



Working during the pandemic

The lived experience of  
Northern Ireland Civil Service staff

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A report by the Northern Ireland  
Public Sector Innovation Lab

# CONTENTS

Foreword	03
1. Synopsis	05
2. Introduction	08
3. Research Findings	13
3A - Insights	16
3B - Reasons and impacts	58
3C - Staff advice	95
3D - Reflections	116
4. Organisational Learning	143
5. Conclusions	153
Appendices	155
Appendix 1 - Survey Questions	156
Appendix 2 - Respondent Demographics	157
Appendix 3 - Theme Framework	158
Appendix 4 - Number of comments attributed to themes	163
Appendix 5 - Method and analysis process	164



# FOREWORD

None of us could have predicted the impact COVID-19 would have on every area of our lives. COVID-19 forced the civil service to change our working practices in a very short space of time and introduce new ways of working so we could continue to deliver public services as effectively and safely as possible. Within days of the first lockdown being announced, the majority of Northern Ireland's civil servants had transitioned to remote working, with a small number continuing to work in NICS buildings.

While the pandemic has presented the NICS with significant challenges, it has also presented us with opportunities and we have seen an unprecedented shift in how the civil service works, with many services now being delivered remotely. It is important that we learn from what is working well and what is not, and pave a way forward with a more flexible approach.

Colleagues across all departments have worked exceptionally hard to adapt to the challenges posed and I commend the fantastic effort of everyone in the NICS. In these unprecedented times, the civil service has quickly adapted to new ways of working to ensure the continuous provision of excellent public services. I am hugely proud of all my colleagues and the immense contribution they have made to the COVID-19 response.

This research was commissioned to find out more about the experiences of NICS colleagues during the first six months of the pandemic. 500 colleagues across all departments reflect the realities of working through the pandemic and the many benefits and challenges colleagues faced.

The information gathered from this research was used to inform the questions in the 2020 NICS People Survey and insights from both surveys will provide us with a better understanding of the current and future needs of our workforce as we design new ways of working to improve the way we do things in future. Health and well-being of colleagues will also be at the forefront of these considerations.

This report provides us with a record of the experience of civil servants working within the COVID-19 restrictions. I am grateful to the Innovation Lab for their work compiling this research. It provides an evidence base, not just for the NICS, but for other public and private sector organisations considering their pathways out of the pandemic. It provides insights that can contribute to how we transform the way we deliver services in the future.

Sue Gray

Permanent Secretary, Department of Finance

May 2021

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*“I enjoyed working from home although I was very busy. I was able to avoid a commute of 50 minutes each way and had more time with my family and was still able to do as much and more work for my Department than before. I often had to work at my desk I was that busy at times. I sold my car and did not replace it as I no longer needed it to commute.”*

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# SYNOPSIS

## Synopsis

The COVID-19 pandemic forced significant and unplanned changes in how the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) operated in order to continue delivering effective public services. These changes alongside the wider impacts of the pandemic led to unprecedented personal and work-related challenges for both leaders and staff in the NICS. The Northern Ireland Public Sector Innovation Lab (the Lab) conducted research to explore, objectively, the lived experiences of NICS staff with the aim of gaining an understanding of the impact on them of working during the pandemic.

This research was conducted between late August and early October 2020. It is worth noting that at this time home schooling was not in operation, COVID restrictions had been relaxed, the weather was generally good and we had more hours of daylight. All of these factors may have played a role in the experiences that were shared with the Lab. To obtain an in-depth understanding of user experience a qualitative survey was designed and issued to NICS staff, with a view to achieving responses from around 50 staff within each of the nine NICS Departments. In all, the views of 468 members of staff across all Departments were obtained, reflecting a range of grade, gender and working locations.

The findings in this report include extensive and varied **insights** derived from staff responses and the underlying **reasons** for and **impacts** of their reported experiences. One question prompted staff to provide **advice** to NICS leaders. This advice has been aligned, where possible with insights to which it relates. In addition a catalogue of staff **reflections** has been captured.

In summarising the analysis seven areas for **organisational learning** were identified that had direct impact on both staff and the organisation. For each of these areas we explain what the analysis has shown and highlight potential ways to use the learning derived from the research. Those areas are:

1. Fully flexible working
2. Leadership style
3. Staying connected
4. Staff integration
5. Well-being
6. Provision of equipment
7. Commuting

Consideration of all of the research findings in this report provides opportunities for organisations, both in the public and private sectors, to derive wide ranging benefits.

## Acknowledgements

The Lab wishes to express a sincere thanks to all those who participated in the survey for being so open and honest and for trusting us with their experiences.

It should be noted that a number of images throughout this publication were downloaded by survey respondents from the website Unsplash (unsplash.com). These have not been individually credited because of the difficulty identifying them. However, this acknowledges the online resource and how useful it was for the respondents.

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*“Reflects missing the camaraderie and social interaction we take for granted.”*

”

**CAUTION**

**MAINTAIN  
SOCIAL  
DISTANCING**



**DISTANCE FROM OTHERS**

# INTRODUCTION



# INTRODUCTION

## The Innovation Lab

The Northern Ireland Public Sector Innovation Lab was formed in 2014 and sits within the Department of Finance. The ethos of the Lab is user-centred innovation and design and it employs this approach to support the NICS and Public Sector to improve services. In doing so, the Lab draws upon several main areas of expertise, which includes Behavioural Science, Service Design, Strategic Insights and Systems Modelling.

## Background

This research was undertaken between late August 2020 and early October 2020. It sought to capture staff experiences during the first six months of the pandemic, a time that brought change and challenge to the respondents that reached far beyond their working lives.

Furthermore, the beginning of working differently for the NICS as a whole occurred overnight, with little or no warning; and was in essence an emergency response to a situation that lingers far beyond a temporary or passing reality. The context within which this research exists therefore requires due mention and, with this, acknowledgement that some of this context lies beyond the control of the NICS.

This context does not, however, leave redundant the efforts to better understand the experiences of staff. Rather, the aim is to accept that this particular time brings additional impacts from the wider world and to identify those that do lie within the remit of the organisation; in the hope that learning from what has worked well can be built upon, and learning about what could be bettered is implemented.

Between March and May 2020 the Lab investigated ways to gain an understanding of the impact on NICS staff of working during the pandemic. After reaching out across the NICS to promote the idea of carrying out qualitative research, permission to proceed was granted in July 2020.

## Research Objectives

The aims of the research were objectively to:

- document the experience of NICS staff working during the pandemic; and
- create an evidence base to inform future policy.

## Methodology

The ethos of the Lab is to place a focus on the voice of the user through User Centred Design. Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing non-numerical information to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. This form of research is recognised as being scientifically rigorous and often proves most effective when capturing lived experiences. Furthermore, insights from qualitative research prove more actionable than quantitative data as they move beyond what is happening by providing answers to why it is happening.

To do this we designed a survey containing open ended questions allowing respondents to answer in unlimited text fields as a way of capturing their lived experiences.

### **Data collection – survey**

The survey was carried out on Typeform, a platform that allowed respondents to complete it on a range of devices – smartphones, tablets, etc. This survey platform was novel to the NICS and was chosen because of its interactive and user-friendly interface. It was decided that using a casual and informal tone would encourage engagement.

The survey was designed using expertise in behavioural science, sociology, user research, and service design. Its goal was to prompt people to reflect on and share their experiences so that they might be better understood (see Appendix 1).

The survey was refined and adapted through several rounds of user testing to ensure that the questions worked and that the responses corresponded with the intention of the question. Testing the accessibility and usability in terms of uploading photographs across different devices was also carried out.

### **Sample Size**

The survey aimed to get responses from 50 staff in each Department between late August and early October 2020. The goal of qualitative research is to produce a range of responses and to look for commonalities of experience that may be extended back to the broader population. The goal is not to classify staff into percentages that have had X or Y experience. A sample of 50 per Department is large for a qualitative study<sup>1</sup>.

Staff were selected by stratified sampling. All staff from each Department who were listed on the staff directory and who had a valid email address were put into a database on the statistical software SPSS. Staff were selected at random by grade to match the overall grade distribution of the Department itself. Staff were then emailed directly in small batches to participate until the sample size of 50 was achieved. This ensured good representation across all grades.

Just under 500 staff working across the nine NICS Departments completed the survey. This was representative of a diverse range of grade, gender and working locations (see Appendix 2).

### **Analysis and theming**

Staff were very open in their responses and really took the time to reflect on their experiences. This provided deep user insights and revealed a broad spectrum of experiences from staff across the NICS.

<sup>1</sup>Baker, S., Edwards, R. How many qualitative interviews is enough? National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper. [http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how\\_many\\_interviews.pdf](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf)

## - Development of themes

An iterative approach was taken to develop themes which were identified from the comments. Initially survey responses from one Department were reviewed, generating 30 themes to be used for the analysis. When analysing subsequent Departments, new themes were identified and added to this framework giving a final total of 35 themes (see Appendix 3). To ensure the validity of this approach, the final framework of themes identified was reflected upon and the first few Departments re-analysed to ensure consistency in the findings.

## - How comments were attributed to themes

Each response received was taken to represent a single comment. Those comments that related only to an individual theme were attributed directly to that theme. The number of comments attributed to each theme can be seen at Appendix 4. The interpretation of the content was evaluated as being either negative or positive. Given the level of detail and range of issues provided by respondents in some single comments, it was common for a single comment to be duplicated and be attributed to multiple themes. For example, this comment was recorded under the following four themes:

- IT & General Resources
- Ways of working
- Interaction with colleagues
- Productivity



*“No access to office facilities, colleagues, printer and other IT means I don’t have everything I need to do my work or to progress things e.g. what used to be a quick five minute face-to-face chat can now take a lot longer when working from home.”*

## - Research analysis

Analysis of the comments within each theme enabled insight statements to be identified which accurately summarised the content of groups of comments with similar meanings. The reasons for, or driving factors of the reported experiences, and the impact on respondents of having those experiences, were also drawn from the comments. Advice provided by staff has been aligned to insights where there is a direct link, and staff reflections are captured in the form of shared photographs and quotes.

The analysis highlighted strong interconnections between themes. These interconnections have demonstrated the complexity of the situations faced by staff living and working during the pandemic. It has provided an evidence base that we believe can be used to address difficulties and could help leverage positive change.

The method, tools and processes used to capture and analyse the responses to the survey have been outlined in detail at Appendix 5.



“

*“Lots more time for home baking with the kids.”*

# RESEARCH FINDINGS



## RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings are defined in four sections:

### **3A Insights**

Contains 126 insights, listed by theme and supported by respondents quotes

### **3B Reasons and impacts**

Contains the underlying reasons for the impacts of the reported experiences

### **3C Staff advice**

Contains 128 separate pieces of staff advice aligned to insights where there is a direct link

### **3D Reflections**

Contains reflections by way of photographs and quotes that respondents shared with us to reflect something positive, something negative and something unexpected.

A wooden chair with a black leather seat is the central focus of the image. The chair is positioned in a room with light-colored tiled flooring. In the background, there is a wooden door and a white wall. A small yellow object is visible on the floor behind the chair. The chair has a simple, functional design with a curved backrest and a horizontal bar near the base of the seat.

“

*“Empty chair - missing my friends and colleagues at work, not just for close working but also for tea/lunch break chats”*

”

## 3A - INSIGHTS

One of the primary outputs from this research is the set of insights that emerged under each theme. All respondents' comments were clustered into the theme framework and a major exercise was conducted to draft insight statements which accurately summarised the content of groups of comments with similar meaning.

The insights reflect, in detail, the reality for staff working during the pandemic. Each one paints a clear picture of what it was 'really' like to work during the pandemic for NICS staff. The Lab believes that these rich insights can be used to influence the design of new policies and ways of working in a user-centric way. Each theme is introduced with the definition that was developed for the theme framework.

### Insight prevalence

To provide context as to how prevalent insights were across the nine NICS Departments the following pre-fixes have been used:

- All... this means an insight found within all (9) Departments
- Most... this means an insight found within 6 to 8 Departments
- Some... this means an insight found within 4 to 5 Departments
- A few... this means an insight found within 2 to 3 Departments

Each insight has been carefully crafted to reflect the exact experiences shared with us. As such some insights are worded similarly but contain subtle differences reflective of what was said and how often it was said. For example in the insights below empowerment to decide where to work was only highlighted in some Departments.

“Respondents from all Departments reported that working from home has empowered staff to decide how and when they work.”

“Respondents from some Departments reported that working from home has empowered staff to decide how, where and when they work.”

## Ways of working

*This refers to respondents' comments about how the pandemic has changed the way they work. For example, more/less flexibility, higher/lower workload.*

A total of 526 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Around six out of 10 respondents indicated a positive impact. Working from home was the reason for the majority of these positive comments. On the other hand there were a diverse number of reasons for the negative comments.



*Rather than sitting in a bus I can go for a walk before and after work.*



*Working ridiculous hours for the first 6 months*

*Able to work longer days being at home and not having to negotiate school runs, travel to work, get a lot more work done, even with children at home.*

*Is was very strange and difficult trying to work on a small laptop when I was used to two large screens in work.*

*Work does not have to be completed during 9-5 hours.*

*Because I tended to carry out complete tasks on my own which put more pressure on me. I have since improved my ways of working and sharing work which has improved this greatly.*

<b>Insights</b>	
<b>1</b>	Respondents in all Departments reported having become enlightened to the fact that they can be as productive at home as they were in an office.
<b>2</b>	Respondents in all Departments reported that working from home has empowered staff to decide how and when they work.
<b>3</b>	Respondents in all Departments were very positive about the flexibility the new way of working has provided and noted experiencing better work life balance outcomes.
<b>4</b>	Respondents in all Departments reported that working remotely had changed how work interactions are conducted and has led to some delays in processing work.
<b>5</b>	Respondents in most Departments reported the ability to work flexible, non-traditional hours has been seen as a positive for working from home.
<b>6</b>	Respondents in some Departments reported that working from home has empowered staff to decide how, where and when they work.
<b>7</b>	Respondents in some Departments feel that using video technology is a more efficient way of conducting effective work meetings.
<b>8</b>	Respondents in some Departments reported the ability to work flexible, non-traditional hours and fit work around other responsibilities has been seen as a positive for working from home.
<b>9</b>	Respondents in some Departments reported that using technology supported them to work well from home.
<b>10</b>	Respondents in some Departments reported having to work longer hours due to increased workloads.
<b>11</b>	Respondents in some Departments reported that their workloads had increased.
<b>12</b>	Respondents in some Departments reported that not having access to hard copy materials made their work more challenging.
<b>13</b>	Respondents in a few Departments reported increased work pressures and tighter deadlines.



## Adapting to change

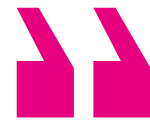
*This refers to respondents' comments about adapting to change during the pandemic. For example, adapting to balance home and work life.*

A total of 219 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Around six out of 10 indicated a negative impact on respondents. This suggests that a number of respondents struggled to adapt to their new circumstances however some reported they adapted well, whilst others reported adapting better as time progressed.

Juggling home and work responsibilities was the reason behind the majority of the negative comments, whereas the flexibility for people to structure their working day was the main reason for the positive comments.



*My home space used to be very separate from work. The 2 now merge. It's hard to switch off.*



*Trying to juggle home life with 3 kids, home schooling and work was difficult. Work sometimes became the least of my priorities but because it wasn't structured 9-5 meant I could fit it in when I was able to. It also made it difficult to distinguish between home and work.*

*After about a month, we settled in, adapted and got on with it. I'd say we are now getting through as much or even perhaps more work than previously.*

*As a working parent, trying to establish a balance between working and spending quality time with children is one of the greatest challenges.*

*Ability to separate work from home has been achievable and works well.*

*Interfaces between work and home are blurred, timescales appear to be less aggressive for most activities. There were certainties when moving/making decisions at pace which seem less relevant now. Is there something being lost?*

*I like the structure, the routine, keeping work and home separate. I like being part of a team, my mind stimulated by others.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in all Departments found there was a blur between their home and work life and they struggled to adapt to this change.
2	Respondents in some Departments reported that they were positive about how well they have adapted to the new way of working and noted experiencing better work life balance outcomes.
3	Respondents in some Departments reported that they have adapted well to working from home as it has empowered them to decide how, where and when they work.
4	Respondents in some Departments reported that they found it difficult to adapt because of pressure on available space in their home.
5	Respondents in some Departments reported that caring responsibilities have made it difficult for staff to adapt to working at home during the pandemic.
6	Respondents in a few Departments reported that they struggled to adapt as a result of changes in how they communicate and interact with their team and work colleagues.
7	Respondents in a few Departments had staff reporting that they struggled to adapt to a new routine and structure.
8	Respondents in a few Departments reported that home schooling hindered their ability to adapt well when working from home.

## Interaction with colleagues

*This refers to respondents' comments in reference to either social/informal interaction or formal/work related interaction with colleagues. For example, I miss my team meeting or asking for advice about work.*

A total of 193 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. The vast majority indicated a negative impact on respondents.

The breakdown of formal and informal communication between work colleagues is the reason for these negative comments.



*There is little to no work place camaraderie.*



*Lack of meeting with colleagues effects communication within the team and helping each other to solve problems quickly and effectively.*

*Harder to get decisions and bounce things off people without face to face discussions.*

*As the newest member in my branch I rely on their experience to guide me and it is difficult to initiate contact to have what may seem as a stupid question answered. These things are much easier dealt with face to face.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in all Departments reported a loss of staff interactions which has negatively impacted the transfer of work information.
2	Respondents in most Departments reported that there seems to be a loss or reduction in camaraderie within teams.
3	Respondents in some Departments reported that a lack of face to face interaction was detrimental to productive communication.
4	Respondents in a few Departments reported that colleagues were able to build or maintain networks using technology.
5	Respondents in a few Departments reported that e-mail had replaced oral communications leading to an increase in time taken to complete tasks.

## Commute

*This refers to respondents' comments about travelling to do their job, for example by car, public transport etc. may include distance travelled, time taken, money saved etc.*

A total of 187 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. All but four indicated a positive impact on respondents. Working from home for either all or part of the working week was the main reason for these comments. It is very clear that the volume of time gained (up to 20 hours a week) has had a significant positive impact on a number of respondents.



*I can start work as soon as I have a coffee in the morning meaning I get ahead of things earlier, also because I don't have to travel to and from work it adds an extra hour to my day*



*Being able to do things that benefit my health and health of my family that I didn't have time for before lockdown due to travelling around 3 hours per day to the office.*

*Reduced commuting - more mental and personal energy for work tasks without being jaded by the commute.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in all Departments reported that not having to travel to work was saving them a considerable amount of time.
2	Respondents in most Departments indicated that their stress levels are reduced and that they feel more relaxed as a result of not having a daily commute.
3	Respondents in most Departments reported that they made financial savings as a result of not having a daily commute.
4	Respondents in some Departments reported that not having to commute allows them flexibility with their start/finish times.
5	Respondents in some Departments reported that not having to commute has provided the opportunity to spend more time with family.
6	Respondents in some Departments reported that not having to commute has provided the opportunity to plan and undertake activities that they value.
7	Respondents in a few Departments reported increased productivity as a result of not arriving in work tired or jaded due to a long commute.

## Stress

*This refers to respondents' comments that directly mentioned stress, feeling overwhelmed or struggling to cope as a result of pressure.*

A total of 156 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Just over half indicated a negative impact on respondents. This shows that although stress levels did increase for a number of respondents due to working during the pandemic there were examples of reductions in stress levels for some.



