

**Findings from NHS Boards’
annual whistleblowing
reporting 2023—24**

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Boards are required to publish and submit annual whistleblowing reports to the INWO after the introduction of the National Whistleblowing Standards (the Standards) on 1 April 2021.
- 1.2 This document provides an overview of findings from Boards' third year of annual whistleblowing reporting for 2023—24.
- 1.3 Twenty-two Health Boards produced an annual report in 2023—24.
- 1.4 All Boards who submitted a report complied with the requirement to report against the 10 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set out in the Standards but not every Board reported against each KPI.
- 1.5 The INWO has continued to see an improvement in the quality of reporting year on year. The INWO published [revised good practice guidance for annual reporting in 2024](#), which we hope will support Boards to achieve reporting against all KPIs in future.
- 1.6 The numbers of whistleblowing concerns received in 2023—24 varied significantly across Boards. Just over a quarter of reporting Boards did not receive any concerns that they assessed as eligible under the Standards. The overall number of concerns received decreased by 21% in 2023—24 compared with 2022—23.
- 1.7 Similar to previous years, Boards need to do more to report fully against KPI 2 (a statement to report the experiences of all those involved in the whistleblowing procedure). We encourage boards to demonstrate that they are actively seeking and reporting on the experiences of **all** those involved in the whistleblowing process, not only whistleblowers. This is an important aspect of promoting trust in the Standards and enabling access.

- 1.8 Approaching four years into the Standards we recognise that developing triangulation of data is critical in identifying trends and themes. Boards' annual reports play a meaningful role in this, and the INWO is keen to provide support to develop the effectiveness of utilising whistleblowing data nationally.
- 1.9 It was encouraging that many Boards described their positive engagement with the national Speak Up Week campaign as well as other local initiatives to raise awareness, develop healthy speak up cultures, and learn and improve as a result of whistleblowing concerns.
- 1.10 The INWO will continue to take a leadership role providing support and guidance to NHS organisations. We are here to support NHS organisations in the implementation of the Standards. We encourage Boards to visit our webpage to access our [latest resources](#).

