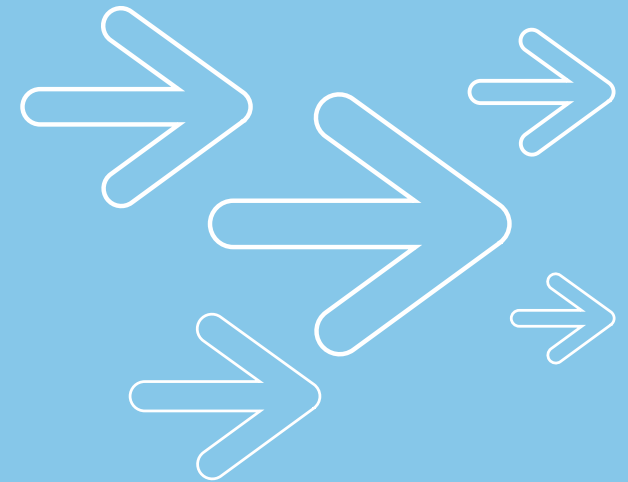
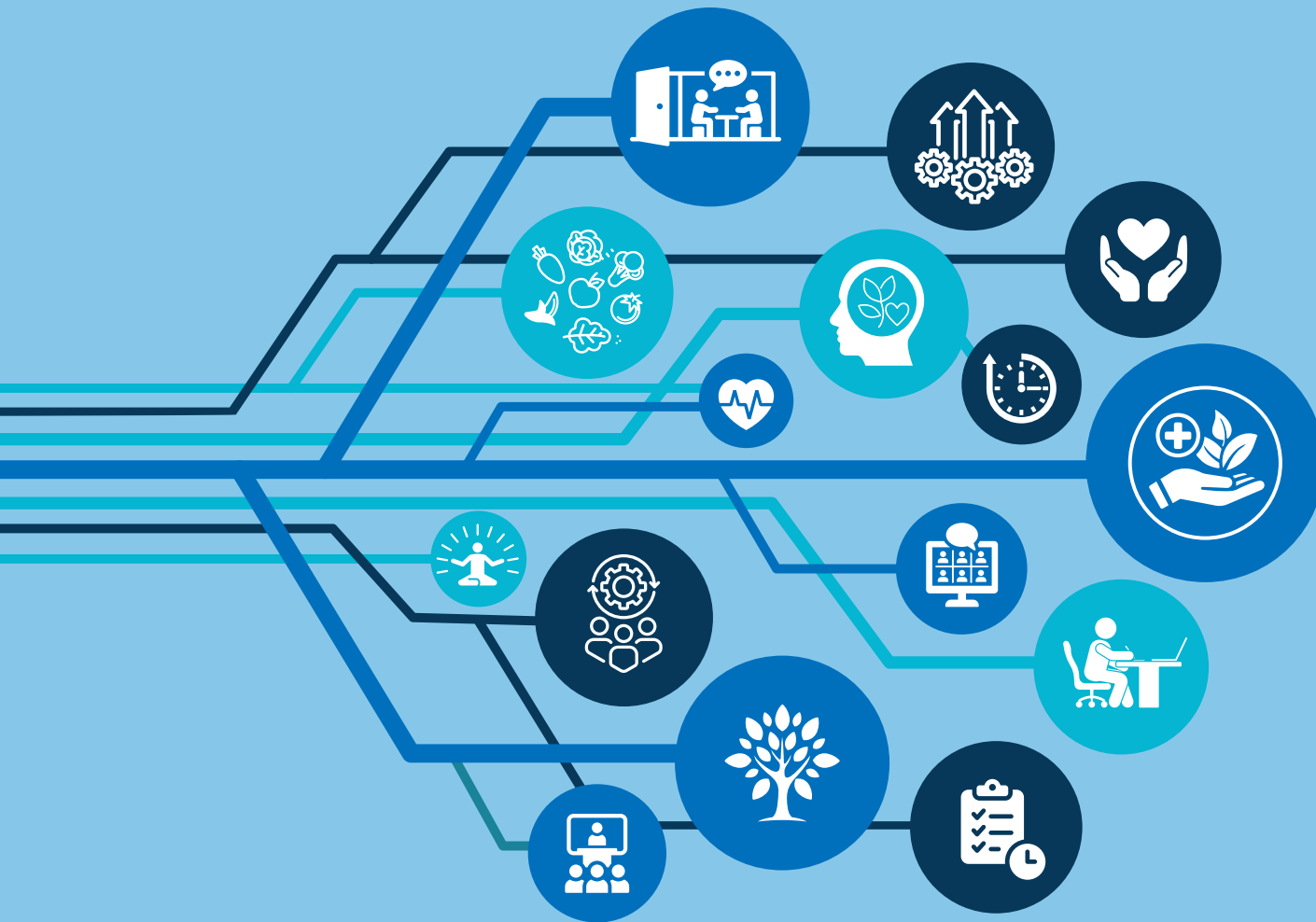


