



Findings from NHS Boards’ annual whistleblowing reporting 2022—23



1. Executive Summary	1
2. Introduction	2
3. Findings	3
4. Quantative Data	4
5. Qualitative Data	5
6. Reporting against key performance indicators	6



1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Boards were required to publish annual whistleblowing reports for the second time in 2022—23 after the launch of the National Whistleblowing Standards (the Standards) on 1 April 2021.
- 1.2 This document provides an overview of findings from Boards' second year 2022—23 of annual reporting on the Standards.
- 1.3 All Boards produced an annual report in 2022—23.
- 1.4 All Boards complied with the requirement to report against the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set out in the Standards but not every Board reported against each KPI.
- 1.5 INWO has seen a positive improvement in reporting from year one, 2021—22.
- 1.6 The numbers of concerns received vary significantly across Boards.
- 1.7 Although there has been an improvement in reporting against KPI 2 (a statement to report the experiences of all those involved in the whistleblowing procedure) we encourage boards to do more to show they are actively seeking and reporting the experiences of people who have used the process. This is an important aspect of promoting trust in the Standards and enabling access. The INWO intends to explore this during Speak Up Week 2024, the theme will be 'Enabling Speaking Up'.
- 1.8 Almost three years into the Standards we recognise that developing the triangulation of data is critical in identifying trends, themes and patterns from the concerns raised. Boards' annual reports play a meaningful role in this,



and INWO is keen to provide support to develop the effectiveness of utilising whistleblowing data nationally.

- 1.9 We are continuing to develop training, guidance, and resources on reporting. In 2024 we intend to supplement our existing training and resources by offering a workshop to NHS staff responsible for producing Board annual reports, on best practice reporting, as well as updating our good practice guidance.
- 1.10 It was encouraging that many Boards described their future plans and ambitions for raising awareness, developing speak up culture, and learning from whistleblowing concerns in their reports.
- 1.11 The INWO in addition to this report will provide individual short written feedback to each Board.
- 1.12 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 Since 2021—22 all NHS Boards are required to report on the Standards by publishing 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 ten KPIs, which are in the [appendix](#).
- 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 every-day business and through the Standards. Effective monitoring and reporting are part of that role.
- 2.4 Based on the information provided by Boards, we have recorded each KPI as 'met,' 'not met,' or 'not applicable.' We have only recorded a KPI as 'met' if all requirements of the KPI have been met in full. If a KPI has been partially or mostly met, we have recorded this as 'not met.'

3. Findings

- 3.1 Boards used different methodologies to report against KPIs. Comparison was not always possible due to this.
- 3.2 All Boards complied with the requirement to report against the KPIs set out in the Standards but not all Boards reported against each KPI.
- 3.3 Boards have made positive improvements in their reporting.



4. Quantitative Data

Figure 1: Summary of key findings



- 4.1 91 whistleblowing concerns were received by Boards in 2022—23. This represents a 14% decrease from last year, 2021—22. The majority of whistleblowing concerns closed were at stage 2, indicating the complexity and risks associated.
- 4.2 These figures do not include any reported concerns not closed and carried forward to the next year.
- 4.3 Three Boards did not receive any concerns in 2022—23. In 2021—22 five Boards did not receive any concerns.
- 4.4 Uphold rates, including partially upheld decisions, seem to have decreased from 2021—22; however not all Boards reported on this KPI or did not report clearly, making it difficult to provide an accurate comparison.
- 4.5 Of all concerns closed in 2022—23, 15% were upheld, 26% were partially upheld, 54% were not upheld and Boards did not report the outcome of 5% of closed concerns.



4.6 [Table 1](#) shows the average number of working days to close concerns at each stage. All Boards who reported handling stage 2 concerns, except two, reported authorising extensions.

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

	Stage 1	Stage 2
Average working days	12	75

4.7 We have noted that where Boards are required to provide quantitative data expressed as a percentage, many Boards provided the numbers but did not express them as a percentage or did so inconsistently. This has resulted in overall lower levels of compliance against KPIs 5,6,8,9 and 10. We recognise, however, that where numbers are small, percentages may be misleading and will reflect on this in updated guidance.

5. Qualitative Data

5.1 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.

5.2 We welcome positive improvement in reporting against KPI 2 (a statement to report the experiences of all those involved in the whistleblowing procedure), with some Boards describing capturing people's experiences through targeted surveys and seeking feedback from confidential contacts. Despite improvement, full reporting against this KPI remains low, demonstrating that there is more work to be done in actively seeking to understand the experiences of all those involved in the whistleblowing process. This includes confidential contacts, witnesses, investigators, and all others involved in the process.



5.3 There was a significant improvement in reporting against KPI 3 compared to last year (a statement to report on levels of staff perceptions, awareness, and training). There were numerous good examples across the reports, with Boards sharing their varied and creative awareness raising activities. Although not specified in the KPIs, we noted that consistently reporting training numbers as percentages against staffing levels would be effective in gauging overall training levels. There is more information about this in our annual reporting good practice guidance.

5.4 On accessibility, we noted a positive improvement in the format and design of reports with infographics, charts and tables being used effectively. However, some Boards provided their reports to the INWO in Board paper format only. These reports are in the public domain and can be found within Board papers. However, annual reports should be submitted and be readily available as a standalone report.

6. Reporting against key performance indicators

6.1 We encourage Boards to consider how they can develop reporting against KPIs 2, 3, 9 and 10, in particular KPI 2 (a statement to report the experiences of all those involved in the whistleblowing procedure). With a focus on everyone involved in the process not only the whistleblower.

6.2 We encourage Boards to provide percentages where a KPI specifies this requirement, as with KPIs 5,6,8,9 and 10.

6.3 As we approach three years since the launch of the Standards, we encourage Boards to consider how they are recording, tracking, and reporting quantitative data when concerns are not closed in the financial year and are carried forward, as well as concerns that have been closed and then re-opened.



Appendix: 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