*Tears came far too easily as not only working remotely but also on emergency work with long hours.*



*In order to try to do my job and respond to the pressures, I found I had to frequently work 12 or more hours each day, at weekends and during holidays. While I understand that this is a unique situation, this amount of work without a break is unsustainable in the longer term and will have a negative impact on people's health and well-being.*

*Life seems slower work life balance has improved less travelling less stress.*

*Without having a 2 hour commute I have more time at home, and I am not stressed about sitting in traffic, so when I start work I am already relaxed and feel more able to start my work better.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in most Departments reported decreased stress levels as a result of the flexibility provided through working from home.
2	Respondents in most Departments reported that their stress levels were reduced as a result of not having a daily commute.
3	Respondents in most Departments reported increased stress levels due to heavier workloads, more pressing deadlines and the need to work longer hours.
4	Respondents in some Departments reported that balancing childcare/schooling responsibilities with work duties was a direct causation of stress.
5	Respondents in a few Departments reported increased stress levels as a result of poor decision making or the poor implementation of policies by managers.
6	Respondents in a few Departments, who had started new roles reported increased stress level due to lack of support.



## IT and general resources

*This refers to respondents' comments in reference to the resources they currently have and any additional resources they might need. For example, screens, laptops, video conferencing, desks, chairs and printers.*

A total of 126 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. About six out of 10 indicated a negative impact on respondents. Poor or no provision of appropriate IT hardware and software was the main reason for these comments. It is clear for these respondents that this negatively impacted on their overall experience and it inhibited their ability to effectively work and communicate from home.



*Colleagues are embracing and engaging more using the various platforms to great effect. The team have more energy and willingness to engage remotely, especially for those with significant commuting distances to the office.*



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*I attend a lot of meetings, not always successful due to lack of access to software and / or limited software.*

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*Being able to use laptops and video conferencing has highlighted to me just how behind we were in the NICS previously, but how being more agile than normal has meant we can embrace new technology without the usual fear that is normally associated with change in the service.*

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*I live in the country and broadband strength is not good.*

## Insights

<b>1</b>	Respondents in most Departments reported that having and using technology has enabled them to effectively work from home.
<b>2</b>	Respondents in most Departments reported that the better use of video conferencing technology has aided communication for staff when working from home.
<b>3</b>	Respondents in most Departments reported that poor IT availability and connectivity impacted negatively on their ability to work effectively.
<b>4</b>	Respondents in a few Departments reported the limitations of using smaller laptop screens.
<b>5</b>	Respondents in a few Departments reflected frustrations at setting up and using new video conferencing technology.
<b>6</b>	Respondents in one Department reported that the fact their Department uses 2 different IT systems, which had caused some difficulties before COVID-19, had seen an increase in difficulties since COVID-19.

## Personal safety

*This refers to respondents' comments around personal safety. For example fear of catching COVID-19, PPE or hand sanitiser supplied.*

A total of 98 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Just over half indicated a positive impact on respondents. Those who were working from home felt safer, less stressed and less anxious than those who were working in the office or field.



*I can make choices to keep safe I'm not in control of that if mixing in an office environment especially when there is such a divided opinion on whether COVID is 'real' or not.*



*Uncertainty around move back to the office and the potential for increased COVID risk.*

*I am very grateful to have the opportunity to work at home. I live with family members who would be vulnerable to COVID-19. I am therefore grateful that I have been able to avoid travelling to my workplace, where at any time I could have caught the virus and brought it back to my home, which could have caused the death of a family member.*

*When I attend meetings or go into the office for any meeting, I'm always wearing a mask. I'm anxious if I see that others are not wearing masks. I have become generally more aware of germs and the distance I should be staying from people to avoid infection. This is relevant for all infections not just COVID-19.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in most Departments feared for their personal safety because of colleagues not adhering to COVID-19 guidelines in the office.
2	Respondents in most Departments felt safer working from home during the pandemic.
3	Respondents in a few Departments noted that new safety precautions were introduced to combat COVID-19 in offices and reduce the risk to their safety.

## Anxiety

*This refers to respondents' comments on anxiety.*

A total of 96 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Just over three quarters indicated a negative impact on respondents. Concern for personal and family safety was the main reason for the negative comments, whereas feeling safe while working from home was the main reason for the positive comments.



*My parents are both in their 80's and since the pandemic started my mum has become bed bound meaning she needs 24 hr care. Under the current circumstances there is no way I will let her go into a care home so the family are looking after her and dad but we have had to be so careful as we are afraid of passing on the virus. As a result we are all suffering from anxiety and personally I don't get much sleep as I am constantly thinking I could put them at risk.*



*My caring responsibilities have increased due to school closures with an increase in uncertainty and anxiety for me, my partner and our children.*

*I worry that if I have been in contact that I may pass it on to someone without knowing and they in turn may take it home to a vulnerable person.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in some Departments reported being anxious and uncertain about COVID-19 and the impact that would have on their family and themselves.
2	Respondents in a few Departments reported that the ability to control their day whilst working from home had a positive impact on their mental health.
3	Respondents in a few Departments reported feeling anxious due to work and home pressures.
4	Respondents in one Department, up to EO grade, reported that working in the office, made them feel anxious and stressed as a result of not being allowed to work from home.

## Emotional reactions about work outputs

*This refers to respondents' comments on their feelings about work. For example, unfairness, resentment or pride.*

A total of 93 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. About four in five indicated a negative impact on respondents. There were many individual reasons for these comments.



*I find it frustrating that I am continuing to work more than my contracted hours when other NICS are 'working' from home with little/no tangible work to do. Likewise, I have not had an opportunity to take much leave however I am sure that those WFH have had the opportunity but haven't needed to because they are under little or no pressure.*



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*Because to achieve what is expected I have to work longer hours and at weekends. Staff are resistance to new procedures as they see it as not their jobs. It is stressful for me as the personal responsible for it.*

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*Being at home even when kids are at school or in another room just feels right. For me, home is truly where the heart is.*

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*As a shielding member of staff, management don't show an appropriate duty of care.*

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*I can get more work done at home and feel more satisfaction in my role - I feel people are being viewed on the work they do now and not simply presenteeism.*

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*Absolutely no 'down time', moving between meetings, travel etc.; back to back meetings and very busy mailbox, undone list increasing despite much longer working hours and inclined to leave laptop on to do a final check before bed etc. People expect 24/7 access and responses now.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in some Departments expressed appreciation and gratitude at having the opportunity to work at home.
2	Respondents in some Departments expressed a sense of resentment due to other staff having little or no tangible work to do.
3	Respondents in some Departments expressed feelings of unfairness at the pressure put onto them through unreasonable managerial expectations or requests.
4	Respondents in some Departments expressed that they felt undervalued by management.
5	Respondents in some Departments stated that they felt they could not trust management with their health and safety.
6	Respondents in a few Departments expressed feelings of unfairness because they believed that their personal responsibilities were not taken account of whilst other peoples were.
7	Respondents in a few Departments expressed gratitude that they had a secure job and income.
8	Respondent in a few Departments expressed personal pride because they were contributing to the essential needs of colleagues and the general public during the pandemic.
9	Respondents in a few Departments expressed feelings of unfairness because staff doing the same job as them, as well as managers, were allowed to work from home and they were not.
10	Respondents in a few Departments felt guilty that they were not carrying their weight in the team.

## Isolation

*This refers to respondents' comments that directly mentioned isolation and feeling of loneliness.*

A total of 89 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. All but four indicated a negative impact on respondents. It is very clear that the loss of interaction with colleagues and disparate working arrangements led to feelings of isolation and loneliness.



*The downside of isolation is a sense of being trapped, no help, and being alone dealing with all issues alone whilst continuing to work and support others.*



*Being on my own for over 8 hours a day with no human interactions can be really depressing.*

*You have less interaction with staff you work with so didn't have social aspect and change of company that you would have had in office. Some staff felt isolated.*

*I was the only member of staff working in my office from March to the May. This was very different to what I was used to.*

*I felt isolated when working as I was not able to call on the experience or knowledge of my colleagues. As the newest member in my branch I rely on their experience to guide me and it is difficult to initiate contact to have what may seem as a stupid question answered.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in most Departments reported respondents who felt isolated because of loss of contact with colleagues, whether this was working at home or in the office.
2	Respondents in some Departments had staff that were feeling lonely, particularly acute for those respondents who work alone or live alone.
3	Respondents in a few Departments had staff who reported that isolation had exacerbated their mental health conditions.
4	Respondents in one Department remained connected to their colleagues through the use of video conferencing technologies thus reducing feelings of isolation.



## Productivity

*This refers to respondent' comments that refer to productivity. For example, I feel I got more done or I don't get as much done when working at home.*

A total of 80 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Just over four in five indicated a positive impact on respondents. It is clear that working in an environment with less distractions and interruptions helped people focus and concentrate and this increased their productivity.



*Due to reduced travel and a better work life balance I am able to be more productive. Less meetings and more focused work.*



*Not so many in office therefore allows for a better and more productive working environment.*

*I am able to get more work done. Less distractions.*

*Lots more emails rather than calls and face to face leading to longer discussions due to misinterpretation and items being lost in translation.*

*I have the capability to do my job from home just as efficiently and effectively as I can work within the office.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in all Departments reported that their productivity increased due to fewer distractions and interruptions when working from home.
2	Respondents in some Departments reported that their productivity increased due to not having to commute.
3	Respondents in some Departments reported that they were more productive at home through better use of IT.
4	Respondents in a few Departments reported that not having the right IT at home has negatively impacted on their productivity.
5	Respondents in a few Departments reported that having to juggle home life with work life negatively impacted on their productivity.

## Teamwork

*This refers to respondents' comments on changes to team dynamic, how they interact and support each other in relation to their work.*

A total of 80 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Just over three quarters indicated a negative impact on respondents. The breakdown of formal and informal communication between colleagues within teams is the reason for these negative comments.



*I am a social person and like being around people I miss my colleagues and the team spirit.*



*Through WebEx/Jabber and the telephone I have felt as much a part of the team as I did while office based.*

*Just miss interacting with people, having a bit of craic and feeling involved in what is currently going on in the Branch.*

*I do miss the office environment, communication was easier, seeing people every day meant that the sense of teamworking was always present. As time has gone on, communication has lessened a bit.*

*Didn't get to bind face to face with new team and colleagues.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in most Departments reported that the impact of working disparately has had a negative impact on how teams work, interact and collaborate.
2	Respondents in most Departments reported staff who were new to their teams having difficulty integrating.
3	Respondents in a few Departments, team spirit was noted to have suffered as a result of working disparately.

## Physical well-being

*This refers to respondents' comments in reporting physical ailments or improvements. For example, back pain and back relief.*

A total of 78 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. About six in ten indicated a positive impact on respondents. Working from home providing the flexibility and time to undertake activities to improve their physical well-being was the main reason for the positive comments. Working longer hours, heavy workloads and not having an appropriate workspace at home negatively impacted on the physical well-being of some respondents.



*With no time consuming commute I have more time. I can focus more on work whilst at the same time do daily home activities. I have also been able to incorporate more exercise and my well-being has improved.*



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*More tempting to snack at home.*

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*I'm not too exhausted when I come home from work now to have any kind of life outside of work. The standard working day is too tiring for me and I feel like I've got my life back again.*

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*Working so many hours and being tired made. tensions rise.*

---

*Spending more time outside walking has improved my mental and physical health.*

<b>Insights</b>	
<b>1</b>	Respondents in most Departments reported that they had more time to engage in activities to improve their physical well-being, such as walking and exercise.
<b>2</b>	Respondents in most Departments reported being less tired.
<b>3</b>	Respondents in most Departments reported feeling tired, fatigued, burnt out or exhausted.
<b>4</b>	Respondents in most Departments reported physical ailments/discomfort resulting from working from home.
<b>5</b>	Respondents in some Departments reported having more energy.
<b>6</b>	Respondents in some Departments reported changes in their dietary habits as a result of working from home.
<b>7</b>	Respondents in a few Departments reported negative effects of sedentary working.

## Managerial responsibilities

*This refers to respondents' comments about how managers have managed and supported their staff during the pandemic.*

A total of 77 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Just over three quarters indicated a negative impact on respondents. There were many individual reasons for these comments, however the majority relate to how the respondents perceived managers discharged their duty of care responsibilities.



*Increased volumes of work could be managed more effectively more focused staff engagement and meetings online.*



*I was moved twice to work on two different work areas that were new to me, and had to pick up very quickly in a highly pressurised environment. I found this very stressful, as although I wanted to do a good job I felt that I didn't have the knowledge, resources or support to make that possible.*

*A big change from the usual civil service culture, management are trusting staff more to produce quality work but in a different way.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in most Departments reported that they felt management did not fully discharge their duty of care.
2	Respondents in some Departments reported feeling that the increased levels of work and workload coupled with resource pressures were not managed effectively.
3	Respondents who were new in a few Departments reported not being properly inducted and integrated into their team.

## Time

*This refers to respondents' comments about how the participant manages their time. For example, I now can exercise when I would normally have been driving.*

A total of 72 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. All but two indicated a positive impact on respondents. The time gained from not having to commute has had a significantly positive impact on respondents and has provided them the flexibility to plan and undertake activities that they value.



*Got to spend a lot of time with my son which I don't normally get when I'm in the office and he is at school.*



*It has been wonderful to be able to have more time with my young children and husband. We have managed to work a routine around work so we all get some focused time. My husband and I now have a better appreciation of each other's work responsibilities and demands and we have a better balance of duties within our household than we did before lockdown.*

### Insights

1

Respondents in all Departments reported that working from home frees up time that supports a better work life balance.

## Caring responsibilities

*This refers to respondents' comments directed toward caring responsibilities that were needed during the pandemic.*

A total of 65 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Around two thirds of which indicated a positive impact on respondents. The majority of comments related to how the flexibility associated with working from home assisted them in managing their caring responsibilities.



*No daily commute. ...enabling sharing of caring responsibilities for children and older relatives.*



*Makes life easier - especially when the schools were closed & the grandparents were all in isolation due to underlying health conditions.*

*Having vulnerable parents, if I was having to travel into the office, I would not have been able to form a bubble with my parents who are very high risk, so it has enabled me to support them whilst not putting them at risk*

*Difficulties working at home with a young child in the house.*

*Due to caring for others etc. it allows us to work later into the evening if I need to take essential time off throughout normal working hours.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in some Departments found it difficult to care for their children whilst trying to undertake their work responsibilities.
2	Respondents in all Departments reported that working from home has helped them to discharge caring responsibilities for either children or elderly relatives.



## Focus and distraction

*This refers to the respondents' comments that highlight the ability or inability to focus on work during the pandemic.*

A total of 63 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Just over four in five of which indicated a positive impact on respondents. Working in an environment with less distractions and interruptions helped people focus and concentrate and this increased their productivity.



*I am better able to manage house work (put a washing on at lunch time etc!), no travelling, getting more work done, less distractions (when the kids are at school...).*



*I am thinking about both what needs to be done for work and around the house all the time. It's harder to focus on one thing properly*

*I have little interruptions and being in the house it's quiet and tranquil.*

*Due to better use of IT, meetings are more structured and don't last as long due to no distractions.*

*Once into the way of working from home, no travelling 45 mins each way to work, less unnecessary interruptions meant able to complete tasks quicker and more efficiently. A different way of working.*

*I am able to get more work done. Less distractions.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in most Departments reported that they were likely to get distracted at home.
2	Respondents in most Departments reported that less distractions enabled them to focus better and be more productive.
3	Respondents in some Departments reported experienced less distractions working from home than in an office.

## Family activity

*This refers to respondents' comments on family activity. For example, eating together, weekly outings cancelled.*

A total of 59 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. All but six indicated a positive impact on respondents. The flexibility associated with working from home and time gained through removal of a daily commute were the main reason for these comments.



*Able to spend more time with my wife and family. Get more work done.*



*Can do more work and still have more time for family.*

*I do not waste 1hr 20mins travelling to Belfast in the morning, getting my children up at 5am to leave with a childminder. I also don't waste 1hr 45mins retuning from work in the evenings, sometimes not getting to collect my children until after 7pm. I can spend more time with my family before and after work which has had a significant improvement in the relationship between us.*

*I have got to spend more time with my children, watch them grow, teach them new things and enjoy any free time I do have with them. Lockdown has strengthened my family bonds.*

*I am a new father and get to spend valuable time with my daughter.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in most Departments reported increased flexibility at work, which has enabled them to spend more time with family.
2	Respondents in some Departments reported that gaining time to share experiences with members of their family has been beneficial.
3	Respondents in a few Departments reported increased workloads having a negative impact on their ability spend time with their family.

## Money

*This refers to respondents' comments on personal finance. For example, money saved or money worries.*

A total of 52 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. All but 6 indicated a positive impact on respondents. The removal of the daily commute was the main reason for these comments.



*I live 58 miles away from work and spend £10 per day on fuel/£14 per day on the bus so I saved a lot of money being at home.*



*I usually walk to work and, coming into autumn, am stocking up on new winter clothes. This year I don't need to do that.*

*To some extent I am happy to have a job to keep me in a routine. something to get up for in the mornings. and full pay of course.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in most Departments have made financial savings as a result of working from home e.g. Fuel savings.
2	Respondents in a few Departments reported gratitude relating to the fact they felt they had a secure job and income.
3	Respondents in a few Departments reported concerns about increased home heating bills and having to purchase their own equipment.
4	Respondents in a few Departments reported having to purchase their own IT equipment and software as the equipment they were provided with was not fit for purpose.
5	Respondents in a few Departments reported money worries because of the reduced income within the home because of the pandemic.

## Accommodation

*This refers to respondents' comments about the building they have been working in during the pandemic. For example, home or office.*

A total of 43 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Around two thirds of which indicated a negative impact on respondents. The majority highlighted disadvantages of working in an open planned office environment, such as noise levels.



*Accommodating 3 members of the household all working from home.*



*I was issued with a laptop. There was no room in my small house for a desk so I had a laptop on my knee. My husband felt he had to go for a walk because there was nowhere for him to go in the house when I was attending a virtual meeting.*

*WFH has enabled me to focus more on work tasks - the open planned office that I was in was noisy as some people spoke loudly all day.*

### Insights

1

Respondents in some Departments reported that working from home has enabled them to identify negative aspects of working in open plan offices.

## Workspace

*This refers to respondents' comments on the workspace they have been using during the pandemic. For example, desk or dining room table.*

A total of 39 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Around three quarters of which indicated a negative impact on respondents. The main focus of these comments was the unsuitability of their home workspace.



*My kitchen was my space, my sanctuary, a place I enjoyed, where I could contemplate my day. Now it's been invaded and it has lost its shine.*



*I live with other family members and have been unable to set up a proper office working space. In the morning, I sit in an armchair, with my keyboard balanced on my knee and my mouse on the chair. I am concerned about the long term impact this is having on me physically and I have already experienced backpain. In the afternoon I am able to pack up my equipment and move into the kitchen, where I can at least set up my computer, keyboard and mouse on a table and use a better chair.*

*I am very fortunate that from my desk at home I have a great view of the beach and all the activity that happens there.*

*Hard to get a quiet area to work in house so I can concentrate fully on my work.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in some Departments reported having to give up space in their home for work to the detriment of their work life balance.
2	Respondents in most Departments reported having an unsuitable work space at home.

## Managerial communication

*This refers to respondents' comments on communication from managers (covering both senior management and direct line management).*

A total of 31 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. All but three of which indicated a negative impact on respondents. There were a number of reasons as to why these comments were made.



*I find that we don't get enough communication from higher levels, we seldom know what's going on and have long periods when we don't know what directions things are going.*



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*Interaction with staff is limited. I try to talk to the staff I have immediate line management responsibility for every other day and try to set up team zoom meetings every other week. However I miss the craic you get from interacting with staff.*

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*I have a sizeable budget to manage, with all my staff now mainly working from home and no meeting facilities other than Zoom I find it difficult to have the same handle on proceedings.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in some Departments reported that due to a lack of communication, staff weren't aware, at times, of what was going on.
2	Managers in a few Departments found it difficult to communicate with their staff during the pandemic.
3	Respondents in a few Departments noted that managers made conscious efforts to support and communicate with their staff on a regular basis.