NICS Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan





Catherine Shannon

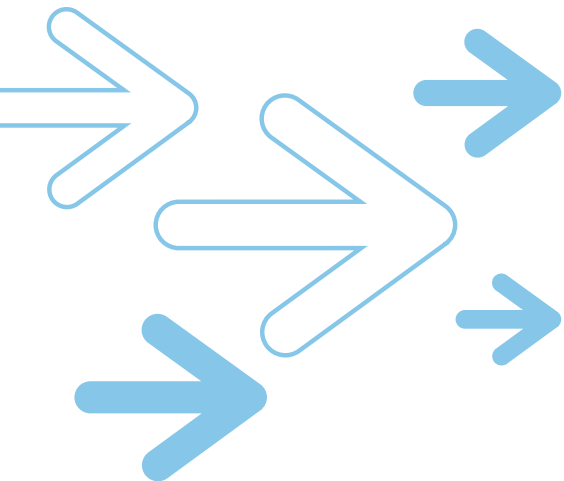
Deputy Secretary,
NICS Human Resources

Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan – why is it important?

It is vital we promote Health and Wellbeing and encourage our people to be healthy. This will enable them to be their best in the workplace and deliver high-quality services to our citizens.

The impacts on physical and mental health are well known however others such as relationships, management skills and the environment we work in are also fundamental to our health.

Health and Wellbeing is not a one size fits all solution and every Civil Service Department will have different needs and aspirations. Our managers, leaders and all of our people have a key role to play in creating positive and healthy working environments to model what healthy behaviours look like and to support us all to build and sustain positive cultures.



NICS People Plan 2024-25

How we got here

A key pillar of the [NICS People Plan 2024-25](#), is to support and improve Health and Wellbeing. We have developed a Health and Wellbeing Framework, based on benchmarking and best practice across other public sector and private sector organisations. This will enable us to understand the Health and Wellbeing of our people and introduce appropriate help and support from a NICS and Departmental perspective.



Investing in employee wellbeing can lead to increased resilience, better employee engagement, reduced sickness absence and higher performance and productivity. Employee wellbeing priorities must be integrated throughout an organisation, embedded in its culture, leadership and people management.

CIPD 24'

Where we are going

We will focus on measures to:

- place emphasis on a positive Health and Wellbeing culture;
- place greater emphasis on the preventative Health and Wellbeing interventions; and
- embed equality, diversity and inclusion providing a clear rationale and case for change.

The NICS diagnostic tool has been developed to provide a high-level view of where the NICS should prioritise our Health and Wellbeing efforts.

