



Healthcare Improvement Scotland Children's Rights Report

2024-2026

Contents

Executive Summary	2
1. Introduction	3
2. Legislative and Policy Context.....	4
3. Ensuring Compatibility with Children’s Rights	4
4. Reporting on Children’s Rights (Part 3 Duty) 2024-2026	5
5. Forward Priorities (2026-2029).....	7
6. Governance and Assurance.....	8
Summary and Conclusion	11

Executive summary

This report sets out how Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) has fulfilled its statutory duties under the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 during the reporting period July 2024 – March 2026. As a listed authority, HIS must:

- Ensure compatibility of all its functions with UNCRC requirements (Part 2)
- Report publicly every three years on actions taken and planned to secure better or further effect on children’s rights (Part 3)

This represents HIS’s first reporting cycle since the UNCRC was incorporated into Scots law. The organisation has taken substantial steps to strengthen governance, develop staff capability, integrate children’s rights within operational and strategic work, and embed rights-based practice across national programmes, improvement work, scrutiny, standards development, and community engagement. Key achievements include:

- Establishing strengthened leadership and governance frameworks, including an organisational compatibility plan and a refreshed Children and Young People Working Group (CYPG)
- Delivering organisation-wide UNCRC learning, including the “Listen and Learn” session accessible to all staff
- Embedding children’s rights considerations within the Scottish Patient Safety Programme, national standards development, and scrutiny and assurance activity
- Strengthening safeguarding and protection practices, including mandatory training, trauma-informed approaches, and alignment with national guidance

- Further development of a child-friendly complaints process, increasing access to justice and ensuring children can exercise their rights to be heard and to seek remedy
- Expanding opportunities for participation, including engagement with young people aged 16–24 through national panels and lived-experience inquiries
- Consistent use of Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIAs) to assess impacts on children’s rights across policies, programmes, and improvement activity

HIS’s publication of report and a child-friendly version, as required by the Act. Approval of this report by the Quality Performance Committee (QPC) and onward submission to Scottish Ministers ensures HIS meets statutory obligations and demonstrates a continued commitment to a rights-based approach across all functions.

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1. Introduction

Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) is the national improvement and scrutiny organisation within NHS Scotland. The role of HIS is to enable the people of Scotland to experience the best quality of health and social care. Our work supports health and social care services to improve. This includes providing quality assurance of NHS services, providing evidence and sharing knowledge with services and enabling people to make informed choices about their care and treatment. HIS does not deliver direct care

Under the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, HIS is legally required to report every three years on:

- The actions it has taken to comply with the compatibility duty
- The actions it intends to take to secure better or further effect children’s rights
- Meaningful engagement with children and young people
- The publication of both full and child-friendly reports

This report covers the period July 2024 – March 2026 and offers a comprehensive account of HIS’s progress to date. The report also details our future priorities for 2026-2029.

2. Legislative and policy context

The UNCRC establishes a comprehensive set of civil, political, cultural, social, and economic rights for all children and young people under eighteen. Scottish Ministers have committed to the maximum possible incorporation of the UNCRC within devolved competence, placing duties on public authorities to act compatibly with children's rights.

Key features of the Act include:

- Part 2: Compatibility Duty – HIS must does not act incompatibly with UNCRC requirements.
- Part 3: Reporting Duty – HIS must report on actions taken/planned and publish a child-friendly version.

The Act emphasises the need for public authorities to adopt a proactive, preventive, and evidence-informed approach to the realisation of rights. HIS's work directly contributes to provision, protection, and participation rights outlined in the Convention

3. Ensuring compatibility with children's rights

3.1 Leadership and governance

In August 2024, HIS's Executive Team approved and implemented a comprehensive organisational plan outlining responsibilities, legal obligations, leadership roles, and operational impacts arising from the UNCRC Act. This plan ensures that decision-making, policy development, and organisational oversight explicitly consider children's rights.

Key actions included:

- Clarifying governance lines for UNCRC compliance
- Embedding rights considerations in corporate decision-making
- Ensuring risks associated with potential incompatibility are identified and mitigated

3.2 Children and young people working group

The Children and young people working group provides operational oversight and is responsible for ensuring that children's rights remain visible across all HIS functions. The group:

- includes cross-organisational representation
- meets quarterly
- leads awareness, capability building, and implementation support
- reviewed and updated its governance arrangements following incorporation of the Act in July 2024

3.3 Workforce capability and learning

HIS undertook extensive organisation-wide learning activity, including:

- A “UNCRC Listen and Learn” session delivered to all staff in March 2025, raising awareness and supporting reflection on how HIS activities affect children and families
- Integration of UNCRC materials into corporate learning channels
- Access to national learning resources and conferences, including the Scottish National UNCRC Conference (Nov 2025)

3.4 Decision-making and impact assessment

The Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) tool is used across HIS to ensure that major programmes and policies are assessed for their impact on children’s rights. Staff are encouraged to consider:

- Whether the work affects children
- Which rights may be engaged
- Whether children and young people should be consulted directly
- Steps required to mitigate negative impacts or maximise positive impacts

4. Reporting on children’s rights (Part 3 duty) 2024-2026

Under the Act, HIS must publish both a full and a child-friendly version of its Children’s Rights Report and must submit the full report to Scottish Ministers. HIS will meet this requirement by:

- maintaining a structured three-year reporting cycle
- ensuring that reporting reflects the themes of Provision, Protection and Participation, as required under statutory guidance
- publishing accessible materials to support transparency and public understanding
- documenting progress and identifying forward priorities to support continuous improvement

The publication of these reports contributes to organisational accountability and demonstrates to Ministers, partners and the public that HIS continues to act compatibly with UNCRC requirements.