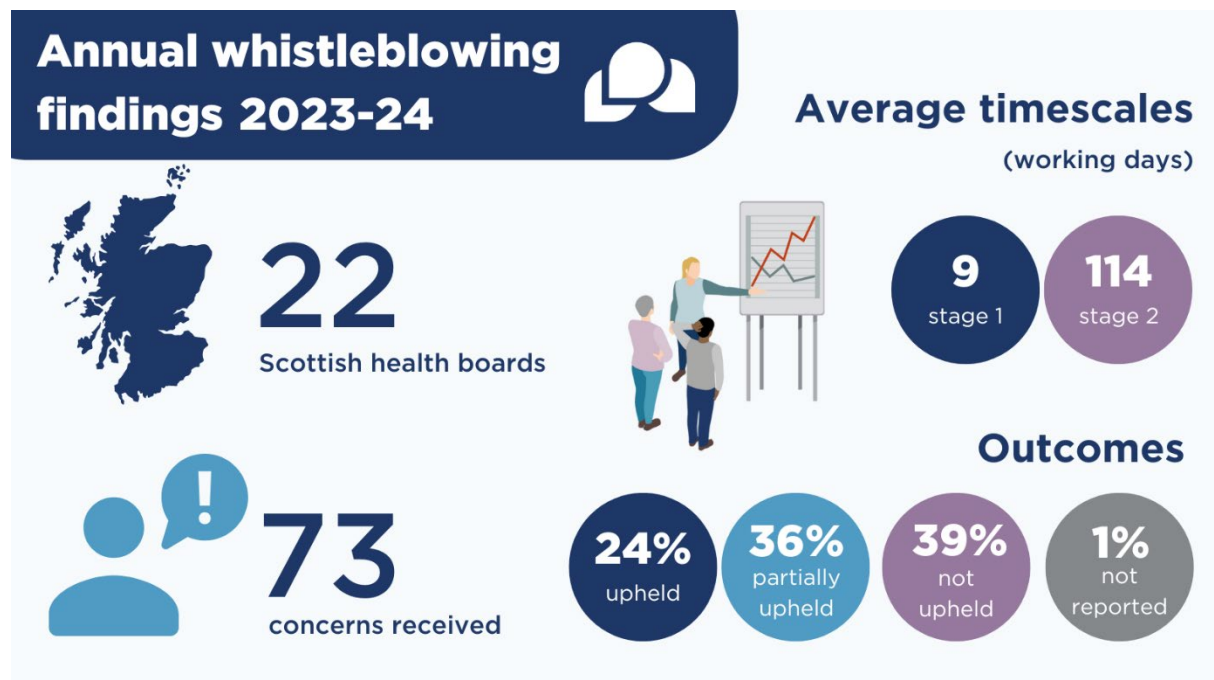
2. Introduction

- 2.1 All NHS Boards are required to publish an annual report setting out performance in handling whistleblowing concerns. This report should:
- 2.1.1 summarise and build on the quarterly reports produced by the Board
 - 2.1.2 include performance against KPIs as set out in the Standards
 - 2.1.3 include and comment on the issues that have been raised, and
 - 2.1.4 set out the actions that have been or will be taken to improve services as a result of concerns (ideally with a supporting action plan against which to track and report progress).
- 2.2 Data required for these reports is based on 10 KPIs, which are set out in [Appendix A](#).

2.3 Boards have a critical role in setting a tone and culture in their organisation that values the contributions of all staff. Their culture and processes will encourage and enable the confidence to speak up as part of everyday business and through the Standards. Effective monitoring and reporting are part of that role.