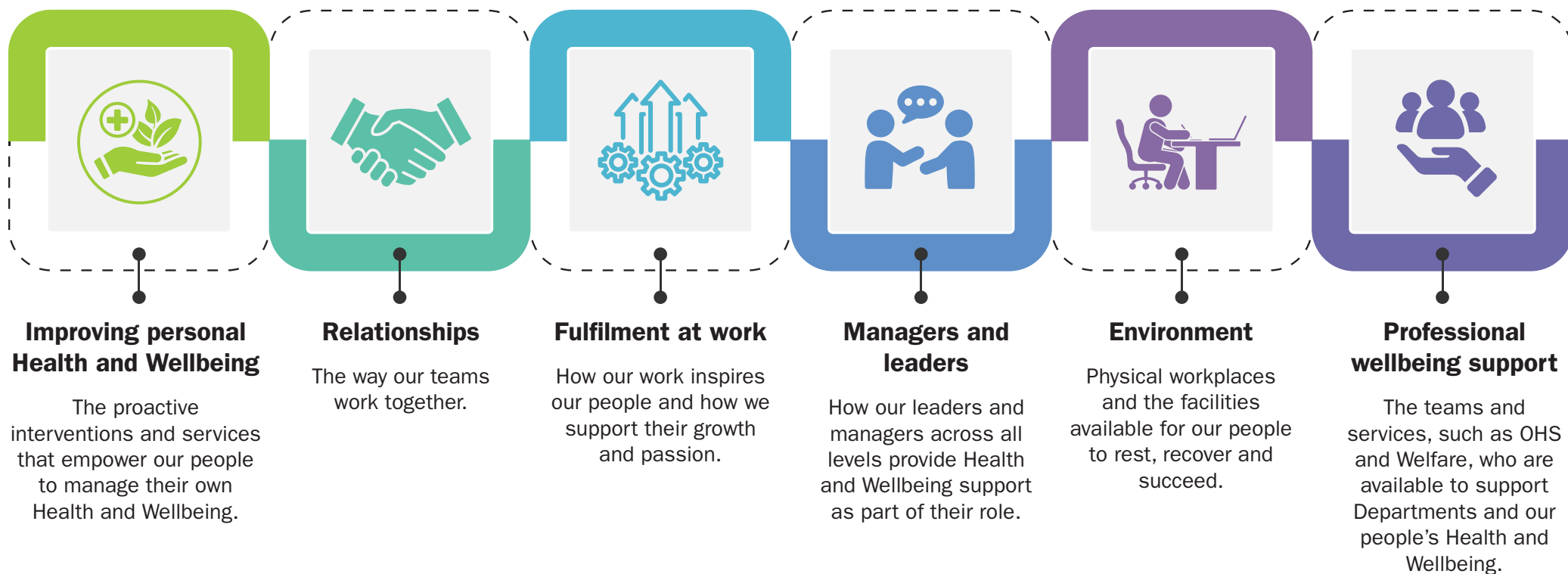
The tool has six core elements (which include 14 sub-elements). For each element there are a series of statements as to what 'good' would look like. Each of these statements were discussed with focus groups, which included a range of grades from AA to G5 in all Departments and were asked to score whether the Department is currently an 'area of excellence', 'significant progress', 'some level of progress' or 'not started'. Statistical data from support services and the NICS People Survey were used to help inform discussion.

Strategic HR Business Partners will engage as key enablers, with Departmental leadership teams and Health and Wellbeing leads, to discuss the feedback specific to their Departments and to support them to develop a Departmental action plan.

The outputs from the focus groups in each Department enable us to:

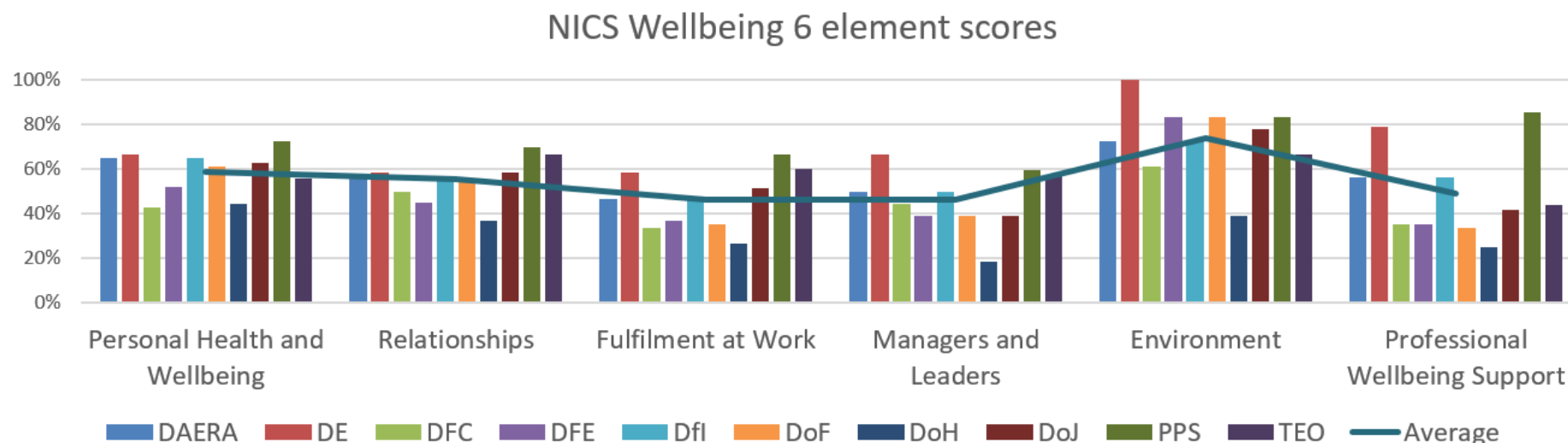
- gain a broad understanding of how Health and Wellbeing is supported across Departments and how it impacts on our people.
- develop strategic action plans to support our people.