To communicate progress clearly, Healthcare Improvement Scotland structures its reporting around the UNCRC themes of Provision, Protection, and Participation. Over the past two years, HIS’s focus on these three themes can be evidenced through the following:

4.1 Provision – Supporting children to grow, stay safe and thrive

Scottish Patient Safety Programme

The Scottish Patient Safety Programme (SPSP) supports NHS boards and partners to improve the safety and reliability of care for children and young people. This contributes to key rights, including the right to life, health, development, and protection from harm (Articles 2, 4, 6, 12, 19, 24). HIS' role includes:

- developing national improvement programmes
- supporting boards to embed safer care practices
- learning from adverse events and sharing national insights

Development of national standards

HIS develops and publishes national standards to provide consistent expectations for safe, effective, person-centred services. These standards support equitable, right-based care for children and young people. Examples include:

- [Bairns' Hoose Standards](#)
- [Gender Identity Standards](#)
- [Sexual Health Standards](#)
- [Eating Disorders Care and Treatment Standards](#)

Standards are co-produced with children, young people, families, and partners, ensuring rights—including Article 12 (voice)—are upheld.

4.2 Protection – Keeping children safe from harm

4.2.1 Scrutiny and regulation

HIS undertakes scrutiny and inspection across healthcare settings, including:

- acute hospitals
- mental health services
- maternity services
- healthcare in justice settings
- services supporting children on Compulsory Supervision Orders at Home

These processes promote rights to safety, protection from violence, and high-quality care.

4.2.2 Safeguarding and trauma-informed practice

HIS maintains clear responsibilities for child and adult protection. All staff must:

- complete regular child and adult protection training
- recognise and report concerns

- apply trauma-informed approaches
- understand risks including exploitation, coercion, and harmful behaviours

This reflects Articles 3, 19, 34-36 and 39.

4.2.3 National Hub for reviewing and learning from child deaths

The National Hub—delivered jointly by HIS and the Care Inspectorate—reviews the deaths of children and young people to ensure lessons are learned and future harm is prevented. The hub contributes to systemic safety, equity, and trauma-informed learning across Scotland.

4.3 Participation – Ensuring children can share their views

4.3.1 Children’s right to complain

HIS is developing a new child-friendly complaints process, aligned with Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) guidance. This will enable children to submit complaints independently or with support, strengthening access to remedy (Article 12, 13, 17).

4.3.2 Staff learning on participation

Staff have access to participation tools, UNCRC learning content, and engagement events that support rights-based approaches to involving children and young people in decision-making.

4.3.3 Community and lived-experience engagement

HIS works directly with people and communities to gather views on services. Participation by young people includes:

- membership of the Citizens’ Panel, where 16–24-year-olds contribute to twice-yearly national health and care surveys
- involvement in lived-experience projects, e.g., representation in the chronic pain insights project.

5. Forward priorities (2026-2029)

HIS has identified several priority areas for the next reporting cycle, including:

5.1 Strengthening rights-based governance

- Enhancing visibility of children’s rights in corporate governance and policy development
- Embedding UNCRC considerations in executive and Board decision-making processes

5.2 Expanding participation and co-design

- More opportunities for children and young people to influence programmes

- Investment in participation methodologies suitable for a wide age range
- Ensuring children are partners—not just consultees—in shaping services

5.3 Improving monitoring, measurement and reporting

- Refining outcome measures for children’s rights realisation
- Strengthening data collection and analysis
- Enhancing transparency in public reporting

5.4 Increasing capability across the organisation

- Additional UNCRC learning modules
- Targeted support for teams with high impact on children’s rights
- Expansion of trauma-informed and safeguarding training

5.5 Accessible communication and publication

- Producing more child-friendly materials
- Making public documents easier to understand
- Ensuring accessibility needs are systematically considered

6. Governance and assurance

HIS has established governance and assurance arrangements that ensure the organisation fulfils its statutory responsibilities under the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, particularly the duty to act compatibly with children’s rights and the requirement to report on actions taken to secure better or further effects of those rights.

6.1 Organisational leadership and strategic oversight

In August 2024, HIS’s Executive Team adopted an organisational plan setting out expectations, roles, and legal obligations under the Act. This plan ensures that senior leaders understand:

- the compatibility duty and its implications for HIS
- how functions, programmes and policies may impact children and young people
- the requirement to demonstrate compliance through robust governance and reporting mechanisms

This leadership commitment provides the foundation for organisational compliance and risk mitigation.

The Executive Team provides strategic direction, ensures compliance is monitored, and integrates children’s rights considerations into HIS’s broader governance, policy development, and corporate risk processes. This approach supports system-wide accountability for embedding rights across all programme areas.

