

Annual Whistleblowing Report (includes Q4 performance data)

April 2025 – March 2026

June 2026

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Contents

Contents	1
Background.....	2
Introduction.....	2
Key Performance Indicators	3
Activity in 2025/26	6

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 fifth annual report provided regarding this work within Healthcare Improvement Scotland and covers the period of April 2025 – March 2026.

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 594 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 have also 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.

Recorded activity

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.

Whilst some issues raised are not technically whistleblowing concerns, nonetheless the intelligence gathered from those conversations is valuable. Where themes have emerged – e.g. particular stresses resulting from headcount pressures – this has been flagged to the appropriate Board committees, and thus to the Board itself. The Whistleblowing Champion, acting in this capacity, is an important additional set of eyes and ears for the Board.

iMatter Staff Engagement Survey

The iMatter survey for 2025 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 2025 survey results for Healthcare Improvement Scotland saw a small increase in staff responding that they had confidence that they could safely raise concerns about issues in their workplace, from a response of 74 in 2024, to 78 in 2025. Similarly, in response to the question that their concerns would be followed up and responded to saw an increase in the return percentage from 68 in 2024 to 72 in 2025.

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 activities to support engagement and culture within the organisation.

The organisational response to the iMatter staff survey results in 2025 promoted collective ownership of what the results were telling us and addresses our iMatter results from multiple angles. Actions have been agreed in partnership to create the best chance of delivering meaningful and sustainable solutions. Combined, these actions seek to develop a shared system of organisational intelligence (for listening, awareness and action), considering other relevant sources of information; creating clear infrastructure around our people and cultural practices; and building a more conscious focus on consistency of staff experience across HIS.

We recognise that a frequent, real-time view of staff experience is invaluable, acting as an 'early warning' system, and highlighting good practice/areas of success. Monthly pulse surveys are now in place across all Directorates. This process is giving the organisation the ability to review staff experience at both Directorate and organisational levels. The focus is on the action that is taken because of what emerges from the Pulse surveys, enabling us to demonstrate to staff that we are listening, and acting on what we hear.

Organisational Approach

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.

'HIS Campus', launched in 2024/25 is 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.

Across Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Speak-Up week ran from 29 September to 3 October 2025 with the theme Listen, Act; Build Trust. We reminded our workforce on how to raise a concern via an all-staff communication and ran the following learning opportunities:

- Speak up week: Launch with Robbie Pearson on Monday 29 September
- Listening to concerns on Tuesday 30 September
- Acting on Feedback on Wednesday 1 October
- Talking Truth to Power with Robbie Pearson on Wednesday 1 October
- The benefits of building trust on Thursday 2 October
- Talking Truth to Power with Robbie Pearson on Thursday 2 October
- Speak up week: Round up on Friday 3 October

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 the Whistleblowing Champion, HR or Union Representatives, 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 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 - 594**
- **% of total staff who completed training – 92%**
- **Manager Headcount – 221**
- **No of Individuals who completed training – 77**
- **% of Managers who completed training – 35 % ***

*Based on the manager's headcount captured above

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 2025- 2026.

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 with a further focus on the need for all managers to undertake the appropriate training modules. The whistleblowing for line manager course is not automatically assigned to managers on Learn Pro and we will pick this up in 2026/27.

INWO leads an annual Speak-Up initiative, and we will use its resources as part of our efforts to promote the vital 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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