6 Key Elements of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy



Key findings

The graph below details the outputs of the Health and Wellbeing focus groups by Department, focusing on the 6 key elements tested for Health and Wellbeing.



As a result of the findings our focus will be on:

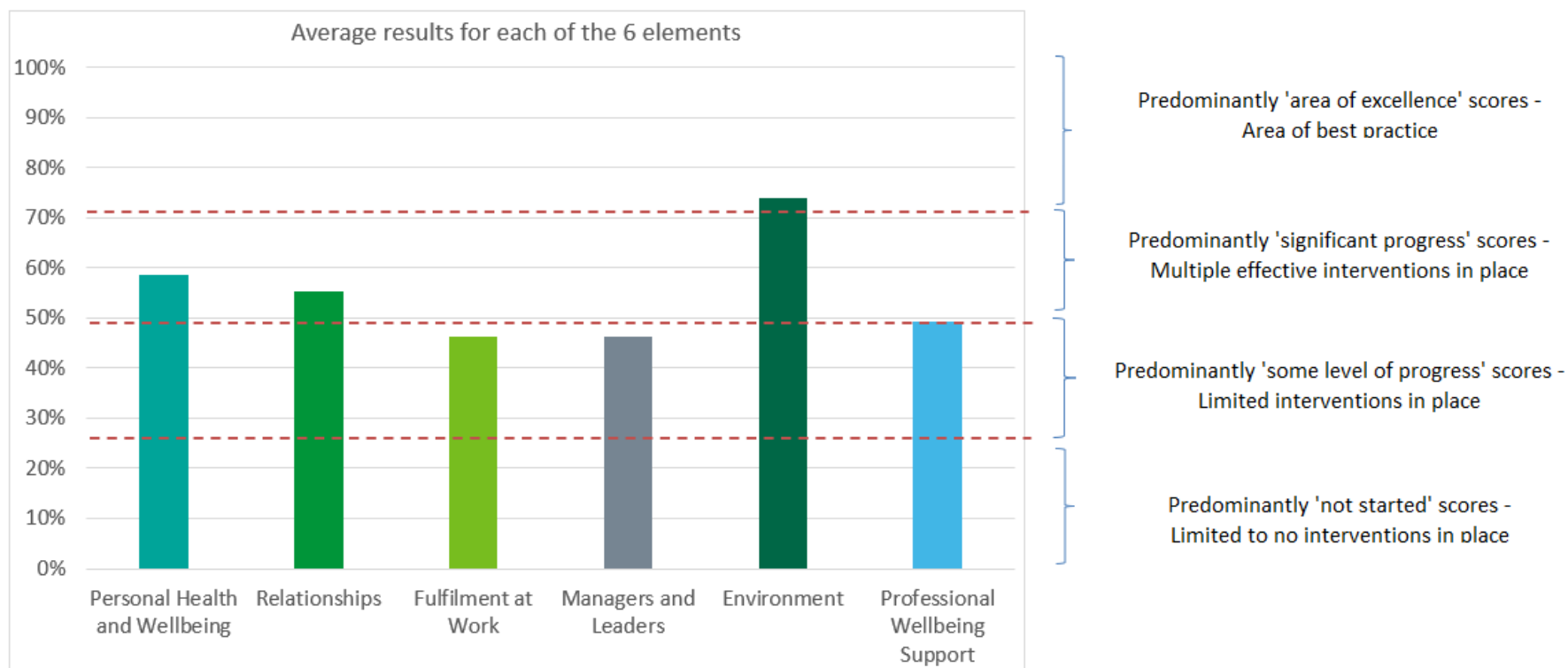
- building on the positive work already underway across Departments and build on these for all of our people and replicate some of the positive rated initiatives in other areas that scored less positively.
- addressing some of the lowest scores with a view to addressing the key reasons for issues that are impacting on the Health and Wellbeing of our people.
- developing plans and initiatives to work on areas that are impacting on the Health and Wellbeing of our people.
- working collaboratively with all Departments, ensuring representation on a range of groups and initiatives including the NICS Mental Health Forum to share experiences, gain insight and identify opportunities to share resources.

It should be noted that the charts reflect “point in time” information and we are committed to work collaboratively with Departments to keep this under review and measure progress and to ensure support is targeted.

Key findings:

- One of the 6 areas tested scored as an area of excellence.
- Areas with lower scores in some areas, prompt a need to explore the causes.

