

NICS – BUILDING FORWARD

In a nutshell

- The Executive has approved three steps to move us out of Covid restrictions, into Recovery, and eventually into PfG. Concurrent work is underway on all three.
- NICS is a key enabler for Recovery success. For that to work best, some changes are needed.
- Recovery in the short to medium term (24 months) will need a strong NICS to support delivery.
- That timeframe is unlikely to be sufficient for full NICS transformation. But this is the time to early-seed the actions needed to put us in the best place for the Recovery phase, and to provide the platform for future NICS reform.
- Covid Recovery is the starting point and a really good opportunity, but reforming NICS stands on its own two feet as a strategic priority, regardless of Covid.

Who is this conversation for?

- The unifying factor for Recovery and NICS reform/transformation is delivery for citizens.
- Our people and financial resources are enablers. But the financial situation will condition what we can do and it is rate limiting.
- That makes it even more important to look at some of our long existing challenges and take steps to address them.

Our people

- The iLab research is a compelling case for serious work on recovering and improving the service. It is based on the lived experience of our colleagues and sets out constructive action which can be taken. The recommendations are deliverable.
- The Covid lived experience continues and it is likely to be some time before all colleagues could return to their places of work. And some may not.
- The experience has not been the same for all and different professional groups have been in very different situations. In reality, we were not “One NICS” before Covid, and Covid will have exacerbated that.
- Some recommendations can be addressed early (recs 3, staying connected; 4, staff integration; 6, provision of equipment). These reflect the impact Covid will have on the world of work for some time yet. Basically, if nothing else is done, these recommendations are important now.
- Some of the recommendations support a strong NICS to deliver Recovery and they support wider transformation. These may need more time to develop but

pace will be important (recs 1, fully flexible working; rec 2, leadership style; rec 5, well-being; and rec 7, commuting).

- On their own, these steps will not be sufficient in the medium to long term. The iLab exam question was to think about how NICS had (and would) respond as a workforce to a pandemic. The Recovery and NICS transformation exam questions raise: business prioritisation, resource planning and allocation, mindshift, skills, professionalization, and potentially a more flexible approach to talent management and knowledge transfer.

The leadership challenge

- The leadership question is: what is NICS for in the next two years?
- Taking account of what we have heard, and what we have seen ourselves, the leadership challenge is big but should be kept simple in design. We need to set a clear vision for medium term focus and long term change in NICS.
- This can be grounded in our values, especially honesty and objectivity. We have to be honest upwards to Ministers and across the service. Prioritisation will be the most difficult conversation upwards and outwards. We can not ignore the fact that some work has to stop. This has been tried many times before with limited success.
- The context is new and it helps. It is no longer about difficult choices and our ability to get through too much work which comes with some costs and risks. This is now about the material risk of failure of key services. It is also about building competitive advantage and societal cohesion.
- In line with the social contact capital idea, any time we spend on low impact/slow delivery activities can not be spent on Recovery.

The organisational challenge

- The organisational challenge is to get the service back and focused on priority work. That is likely to look different across Departments and even within professional groupings within Departments.
- Standardisation tends to be our norm but that might not be the right way forward at this time. In the early months, each Department at senior level will need to recover its people resources and that may look different in Departments, professions, work settings etc.
- Going into lockdown was a jolt and coming out of that has to take account of what the staff have told us.
- Getting staff back can not be a jolt and will need to be done sensitively but with clear planning and purpose. This needs co-ordination across NICS but a large amount of Departmental flexibility within that would be beneficial.
- Keeping a close eye on what post-Covid staff engagement looks like will be important.

The delivery challenge

- Delivering this will require a shift in how we position and use support services.
- “Back Office” should be banned.
- Support services should be able to touch and feel front line citizens’ outcomes. They play their role through delivering services to NICS but it would be interesting to look at whether citizen outcomes are sufficiently positioned.
- The iLab recommendations should be priority work, along with the Recovery exam questions suggested above.
- What does that programme of work look like, who sets the pace, and how do we make the join between NICS recovery and Covid Recovery?
- What does this mean for PSS/NICS Board?

DRAFT