## Home schooling

*This refers to respondents' comments on home schooling during the pandemic.*

A total of 30 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. All but three of which indicated a negative impact on respondents. The main reason for the comments was the difficulty in trying to balance work responsibilities whilst home schooling.



*It was very difficult to juggle work and home schooling, exhausting and felt like nothing was getting done very well.*



*After the first 3 months of working and living from home also shielding my daughter and balancing home schooling with full time working 5 days a week I was physically and emotionally exhausted and even though children have gone back to school it is still hard to continue being motivated to work from home.*

*I already have mental health problems, so being isolated from people and trying to juggle work and parenting and home schooling and a husband that is a key worker has taken its toll on me.*

*Stress of home schooling and child care combined with trying to work.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in some Departments reported that balancing work and home schooling was difficult and sometimes stressful.
2	Respondents in a few Departments felt positive about having the opportunity to home school their child.



## Motivation

*This refers to respondents' comments where participants referred to motivation levels.*

This theme attracted a total of 25 comments across the NICS, Around three quarters of which indicated a negative impact on respondents. There were no main reasons as to why these comments were made it was a number of individual reasons.



*You can only deal with a crisis for so long before you get fed up/ have had enough; also lack of structure makes it difficult to keep going and keep pushing.*



*I have worked at home since pandemic began. I really enjoy home working and not looking forward to going back in to the office again. I am quite good at motivating myself, although there are some times where I procrastinate .. overall I have been able to meet most targets.*

*Self motivation and enthusiasm for the work is difficult to sustain after 6 months of physical removal from the workplace and colleagues.*

*I can get up and get to work as I've more motivation.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in a few Departments found it difficult to sustain enthusiasm for the work due to the physical removal from the workplace and colleagues.
2	Respondents in a few Departments reported decreased motivation levels due to having to manage increases in personal and work responsibilities.

## Emotional support

*This refers to respondents' comments on support they have received during the pandemic from those all around them. For example, family, colleagues, friends, support services etc.*

A total of 20 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Just under three quarters of which indicated a negative impact on respondents. The main reason for these comments was a sense that managers did not reach out to try and support their staff or take account of their personal circumstances.



*I have a toddler who attends daycare. This was closed until August 2020 and so my husband and I were working from home and looking after our son at the same time which was very difficult. My manager was very understanding of this. It is not as much as an issue now as the nurseries have opened again but they may close again in the future.*



*I have a child with learning difficulties and special needs who requires full time adult support in school and who was then reliant on me 24/7 for learning and development as well as normal care. I got no respite from this and had the added responsibility of getting the child through months of important school work for transitioning to another school. I had NO support from my work in this and was fully expected to get the normal job done as well and without any daily communication to see how I was getting on. It was very much a case of log on and get the work done despite whatever else is happening.*

*Learning new post. No one to ask informally. No support / encouragement.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in a few Departments felt unsupported particularly through the inaction of their managers.
2	Respondents in a few Departments reflected that they felt supported by their managers with their individual circumstances considered sensitively.

## Learning

*This refers to respondents' comments that have related to learning during the pandemic.*

A total of 16 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. Just under three quarters of which indicated a positive impact on respondents. Having to take on new duties or use new technology was the main reason for these comments.



*I started a new role in a new department and have not been able to fully avail of existing staff or the office environment to learn my new role.*



*My work experiences since March have developed my career and abilities at a significant pace. While challenging and at times particularly stressful, this has been a very rewarding experience and has no doubt developed my abilities and I hope will impact positively on my career.*

*Working remotely has allowed me to develop skills pertinent to my job.*

*Training was limited - concern if doing the tasks correctly.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in a few Departments reported that working from home has helped them to learn new skills.
2	Respondents in a few Departments who undertook new duties during the pandemic found the associated learning experience beneficial.
3	Respondents in a few Departments found it hard to learn their new role.

## Environment

*This refers to respondents' comments on environmental impacts and an appreciation of the environment and nature.*

A total of 15 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. All of which indicated a positive impact on respondents. The reduction in carbon emissions and less pollution as a result of reduced commuting was the main reason for these comments.



*As I am concerned about the planet and environment it means a lot to me not to have to use the car or public transport to get to work therefore cutting my carbon footprint.*



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*Less commute in rush hour air polluted rat race.*

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*I love that I can spend more time with the dog and family. I walk the dog every lunch as I feel I have more energy now, and the dog loves the walks too! I escape my office and get outside for a bit of exercise or explore in the garden!*

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*Positive impact on the environment to less travel and vehicle emissions.*

### Insights

1

Respondents in a few Departments reported that not having to commute was having a positive impact on the environment.

## Monotony

*This refers to respondents' comments on boredom and monotony.*

A total of 13 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. All of which indicated a negative impact on respondents. The lack of change in routine and working from home were the main reasons for these comments.



*It has been groundhog day. Monotony and sameness.*



*At the start it felt like every day was the same - trying to juggle work with home schooling.*

*Lack of 'in-person' contact makes work boring and tedious.*

*Being at home all of the time is quite boring.*

### Insights

1

Respondents in a few Departments reported feeling a sense of monotony in that every day seemed to be the same.

## Decision making

*This refers to respondents' comments on decisions managers have made during the pandemic. This is both direct and senior managers.*

A total of 8 comments across the NICS were attributed to this theme. All of which indicated a negative impact on respondents. There were no main reasons as to why these comments were made it was a number of individual reasons.



*Long hours and very difficult decisions with no obvious answers being required in very short timescale affecting people's health and business viability.*



*The lack of support from the majority of our senior management meant that we had to make the decisions of which Departments got the initial IT equipment and prioritise this in the first 3 months of the pandemic.*

*Harder to get decisions and bounce things off people without face to face discussions.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in a few Departments reported that managers were making decisions from remote locations without the full picture of what was happening on the ground.
2	Respondents in a few Departments reported that managers were making decisions without seeking views of those with expertise in that field.
3	Respondents in a few Departments reported that new ways of working changed work interactions which led to delays in decision making.

## Public transport

*By this we mean responses that reference public transport.*

This theme attracted a total of seven comments across the NICS, around three quarters of which indicated a negative impact on respondents. The fear of contracting COVID-19 on public transport was the main reason for the comments.



*I used to use the bus but the social distancing is not being obeyed or enforced so I have to walk or cycle.*



*Worry about picking up the virus on public transport as it is not always possible to socially distance on the bus when other passengers get on.*

*Not having to travel on public transport; limiting the number of people in contact with on a daily basis.*

### Insights

1

Respondents in a few Departments reported that not having to take public transport means a lack of direct contact and lower risk of infection.



## Trust

*By this we mean responses that reference or indicate a link to trust. For example my manager lets me get on with things or I am not allowed to work outside of core hours.*

This theme attracted a total of seven comments across the NICS, just over half of which indicated a positive impact on respondents. There were no main reasons as to why these comments were made it was a number of individual reasons.



*A big change from the usual civil service culture, management are trusting staff more to produce quality work but in a different way.*



*Working from home has meant that I am able to produce more. Having my work computer at home and my manager has allowed me the flexibility to work longer days when required and shorter when necessary to maximise my time.*

*I believe that the ability to work from home has shown how much my employer trusts me to do a good job. This inspires confidence in my role within the NICS.*

Insights	
1	Respondents in a few Departments stated that management are trusting staff to produce quality work but in a different way.
2	Respondents in a few Departments felt they could not trust management with their health and safety.

## Business travel

*By this we mean responses that refer to travel to attend meeting, courses, conferences, etc.*

This theme attracted a total of five comments across the NICS, all of which indicated a positive impact on respondents. Using video conferencing was the main reason for these comments.



*Zoom meetings are much more efficient use of time as attendees can join in from anywhere without wasting time travelling.*



*It makes you realise that many meetings which before would have been held face to face are not necessary in that format. In my branch we have held many internal and external video conference meetings successfully. This has saved travel time and also additional cost.*

### Insights

1

Respondents in a few Departments reported that holding video conferencing means the need for business travel to meetings is largely unnecessary.

## Leadership

*By this we mean responses referring to leadership and how it has been displayed during the pandemic.*

This theme attracted a total of five comments across the NICS, four of which indicated a negative impact on respondents. There were no main reasons as to why these comments were made it was a number of individual reasons.



*It is about taking advantage of the opportunities and not being overwhelmed by the barriers. Its created space to do things we should have done long ago. Accepting ambiguity and moving at pace, creating the new normal and making it better than the old ways of working.*



### Insights

1

Respondents in a few Departments reported that the crisis created space to do things we should have done long ago and that leaders should take advantage of the opportunities and not be overwhelmed by the barriers.

## Preparedness

*By this we mean responses referring to preparedness in the past, now and in the future. For example, appropriate physical environment.*

This theme attracted a total of five comments across the NICS, all of which indicated a negative impact on respondents. Not having IT equipment available to staff was the main reason for these comments.



*I had the IT equipment to carry out my work but not everyone in the branch had and this caused some delays in setting up teams and communicating. In the end remote working made setting up and running a team easier once the NICS infrastructure caught up.*



### Insights

1

Respondents in a few Departments believed the NICS was completely unprepared for working from home.

## Gender

*By this we mean responses that infer or reference specifics about gender.*

This theme attracted a total of two comments across the NICS, all of which indicated a positive impact on respondents. There were no main reasons as to why these comments were made it was a number of individual reasons.

Insights	
1	Respondents in a few Departments reported that it was fantastic that pregnant staff could work from home and therefore avoid the need to travel on public transport.
2	Respondents in a few Departments reflected feel that women who are going through menopause or on their periods should be given the option to work from home.

“

*Working from home has provided more flexibility and a more comfortable environment”*

”



## 3B - REASONS AND IMPACTS

The drivers behind the reported experiences were identified through analysis of the findings and are recorded as the 'reasons'. Further to this, the way in which those experiences impacted upon the individuals are recorded as 'impacts'.

For example, one of the themes identified was stress. Factors influencing a reduction in stress included the lack of a commute and lack of distractions when working at home. These are recorded as 'reasons', because they are 'reasons' for stress levels being impacted, in this case by reducing it. In turn, some of the favourable impacts (i.e. outcomes that are desirable) of changes in this theme were increased productivity and mental well-being.

Reasons for driving an increase in stress levels (pushing in an undesirable direction), included not having colleagues to offload to, or having to balance work and childcare. Some of the unfavourable impacts of stress revealed in the survey were mental health issues and finding it harder to switch off after work.

This is an important piece of analysis that will help decision makers see how the positive experiences of staff might be facilitated or improved (by focusing on those factors which resulted in favourable outcomes); in addition the analysis will help alleviate the negative experiences (by addressing factors which contributed to unfavourable outcomes).

## Ways of working

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Makes caring responsibilities easier.	More enriched life (time with family, etc.).
	Better physical and mental health outcomes.
The ability to work from home.	Feeling safer at home.
Less distractions.	Improved concentration.
	Increased productivity.
Good availability of IT infrastructure and connectivity.	Easier to attend meetings.
	Personal and work time gained.
Less interruptions in working environment.	Better work life balance.
	More enriched life (time with family, etc.).
	Better physical and mental health outcomes.
	Personal time gained.
	Financial savings.
	Increased productivity.
Flexibility with work and personal time.	Better work life balance.
	More enriched life (time with family, etc.).
	Better physical and mental health outcomes.
	Personal time gained.
Limited or no availability of IT infrastructure and connectivity.	Collaborative working is more difficult.
	Feelings of frustration and stress.
	Lack of access to hard copy materials.



Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Increased workloads and challenging deadlines resulting from the pandemic.	Poorer work life balance.
	Additional pressures on staff.
	Feelings of frustration and stress.
	Feelings of resentment/unfairness.
	Difficulty in managing staff.
Working longer hours due to increased personal or pandemic related work responsibilities.	Poorer work life balance.
	Additional pressures on staff.
	Feelings of frustration and stress.
	Hard to switch off from work.
	Feelings of resentment/unfairness.
Being made to work from home.	Additional pressures on staff.
	Poorer work life balance.
	Feelings of frustration and stress.
	Hard to switch off from work.
	More difficult to focus on work due to distractions/responsibilities.
	Lack of access to hard copy materials.
	Feelings of resentment/unfairness.
Juggling work and home life.	Poorer work life balance.
	Additional pressures on staff.
	Feelings of frustration and stress.
	Feelings of resentment/unfairness.
	Hard to switch off from work.
	More difficult to focus on work due to distractions/responsibilities.
Lack of contact with colleagues.	Collaborative working is more difficult.
	Online meetings can make it difficult for everyone's voice to be heard.
	Feelings of frustration and stress.
	Work delayed and deadlines not met.

## Ways of working continued

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Reduced staff resource.	Work delayed and deadlines not met.
	Additional pressures on staff.
Poor workspace and work environment.	More difficult to focus on work due to distractions/responsibilities.
Safety concerns in offices and in the field.	Fear for personal safety.
Not allowed to work from home.	Feelings of resentment/unfairness.
	Fear for personal safety.
Teams working across different locations.	Collaborative working is more difficult.
	Work delayed and deadlines not met.
	Difficulty in managing staff.
	Fear for personal safety of working in unfamiliar offices.

## Adapting to change

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Flexibility to be able to work around home life.	Reduced stress.
	Improved work life balance outcomes.
Having the freedom to structure own work day.	Reduced stress.
	Improved work life balance outcomes.
	Builds stronger relationships between managers and staff.
Access to and use of technology.	Enabled the continued delivery of work outcomes.
	Enabled interaction between teams and colleagues to continue in some form.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Difficulties in balancing home and work responsibilities.	Unfavourable work life balance.
	Increased stress levels.
	Increased anxiety levels.
	More difficult to focus on work due to responsibilities.
	Additional pressures on staff.
Caring responsibilities (particularly for those with young children).	Unfavourable work life balance.
	More difficult to focus on work due to responsibilities.
	Additional pressures on staff.
	Increased stress levels.
	Increased anxiety levels.
Home schooling.	Additional pressures on staff.
	More difficult to focus on work due to responsibilities.
	Increased stress levels.
	Increased anxiety levels.
New work routine and structure.	Monotony.

## Adapting to change continued

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Changes to how interaction with colleagues happens.	Isolation.
	Hindered the continued delivery of work outcomes.
Poor workspace and work environment.	Unfavourable work life balance.
Technology (if not understood).	Hindered the continued delivery of work outcomes.
	Hindered interaction between teams and colleagues.
	Collaborative working is more difficult.

## Interaction with colleagues

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Ability to build or maintain networks using technology.	Supported the building and maintenance of work relationships.
	Enabled the continued delivery of work outcomes.
	Reduces feelings of isolation.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Working across different locations and not all being in the office.	Work relationships more difficult to build and maintain.
	Reduced camaraderie/team spirit within teams.
	Detrimental to solving problems and collaborative working.
	Reduced transfer of work information.
	Reduced socialising.
	New starts struggle to bond and integrate into teams.
	Feelings of loneliness, isolation and disconnection.
Reduced face to face communication.	Work relationships more difficult to build and maintain.
	Reduced camaraderie/team spirit within teams.
	Detrimental to solving problems and collaborative working.
	Reduced transfer of work information.
	Reduced socialising.
	New starts struggle to bond and integrate into teams.
	Feelings of loneliness, isolation and disconnection.

## Interaction with colleagues continued

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Breakdown of normal social routines.	Reduced camaraderie/team spirit within teams.
	Reduced transfer of work information.
	Reduced socialising.
	New starts struggle to bond and integrate into teams.
	Feelings of loneliness, isolation and disconnection.
Having to use technology to interact/communicate.	Work relationships more difficult to build and maintain.
	Detrimental to solving problems and collaborative working.
	Reduced transfer of work information.
	Reduced socialising.
	New starts struggle to bond and integrate into teams.

## Commute

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Flexibility to be able to work around home life.	Improved work life balance outcomes.
	Starting work more energised,
	Less tired and being more productive.
	Financial savings.
	Feeling safer as not using public transport.
	More relaxed.
	Environmental benefits.
Time gained through no commute.	Improved work life balance outcomes.
	Has provided the opportunity to plan and undertake activities that respondents value.
	More relaxed.
Flexibility as to when respondents start or finish the day.	Has provided the opportunity to plan and undertake activities that respondents value.
	More relaxed.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Change of routine resulting from no commute.	Loss of the natural break between work life and home life.
Not using public transport to commute.	Loss of socialising with others and building networks/friendships.

## Stress

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Not having to physically commute.	Removal of the stresses of getting organised for work and sitting in traffic.
	Improved mental well-being.
Having a less distracting environment at home.	Improved concentration levels.
	Better productivity.
	Improved mental well-being.
Having more control of their working day.	Reduction in stress due to flexibility to organise their responsibilities.
	Improved mental well-being.
Making a positive contribution to society through their work.	Helps to manage the stresses of pandemic related workload pressures.
	Improved mental well-being.
	A sense of pride and achievement.



Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Working longer hours due to increased personal or pandemic related work responsibilities.	Detrimentially impacted mental health conditions (e.g. Depression).
	Poorer work life balance.
No colleagues to offload to.	Additional stress due to reduced support available to help deliver services.
	Feeling of isolation/disconnection.
Managers making decisions remotely with a lack of on the ground perspective.	Feeling of distrust, anger and a sense of unfairness.
Balancing childcare/schooling.	Additional stress as more difficult to focus on work due to responsibilities.
	Additional pressures on staff.
	Poorer work life balance.
Branches not implementing policies.	Fear for personal safety.
Workloads/deadlines increased/ shortened.	Increased people reporting mental health conditions (e.g. Depression).
Bullying.	Increased people reporting mental health conditions (e.g. Depression).
Lack of support for newcomers.	Increased stress.
IT issues affecting ability to communication and work effectively.	Increased stress.
Risks to personal safety.	Increased stress.
	Increased people reporting mental health conditions (e.g. Depression).
Change in daily routine.	Poorer work life balance.

## IT and general resources

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Provision of effective IT hardware and software.	Provided staff with the flexibility to work productively from home.
Use of new communication tools such as video conferencing and Jabber.	Helped staff keep in touch.
	Supported the building and maintenance of work relationships.
	Enabled the continued delivery of work outcomes.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Poor access to IT software.	Inhibited the ability to work productively from home.
Lack of IT hardware/office equipment at home e.g. Printers/chairs/monitors.	Inhibited the ability to work productively from home.
	Negatively impacts on physical well-being.
Connectivity.	Inhibited the ability to work productively from home.
	Makes productive communication difficult.
Suitability of the equipment supplied.	Monotony.
Incompatible IT platforms within and across Departments.	Makes productive communication difficult.

## Personal safety

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Working at home.	Feeling safer at home than in office.
	Less stress.
	Less anxiety.
	Feeling grateful.
Not having to travel in public transport.	Feeling safer.
	Less stress.
	Less anxiety.
Staff with pre-existing medical conditions.	Feeling safer.
	Less stress.
	Less anxiety.
New office COVID-19 precautions for Health & Safety being implemented.	Feeling safer.
	Less stress.
	Less anxiety.
Pregnancy.	Feeling safer at home than in office.
	Less anxiety.
	Feeling grateful.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Having to work in the office/field.	Feeling fearful.
	Increased anxiety.
	Increased stress.
Colleagues and customers not adhering to COVID-19 guidelines.	Feeling fearful.
	Increased anxiety.
	Increased risk of catching COVID-19.
Office COVID-19 precautions for Health & Safety not implemented properly.	Feeling fearful.
	Increased anxiety.
	Increased risk of catching COVID-19.
Emotional reactions about managerial decisions.	Feeling undervalued.
	Distrust of management and others.
	Feelings of resentment.
Not being allowed to work from home.	Feelings of resentment.
Relocation to unfamiliar office environment.	Feeling fearful.
	Increased anxiety.
No provision of PPE.	Feeling undervalued.
	Distrust of management and others.
	Feelings of resentment.
	Increased risk of catching COVID-19.
Outbreak of COVID-19 in office.	Feeling fearful.
	Increased anxiety.
	Increased risk of catching COVID-19.