We are able to take a deeper look at average NICS scores for each of the 6 elements being tested through the Health and Wellbeing focus groups, allowing us to better understand the various factors where we have effective measures in place and those that require more urgent focus.



Key positive themes:



Flexible working

This included many positive comments about the alternative and flexible working opportunities (including hybrid) that exist within the NICS which can help staff balance work and personal commitments.



Support Services

The range of internal and external support options available, including Well, Well Champions, Welfare Support, Learning & Development, Employee Assistance Programme (Inspire) and the Charity for Civil Servants.



Policies

Positive comments around the policies that are in place to support our people, particularly recent changes to special leave policy, but also other policies including hybrid, raising concerns and flexible working.



Employee Forums

Encouraging comments around the range of support networks that support our diverse workforce.



Environment

Majority of Departments scored very highly in this area. Very positive comments overall on buildings, equipment, and Health & Safety practices in general.



Managers and Leaders

A number of very positive comments around direct line managers including Senior Civil Service (SCS) and Departmental Board approaches to Health and Wellbeing.



Health Check Roadshows

A significant number of positive comments on the benefit of these activities.



Key areas for improvement:

Life Balance	Lowest scoring area. Improvements discussed included positive digital health practices e.g. working within normal business hours. Life balance considerations required for improvements in resourcing of teams.
Support Services	Many positive comments, however generally seen as reactive rather than proactive. A need for increased visibility at earlier stage. Also appropriate support often difficult to find if an issue arises. Some low scores on whether support services have forums to meet or are formally reviewed.
Health Roadshows	Increased availability of these would be welcome. Many comments around not being able to register due to lack of spaces. Intervention seen very positively for attendees.
Working Well Together	Positive comments generally, however lots of examples where poor/inappropriate behaviour is not addressed, people's lack of confidence or uncertainty of knowing what to do if dealing with poor/inappropriate behaviour.
Talent Management	Lack of understanding on approach to Talent Management, aligning skills to posts especially relating to general service competitions.
Leadership	No formal Health and Wellbeing Champion at SCS level. Comments to suggest that improved communication would be helpful in informing our people if various Health and Wellbeing issues are considered at Departmental Board level.
Performance Process	Discussion highlighting need to review the current performance management process. Views expressing performance not adequately managed.
Environment	Some negative comments on the lack of healthy food options around specific buildings across the NICS.
Communication	Very strong views that communications need to be better targeted and less saturation.
Learning & Development	Perception of a lack of encouragement and capacity to avail of learning and development opportunities.
Induction	Some areas experiencing a very limited/minimal induction. Issues raised due in part to new ways of working.

Action Plan

This Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan focuses on measures to:

- place emphasis on a positive Health and Wellbeing culture;
- place greater emphasis on the preventative Health and Wellbeing interventions; and
- embed equality, diversity and inclusion providing a clear rationale and case for change.

5 key action areas have been identified:

Key Element	Action	Action Owner	Review
Fulfilment at work: Mental health/life balance	<p>Take forward plans with Departments to address emerging patterns of working practices that are impacting negatively on our people, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • through promotion of Learning and Development (L&D) training, materials and resources. • messaging from senior levels to ensure time is allocated for L&D or health related initiatives. • complete review of the NICS hybrid working policy. 	NICS HR with input from Departments and P&OD	March 2025
Professional Wellbeing Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an NICS Wellbeing app/hub to improve Health and Wellbeing messaging channels and accessibility to services at the right time. • Increase availability of awareness sessions to improve proactive support. • Increased Health Roadshows and other interventions. • Improve support options for bereaved people. 	NICS HR	March 2025
Fulfilment at work: Job design and talent management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity on job families and clear career pathways. • Provide clarity on NICS approach to Talent Management. 	NICS HR and P&OD	Sept 2025



Managers and leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NICS HR to establish a NICS Mental Health Forum with representatives from all Departments and Trade Unions.• This forum will share learning, identify gaps and develop further collaborative approaches across the NICS to support the mental Health and Wellbeing of our people.• Appoint SCS Health and Wellbeing Champion for the NICS.• Ensure mental health support is incorporated and reflected in the range of managers toolkits developed by NICS HR.• Scope mental health provision across departments to develop focused plans for short medium- and long-term actions.• Analyse mental health related absence and develop actions for 2025-2026	NICS HR and P&OD	October 2024 March 2025 March 2025
Improving personal Health and Wellbeing: Induction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop an in-person and e-learning corporate induction.• Introduce a First 100 Days pilot.	NICS HR and P&OD	March 2025 March 2025

