

Annual Whistleblowing Report

April 2024 – March 2025

June 2025

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Published Month Year

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Background

All NHS Boards within Scotland are required to publish an annual report in respect of their approach and performance in handling Whistleblowing concerns as a requirement of the National Whistleblowing Standards since 2021.

This is the fourth annual report provided regarding this work within Healthcare Improvement Scotland and covers the period of April 2024 – March 2025.

Introduction

Healthcare Improvement Scotland, as Scotland's national improvement agency, was established in 2011 to enable the people of Scotland to experience the best quality of health and social care and the focus of our efforts are:

- Enabling people to make informed choices about their care and treatment.
- Helping Health and Social Care organisations to improve their services.
- Providing evidence and sharing knowledge with services that help them improve.
- Enabling people to get the best out of the services they use.
- Providing quality assurance that gives people confidence in NHS services.

We are a relatively small employer with approximately 580 staff employed across the organisation. We are constituted as a Special Health Board, like Public Health Scotland, and as such operate in a different manner from other NHS Boards.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland also has a unique role within NHS Scotland. If a member of NHS Scotland staff or member of the public has concerns relating to the safety or quality of patient care and has tried to resolve these through their own organisation or through the INWO or feel unable to use these routes, then they can raise their concerns in confidence with us. NHS Scotland staff can contact Healthcare Improvement Scotland directly with concerns under the Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA). This legislation protects whistleblowers from detrimental treatment by their employer and gives statutory protection against victimisation to workers who speak out. We can also receive referrals from other organisations when they become aware of potential patient safety or quality of care concerns about a service within the NHS in Scotland, such as the Mental Welfare Commission, the General Medical Council or the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland has a legal obligation to respond to these concerns.

As such, our staff are aware of our role across the wider NHS system within Scotland and our responsibility to respond to concerns.

Key Performance Indicators

1. Learnings, Changes and Improvements as a result of considering Whistleblowing concerns

Within the organisation we have a range of support for Whistleblowing, as required by the national standards.

We have an established Board Whistleblowing Champion, Keith Charters, who has held this role since 2021. We also have nominated Whistleblowing Confidential Contacts: Ann Grant, Head of People and Workplace, and Kenny Crosbie from our inspection team who is also Unison Steward. Our Employee Director, Duncan Service, is also a key figure in oversight and support of our Whistleblowing standards and awareness.

During the reporting period of April 2024 – March 2025 there have been no Whistleblowing concerns raised within the organisation. There have continued to be grievances lodged during the reporting period, a total of **two** in total which does confirm that concerns have been raised via the normal HR policy process.

The iMatter survey for 2024 included questions relating to staff awareness of how to raise concerns and the degree of confidence that these will be dealt with appropriately.

The results reported in the 2024 survey results for Healthcare Improvement Scotland saw a drop in staff responding that they had confidence that they could safely raise concerns about issues in their workplace, from a response of 81 in 2023, to 74 in 2024. Similarly, in response to the question that their concerns would be followed up and responded to saw a reduction in the return percentage from 75 in 2023 to 68 in 2024.

As a result of this information, in addition to the established arrangements regarding awareness of the Whistleblowing standards, Healthcare Improvement Scotland undertook a range of additional activity to support engagement and culture within the organisation.

Nine actions were agreed in partnership to create the best chance of meaningful and sustainable solutions. It was particularly clear that frequent and real-time feedback on staff experience is invaluable and acts as an early indicator of matters of concern or equally where we can look at areas of good practice.

Pulse Surveys are now in place across all Directorates within the organisation and are running successfully. This provides invaluable detail at a local and organisational level with a focus on action taken in response to concerns or issues that might arise. By doing this we are enabled to demonstrate to staff that we are listening and acting on what has been heard.

As an organisation, Healthcare Improvement Scotland works hard to have an open and inclusive approach to communication with our staff, including our regular monthly 'All staff huddles' conducted via Teams. These are well attended with an average of over 50% of our staff attending the actual events where they have an opportunity to ask questions of the speakers and on general topics that may be current. These events are also recorded and available to all staff.

Dialogue and discussion with our Executive Team and our Partnership Forum is also encouraged and visible to the organisation.

In the early part of 2024/25, we launched 'HIS Campus', a model which has been developed to support our overall approach to supporting Learning and development within the organisation. We actively foster a learning environment which enables individuals and teams to be involved in work projects and activities (both within, and beyond their sphere of influence) which will support, develop, and stretch their professional competence and confidence.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland also looked at how to evolve its project management function to maximise the flexibility of the skill set for this group and in recognition of the number of employees engaged within this work. In May and June 2024, Project Officer and Senior Project officer staff were invited to offer views on their roles, development and aspirations by participating in a series of listening sessions that followed a structured set of questions. The intention of these arrangements was to create a safe space for all participants to share their views openly. Our Partnership Forum and Staff Governance Committee were briefed about the sessions and the planned approach.

2. Experiences of all those involved in the Whistleblowing Procedure

As previously reported, the organisational experience indicates that staff will often initially consider whistleblowing as a possible route for raising a concern but, following discussion with Whistleblowing Confidential Contacts (either in that capacity or in their union guise), will ultimately choose the grievance route because of the nature of the issue. We view this positively: the fact that these conversations are happening means that concerns end up in the most appropriate channel.

Activity has taken place with the Partnership Forum and Directorates to ensure that staff are aware of processes to be undertaken to raise concerns. This has referenced the use of workforce policies including Whistleblowing arrangements.

3. Levels of Staff Awareness and Training

In terms of the workforce information requested, the return for Healthcare Improvement Scotland that we can provide as at the end of March, based on information available from our LearnPro system is as follows:

- **No of Staff registered on LearnPro (Headcount) – 637**

(this figure includes public partners and board members registered on the system)

- **No of Staff who completed training - Whistleblowing Overview - 579**
- **% of total staff who completed training – 91%**
- **Manager Headcount – *not identifiable from the system***
- **No of Individuals who completed training –**
 - a) **32 individuals have completed the Whistleblowing for Line Managers**
 - b) **38 have completed the module for managers and people who receive concerns**
- **% of Managers who completed training – *as detailed above not identifiable from the system***

We continue to remind our employees of the need to complete the training as required.

4. The total number of concerns received.

As detailed above, Healthcare Improvement Scotland did not receive any Whistleblowing concerns from within our workforce during the reporting period of 2024- 2025.

As previously mentioned, the organisation has continued to receive Grievances as per current Once for Scotland Policy arrangements. During this time, we received a total of 2 formal grievance submissions from individual staff.

As part of the Grievance Policy, there is also an opportunity to resolve issues through informal resolution processes prior to the submission of a formal grievance, and this has been a useful process to deal with employee concerns within the organisation.

5. Concerns closed at Stages 1 and 2

6. Concerns upheld

7. Time Taken to respond

8. – 10. Compliance to Timescales

As no cases or concerns were received, then the KPI sections above are not applicable in terms of this annual report.

Activity in 2025/26

As mentioned earlier, Healthcare Improvement Scotland continues to have a high level of team, Directorate, and organisational engagement with all our staff on a regular basis, including through All-Staff Huddles and other collective meeting and engagement arrangements.

The Pulse survey work is now embedded within the organisation and will continue during the current reporting year.

We have also begun a further area of work in relation to organisational culture which will become a focus of discussion and awareness across Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

We will ensure continued maintenance of training for all staff.

INWO leads an annual Speak-Up initiative, and we will use its resources as part of our efforts to promote the important role played by our whistleblowing procedures.

During 2025/26 our board representative will again be part of the Whistleblowing Champions Group to allow us to learn from good practice in other areas of the NHS.

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