## Anxiety

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Working at home.	Reduced anxiety levels around fear of contracting COVID-19.
	Improved mental well-being.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Concern for personal and family safety.	Increased anxiety levels.
	Adverse impacts on mental health.
Long term implications of the pandemic.	Increased anxiety levels.
	Feelings of fear and uncertainty.
	Adverse impacts on mental health.
Balance of work and home pressures.	Increased anxiety levels.
	Adverse impacts on mental health.
Unsafe working environment.	Increased anxiety levels around fear of contracting COVID-19.
	Adverse impacts on mental health.
	Feelings of resentment.
Behaviours of colleagues (e.g. Social distancing).	Increased anxiety levels around fear of contracting COVID-19.
	Adverse impacts on mental health.
	Feelings of anger.
Increased workload due to pandemic.	Increased anxiety levels around ability to meet deadlines.
	Adverse impacts on mental health.
Not allowed to work from home.	Feelings of resentment.

## Emotional reactions about work outputs

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
The ability to work from home.	Feelings of gratitude.
Having a secure job and income.	Feelings of gratitude.
Contributing to the essential needs of colleagues and the general public.	Feelings of pride.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Managers not taking account of personal circumstances.	Feeling undervalued.
	Feelings of resentment.
	Feelings of unfairness.
	Feelings of distrust of management.
Perception of others not working or having a reduced workload.	Feelings of unfairness.
	Feelings of resentment.
Forced to work in the office.	Feelings of unfairness.
	Feelings of resentment.
	Feelings of distrust of management.
Concerns that they are not carrying their weight in their team.	Feelings of guilt.

## Isolation

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Use of new communication tools such as video conferencing and Jabber.	Remaining connected to teams and colleagues.
	Reduced feelings of isolation.
	Allows for socialising.
Flexibility to choose working location.	Reduced feelings of isolation.
	Allows for socialising.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Working alone.	Feeling isolated.
	Adverse impacts on mental health.
	Reduced ability to socialise.
	Reduced motivation.
Breakdown of interaction with colleagues.	Feeling isolated.
	Reduced ability to socialise.
	Feeling disconnected.
No face to face communication.	Feeling isolated.
	Adverse impacts on mental health.
	Reduced ability to socialise.
Living alone.	Feeling lonely.
	Feeling isolated.
	Adverse impacts on mental health.
	Reduced ability to socialise.
	Feeling disconnected.
	Reduced motivation.

## Productivity

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Not working in a noisy office environment.	More productive.
	Better able to focus and concentrate.
	Reduced stress levels.
Flexibility of when and where they work.	Plan to work when they feel they can be most productive.
Better use and supply of IT hardware and software.	Having the right tools to do their job.
	More productive.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Poor access to IT hardware and software.	Don't have the right tools to do their job.
	Less productive.
Home schooling.	Distracted and unable to concentrate fully.
	Less productive.
Feelings of anxiety.	Being overwhelmed.
	Less productive.



## Teamwork

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Supply and use of communication software.	Maintains team relationships and enables collaboration.
	Enables the continued delivery of work outcomes.
Regular virtual meetings held.	Maintains team relationships and enables collaboration.
	Enables the continued delivery of work outcomes.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Teams working across different locations.	Reduced camaraderie/team spirit within teams.
	Hinders the continued delivery of team outcomes.
	Harder to collaborate and reduction in capability for peer review.
	Feelings of isolation and disconnection.
	Reduced socialising.
Breakdown of normal social routines.	Reduced camaraderie/team spirit within teams.
	Feelings of isolation and disconnection.
	Reduced socialising.
	New starts struggle to bond and integrate into teams.
Not holding regular virtual meetings.	Hinders the continued delivery of team outcomes.
	Harder to collaborate and reduction in capability for peer review.
	Feelings of isolation and disconnection.
Poor or no structured communication.	Hinders the continued delivery of team outcomes.
	Harder to collaborate and reduction in capability for peer review.
Joining a new team.	New starts struggle to bond and integrate into teams.
	Feelings of isolation and disconnection.

## Physical well-being

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Time gained from not having to commute.	More time to engage in activities to improve their physical well-being.
	Less tired.
	Improved mental well-being.
	Less stress.
Flexibility to structure their day.	Having more energy.
	More time to engage in activities to improve their physical well-being.
	Improved mental well-being.
Not working in an office.	Less stress.
	More comfortable, particularly for those with minor and chronic illnesses.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Heavy workload and long hours due to increased personal or pandemic related work responsibilities.	Feeling tired, fatigued, burnt out or exhausted.
	Changes in their dietary habits and weight gain.
	Headaches.
Poor home workspace.	Led to back, shoulder and neck pain.
Easy access to food.	Changes in their dietary habits and weight gain.
Sedentary working.	Led to back, shoulder and neck pain.
	Weight gain.
Small screens.	Led to back, shoulder and neck pain.
	Headaches.
	Sore eyes.
Home schooling.	Feeling tired, fatigued, burnt out or exhausted.
Shift work.	Feeling tired, fatigued, burnt out or exhausted.
Anxiety.	Feeling tired, fatigued, burnt out or exhausted.
	Headaches.

## Managerial responsibilities

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Managers providing support.	Building better relationships.
	Builds trust.
	Builds loyalty.
Managers fully taking account of individual circumstances.	Feeling valued.
	Builds better relationships.
	Builds trust.
Managers being flexible with staff.	Builds loyalty.
	Feeling of gratitude.
	Feeling valued.
	Building better relationships.
	Builds trust.
	Builds loyalty.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Managers not providing support.	Feeling undervalued.
	Negative impacts on health and well-being.
	Increased stress.
	Increased anxiety.
	New starts struggle to bond and integrate into teams.
Managers not considering individual circumstances.	Feeling undervalued.
	Negative impacts on health and well-being.
	Feelings of feelings of resentment/unfairness.
	Increased stress.
	Erosion of trust.
	Increased anxiety.

## Managerial responsibilities continued

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Unreasonable expectations placed on staff.	Feeling undervalued.
	Frustrated with disproportionate workloads.
	Increased stress.
	Increased anxiety.
Managers not being flexible.	Negative impacts on health and well-being.
	Increased stress.
	Increased anxiety.
Lack of communication.	Feeling undervalued.
	Increased stress.
	Erosion of trust.
	Increased anxiety.
	New starts struggle to bond and integrate into teams.
Not managing resources effectively.	Frustrated with disproportionate workloads.
	Negative impacts on health and well-being.
Not being integrated in a new team.	Feeling undervalued.
	Increased stress.
	Increased anxiety.

## Time

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Not having to commute.	Provided the opportunity to plan and undertake activities that respondents value.
	Improved work life balance outcomes.
Flexibility as to when respondents start or finish the day.	Provided the opportunity to plan and undertake activities that respondents value.
	Improved work life balance outcomes.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Heavy workload and long hours due to increased personal or pandemic related work responsibilities.	Less opportunity to plan and undertake activities that respondents value.
	Unfavourable work life balance outcomes.

## Caring responsibilities

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Working from home.	The flexibility to care for their children or elderly relatives.
	Time available for unpaid caring responsibilities and spending time with elderly relatives.
	Children's well-being benefitted by being cared for by their parent.
	Improved family relationships.
	A reduced risk to their personal safety made it easier to support vulnerable family members.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Trying to balance work and caring responsibilities.	Devastatingly difficult leading to deterioration in mental health.
	Damage to family relationships.
	Working longer hours in the evenings to deal with work pressures.
	Increased anxiety.
School closures.	Increased personal caring responsibilities.
Increased workloads.	Feeling of guilt at not being able to spend more time caring for children.
Lack of support or understanding of heavy caring responsibilities.	Feeling of anger and unfairness.

## Focus and distraction

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Working from home.	Less distractions at home than in an office.
	Less interruptions from colleagues.
	Quieter.
	Improved concentration.
	Better productivity.
	Flexibility to work when can focus best.
No more office politics as working away from the office.	More relaxed and focused.
Using video technology for meetings.	Tend to be more focused.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Jobs to be done around home.	Difficult to focus when these are in your field of vision at home.
Working from home.	Noisy.
	Easily distracted by others in the household.
Poor workspace at home.	Unable to focus.
Fluctuating workload.	Difficult to remain focused.

## Family activity

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
No commute.	Able to spend time with family undertaking activities they valued.
	Less pressure in the mornings provides better worklife balance.
	Family meal more likely every evening.
Working from home.	Able to spend time with family undertaking activities they valued.
	Less reliance on others to help with school runs etc.
	Increased flexibility to discharge caring responsibilities.
	Stronger family bonds.
	Ability to home school children and avoid gaps in education.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Lockdown restrictions.	Inhibited access to relatives/family and led to mental health issues.
Increased workload and pressing deadlines.	Less time available to spend with family.
Increased workloads.	Feeling of guilt at not being able to spend more time caring for children.
Blur between home and work life when working from home.	Difficult for young children to understand why a parent cannot spend all their time with them.



## Money

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
No commute.	Fuel savings.
	Not having to pay for public transport.
	Parking savings.
Working from home.	Not paying for childcare.
	Not buying coffees and lunches.
	Paying off debts due to financial savings.
	Can increase investments due to financial savings.
Having a secure income.	Feeling of gratitude.
	Reduced stress and anxiety linked to financial hardship.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Furlough of partner.	Made cutbacks to manage on a single wage.
NICS not prepared at start of pandemic.	The need to purchase personal IT and office equipment.
Working from home.	Increased heating and electricity bills.

## Accommodation

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Working from home.	Increased productivity due to less distractions than in open planned office.
	Ability to listen to music/radio.
	Quieter than working in open planned office.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Working in an office.	Constant interruptions from colleagues.
	Uninspiring environment.
	Fear for safety as some colleagues not social distancing or safety procedures not implemented in a timely manner.
Working from home.	Additional wear and tear on fixtures and fittings.
Home schooling.	Led to a noisy and distracting environment not conducive to productive working.

## Workspace

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Working from home.	Happy to be able to work in same space as other family members.
	Reduced stress due to feeling calmer and relaxed in own environment.
	Ability to control own working environment.
	Makes for a less pressurised atmosphere.
Having space available in the home.	Feeling comfortable.
	Better able to concentrate.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Using home furniture as workspace.	Led to physical ailments such as neck and back pain.
Working from home.	Using home for work led to blur between the two making it hard to switch off.
	Not using ergonomically equipment and fear this could lead to physical ailments.
A number of people working from home.	Cramped with a lack of space to facilitate.
	Difficult to focus/concentrate.
	Difficult to maintain confidentiality.
Giving up home space for work.	Feeling of frustration.
	Detrimental to work life balance outcomes.

## Managerial communication

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Managers scheduling regular meetings.	Kept lines of communication open and allowed staff to express concerns and issues.
	Discharging duty of care responsibilities for staff.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Lack of direct communication from managers.	Confusion.
	Feeling undervalued.
	Staff feel less informed.
	Feelings of isolation.
	Uncertainty as to future plans.
Teams working across various locations with no direct line of sight.	Managers find it difficult to communicate with staff as they cannot see progress on projects.
	Difficult for managers to delegate effectively.
Managers refusing to share information with staff.	Detrimental to team morale.
Inadequate IT equipment.	Managers found this frustrating when trying to monitor/allocate work.

## Home schooling

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Working from home.	Parents provided the flexibility to supervise and assist with home schooling.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Juggling work with home schooling.	Difficult to distinguish between work and home.
	Increased stress.
	Pressure led to rushing everything which affected quality of output.
	Physical and emotional exhaustion.
No support or flexibility provided by line management.	Emotional distress.

## Motivation

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Working from home.	Increase in self-motivation.
Working for NICS.	Grateful for secure income.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Every day feels the same no change in routine.	Feelings of low mood.
Reduction in leisure opportunities due to increases in responsibilities.	Feeling trapped.
Physical removal from workplace and colleagues.	Difficult to maintain self-motivation.
Working extended hours.	Hinders work life balance in terms of low motivation.
Feeling unappreciated.	Demoralised.
Attacks on civil servants in the media.	Lowers motivation.

## Emotional support

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Personal circumstance being considered and flexibility shown by direct line manager.	Increased loyalty.
	Sense of gratitude.
	Feeling valued.
Managers holding regular meetings and everyone given the opportunity to discuss any concerns/worries.	Sense of we're all in this together.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Lack of direct communication from management.	Feeling undervalued.
Personal circumstance not being considered or understood by direct line manager.	Feeling overwhelmed.
	Feeling undervalued.
	Loss of trust.
	Sense of unfairness.
	Reduced work life balance outcomes.
Lack of support from managers and colleagues for staff starting new role.	Staff not receiving adequate support to integrate into a new team.
Loss of interaction with colleagues.	Reduced feeling of support as less regular discussions with team mates leading to feelings of isolation.

## Learning

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Courses moving online and free of charge.	Increase in professional skills.
Working from home.	Increased digital skills.
Taking on new roles.	Increased skills, knowledge and ability.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Limited training.	Uncertainty if doing job correctly.
Lack of face to face interaction.	Difficult to learn new role.
No on the job training.	Difficult to learn new role.
Lack of job specific induction.	Difficult to learn new role.

## Environment

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
No commute.	Reduced pollution.
	Safer roads.
	Reduced individual carbon footprints.
Working from home.	People had the flexibility to enjoy nature around them through walking and exercising.
	Ability to work in their garden or with a view to appreciate nature.

**There were no unfavourable reasons and impacts identified.**

## Monotony

There were no favourable reasons and impacts identified.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Working from home.	Sense of groundhog day.
No transition from work to home.	Blur between home and work life.

## Decision making

There were no favourable reasons and impacts identified.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Lack of senior management support.	Lower grades made prioritisation decisions above their responsibility.
Making difficult decisions with restrictive time pressures.	Detrimental impact on peoples mental well-being.
Lack of consultation with staff or experts.	Decisions not fully thought out and not effective in some cases.
Managers making decisions remotely without knowledge of impact on the ground.	Increased stress for staff on the ground.
	Feeling of unfairness.
	Feeling of frustration.
Lack of communication, especially face to face.	Difficulty in bouncing ideas off peers leading to delays in making decisions.

## Public transport

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Working from home.	Feeling safer.
	Reduced anxiety.
	Reduced stress.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Loss of social interaction.	Feeling lonely.



## Trust

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Flexibility provided by managers.	Increased productivity.
	Inspires confidence.
	Feelings of gratitude.
	Feelings of loyalty.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Personal health and safety.	Staff cannot trust management to keep them safe.

## Business travel

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Using video conferencing to hold meetings.	Increased efficiency as no requirement to waste time and money travelling to meetings.
	Highlighted how many meetings that were held previously were not now required.

**There were no unfavourable reasons and impacts identified.**

## Leadership

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Opportunity presented by pandemic.	The will to learn and making working practices better than before.

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Senior leaders focus more on outputs than staff well-being.	Feeling undervalued.
Lack of support for staff on the ground.	Feeling undervalued.

## Preparedness

**There were no favourable reasons and impacts identified.**

Reasons for unfavourable comments	Unfavourable impacts identified
Lack of surplus IT equipment to support working from home.	Breakdown in interactions between colleagues.
	Staff had to purchase personal equipment.
	Delays in processing work.
	Unable to work from home.

## Gender

Reasons for favourable comments	Favourable impacts identified
Pregnancy.	Feeling safer at home as less contact with the public and no requirement to travel on uncomfortable public transport.
Working from home whilst going through the menopause or being on their period.	Feeling more comfortable.

**There were no unfavourable reasons and impacts identified.**



“

*“Blurring of the boundary  
between home and work.”*

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## 3C - STAFF ADVICE

One of the survey questions was: *‘knowing what you know now, if another lockdown was to take place in two years’ time, what advice would you give to senior managers about supporting their staff?’*

The responses to this question were analysed and developed into “staff advice”. The lists of insights identified previously for each theme is used, and where a clear connection between an insight and staff advice is evident these have been brought together. In some cases a theme or an individual insight is not listed. This is because no clear connection with a piece of staff advice was identified. ‘Overarching staff advice’ is provided for some themes where the advice provided related to a theme but not a specific insight.

The staff advice presented here provides a valuable perspective on how respondents see the challenges and issues arising from working during the pandemic being resolved. Often those closest to the situation are best placed to see solutions. This staff advice forms a catalogue of forward thinking options which can be used by policy and decision makers when considering the future of working within the NICS and in other public and private sector organisations.

## Ways of working

OVERARCHING STAFF ADVICE	
NICS should introduce a flexible policy on working from home that allows for blended working	

Insights		Staff advice
2	Respondents from all Departments reported that working from home has empowered staff to decide how and when they work.	The Department should introduce a flexible policy on working from home.
4	Respondents in all Departments reported that working remotely had changed how work interactions are conducted and has led to some delays in processing work.	Senior Managers need to be more understanding of the difficulties and challenges about working from home. E.G. software issues, home broadband issues, no access to key personnel to liaise with.
5	Respondents in most Departments reported the ability to work flexible, non-traditional hours has been seen as a positive for working from home.	The Department should be more flexible with hours for those who come into the workplace.
6	Respondents in some Departments reported that working from home has empowered staff to decide how, where and when they work.	Staff recommend that the Department should move towards a more sustainable approach to working from home consistently.
		Staff would recommend that the NICS embraces working flexibly, for example remote working where possible and appropriate.
		Introduce a policy that allows staff to work their hours (time of day) to fit around their home life to allow for a better balance.
		Allow staff the flexibility to work their hours when they want to (24/7) where appropriate.
7	Respondents in some Departments feel that using video technology is a more efficient way of conducting effective work meetings.	A flexible approach to working in the NICS should be adopted as standard e.g. working remotely and embracing new technologies.

## Ways of working continued

Insights	Staff advice
8 Respondents in some Departments reported the ability to work flexible, non-traditional hours and fit work around other responsibilities has been seen as a positive for working from home.	Introduce a policy that allows staff to work their hours (time of day) to fit around their home life to allow for a better balance.
9 Respondents in some Departments reported that using technology supported them to work well from home.	The Department should introduce a flexible policy on working from home.
	Be adaptive, embrace new technology, improve the broadband connections for staff to allow them to fully engage and help staff adapt their homes for home working.
	Look to work digitally where possible and ensure staff are trained to cover a wider range of work areas.
10 Respondents in some Departments reported having to work longer hours due to increased workloads.	Managers should work with staff ensure there is a balance between personal lives and business objectives. E.G. ensure people are not working ridiculous hours.
	A flexible and supportive approach to working in the NICS should be adopted as standard E.G. a working from home policy that considers people's individual circumstances.
	Staff recommend that managers are realistic about deadlines and workloads. E.G. People working from home should not need to be forced to work 24/7. They are entitled to switch off.
	A member of staff recommends not having unrealistic expectations of staff working from home. I.E. they are not on call 24/7.
11 Respondents in some Departments reported that their workloads had increased.	Staff recommend that workloads are monitored and balanced being careful not to overload staff.