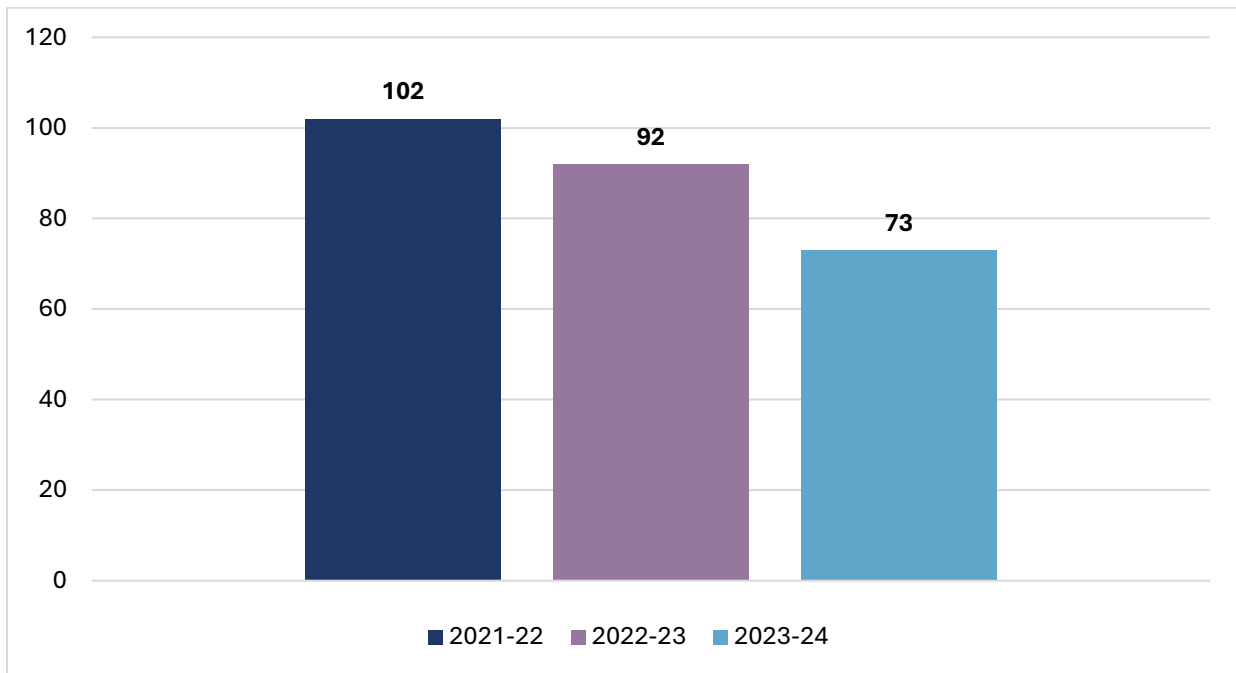
3. Findings — Quantitative data

Figure 1: Summary of key findings



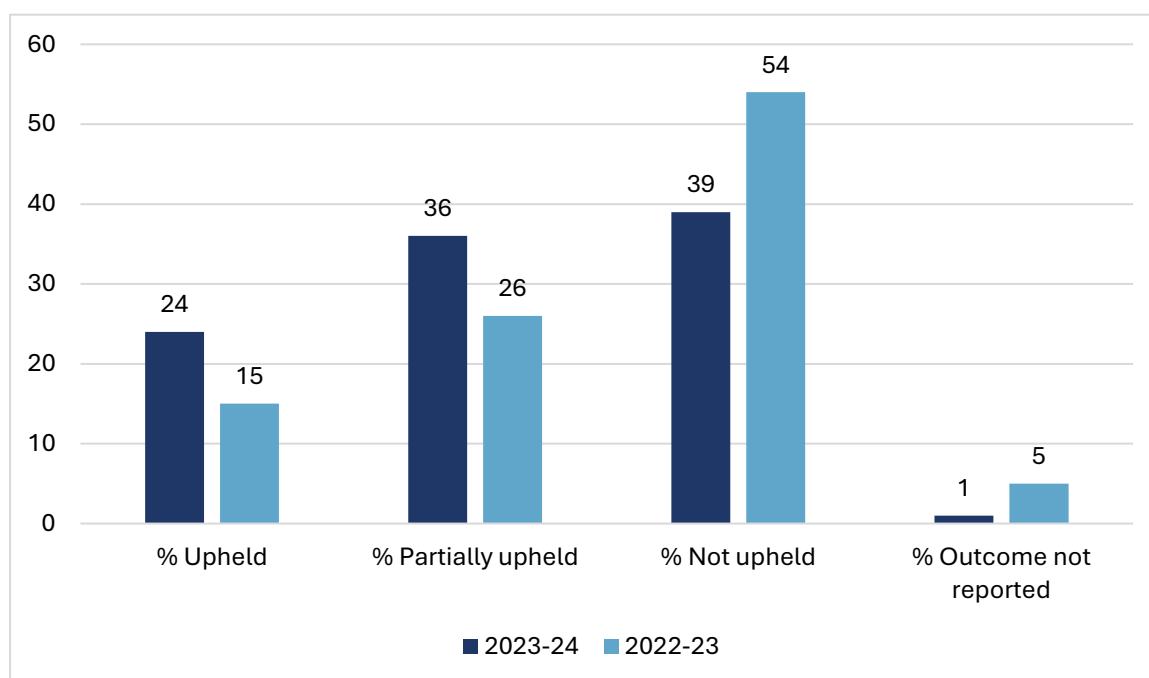
3.1 Seventy-three whistleblowing concerns were received by Boards in 2023—24 and assessed as eligible for consideration under the National Whistleblowing Standards. This represents an 21% decrease from last year, and a 28% decrease from 2021—22. The majority of whistleblowing concerns closed were at stage 2, indicating the complexity and risks associated.

Figure 2: Total number of whistleblowing concerns received across Scotland



- 3.2 Six Boards did not receive any concerns eligible for handling under the Standards in 2023—24. This is just over a quarter of reporting Boards and an increase from three Boards in 2022—23.
- 3.3 A table showing the breakdown of concerns by Board for the past three reporting years is included in [Appendix B](#).
- 3.4 The percentage of concerns upheld or partially upheld has increased since 2022—23, as shown in [Figure 3](#) below.

Figure 3: Outcome of closed concerns



3.5 Of all concerns closed in 2023—24, 24% were upheld, 36% were partially upheld, 39% were not upheld and the outcome was not reported in 1% of closed concerns.

Table 1: Average number of working days to close concerns by stage 2023—24

	Stage 1	Stage 2
Average working days (2022—23 figure shown in brackets)	9 (12)	114 (75)

3.7 Stage 1 cases were completed 25% quicker than last year. Stage 2 cases took 52% longer on average than last year. The majority of Boards reported authorising extensions, with a minority acknowledging a need for improvement to ensure this happens consistently.

