to publish later this week.

**Legislation:** First meeting of DHSC led group to report on the use of the Coronavirus Act powers met today. DHSC to circulate first draft of text for the planned webpage. Final draft format will need to be ready by 15 May. To ensure most up to date information is published clearance for final text will be very close to the final agreed deadline.

**Comms** - The Cabinet Office is compiling a bid for comms campaign funding relating to CV-19, and the NIO will input a top-line bid tomorrow, including for research and insight. DHSC is planning another phase of "Stay at Home" ads across the UK, which have been run past NICS. The NIO has started to highlight businesses who are doing good work in supporting the effort against CV-19 and remaining operational, with a tweet about Bedwin furniture this morning. This will continue on a daily basis in the weeks ahead. SoSNI has accepted an interview from The View on BBC NI, to be recorded on Thursday afternoon for broadcast at 2230 that day.

**Economy** - The NI Chamber of Commerce has carried out a survey of 300 of its member firms and found that 80% were planning to furlough some of their workers in the next week, with almost a third of surveyed firms saying they planned to furlough all of their employees. These figures have been echoed globally with BEIS reporting that 81% of the global workforce of 3.3 billion people have had their workplace fully or partly closed. In the UK more than nine million workers are expected to be furloughed under the UKGs Job Retention Scheme (JRS), with the cost to the taxpayer over three months estimated at £30-40 billion. These early figures offer an indication of the scale of the economic downturn and uphill recovery in NI and across the UK.

# NIO

Resource	Critical Business
<p><b>NIO Figures for 8 April</b></p> <p>Working in the office / travelling 6(7)  Working at home 166(165)  Self Isolating - symptoms - still working 0(0)  Family Isolating - no symptoms - still working 5(5)  Self Isolating - confirmed - still working 1 (1)  Sick - Covid 0(0)  Sick- other 1(1)  Special Leave 2(0)  Other leave / NWD 10(11)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both sites remain open; Prime Minister's announcement on evening of Mon 23 March reinforced need to work from home.</li> <li>Those working in office continue to be significantly reduced with corresponding rise in numbers working at home.</li> <li>Easter leave commitments will be reviewed to ensure critical business continues</li> <li>HR working on shift patterns and allowances as well as absence returns to Cabinet Office; C3 shifts are priority work-in-progress</li> <li>Ongoing work on new starter arrangements</li> <li>Vetting process is being restricted to business critical staff; staff are able to have existing clearance extended 1 year</li> </ul>	<p><b>Human Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business Impact Assessment completed and has been submitted to PUS and SofS</li> <li>Process to move staff into priority areas has begun, with retraining taking place</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> </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 being gradually delivered to households this week</li> <li>Guidance is being prepared for use of Zoom/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> </ul>

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# Forward Look

## COBR

- COBR meeting confirmed for tomorrow Thursday. We expect that this will discuss the review point of social distancing guidelines and plans for the Easter weekend. DAs invited.

## PM C-19 Strategy

- Thursday: **NHS capacity: readiness for the peak** Friday: **PPE: supply and public messaging; [Prisons]** Saturday: **UK-wide delivery; [International update]**

## C-19 Strategy (O) - CabSec chaired

- Thursday: [TBC] Transport and construction update [BEIS / DfT]
- Friday: TBC

## International MIG:

- Tomorrow's IMIG meeting is likely to discuss **vulnerable countries** and **vaccines**. As of 4.30pm, no agenda or papers had been circulated. Once the agenda is confirmed we can decide whether a Minister needs to attend from NIO.
- Tomorrow's IMIG (O) meeting is due to discuss the theme of **International partnerships**, including: a) Bilateral country prioritisation (FCO), b) NATO (MOD/FCO), c) Assistance to near neighbours and close allies (FCO), d) G7/G20 (Cabinet Office). An NIO official will dial in.
- Tomorrow afternoon Cabinet Office and FCO colleagues are convening a call with DA and TO officials. The agenda will include items on: **Consular assistance, Repatriation Flights and International procurement**. Paul Flynn and Name Redacted will dial in from NIO.

## Economic MIG:

- An Officials meeting is scheduled to take place tomorrow. As of 4.30pm, agenda, scheduler and papers are yet to go out, however the agenda is likely to focus on the theme of economic recovery. DAs are expected to be invited.

## Healthcare MIG:

- Thursday: Prioritisation of testing [DHSC] Decision needed on prioritisation of testing among public sector workers; Volunteering [DHSC] Focus on verification of volunteers, level of volunteering activity and task allocation; Commencement of Schedule 8 of Coronavirus Act - Mental health [DHSC] To agree the commencement of the Mental health provisions in the Coronavirus Act.

## Public Services MIG

- Thursday: **Prioritisation of LA services (MHCLG)** Identify which duties and burdens that depts (and DAs) impose on LAs could be deprioritised; agree x-government approach to prioritisation of these duties. **DWP update (DWP)** Objective: to update the MIG on how they've responded to the crisis, including by reorganising parts of the department to focus on the priority issues. **Policing and social distancing (HO)** Outline the latest position on public behaviour and policing around social distancing, including arrests and public perceptions.
- Lord Chancellor and CDL agreed at yesterday evening's Prisons Group to postpone the item on **courts** until after the Easter weekend, to allow further time to crystallise policy development. We currently expect this item at next Thursday's GPS MIG (16th April).
- There are no meetings scheduled over the Easter weekend/bank holidays. This will only change if there is urgent need for the MIG to give collective agreement to an issue.

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