## Ways of working continued

Insights		Staff advice
12	Respondents in some Departments reported that not having access to hard copy materials made their work more challenging.	Accelerate work analysing the digitisation of processes and reduction of paper, to support comprehensive remote working arrangements as far as possible.
13	Respondents in a few Departments reported increased work pressures and tighter deadlines.	To reduce stress levels, managers need to be realistic with deadlines and timescales when asking staff working from home to complete urgent tasks.

## Adapting to change

### OVERARCHING STAFF ADVICE

Allow staff the flexibility to use their NICS office when they want to.

Insights	Staff advice
<p>1 Respondents in all Departments found there was a blur between their home and work life and they struggled to adapt to this change.</p>	<p>Senior managers should regularly check in on the well-being of their staff to see if they are coping ok, particularly for staff on an alternative working pattern who end up working the equivalent hours of a full time staff member.</p> <p>Everybody's situation is different therefore managers should have empathy in discharging their duty of care and put themselves in the shoes of their staff members prior to making decisions.</p> <p>Have a clear strategy for remote working which acknowledges people still need to connect, feel part of a team and nurture their professional and peer networks.</p>
<p>6 Respondents in a few Departments reported that they struggled to adapt as a result of changes in how they communicate and interact with their team and work colleagues.</p>	<p>That a strategy is developed to encourage and maintain contacts between teams and individuals.</p>



## Interaction with colleagues

Insights		Staff advice
1	Respondents in all Departments reported a loss of staff interactions which has negatively impacted the transfer of work information.	Encourage staff to keep in touch with each other (formally and informally) and the technology is in place to enable this e.g. team meetings and tea breaks.
		Encourage staff to stay in contact with each other, work together and support each other.
		Ensure there are regular meetings where staff can feel they are contributing to the team and have opportunities to share best practice.
2	Respondents in most Departments reported that there seems to be a loss or reduction in camaraderie within teams.	Managers should take time to build and maintain team relationships being particularly mindful of staff who feel isolated.
3	Respondents in some Departments reported that a lack of face to face interaction was detrimental to productive communication.	Allow staff the flexibility to use their NICS office for face to face contact when they want to.
4	Respondents in a few Departments reported that colleagues were able to build or maintain networks using technology.	Ensure video conferencing is used in a way that will support interaction between colleagues.

## Commute

For this theme there was no staff advice that could be aligned to the insights.

## Stress

### OVERARCHING STAFF ADVICE

Implement quicker mental health support, flexible policies to take account of the vast differences in everyone's circumstances.

Insights		Staff advice
1	Respondents in most Departments reported decreased stress levels as a result of the flexibility provided through working from home.	Implement better agile working policies. Make sure that everyone is treated the same and everyone has the capacity to work from home. Be more aware of the difficulties staff may face.
3	Respondents in most Departments reported increased stress levels due to heavier workloads, more pressing deadlines and the need to work longer hours.	To reduce stress levels, managers need to be realistic with deadlines and timescales particularly when adjusting to a new way of working.
4	Respondents in some Departments reported that balancing childcare/ schooling responsibilities with work duties was a direct causation of stress.	Allow staff to work flexibly around other pressures and priorities this will facilitate improved output.
		Managers should be flexible with staff to build trust that things will get done even if they are not done during the typical 9-5 framework.

## IT and general resources

Insights	Staff advice
<p>1 Respondents in most Departments reported that having and using technology has enabled them to effectively work from home.</p>	<p>Make sure you give staff appropriate IT facilities, a financial contribution towards an office desk and chair.</p> <p>Staff recommend giving staff advice about where/how to set up a workstation when working from home.</p> <p>Provide laptops to all staff members and remove all desktops.</p> <p>Provide everyone with the necessary IT and office equipment and infrastructure to support remote working. E.G. printers, laptops.</p>
<p>2 Respondents in most Departments reported that the better use of video conferencing technology has aided communication for staff when working from home.</p>	<p>Ensure video conferencing technologies are utilised in a way that will support interaction between colleagues and allow managers to discharge their duty of care responsibilities e.g. virtual check-ins.</p>
<p>3 Respondents from most Departments reported that poor IT availability and connectivity impacted negatively on their ability to work effectively.</p>	<p>Have the IT infrastructure (E.G. Laptops/ Printers/phones) and equipment in place to allow more staff to work remotely to ensure continued delivery of the business.</p> <p>Develop a strategy to provide access to up to date IT and office equipment to enable efficient and effective working from home.</p> <p>Provide up to date IT and office equipment to enable working from home. This includes software such as video conferencing.</p>
<p>4 Respondents in a few Departments reported the limitations of using smaller laptop screens.</p>	<p>Make sure everybody has proper equipment &amp; resources - monitor, keyboard, mouse, headset, good broadband connection and required safety equipment.</p>
<p>5 Respondents in a few Departments reflected frustrations at setting up and using new video conferencing technology.</p>	<p>Provide training on any new software that is being used.</p>

## Personal safety

The safety of your staff should be prioritised above business needs.

1	<p>Respondents in most Departments felt safer working from home during the pandemic.</p>
	<p>Take into account staff concerns regarding what feels 'safe' for them individually and facilitate / continue home working arrangements as much as possible if a staff member feels safer doing so.</p>

## Anxiety

<b>OVERARCHING STAFF ADVICE</b>
<p>To tackle isolation &amp; anxiety, communications should be developed to ensure regular formal and informal communication takes place across all grades / teams / business areas.</p>

Insights	Staff advice
1	<p>Respondents in some Departments reported being anxious and uncertain about COVID-19 and the impact that would have on their family and themselves.</p>
3	<p>Managers should reassure their staff.</p>
3	<p>Respondents in a few Departments reported feeling anxious due to work and home pressures.</p>
4	<p>Managers need to support staff by paying particular attention to workloads and working patterns and how they may place pressures on their mental health.</p>
4	<p>Respondents in one Department, up to EO grade, reported that working in the office, made them feel anxious and stressed as a result of not being allowed to work from home.</p>
	<p>Managers should listen to staff concerns and ensure individual needs are met whilst also making sure it's fair for the whole office.</p>

## Emotional reactions about work outputs

OVERARCHING STAFF ADVICE	
Managers should treat staff equally and have fair expectations.	
Insights	Staff advice
2	<p>Respondents in some Departments expressed a sense of resentment due to other staff having little or no tangible work to do.</p> <p>The Department should develop a contingency plan to ensure that work is equally distributed to all staff and it isn't 'the few' doing it all. This should help reduce feelings of resentment and unfairness.</p>
3	<p>Respondents in some Departments expressed feelings of unfairness at the pressure put onto them through unreasonable managerial expectations or requests.</p> <p>The Department should have a fully prepared HR policy in place instead of leaving COVID Managing Attendance to LMs as there's too much disparity in how this is being implemented leading to feelings of unfairness and demoralisation.</p>
	<p>Managers should introduce a staff rotation scheme to avoid feelings of unfairness from staff working in the office toward those working at home or consider alternative rewards (E.G. flexi, bonus).</p>
	<p>A respondent stated that managers should display leadership and not make unreasonable requests of staff.</p>
4	<p>Respondents in some Departments expressed that they felt undervalued by management.</p> <p>Staff should be valued and not just seen as a resource.</p>
	<p>That managers should value substantive and agency staff equally.</p>
5	<p>Respondents in some Departments stated that they felt they could not trust management with their health and safety.</p> <p>Managers have a duty of care to contact their staff to make sure they are coping ok. This is particularly important for staff with pre-existing mental health conditions.</p>
	<p>Staff recommended that managers are considerate of the health and well-being of their staff when making a decision about bringing them into the office.</p>
	<p>Staff recommend that senior leaders actively listen to staff views and concerns and take meaningful actions in discharging their duty of care that will improve the health and well-being of their staff.</p>

## Emotional reactions about work outputs continued

Respondents in a few Departments expressed feelings of unfairness because they believed that their personal responsibilities were not taken account of whilst other peoples were.	Managers should balance Staff engagement with advice on how to manage the work. Some branches were over the top trying to force social interaction via video but not supporting on the work front or taking time to understand the challenges the staff are facing.

## Isolation

OVERARCHING STAFF ADVICE
To tackle isolation & anxiety, communications should be developed to ensure regular formal and informal communication takes place across all grades / teams / business areas.

Insights	Staff advice
1 Respondents in most Departments reported respondents who felt isolated because of loss of contact with colleagues, whether this was working at home or in the office.	Staff recommend that face to face contact is maintained wherever possible for both team and 1-1 meeting.
	Staff recommend that more non-work related content is shared on the intranet or sent out via email, such as recommended podcasts, recipes, puzzles, forums etc. - staff need some stimulation to replace office chat.
	Staff recommend that managers implement set-frequency/regular meetings of teams or with staff to catch up and avoid isolation (such as a weekly video meeting or daily five-minute update call).
2 Respondents in some Departments had staff that were feeling lonely, particularly acute for those respondents who work alone or live alone.	Staff recommend that managers take on board the mental pressures associated with solitary working.
	Managers should schedule more contact and zoom meetings with staff to help tackle loneliness.
4 Respondents in one Department remained connected to their colleagues through the use of video conferencing technologies thus reducing feelings of isolation.	Staff recommend that Departments normalise communications through jabber/calls/video calls, even non-work related conversations so staff get into the habit of using the technology and staying in touch.

## Productivity

For this theme there was no staff advice that could be aligned to the insights, however there was one piece of overarching staff advice.

OVERARCHING STAFF ADVICE
Put in place better arrangements to work flexibly now to cope with issues in the future. There are qualitative productivity and environmental dividends to be gained from a positive change in teamworking.

## Teamwork

Respondents in most Departments reported that the impact of working disparately has had a negative impact on how teams work, interact and collaborate.	Managers should ensure that teams keep in touch remotely to ensure team spirit is maintained and everyone knows what is expected from them.
	Ensure there are regular team communications to check on staff well-being and share information.
	Teams should be encouraged to have scheduled, structured and time limited formal team briefs (short and succinct).
Respondents in most Departments reported staff who were new to their teams having difficulty integrating.	Managers should schedule time for regularly one-to-one meetings with their staff.
Respondents in a few Departments, team spirit was noted to have suffered as a result of working disparately.	Ensure there is regular communication to maintain team culture.
	Managers should schedule meetings of small teams (5-6) to allow some room for friendships and team spirit to continue.

## Physical well-being

For this theme there was no staff advice that could be aligned to the insights, however there was one piece of overarching staff advice.

OVERARCHING STAFF ADVICE
Senior managers should inform staff of the potential health deficits that may result from working from home and place a greater emphasis on safeguarding physical and emotional well-being.

## Managerial responsibilities

Insights	Staff advice
<p>1 Respondents in most Departments reported that they felt management did not fully discharge their duty of care.</p>	<p>Everybody's situation is different therefore managers should have empathy in discharging their duty of care and put themselves in the shoes of their staff members prior to making decisions.</p> <p>Managers need to recognise the importance of their duty of care to regularly check on staff's mental and physical well-being.</p>
<p>2 Respondents in some Departments reported feeling that the increased levels of work and workload coupled with resource pressures were not managed effectively.</p>	<p>Staff recommend that managers take a flexible approach to how they manage their staff, this includes workload and work location.</p> <p>Staff recommend that managers monitor workload and intervene if they see workload imbalance.</p> <p>Managers should treat staff equally and not expect the bulk of the work and pressure to fall on a small number of staff.</p> <p>Staff recommend that managers allocate meaningful tasks and provide feedback to staff and acknowledge their work.</p>

## Time

For this theme there was no staff advice that could be aligned to the insights.



## Caring responsibilities

Insights		Staff advice
1	Respondents in some Departments found it difficult to care for their children whilst trying to undertake their work responsibilities.	Staff recommend that there needs to be clear guidance to managers of how they should be treating their staff and treating all staff equally.
		Staff recommend that managers should be more considerate of staff who have children at home or who have additional caring responsibilities and any staff member who is claiming to find it difficult. Touch base much more frequently and ensure everyone feels valued not just those working on the frontline.
		Staff recommend to give staff advance notice of meetings and ask about times that suit so they can plan for childcare and caring responsibilities.

## Focus and distraction

For this theme there was no staff advice that could be aligned to the insights.

## Family activity

Insights		Staff advice
3	Respondents in a few Departments reported increased workloads having a negative impact on their ability spend time with their family.	Staff recommend NICS ensures there is understanding for young families and to provide as much help to staff as possible.

## Money

Insights		Staff advice
3	Respondents in a few Departments reported concerns about increased home heating bills and having to purchase their own equipment.	Staff recommend that NICS should cover any additional costs that staff incur as a result of working from home. E.G. heating/electric, equipment.
4	Respondents in a few Departments reported having to purchase their own IT equipment and software as the equipment they were provided with was not fit for purpose.	Staff recommend that equipment or vouchers should be made readily available to make your home working environment more comfortable.

## Accommodation

Insights		Staff advice
1	Respondents in some Departments reported that working from home has enabled them to identify negative aspects of working in open plan offices.	Staff recommend that NICS develops a policy which allows staff the flexibility to use their NICS office when they want to.
		Staff recommend certain buildings should be ear-marked to facilitate some staff, who can't easily work from home.
		Staff recommend that senior leaders should provide clear and concise direction and guidance to staff.

## Workspace

Insights		Staff advice
2	Respondents in most Departments reported having an unsuitable work space at home.	Staff recommend that equipment or vouchers should be made readily available to make your home working environment more comfortable.
		Staff recommended that if they are working from home that a workstation assessment should be carried out to ensure that it complies with Health and Safety Regulations.

## Managerial communication

Insights	Staff advice
<p>1 Respondents in some Departments reported that due to lack of communication staff weren't aware, at times, of what was going on.</p>	<p>Staff recommend that managers should take time to build and maintain relationships &amp; morale.</p> <p>Staff recommend that managers should communicate clearly and regularly check in with staff individually and in teams.</p> <p>Staff recommend that senior leaders to provide clear and concise direction and guidance to staff and to acknowledge the challenging environment(s) that staff find themselves in.</p> <p>Staff recommend that senior staff should ensure they have a clear vision and direction for staff and that they communicate this constantly to guide staff in their work from the outset.</p> <p>Staff recommend that senior managers (G7 &amp; above) should regularly communicate with their staff on a "Live" basis. e.g. Like a live feed from your head of division that staff can just tune in to watch and get updates on work taking place would be helpful.</p>
<p>2 Managers in a few Departments found it difficult to communicate with their staff during the pandemic.</p>	<p>Staff recommend that the NICS should ensure video conferencing technologies are utilised in a way that will support interaction between colleagues and allow managers to discharge their duty of care responsibilities e.g. virtual check-ins.</p> <p>Staff recommend the use of visual face to face communication to maintain interaction with staff.</p> <p>Staff recommend NICS make sure all contact details are up to date to ensure communicating with everyone is simple and straightforward.</p>

## Home schooling

Insights	Staff advice
<p>1 Respondents in some Departments reported that balancing work and home schooling was difficult and sometimes stressful.</p>	<p>Staff recommend that managers need to understand that everyone's circumstances differ. Where there are young children that require home schooling this is a full time job. If both parents work full time there needs to be some accommodation by senior managers in recognising the challenges staff are facing.</p>

## Motivation

Insights	Staff advice
<p>1 Respondents in a few Departments reported decreased motivation levels due to having to manage increases in personal and work responsibilities.</p>	<p>Staff recommend that managers should be mindful that everyone's situation is different and they should organise activities, quizzes or competitions to help keep staff motivated which in turn has positive impacts on mental health.</p> <p>Staff recommend that managers should organise frequent one-to-one contact with staff as it is essential to maintain focus, motivation and drive work forward. Also, informal meetings of small teams (5-6) allows some room for friendships and team spirit to continue.</p> <p>Staff recommend that appropriate reward and recognition packages are considered.</p>

## Emotional support

Insights		Staff advice
1	Respondents in a few Departments felt unsupported particularly through the inaction of their managers.	Staff recommend that managers should be flexible and consistent in supporting their staff and provide them with access to all available resources required.
		Staff recommend putting in place a face to face support system for staff if required as everyone has reacted in different ways to this lockdown.
		Staff recommend managers provide a level of pastoral care and reassurance.

## Learning

Insights		Staff advice
1	Respondents in a few Departments reported that working from home has helped them to learn new skills.	Staff recommend that the NICS ensures everyone can use the technology that has been provided.
		Staff recommend that new technologies be used to continue or enhance staff development which will result in improved productivity.

## Environment

Insights		Staff advice
1	Respondents in a few Departments reported that not having to commute was having a positive impact on the environment.	Staff recommend that NICS provide staff with the tools to support the public now so we'll be better placed to be there in times of crisis. Put in place better arrangements to work flexibly now to cope with issues in the future. There are qualitative productivity and environmental dividends to be gained from a positive change in team working.

## Decision making

Insights		Staff advice
1	Respondents in a few Departments reported that managers were making decisions from remote locations without the full picture of what was happening on the ground.	Staff recommend that managers should make decisions quickly and ensure support is available for staff who may need it.
2	Respondents in a few Departments reported that managers were making decisions without seeking views of those with expertise in that field.	Staff recommend that managers should not panic and fully consider the impacts of decisions before implementing them.

## Trust

Insights		Staff advice
1	Respondents in a few Departments stated that management are trusting staff to produce quality work but in a different way.	Staff recommend that managers should embrace the culture of allowing staff to get on with their jobs - you may be surprised how well a lot of people can grow and develop when put under some pressure.
		Staff recommend that managers should know when to trust a member of staff. Don't feel like you have to fill all their hours with work. Be considerate of time they can use to develop skills and improve their knowledge base.
		Staff recommend that managers should trust their staff.

## Leadership

Insights		Staff advice
1	Respondents in a few Departments reported that crisis created space to do things we should have done long ago and that leaders should take advantage of the opportunities and not be overwhelmed by the barriers.	Staff recommend that leaders should take the positive lessons forward from how this pandemic was managed.