4. Findings — Qualitative data

- 4.1 KPIs 1, 2 and 3 require Boards to include qualitative statements about whistleblowing, allowing Boards to provide deeper insight through reporting about awareness, the experiences of everyone involved in the whistleblowing process and learning and improvements.
- 4.2 In the main Boards provided helpful levels of detail for KPIs 1 & 3 to demonstrate their learning as a result of whistleblowing concerns and what they are doing to improve staff perception and awareness of the Standards. A number of Boards did not provide training figures as a percentage of all staff (or sub-groups of staff), making it difficult to assess progress in this area.
- 4.3 KPI 2 requires Boards to report on the experiences of all those involved in the whistleblowing procedure. This includes whistleblowers, but also witnesses, confidential contacts, investigators, and all other staff involved in the process. Compliance with KPI 2 remains low. This is due to Boards interpreting the requirement narrowly to only refer to the experiences of whistleblowers.
- 4.4 Boards should demonstrate in their reporting for KPI 2 that they routinely seek feedback from everyone involved in the process to ensure they have wider insight to support learning and improvement. More information on this is available in our [good practice guidance for annual whistleblowing reporting](#).
- 4.5 Reports were generally clear and accessible, with many Boards making effective use of infographics, charts and tables. An increasing number of Boards included figures from previous years for comparison. It would be helpful in future reporting for Boards to include more analysis of emerging trends.

5. Reporting against key performance indicators

- 5.1 We encourage Boards to consider how they can develop their reporting against KPI 2 (a statement to report the experiences of all those involved in the whistleblowing procedure).
- 5.2 We encourage Boards to consistently provide percentages where a KPI requires this, as with KPIs 5,6,8,9, and 10.
- 5.3 Boards should provide training numbers for KPI 3 as a percentage to place the numbers in context.
- 5.4 Boards must submit their annual reports on time. We understand that Boards may face various pressures; however, without receiving the annual information, we cannot assess a Board's performance, evaluate the broader national picture, or provide tailored support where needed. Specifically, we will be unable to include essential data in our national findings report. We will continue to actively gather this information to support improvement in the sector and speak up culture and ensure that processes are functioning effectively. Support or intervention action is taken by our office to encourage good practice or address poor performance by an organisation under our jurisdiction. You can find further information about the policy and how we take support and intervention action in this leaflet: [Support and Intervention Policy — What it means for your organisation](#).

Appendix A: National Whistleblowing Standards KPIs

KPI	Requirement
1	a statement outlining learning, changes or improvements to services or procedures as a result of consideration of whistleblowing concerns
2	a statement to report the experiences of all those involved in the whistleblowing procedure (where this can be provided without compromising confidentiality)
3	a statement to report on levels of staff perceptions, awareness and training
4	the total number of concerns received
5	concerns closed at stage 1 and stage 2 of the whistleblowing procedure as a percentage of all concerns closed
6	concerns upheld, partially upheld, and not upheld at each stage of the whistleblowing procedure as a percentage of all concerns closed in full at each stage
7	the average time in working days for a full response to concerns at each stage of the whistleblowing procedure
8	the number and percentage of concerns at each stage which were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days
9	the number of concerns at stage 1 where an extension was authorised as a percentage of all concerns at stage 1
10	the number of concerns at stage 2 where an extension was authorised as a percentage of all concerns at stage 2

Appendix B: Number of concerns received by Board

Board	No. of staff (headcount) ¹	No. of concerns received assessed as eligible for consideration under the National Whistleblowing Standards ²		
		2021—22	2022—23	2023—24
Health Improvement Service	562	0	0	0
National Services Scotland	3,456	4	2	1
NHS 24	2,124	0	0	1
NHS Ayrshire and Arran	11,797	5	3	1
NHS Borders	3,513	1	3	1
NHS Dumfries and Galloway	4,854	3	2	0
NHS Education Scotland	2,089	0	1	2
NHS Fife	10,233	2	1	1
NHS Forth Valley	7,369	6	13	2

¹ Data gathered by NHS Education for Scotland, census date 31 March 2024, accessed here [NHS Scotland workforce | Turas Data Intelligence](#) on 11 February 2025

² Excluding anonymous or unnamed concerns

NHS Golden Jubilee	2,527	0	1	0
NHS Grampian	16,811	14	8	18
NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde	42,262	29	19	16
NHS Highland	11,328	5	5	6
NHS Lanarkshire	15,357	2	3	1
NHS Lothian	28,201	14	11	10
NHS Orkney	737	2	1	0
NHS Shetland	845	0	1	2
NHS Tayside	14,783	6	4	5
NHS Western Isles	1,075	1	2	0
Public Health Scotland	1,260	0	1	1
Scottish Ambulance Service	5,823	6	11	5
The State Hospital	657	2	0	0