6.2 Children and Young People Working Group (CYPG)

The Children and Young People Working Group oversees the operational implementation of children's rights across HIS by:

- Ensuring children's rights are visible and understood across HIS functions
- Supporting teams to integrate rights-based considerations into planning, design and delivery of work
- Facilitating staff learning, capability building and organisational consistency
- Advising compatibility considerations and identifying areas requiring further development
- Updating internal governance arrangements when legislation or statutory guidance changes

Following the incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law in 2024, CYPG reviewed and strengthened its remit to better support the organisations' statutory duties.

6.3 Embedding children's rights in decision-making

HIS uses the Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) approach to support structured, evidence-based consideration of children's rights in policy development, programme design, and major organisational decisions. The CRWIA process ensures that staff assess:

- Whether children or young people may be directly or indirectly affected
- Which UNCRC articles may be engaged
- Potential risks to children's rights and how these should be mitigated
- Opportunities to promote or strengthen children's rights
- Whether engagement with children and young people is required

This systematic approach ensures compatibility is embedded in decision-making and informs assurance processes within HIS.

6.4 Workforce development and organisational culture

A core element of HIS's governance model is to ensure that staff have the knowledge, skills and confidence to contribute to the organisations' children's rights obligations. Workforce development is supported through:

- Organisation-wide UNCRC learning, including the "Listen and Learn" session delivered in March 2025, which raised awareness of duties under the Act and how they relate to HIS functions
- Participation in national events and learning networks, including the Scottish National UNCRC Conference (2025)

- Mandatory training on child protection, adult protection, trauma-informed practice, and preventing violence, exploitation or harmful behaviour

These activities help ensure HIS maintains a rights-respecting organisational culture and strengthens governance assurance through informed and capable staff.

6.5 Safeguarding and protection governance

HIS maintains clear governance arrangements for safeguarding, including policies and mandatory training designed to ensure staff understand their responsibilities to recognise and report concerns about children's safety or wellbeing. Staff must act in accordance with national child protection guidance, and HIS monitors compliance with training and reporting processes. These arrangements support HIS's duties relating to Articles 3, 19 and 39 of the UNCRC and ensure the organisation upholds high standards of public protection.

6.6 Reporting, transparency and accountability

Under the Act, HIS must publish both a full and a child-friendly version of its Children's Rights Report and must submit the full report to Scottish Ministers. HIS will meet this requirement by:

- Maintaining a structured three-year reporting cycle
- Ensuring that reporting reflects the themes of Provision, Protection and Participation, as required under statutory guidance
- Publishing accessible materials to support transparency and public understanding
- Documenting progress and identifying forward priorities to support continuous improvement

The publication of these reports contributes to organisational accountability and demonstrates to Ministers, partners and the public that HIS continues to act compatibly with UNCRC requirements.

6.7 Monitoring progress and continuous improvement

HIS monitors progress on children's rights through:

- Regular review of activities via the CYPG
- Oversight from Executive leadership
- Integration into corporate planning and improvement cycles
- Identification of priorities for the following reporting period

Future priorities, such as strengthening participation, improving governance processes, enhancing reporting mechanisms, and increasing rights-based visibility across service areas, ensure that HIS continues to evolve its approach in line with statutory requirements.

These arrangements support strong leadership, effective oversight, informed decision-making, and transparent reporting.

Summary and conclusion

Since the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 came into force, HIS has made considerable progress in embedding a rights-based approach across leadership, governance, policy development, scrutiny, standards setting, improvement programmes, and workforce capability building. Key developments include strengthened governance structures, an organisational compatibility plan and a refreshed Children and Young People Working Group, ensuring that children's rights remain central to organisational decision-making and oversight.

Children's rights are now more consistently reflected in national programmes, including the Scottish Patient Safety Programme, the development of national standards, scrutiny and assurance activity, and safeguarding practice. HIS has invested in building staff capability through organisation-wide UNCRC learning and trauma-informed training, alongside work to create an accessible, child-friendly complaints process that supports the right of children and young people to be heard.

The organisation also highlights its deepening commitment to inclusive participation. Children and young people have meaningfully contributed to standards development, lived-experience projects, and national panels, ensuring their voices shape health and care improvement. The increasing use of Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments has further strengthened rights-based, evidence-informed policy and programme development.

Overall, HIS has demonstrated clear progress in fulfilling its statutory responsibilities under the UNCRC Act and in embedding children's rights across its functions. The organisation recognises, however, that continued focus is needed. Priorities for 2026–2029 include further strengthening governance, expanding participation and co-design opportunities, building organisational capability, enhancing monitoring and reporting processes, and improving the accessibility of public-facing communications.

The foundations established during the 2024–2026 cycle provide a strong platform for future progress. HIS remains committed to ensuring that children's rights are at the heart of decision-making, programme delivery, and organisational culture—supporting all children and young people in Scotland to grow, thrive, and be heard.

Need information in a different format? Contact our Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights Team to discuss your needs. Email his.equality@nhs.scot or call 0141 225 6999. We will consider your request and respond within 20 days.

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