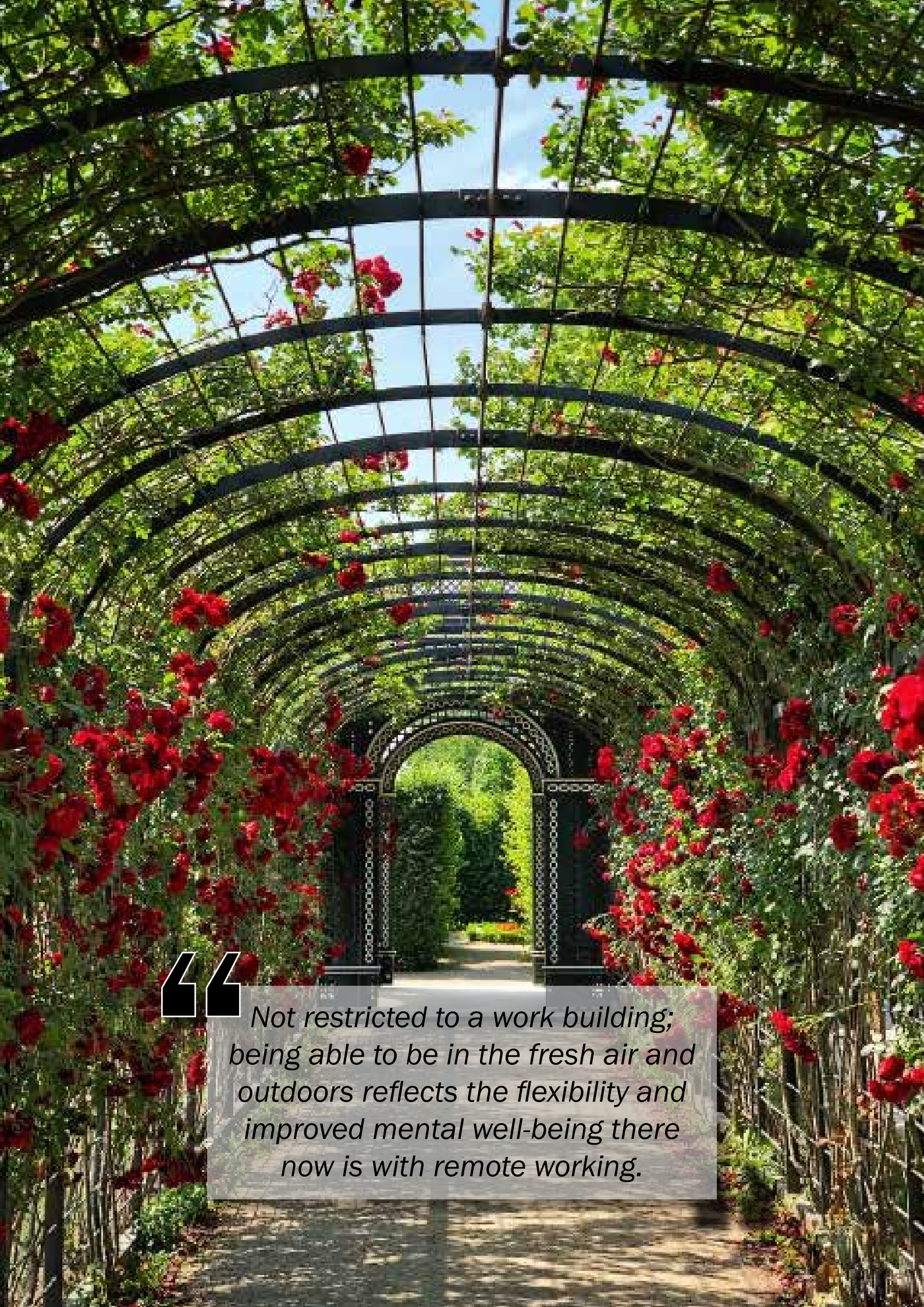
## Preparedness

Insights		Staff advice
1	Respondents in a few Departments believed the NICS was completely unprepared for working from home.	Staff recommend that In a time of crisis a communications plan should be in place to cascade guidelines and key messages down to employees in a more timely manner.
		Staff recommend that NICS should not wait for a crisis to grapple with the problems that exist today. This crisis exposed weaknesses and poor practice that we always knew existed and never did anything about.
		Staff recommend that NICS should have the IT infrastructure and equipment in place to allow more staff to work remotely to ensure continued delivery of the business.
		Staff recommend that NICS should adopt new policies now that will facilitate continued working from home, if not full-time, then at least on a part-time basis, so that if this happens again, we can seamlessly transition.
		Staff recommend that NICS should have contingency plans in place for staff to be able to work remotely at short notice if required ensuring they know what is expected of them and what help/support is available to them.
		Staff recommend that NICS should investigate the feasibility of the Departments working on one network or have a solution that allows staff to work across multiple networks if required.

## Gender

Insights		Staff advice
2	Respondents in a few Departments suggested that women who are going through menopause or on their periods should be given the option to work from home.	Staff recommend that NICS develop a working from home policy which includes considerations that allow staff to balance work life and home life for example gender specific conditions and family and caring responsibilities.





*Not restricted to a work building; being able to be in the fresh air and outdoors reflects the flexibility and improved mental well-being there now is with remote working.*



### A picture is worth a thousand words

*"A picture is worth a thousand words, so we'd love to see what working during the pandemic looked like for you!"*

As part of the survey, respondents were asked to upload two pictures - one representing a positive and one representing a negative aspect of working during the pandemic. Further, respondents were asked why these pictures represented the positive and negative. This section displays a selection of pictures and quotes from respondents. Thank you again to everyone who provided us with these reflections, they provide a powerful snapshot of your experiences and emotions.

### Positive pictures and quotes

Several main themes emerged from the responses, the majority of which were related to working at home and were interconnected. These themes served to reaffirm the main findings of the research.

Gaining more free time from not having to commute was a recurring theme. From this, respondents told us they were able to spend more time with their family and had more opportunities to walk, run and exercise outdoors. On the subject of outdoors, respondents were able to appreciate nature, their gardens and flowers, the environment and enjoy the views. Many reported reconnecting with and spending more time doing hobbies, such as cooking and music.

Another major positive for many was simply the concept of working at home and the flexibility, freedom, comfort and work life balance this allowed. Many reported spending more time with their pets and enjoying seeing birds visiting their gardens. Another positive for some was the team work, togetherness and kindness of colleagues and their community. These reflections help to illustrate positive impacts on respondents' mental health and well-being.

### Negative pictures and quotes

A broader, less defined range of themes arose that related to negative aspects of working during the pandemic. The main themes tended to reflect the less favourable insights and findings of the research and many are interconnected.

The strongest focus was around feelings of loneliness, isolation and missing the social interaction with work colleagues and the office dynamic in general. This extended to missing family and friends. This was compounded through the COVID-19 restrictions introduced, for example, on attendance at funerals and other family events.

Another aspect was a general feeling of low mood and negative thoughts. This resulted from having nothing to look forward to, for example holidays or the monotony of doing the same things every day. A feeling of being trapped at home or having no escape from home and having no clear boundary between working life and home life was also conveyed. This is linked to the feeling that some respondents considered that their time

was not their own as they were spending long hours at their computer. The difficulty of juggling time between home and work responsibilities, for example, home schooling and caring for children, was another theme referred to by respondents. These reflections help to illustrate the negative impacts on their mental health.

IT and technology issues were commonly mentioned. Among others, small screens, lack of printer and connection problems were cited as issues. Small desks, a lack of space and unsuitable seating illustrated that for many, their workstations were unsuitable. Whilst increased snacking and weight gain also drew a number of references. These reflections help to illustrate the negative impacts on their physical health.

## Unexpected reflections

*“On reflection, from the answers you’ve shared, is there anything that came to mind that you weren’t expecting?”*

The survey was designed to get respondents to think carefully about their own experiences and what had impacted on them while working during the pandemic. This question was included to invite respondents to further reflect on the answers they had provided.

This elicited a broad range of responses that were difficult to cluster into themes. Some of the main themes that emerged were that respondents were surprised by how well they had adapted to working at home and how productive they could be at home. A number also reported enjoying more time with their family.

Alternatively missing face to face interaction with colleagues and friends was mentioned on a number of occasions with a few references to feelings of disconnection and loneliness. A number of the reflections referred directly to the impact on respondents of completing the survey. These indicated that taking time to reflect on their working during the pandemic journey had helped them crystallise their thoughts and developed a deeper understand of the impacts this period has had upon them.

[Positive reflections](#) can be seen on pages 118 to 126

[Negative reflections](#) can be seen on pages 127 to 137

[Unexpected reflections](#) can be seen on pages 138 to 141



*I can go for a walk at sunrise instead of driving to Belfast.*



*With no commute we had time as a family to grow tomatoes, develop sour dough and make our own pizza.*



*I was able to work from home and home school my children which meant I got to spend more quality time with my children.*

“

”



*It is very handy to be at home when there are any deliveries or to do household tasks during breaks or lunches.*



*Because it represents freedom to escape it.*



*As I was allowed to take chair, table and monitor from my office so I can work as closely as possible with DSE requirements.*

“

”



*Something silly but it has been brilliant to my washing on the line & to be able to take it in when the rain comes on.*



*Working from home is more comfortable for me, in terms of what I can wear, eat, time management and work/life balance. I don't have to commute to work and I save money and stress because of it. I have more trust from my management and I feel like I can be more flexible with my day.*



*Less restrictive/confined working arrangements.*

“

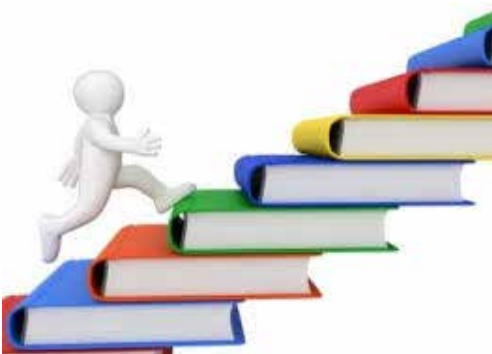
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*Being able to be at home, no commute and extra time available for work/home, dinosaurs to keep me company!*



*It is my mobile workstation that I can take anywhere.*



*Although it could be an uphill climb learned a lot on the way.*



“

”



*At home it is very scenic and very relaxed.  
No stress of city life.*



*Working at home noticing wildlife during  
the day past the window. Also able to  
factor in early morning walks and walk in  
nature.*



*My almost constant companion, and  
unpaid ‘therapist’: I try to be the person  
my dog thinks I am.*

“

”



*Getting outside. Calm feelings.*



*I worked in the garden and planted a flower bed. I enjoyed watching the plants taking root, and growing and flowering and the butterflies and bees flitting from flower to flower and contributing to nature. Watching the changes/seasons. It was hard work, but was a great stress reliever and is ongoing.*



*Comfort and de-stressing from company of family and pets.*



“

”



*I had time to watch the birds, butterflies, squirrels in my back garden. Never knew it was like Heathrow as we back onto fields.*



*Enjoying the countryside around me and enjoying a pre-work morning run instead of a 1.5 hour commute.*



*It reflects the increased family time during this time and how this increase has been excellent.*

“

”



*New tools to work in new ways.*



*I have been able to focus on my physical and mental well-being and incorporate more exercise every day.*



*Going out walking in my local area clears my head.*

“

”



*It shows my work laptop, at home, waiting for me to work on once I finish this survey. The same screensaver would show up if I were in the office on my PC. I can work at home just as well as from the office.*



*People were much kinder and more caring - looking out for each other.*



*Teamwork, tackling the problem of a very new working environment.*



*I was able to spend time with my children and experience this with them.*

## NEGATIVE REFLECTIONS



*I do miss the social contact with people in general, including my work colleagues. Technology is great but just not the same.*



*On occasion I miss the interaction with my work friends and colleagues. I talk to them online and video call sometimes but it's not the same as face to face.*



*Less social interaction, missing friends and colleagues, isolation.*



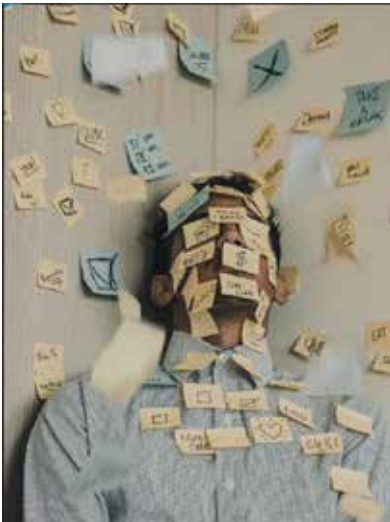
*I miss interacting with my work colleagues on a daily basis and seeing the people I work with regularly; except via the internet.*

“

”



*A picture of our empty office everyone working in isolation at home lack of communication and team spirit.*



*I loved working from home at the start of the pandemic and I got a lot more work done. But as time goes on, we are all settling in and less communications are being sent out. I am starting to feel more isolated and less like I am working, and that impacts my productivity.*



*No holiday this year because of pandemic.*



“

”



*It's terrible to think that even giving a friend or colleague a hug, or taking a cup of coffee from them, can spread a virus.*

*It's almost as if the things that make life worthwhile, like human contact and spending time with family, are forbidden.*



*Despite COVID not affecting me or my family in terms of illness or disrupted holidays etc it was very sad to always be aware why things had changed and the media was always (and rightly) highlighting the number of infections, hospitalisations and deaths.*

**"You end up grieving twice: once when you lose the person you love and know, and again when they pass away."**

*Due to CV19 restrictions I am unable to visit my father who is in a care home for Dementia.*

“

”



*After 14 or 15 weeks Working from home became living at work which for me was horrible and did get me down.*



*Not seeing family or friends. I lost my young sister. Says it all really.*



*It reflects the fact that at times working from home has felt quite lonely and isolated due to not having the same interaction with colleagues/friends. It also reflects the fact that there doesn't seem to be much positivity around regarding getting back to some sort of normality any time soon. Constant negativity from various sources on TV, radio and social media has made it harder to see light at the end of the tunnel.*

“

”



*Constant reminders every time I went out of fear of catching COVID.*



*Simply it was the whole uncertainty of what was going happen & when it was going end.. not even work related just life related.*



*As a team we are used to pressure but in 33 years of working in the civil service I have never experienced the level of stress or pressure that this pandemic has brought.*





*Not everyone has the space to work from home and no account whatsoever seems to have been taken of this.*



*The many hours without breaks affected my eyesight requiring glasses.*



*Airplanes grounded because of the pandemic - resulted in a cancelled holiday and redundancy. There are so many negative things, I feel for those who have lost loved ones; those who took sick and are still suffering from long term COVID-19; those owners and employees in businesses experiencing hardship (loss of work, financial and their mental health is suffering); the protests; the extreme divides and polarity of people's views.*

“

”



*Overeating and less opportunity to exercise has lead to weight gain.*



*I moved home during the pandemic and had no internet access. I went to my sons house for a week to log on to work. He was also working from home and home schooling three children. The room available to me for working out of was also home to a Chameleon. As if that wasn't bad enough I had to listen to the scratching of the locusts trying to get out of their container before it was dinnertime!*



*Tiredness and not being able to answer every question everyone has.*

“

”



*I've got bigger lol so need to make more time to get out.*



*Not really a great desk for my work as yet.  
Quite lonely in my room.*



*Feel fenced in at times.*

“

”



*I hated that I didn't always have time to do the things I needed to do for myself or my family. I didn't always have time to cook a proper dinner, we had ready meals more often than we ever did before and juggling work and looking after the kids often meant I was distracted. This miserable burnt frozen pizza was cremated on a day when I had no time for my family, the juggling wasn't working, my boss was frustrated I wasn't available when I was needed in work, my kids wanted me to spend time with them. When I presented this for dinner the kids cried, so we all had cereal instead.*



*I'm currently working at a tiny laptop on a wobbly camping table in my spare bedroom.*



*With everyone at home either working or home schooling the house got messier and messier.*

“

”



*It's harder to get a break from work  
because it's always there.*



*I used to love my kitchen, now I can't wait  
to get out of it.*





*The wonderful aspects of learning and development as you work that gets trapped in your head as a result of not co-constructing through F2F interaction. Sitting in front of a screen can be quite a grey experience in contrast to the rich varied colours and variety of different meetings, contexts, locations and the amazing breadth of people I would usually interact with.*



*Juggling work and childcare was difficult.*



*There have been a lot of positives within the team - good working relationships, less time travelling so more dedication to work, more able to deal with home issues easily so less need to take time off e.g. improved sick absence.*



*It made me look back and realise that although work was so stressful & strange it made me appreciate me family & the special times spent during lockdown which I will treasure forever.*



*I didn't realise I would enjoy working from home and in the office 2 days as part of the pilot scheme. it really is the best of both worlds.*



*One thing that has really shocked me is how productive my Business Area has been working from home. We all get through so much work and personally I feel we have never been so productive and that makes me feel good, knowing that it works.*



*Would have expected family interruptions to be more of an issue during work-from-home. Have found they've been very understanding of "work hours".*



*Yes, on reflection the NICS have done well to kit staff out for remote working quickly which should be applauded.*



*I feel the need to state that working from home as a result of COVID has really been a life changer in a very positive way.*



*The time and money saved in not travelling to and from work is very under-rated!  
Great for work life balance.*

---

*I had underestimated the positive aspects on my home life from lack of commute and freedom to log in any time out of 'normal' working hours, if something was needed under pressure.*

---

*I don't wish for the picture to be wholly negative. Home working is perfectly suitable, preferable and safe provided childcare is taken into account. With proper use of technology, duties can be discharged effectively. This was a novel challenge for all including management. Clearly learning has to take place from any response to such unprecedented circumstances. My personal situation was particularly challenging due to a range of factors, but once childcare opened, WFH was near optimal.*

---

*The ease of transition and that old working practices don't necessarily mean better.*

---

*The sense of being alone, even though I am in the house with my wife who is working upstairs and being able to hear traffic and people outside.*

---

*My thoughts and feelings were more negative than I'd have allowed myself to acknowledge normally - probably cos I am conscious of supporting my staff, maintaining positive yet support management and always being there for everyone in addition to heavy workload is probably having a bigger impact on me, than I acknowledge or perhaps are even aware of.*





*Probably didn't think I would miss meeting other colleagues as much. When you're stuck with the same people every day it's good to talk to others on the same floor who you don't work with.*

-----

*Being lonely, even though you have contact via email and phone.*

-----

*In reflecting for my answers I definitely feel very angry again at the expectations put on me to carry on with work as normal, with no regard to my personal situation or my mental health.*

-----

*While the office was closed during lockdown I was doing the jobs of at least four people, from AO to DP. Now the office has reopened I'm still doing this - some staff now expect me to do it as a matter of course and while I didn't resent it at the time, I do now. I didn't realise that was how I felt until I was writing my answers in this survey.*

-----

*I realised that I felt a little out of the loop and disconnected from my team. This made me feel anxious about the value of my contribution to the team.*

-----

*I realised I worry about the accuracy of my work more.*

-----

*I guess I haven't thought in depth about my work over the past few months and have just got on with the job with little reflection. The survey questions have made me think a little more.*

-----

*Just the nature of the questions, probing to think what words first come to mind. I was surprised at the words which I identified with.*



*I feel on reflection that I coped better with lock-down than I maybe felt I was coping at the time. Writing down my answers made me realise how many demands there were on me and that I wasn't always judging myself fairly. My grandfather died from COVID-19, so it was a desperately sad time for me and my family. The relationships, support networks and sense of purpose I have in work helped to get me through that period.*



*The visual understanding and feelings of working in pandemic. To actually try and find something other than words.*



*I have taken time to think about the experience.*



*My thoughts and feelings were more negative than I'd have allowed myself to acknowledge normally - probably cos I am conscious of supporting my staff, maintaining positive yet support management and always being there for everyone in addition to heavy workload is probably having a bigger impact on me, than I acknowledge or perhaps are even aware of.*



*It made me look back and realise that although work was so stressful & strange it made me appreciate me family & the special times spent during lockdown which I will treasure forever.*



*I didn't realise that potentially having COVID-19 has made me feel as paranoid as it has until I thought about it and wrote these feelings down.*



*Yes I didn't expect to produce a picture of how I saw things and how the negative imagine overpowered the positive one.*



“

*“While I am at home there are always 101 other things that need done other than work. Now that I am at home all the roles my husband completed while I was out of the house are now just left for me to do. Work would have been my escape and time to myself now I don't have that.”*

# **ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING**

## ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

In summarising the analysis and based on the experiences shared by respondents, seven main areas emerged that impacted on both staff and the organisation. Consideration of these areas may provide opportunities for organisational learning within and beyond NICS.

For each main area, potential ways to use the learning derived from the research are highlighted, particularly when the insights (see Section 3A) are combined with the reasons and impacts (see Section 3B) referred to in earlier sections. This research was conducted solely with civil servants who were responsible for maintaining and delivering services to the public during this period.

The seven main areas of organisational learning are listed below and expanded upon in this section.

1. Fully flexible working
2. Leadership style
3. Staying connected
4. Staff integration
5. Well-being
6. Provision of equipment
7. Commuting

## **Fully flexible working**

The analysis shows that providing staff with flexibility is important and beneficial. Responses clearly indicated that having the ability to work with options of where, when or how had positive impacts for staff. Aspects that provided opportunities or presented barriers have been identified and these are outlined in the considerations below. The experiences that staff shared described the benefits that having flexibility provided and in some cases the disadvantages of not having as much or any flexibility.

An opportunity now exists to embed the significant positive impact for staff of having the flexibility and time to undertake activities that enrich their lives and improve well-being. It may also help to counter the feelings of isolation, stress, tiredness, frustration, anxiety, not being able to switch off and guilt experienced by staff.

**The research suggests that the development of an organisation wide policy for fully flexible working, underpinned by measures that would make this way of working fundamental to how the organisation operates, is key to delivering positive change.**

Drawing on the research and analysis, consideration should be given to the following if an organisation is to develop such a policy:

- The location from which staff can work.
- How interaction can be improved to support teams and individuals working across various locations.
- How staff and managers balance the boundaries between home and work responsibilities.
- The use and provision of IT hardware, software and office equipment to support working across various locations.
- Flexibility around times when staff can work (including office, at home or various locations).
- How work allocation and productivity will be agreed and monitored.

## Leadership style

The analysis has shown that a number of respondents stated that they felt grateful for the support their managers provided in helping them to balance their personal and work responsibilities. They noted that this helped them adapt to the challenges they faced and cope with additional pressures. However, many respondents did not share a similar experience. A number reported that managers set unreasonable demands with no consideration or discussion about the individual's personal circumstances. This manifested itself in respondents reporting a breakdown of trust and loss of goodwill allied with feelings of stress, unfairness and resentment. It is clear from the experiences of respondents that having a manager who is empathetic helped them during this period and that NICS can benefit from best practice in this area being shared.

An opportunity now exists to capture the positive lived insights of staff who worked in a supportive environment to put in place practices that will counter feelings of stress, unfairness, resentment, distrust, anxiety and a sense of being undervalued experienced by NICS staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. NICS should seek to grow trusted relationships, increase goodwill and inspire loyalty through these practices which will result in increased productivity as the NICS will be a more harmonious organisation to work within.

**The research suggests leaders and managers should embed and reinforce trust, empathy and emotional awareness into their organisations. Taking a person centred approach to leadership and management is a key step in delivering positive change in this area.**

Drawing on the research and analysis, consideration should be given to the following if organisations are to take a person-centred approach to leadership and management:

- How to embed and visibly promote trust, empathy and emotional awareness.
- The negative impact on staff when their personal circumstances are not considered.
- The positive reactions of staff who experienced working with supportive and understanding managers.
- The detrimental impact on staff of placing unreasonable demands on them.
- How leaders and managers can collate and identify the broad range of business and personal circumstances affecting their staff.
- Share best practice examples of these behaviours.

## **Staying connected**

The analysis strongly indicated that respondents found the loss of direct interaction with their colleagues very difficult. Respondents reported a loss or reduction of camaraderie/ team spirit which was detrimental to collaborative working and the social structures of individuals. Those who did not have appropriate IT hardware and software, or training in its use, found it difficult to keep in touch or check in with colleagues working across various locations. The adverse impact on mental health of reduced contact manifested itself in reports of loneliness, isolation or feeling disconnected. However, those that were provided with the appropriate equipment and training reported that this enabled them to keep in touch, build networks and continue to deliver services.

The loss of contact with colleagues and friends clearly had a detrimental impact on respondents however, there is now an opportunity to develop processes that will enable and support interactions. Supporting and improving the communication methods within NICS will help to counter the feelings of loneliness and isolation, the loss of camaraderie, the reduction in team spirit, the barriers to building and maintaining networks and the difficulties of trying to share work information experienced by staff and build a fully connected NICS.

**The research suggests that designing and delivering organisation wide processes to improve and support how teams and individuals stay in touch can address the detrimental impacts experienced by staff and teams.**

Drawing on the research and analysis, consideration should be given to the following if an organisation is to take the approach above:

- The frequency and structure of team and individual meetings and check ins.
- Provision and training on available communication technologies and encouragement to use it.
- Allow staff to use technologies for social interaction and tea breaks.
- How to facilitate face to face communication.
- Investigate and provide methods and tools that enable real-time collaborative working.



## **Staff integration**

The analysis highlights that staff who joined the organisation or had moved to a new role or a new team had faced difficulties in integrating when working remotely. A very consistent picture was painted by respondents of difficulties in trying to gain knowledge and build relationships. In some cases a lack of clear understanding of what was expected from them was reported. This had a detrimental impact on respondents with some reporting feelings of isolation, disconnection, anxiety and stress.

An opportunity now exists for steps to be taken to build on the work already undertaken by teams within NICS to ensure that anyone faced with these challenges is fully integrated and settled into their new role thus avoiding the detrimental impacts on their mental health.

**The research suggests that organisations should review and redesign their current processes that support staff as they integrate and settle into their team, with particular focus on teams working across various locations. This should counter the detrimental impacts experienced by staff.**

Drawing on the research and analysis, consideration should be given to the following if an organisation is to take the approach above:

- How to conduct remote inductions.
- The communication of expected roles and responsibilities by line managers.
- How to meet and be introduced to new colleagues.
- Transferring knowledge to enable new staff to work effectively in their team.
- How training is to be conducted.

## Well-being

The analysis has shown how the wide variety of experiences our respondents shared impacted upon both their physical and mental health. The overall picture is slightly negative, however given the current landscape, the fact that many positive impacts were shared is significant. The detrimental impacts on well-being centred around the breakdown of communications, balancing personal and work responsibilities, provision of no or poor quality IT and/or office equipment and increased work pressures. The beneficial impacts arose as a result of working from home and the removal of the commute which provided flexibility to undertake activities respondents valued.

The experiences shared by respondents detailed how the situations they encountered affected their well-being. This has presented an opportunity to embed these insights and by doing so further support staff working within the NICS.

**The research suggests that the experiences shared by staff working during the pandemic should be reflected upon and where required organisational policies on physical and mental well-being should be reviewed and updated to support staff adapting to a new way of working.**

Drawing on the research and analysis, consideration should be given to the following if an organisation is to take the approach above:

- The impact of the breakdown of interactions with colleagues.
- The impact of not having a daily commute and the increased personal time to undertake activities staff value.
- The difficulties arising from balancing home and work responsibilities.
- The impact of how workloads were balanced.
- How suitable the environment in which people worked was from a health and safety perspective.
- How suitable the equipment used by staff was from a health and safety perspective.

## **Provision of equipment**

The analysis has shown that a number of respondents faced difficulties due to either poor provision of IT, poor provision of office equipment/furniture or both. The impacts on respondents varied to include physical pain, inability to communicate effectively, barriers to collaboration and unsuitable working environments. There were some respondents who reported being appropriately resourced in this area and how this supported them to work effectively.

An opportunity now exists to build on the work already undertaken by teams within NICS to equip staff to work effectively. This may contribute to countering the breakdown of interactions, improving collaborative working, reducing discomfort, and reducing feelings of isolation and stress experienced by NICS staff.

**The research suggests that by developing and implementing a strategy to supply staff with equipment to enable them to work in a safe, collaborative and productive manner organisations will derive many benefits for both staff and the organisation.**

Drawing on the research and analysis, consideration should be given to the following if an organisation is to take the approach above:

- The impact of current provision of IT hardware, software and office equipment on health and safety compliance.
- Learning from the positive impact experienced by those who received appropriate IT and equipment support.
- The impact of current provision of IT hardware, software and office equipment on productivity and collaborative working.
- The software staff currently have access to and what is available on the market.
- Access to broadband.
- Reliance on hard copy documents.

## Commuting

The analysis pointed strongly to the positive impact of removing the daily commute. The amount of personal time and flexibility gained as a result of this provided respondents with opportunities to undertake activities that they valued whether this be spending time with family, exercising or caring for others. This had a considerably positive impact on work life balance and well-being.

There is an opportunity to explore how these positive impacts may be made available to a wider number of staff across the NICS whilst at the same time making NICS a recognised leader in the field of agile organisations.

**The research suggests that to achieve the many benefits identified organisations should explore radical and innovative options that give staff the choice of where, when and how they work in order to reduce commuting.**

Drawing on the research and analysis, consideration should be given to the following if an organisation is to take the approach above:

- Feasibility of how job roles can support these options.
- The significant benefits of additional personal time for staff.
- The improvement in staff health and well-being experienced through not commuting.
- The negative impact on staff motivation and morale of a forced return to a daily commute.
- Accessibility of the current NICS estate.
- Impact on the environment and congestion.

“

*“This reflects my sense that I had to put on a brave face and pretend to be in control, when in fact I often felt extremely anxious and stressed.”*

”



# CONCLUSIONS

## CONCLUSIONS

The detail within this report is drawn directly from the experiences of staff working in NICS during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic. During those six months there were many enforced restrictions placed on how people lived and worked and it is this unparalleled landscape that provides the backdrop to the experiences shared with us by the respondents. The human challenges faced by NICS staff and wider society have had far-reaching social, cultural and economic consequences and these will have had an impact on us all as individuals. In light of that landscape it would be expected that the responses to the survey would be reflective of many negative experiences.

Despite this, it is significant that so many respondents reported strong positive experiences as a result of having the ability to work flexibly. It is important that the NICS recognises the positive impacts this has had on health and well-being, and that it carefully considers ways of retaining some or all of these positives.

It is also fair to state that a number of respondents did experience challenging, complex and stressful situations. The analysis of the evidence points to a diverse range of circumstances faced by staff in these situations. Some can be attributed directly to the impact of living during a pandemic - for example, home schooling, leading to difficulties in adapting to change, and restrictions on day to day freedoms contributing to feelings of isolation, stress and anxiety. Other reasons are directly related to work - for example, poor provision of IT and office equipment or people not having space at home from which to work effectively. It is important to observe the reported negative impacts this has had on health and well-being.

There was evidence that respondents working in some areas saw an increase in workloads with very demanding deadlines, driven by departmental responses to the pandemic. This undoubtedly contributed to some respondents experiencing more challenging circumstances of living and working during the pandemic than others.

While it is true to state that some of the findings within this report are organisation specific, the broader conclusions paint a picture of the lived experiences of 'people' working during the pandemic. It is hoped, therefore, that this report is used as a resource by organisations from both the public and private sectors and from which they can derive wide ranging benefits.

# APPENDICES



<b>SURVEY QUESTIONS</b>	
<b>1</b>	Let's begin! Jot down the first 5 things that come to mind that represent "working during the pandemic" for you.
<b>2</b>	Excellent, now from your 5 things can you identify the 3 that have the most impact for you  • Tell us a little about why _____ has impact for you?
<b>3</b>	Thanks for that. Now, if you think about your time working during the pandemic, what has stood out for you about your experience?
<b>4</b>	A picture is worth a 1,000 words, so we'd love to see what working during the pandemic looked like for you!  • Would you now please take and upload two photos:  • One that represents something positive and one that represents something negative for you whilst working during the pandemic.  • If you can't access or take a photo for any reason, just scroll down and you can tell us what you had in mind.  Remember, you're completely anonymous, so be creative!
<b>4A</b>	First, a photo of something positive:  Why does this picture reflect the positive for you of working during the pandemic?
<b>4B</b>	And now, a photo of something negative:  • Why does this picture reflect the negative for you of working during the pandemic?
<b>5</b>	Would you be willing for us to share your photos and anonymised comments on the NICS intranet?
<b>6</b>	Knowing what you know now, if another lockdown was to take place 2 years from now, what advice would you give to senior managers about supporting their staff?
<b>7</b>	Almost done! - On reflection, from the answers you've shared, is there anything that came to mind that you weren't expecting?
<b>8</b>	Which of the following best describes your situation since April 2020?
<b>9</b>	What Department do you work within?
<b>10</b>	What grade/analogous grade are you?
<b>11</b>	What is your gender?
<b>12</b>	OK, last question:  • Would you be willing to tell us a little more about your experience?

Overall 468 members of staff from across NICS took part in this research.

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS					
Work Location		Gender		Grade	
Home	386	Female	269	AA/AO	68
Office	48	Male	179	EOI/EOII	135
Mix	14	Non - Binary	2	SO	94
Field	5	Prefer not to say	18	DP	98
Available - not working	4	No response	3	G6/G7	63
Sick	2			SCS	5
No response	0			Industrial	1
				No response	4

Once the surveys were completed and submitted the Innovation Lab was faced with the task of affinity mapping (a service design tool used to group data) thousands of individual pieces of data into themes.

The Lab started with one departmental dataset and themed it initially to give an indication of the potential themes that the data fell into. From this initial theming exercise the Lab was able to develop a framework of themes this gave a common language that could be used across all the Departments. The list below is the theme headings developed followed by a brief explanation of what the Lab means when referring to these themes.

This list is in alphabetical order.

### **Accommodation**

Responses about the building respondents have been working in during the pandemic. For example, home or office.

### **Adapting to change**

Responses referring to adapting to change during the pandemic. For example, adapting to balance home and work life.

### **Anxiety**

Respondents reporting anxiety.

### **Business travel**

Responses that refer to travel to attend meeting, courses, conferences, etc.

### **Caring responsibilities**

Responses directed toward caring responsibilities that were needed during the pandemic.

### **Commute**

Responses about travelling to do your job, for example by car, public transport etc. May include distance travelled, time taken, money saved etc.

### **Decision making**

This relates to decisions managers have made during the pandemic. This is both direct and senior managers.

## **Emotional reactions about work outputs**

Responses that refer to feelings about work. For example, unfairness, resentment or pride.

## **Emotional support**

This relates to support respondents have received during the pandemic from those all around them. For example, family, colleagues, friends, support services etc.

## **Environment**

Responses about environmental impacts and an appreciation of the environment and nature.

## **Family activity**

Responses directed to family activity. For example, eating together, weekly outings cancelled.

## **Focus and distraction**

Responses that highlight the ability or inability to focus on work during the pandemic.

## **Gender**

Responses that infer or reference specifics about gender.

## **Home schooling**

Responses referencing home schooling during the pandemic.

## **Interaction with colleagues**

Responses where there is reference to either social/informal interaction or formal/work related interaction with colleagues. For example, I miss my team meeting or asking for advice about work.

## **Isolation**

Respondents referring to isolation.

## **IT and general resources**

This relates to respondents referring to the resources they currently have and any additional resources they might need. For example screens, laptops, video conferencing, desks, chairs and printers.

## **Leadership**

Responses referring to leadership and how it has been displayed during the pandemic.

## **Learning**

Responses that relate to learning during the pandemic.

## **Managerial communication**

Responses commenting on communication from managers (covering both senior management and direct line management).

## **Managerial responsibilities**

Responses about how managers have managed and supported their staff during the pandemic.

## **Money**

This relates to references to personal finance. For example, money saved or money worries.

## **Monotony**

Responses around boredom and monotony.

## **Motivation**

Respondents referring to motivation levels.

## **Personal safety**

This theme relates to respondents reporting thoughts around personal safety. For example fear of catching COVID-19, PPE or hand sanitiser supplied.

## **Physical well-being**

This theme relates to respondents reporting physical ailments or improvements. For example back pain and back relief

## **Preparedness**

Responses referring to preparedness in the past, now and in the future. For example, appropriate physical environment.

## **Productivity**

Responses that refer to productivity. For example I feel I got more done or I don't get as much done when working at home.

## **Public transport**

Responses that reference public transport

## **Stress**

Respondents referring to stress.

## **Teamwork**

This relates to respondents who highlighted changes to team dynamic, how they interact and support each other in relation to their work.

## **Time**

Responses about how respondents manage their time. For example, I now can exercise when I would normally have been driving.

## **Trust**

Responses that reference or indicate a link to trust. For example my manager lets me get on with things or I am not allowed to work outside of core hours.

## **Ways of working**

Responses that highlighted how the pandemic has changed the way respondents work. For example, more/less flexibility, higher/lower workload.

## **Workspace**

Responses about the workspace respondents have been using during the pandemic. For example, desk or dining room table.

# NUMBER OF COMMENTS ATTRIBUTED TO THEMES

## APPENDIX 4

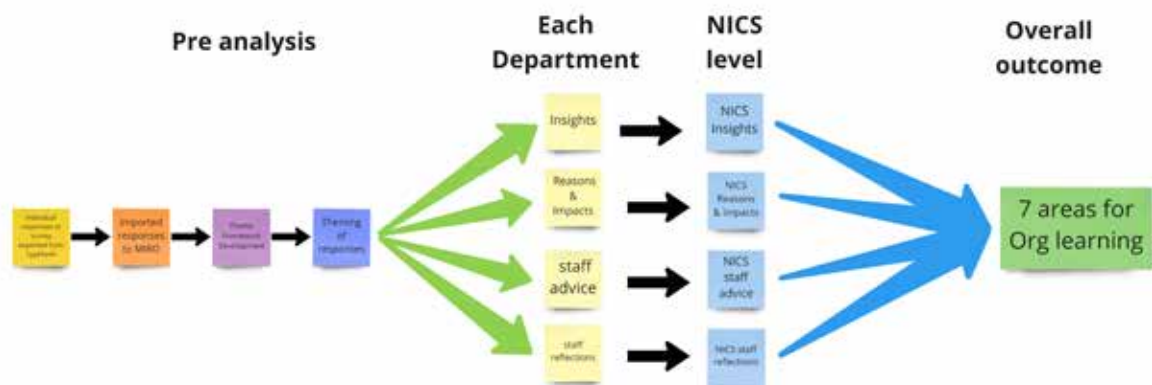
RANK	THEME	TOTAL	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NETT
1	Ways of working	526	318	208	110
2	Adapting to change	219	84	135	-51
3	Interaction with colleagues	193	19	174	-155
4	Commute	187	183	4	179
5	Stress	156	67	89	-22
6	IT and general resources	126	52	74	-22
7	Personal safety	98	51	47	4
8	Anxiety	96	15	81	-66
9	Emotional reactions about work	93	14	79	-65
10	Isolation	89	4	85	-81
11=	Productivity	80	69	11	58
11=	Teamwork	80	18	62	-44
13	Physical well-being	78	45	33	12
14	Managerial responsibilities	77	19	58	-39
15	Time	72	70	2	68
16	Caring responsibilities	65	39	26	13
17	Focus and distraction	63	50	13	37
18	Family activity	59	53	6	47
19	Money	52	46	6	40
20	Accommodation	43	14	29	-15
21	Workspace	39	10	29	-19
22	Managerial communication	31	3	28	-25
23	Home schooling	30	3	27	-24
24	Motivation	25	8	17	-9
25	Emotional support	20	6	14	-8
26	Learning	16	10	6	4
27	Environment	15	15	0	15
28	Monotony	13	0	13	-13
29	Decision making	8	0	8	-8
30=	Public transport	7	2	5	-3
30=	Trust	7	4	3	1
32=	Business travel	5	5	0	5
32=	Leadership	5	1	4	-3
32=	Preparedness	5	0	5	-5
35	Gender	2	2	0	2



The information below outlines the steps taken to collect and analyse survey responses relating to lived experiences of NICS staff working during the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure i shows the journey taken to reach the final conclusions of the research. The survey was developed and issued using an online software tool called Typeform<sup>2</sup> and transferred to an online collaboration whiteboard tool called Miro<sup>3</sup>. The responses were then separated by NICS Departments. A theme framework was developed and the responses to the survey questions were themed against this to produce findings for each of the nine departments. These findings were then collated and analysed to produce the NICS insights, reasons and impacts, staff advice and reflections contained within the body of this report. All of these findings led to the identification of the seven areas of organisational learning listed in section 4 of the report.

Figure i.



Designing the survey

A qualitative survey was chosen for this project as it was important that respondents were provided with the opportunity to share their experiences in their own words. Questions were developed iteratively and a number of tests conducted with friends and colleagues before the final questions were agreed.

After a period of research and testing Typeform was chosen as the software we would use to issue the survey. The steps taken to develop, issue and analyse the survey are illustrated at figure ii.

Figure ii.



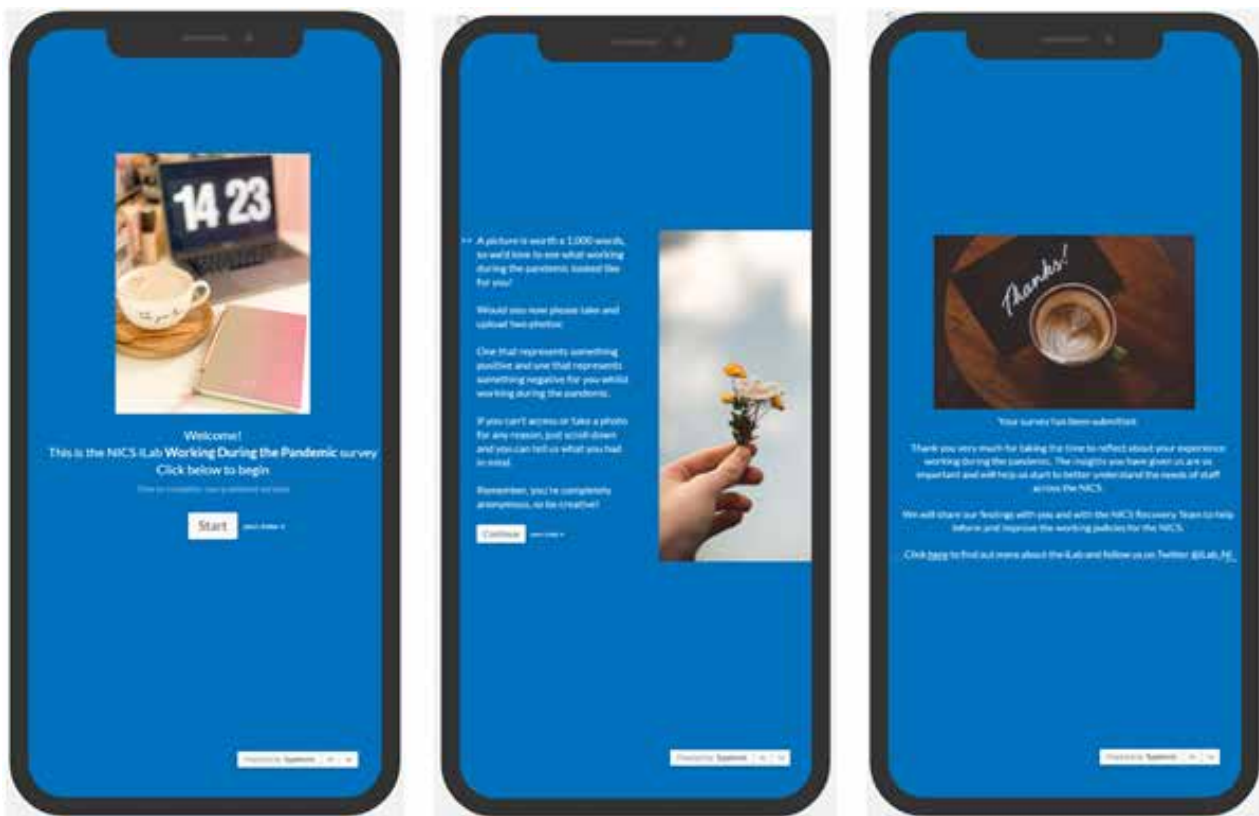
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.typeform.com/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.miro.com/>

## Typeform

Typeform is a product that specialises in online form building and surveys. It creates dynamic forms based on the needs of those designing a survey. We selected Typeform for several reasons including the user friendly interface, the conversational 'tone' of the interface, ability to structure questions using built in logic, option for the user to upload images, use via multiple devices and the ease with which we could download and transfer the data to our online collaborative whiteboard. A visual representation of some of the questions from the final survey and then how the survey looked on a smartphone are captured at figure iii.

Figure iii.



## Question development

No questions were mandatory and the majority of questions asked for short, free text responses. The demographic questions were multiple choice. The questions were designed by staff with backgrounds in Psychology, Behavioural Science and Sociology. A brief overview of the intent is outline below.

## Questions 1 – 3

1. *Let's begin! Jot down the first 5 things that come to mind that represent "working during the pandemic" for you.*
2. *Excellent, now from your 5 things can you identify the 3 that have the most impact for you. -> Tell us a little about why \_\_\_\_\_ has impact for you?*
3. *Thanks for that. Now, if you think about your time working during the pandemic, what has stood out for you about your experience?*

These first three questions ask users to quickly jot down the five things that come to mind about the ways the pandemic has affected them and then to prioritize the three that have had the most impact for them. This question is designed to elicit a more considered response to what has impacted the respondent during the pandemic and encourage them to share their thoughts and emotions. It is common for people to cluster thoughts when prompted by a question, perhaps recording three closely related themes quickly and easily. The requirement to record five things is more challenging and requires pause for thought and consideration and encourages people to broaden their frame of reference. Question 2 requires further reflection as the respondent is asked to select the three of their responses that had the most impact and explain why in more detail. This funnelling approach was designed to encourage respondents to unpack their thoughts. It was notable the number of 4th and 5th responses to question 1 that were included in the top three impacts. Question 3 again refined the thinking by asking what stood out about their experiences. This question was designed to allow the respondent to reflect on their previous answers and explanations, process these thoughts and summarise what has stood out for them.

## Question 4

4. *First, a photo of something positive:  
-> Why does this picture reflect the positive for you of working during the pandemic?*

We have all experienced how looking at a personal photograph has the ability to transport you back to that time and place. This powerful concept was the reason behind the inclusion of a question asking respondents to share photographs/pictures that represented a positive and a negative experience of working during the pandemic. We then asked them to say a few words to explain why the picture represented their experience in order to capture the associated emotions. These provide a visual representation of how respondents worked and lived during the pandemic. To note, we spent considerable time in our pilot trialling different methods and wording for this question to make sure the request and instructions were as clear as possible. We also gave respondents the option of uploading a picture from unsplash.com, an online source of free images, if they did not wish to upload a personal photograph. This has provided a gallery of powerful images and quotes which we have used throughout the report and captured in Section 3D.

## Question 6

6. *Knowing what you know now, if another lockdown was to take place 2 years from now, what advice would you give to senior managers about supporting their staff?*

This question asked respondents to provide advice to leaders should a pandemic situation occur 2 years into the future. This encourages respondents to draw on their own experiences and provide advice that they believe would improve the response if such an event was to occur again in the future. Through opening up the ability to use hindsight we provided the respondents with the opportunity to highlight some of the issues that they observed or personally faced during this pandemic that they may not have considered when answering questions 1 to 3.

## Question 7

7. *Almost done! - On reflection, from the answers you've shared, is there anything that came to mind that you weren't expecting?*

This question was included to gauge how respondents reflected on their experiences, identify unexpected thoughts that came to mind during these reflections and allowed them to process their thoughts relating to their journey whilst working during the pandemic.

## Issuing the survey

The survey aimed to achieve responses from around 50 staff in each in Department in the period between late August and early October 2020. The goal of any qualitative work is to produce a range of responses and to look for commonalities of experience that may be extended back to the broader population. The goal is not to classify staff into percentages that have had X or Y experience. A sample of 50 per Department and around 500 overall, is very large for a qualitative study<sup>4</sup>.

Staff were selected by using a stratified sampling technique. All staff from each Department who were listed on the staff directory and who had a valid email address were put into a database on the statistical software package SPSS. Staff were randomly sampled by grade to roughly match the overall grade distribution of the Department itself according to full time equivalent detailed in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency personnel statistics<sup>5</sup>. Staff were then emailed directly in small batches of around 200 staff and asked to participate until the sample size of 50 was achieved. The response rate was between 8% - 16% with the average at 12.5%. This method of selecting staff to participate was new to the NICS. Typically, staff surveys are posted to all staff via the intranet for anyone to respond. Although this method may be appropriate for large numbers of quantitative responses, the analysis would have been far too time consuming (and unnecessary) for an in-depth qualitative survey. In addition, we wanted to ensure good representation across all grades and could not have controlled that with an open-ended invitation. Just under 500 staff working across the nine NICS Departments completed the survey. This was representative of a diverse range of grade, gender and working locations.

<sup>4</sup> Baker, S., Edwards, R. How many qualitative interviews is enough? National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper. [http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how\\_many\\_interviews.pdf](http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/4/how_many_interviews.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/personnel-statistics-nics-2020>

## Capturing the data

When the surveys were closed all the data was exported into Microsoft Excel. This enabled us to directly transfer the data into the collaborative online whiteboard software MIRO. MIRO takes the data held within each cell in an excel spreadsheet and presents it on a whiteboard as a post-it note as shown in Figure iv.

Figure iv.

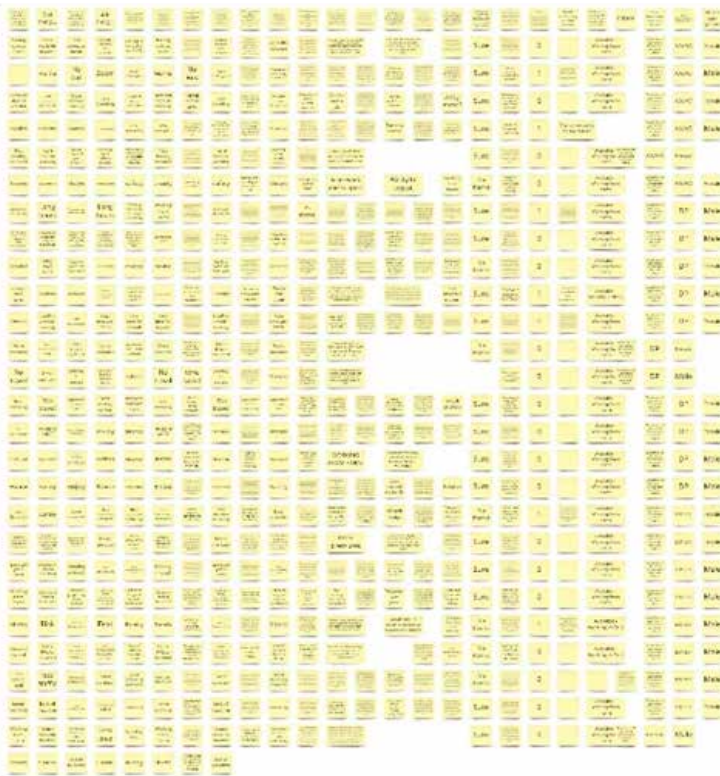


Figure v. provides a visual representation of how we arranged the data for an individual Department.

Figure v.



Figure vi.

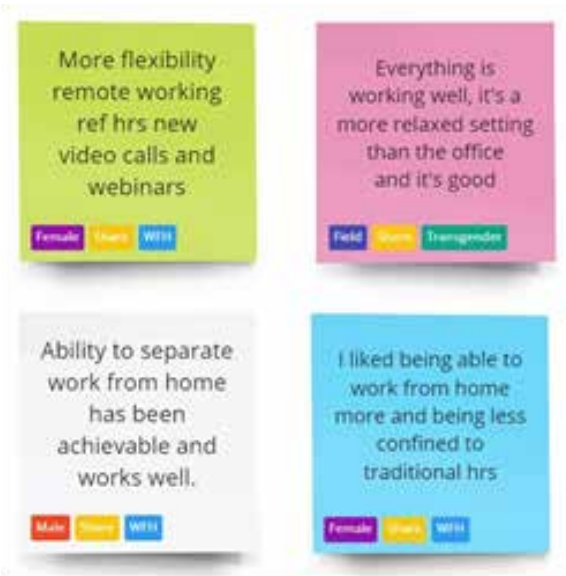




We labelled individual post-its with demographic information such as grade, gender, permission to data share data and work location using colour or the tag function so we could look for trends throughout our analysis, see figure vi.

Figure vii. shows examples of how the tag function within Miro was utilised to help us track the demographic data throughout the analysis. We asked permission within the survey to share pictures as part of our report. The yellow tag was used to identify those respondents who had granted us permission.

**Figure vii.**



**Analysis process**

We took the data from the first Department and reviewed the responses to develop a strategic approach to undertake the analysis. We found that the questions naturally split into four sections. The responses to Questions 1-3 formed the “insights” and “reasons and impacts” sections. The responses to Question 6 formed the “staff advice” section and Questions 4 and 7 formed the “positive, negative and unexpected staff reflections” section. This is shown in figure viii.

**Figure viii.**



The analysis of the responses to the first Department provided us with a sense of themes that were emerging and from this a high-level themes framework was developed, see yellow post-its in figure ix. We then reconsidered the large groups of post-its within the high-level themes and developed sub-themes that better represented the data. These sub-themes are represented by the grey cards in figure ix. For example, for the “family” theme, we had identified a number of comments that related to family and home life. On further consideration however it became clear that “family” was too broad and we discovered the subthemes of “caring responsibilities”, “family activity” and “home schooling”. For each theme we developed a definition which can be read at **Appendix 3**. On completion of the test Department, we had developed a theme framework that contained 30 themes. We used this framework to then deductively code the remaining Departments responses. As we progressed through the next two Departments we identified five additional themes which resulted in the final theme framework. To ensure consistency of approach we re-themed the first two Departments against the final framework.

**Figure ix.**



## Affinity mapping<sup>6</sup>

To help us sort the individual comments to themes, we designed a frame in Miro which contained all of the themes with a designated area for positive and negative comments to be assigned and a central area for the post-its to sit prior to mapping. This is shown in figure x.

Figure x.



Each theme within the frame was labelled with a title and the definition using the card function within Miro, see figure xi. We also had markers placed with the card so we were able group comments with either positive or negative tendencies.

Figure xi.



<sup>6</sup> <https://www.usertesting.com/blog/affinity-mapping>



The same three researchers themed every comment received. Each comment was discussed prior to it being associated to a particular theme or themes. This helped to clarify our understanding of the comments made, identify the theme or themes it related to and reduce the impact of our personal bias on the findings. This was time consuming; however, the benefits derived resulted in improving the integrity of the evidence contained within the report. Given the level of detail and range of issues provided by respondents in some single comments, it was common for a single comment to be duplicated and be attributed to multiple themes. An example of question 2 mapped for a Department can be seen in figure xii.

**Figure xii.**



Figure xiii. illustrates how the comments with positive and negative tendencies were mapped to the ways of working theme.

**Figure xiii.**



Once all of the comments were themed we reviewed each theme individually look for commonalities from which we could initially derive insights and, at a later stage, draw out “reasons and impacts”. For some themes this was straightforward due to the low number of comments associated. However, for themes which had a lot of comments, we clustered the comments around commonalities we found. Figure xiv illustrates how this was achieved for a theme. The black stars are the commonalities. Once this was completed we considered the comments for a third time in relation to the commonalities and derived insights if we could identify them. Also, throughout the development of insights we tried, where possible, to draw upon the language that was used by staff within their comments. These insight statements are represented by the light green rectangles on the left in figure xiv. This process was completed for each theme in each Department and resulted in over 570 insights being identified across all Departments.

**Figure xiv.**



## Collating insights at NICS level

To derive NICS wide insights, we grouped the 570 insights we had derived from the nine Departments into the overarching themes. An example of this is shown in figure xv. where each Department is represented by a different coloured post-it note.

Figure xv.



Figure xvi. shows how we did this with the single-worded teal post-its representing the commonality and the Departmental insights clustered around those. We discussed the content of all the insights and used these to create the NICS level insights. These are represented by the teal coloured post-its in the centre of each cluster.

Figure xvi.



We felt it was important to represent how common each insight was amongst the Departments, and, for this, we developed the template outlined in figure xvii.

**Figure xvii.**

To provide context as to how prevalent insights were across the nine NICS Departments the following pre-fixes have been used:

- *All...* this means an insight found within all Departments
- *Most...* this means an insight found within 6 to 8 Departments
- *Some...* this means an insight found within 4 to 5 Departments
- *A few...* this means an insight found within 2 to 3 Departments

**Reasons and impacts**

The Lab includes a system dynamics modeller and we were able to call upon his expertise to help us understand what we were seeing within the data. As we were reading and re-reading every comment it became clear that the richness within it provided more than insights and indeed could present a useful reference tool for policy and decision makers. To develop this tool we identified the drivers behind the reported experiences and recorded these as the ‘reasons’. Further to this the way in which those experiences impacted upon the individuals are recorded as ‘impacts’.

We identified these by theme and listed them as either favourable or unfavourable. Figure xviii. is an example of how we collated the data by theme with green representing favourable reasons and red unfavourable.

**Figure xviii.**

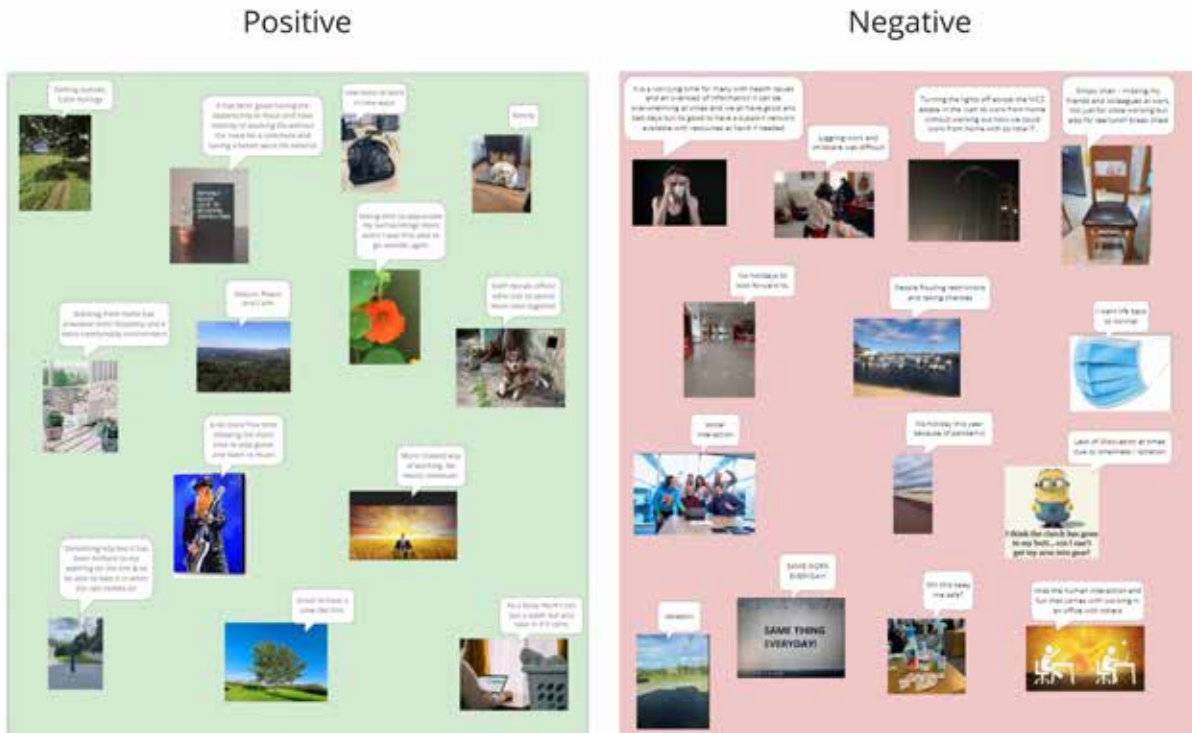




## Staff Reflections

Questions 4 and 7 of the survey enabled us to capture staff reflections whether these be positive, negative or unexpected. We again used the same theme frame to map the responses which helped us gain a flavour of the reflections for each Department and across NICS. From the theme frame we were then able to select pictures and quotes that conveyed what we had analysed. Figure xxi. illustrates an example of this for question 4.

Figure xxi.





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