



**Scottish
Ambulance
Service**

Working in Partnership with Universities



Feedback, Comments, Concerns and Complaints Annual report 2023/24



Contents:

Introduction	2
Encouraging and Gathering Feedback	4
Encouraging and Handling Complaints	7
Accountability and Governance	8
Our Culture of Learning from Feedback	10
Conclusion	11

1. Introduction

Statement from our Chief Executive, Michael Dickson OBE

We really value the feedback we receive from patients, their families, the public, our staff and partner organisations. This feedback is vital as it helps us to shape and improve services and ensure we continue to deliver high quality care for communities across Scotland.

The vast majority of feedback we do receive is in the form of compliments, with our staff receiving so much praise for the fantastic work they have done or the outstanding care they have provided. This year's statistics are no different and we've seen a welcome increase in the number of compliments received and a decrease in the number of complaints received.

Whatever type of feedback it is, we are an organisation who takes it very seriously and welcomes it - as we see it as a really valuable opportunity to learn.

At a national level, we hear concerns about delays in ambulances arriving to help people, we hear about hold ups at hospitals with patients waiting in ambulances outside the hospital doors to be admitted, and we hear from patients who don't believe they have been triaged in the right way, for example through unnecessary journeys to hospital.

We've brought in a range of new initiatives to address this with the key aim to help us free up resources to prioritise patients with life-threatening conditions and those most in need, as well as ensuring patients get the right care, in the right place at the right time. We are also working very closely with Health Board partners to improve local services such as hospital turnaround times. To boost capacity, this year, we saw 220 new paramedics, technicians and advanced practice practitioners join the Service. This builds on the record recruitment we have seen over the last three years, with 1388 staff brought in through our Demand and Capacity Programme. Over 50 new vehicles such as Rapid Response Vehicles were also deployed to help respond in a more flexible manner throughout busy periods.

We've also brought in important changes to our 999 call centres to improve the way we triage emergency calls with the aim of providing better care to patients.

Our highest priority calls, such as life-threatening incidents, are managed in the normal way and we dispatch an immediate ambulance response. However, for other patients, especially those with multiple comorbidities and complex care needs, a better option can be an alternative pathway rather than transport to an A&E department.

To meet this need, we have developed an Integrated Clinical Hub (ICH), made up of clinicians including clinical advisors, advanced practitioners and GPs who engage with these patients seeking help through 999.

Following an initial assessment by the 999 team, the patient is advised they will receive a callback from the ICH. The ICH Team work to better understand the specific conditions which have caused the patient to contact us, and this allows us to help get the patient to the right part of the system to meet their needs. This initiative is working very well, with 55,000 unnecessary ambulance journeys



having been saved since April 2023.

Similarly, our new Pathways Hub has demonstrated an increase in the number of patients managed on-scene, with 25.5% of all emergencies being managed without needing conveyance to hospital A&Es. This work is now embedded within the Service and connects patients with local services that best meet their needs, without needing to go through busy A&E departments. The Pathways Hub also includes referrals to preventative services such as Falls Pathways, Alcohol and Drug Partnerships and Social Services.

These are important developments which we have brought in to improve patient care. It has been shaped directly by the feedback we have received from patients and wider stakeholders, so I'd like to thank all those who have contacted us this year to share their views, experiences and opinions. It is greatly appreciated.

2. Encouraging and Gathering Feedback

We actively promote a range of methods by which members of the public can feedback their experiences of the Scottish Ambulance Service. Email and telephone continue to be the primary methods of contacting us, but the public continue to utilise online channels such as Facebook, Twitter, the Scottish Ambulance Service website and Care Opinion. We also encourage feedback through the Citizens Advice Scotland 'Patient Advice and Support Service'.

As we outlined in our introductory comments, the vast majority of our feedback is positive and any comments from patients, their families, carers or members of the public are fed back directly to the staff involved and their manager.

Where negative feedback is involved, a thorough investigation is undertaken where we will engage with complainants to explain why certain actions were taken, outline where any lessons have been learned and where remedial action may have been taken. In certain cases, formal face-to-face meetings are offered and, where appropriate, a sincere apology offered.

CARE OPINION

We continue to promote Care Opinion as a valuable channel for feedback from patients, families and carers who would rather express their views anonymously or indirectly to the Service. The website allows their voice to be heard on a national forum and gives us a great opportunity to engage with them about the care they received or assist them with any ongoing issues.

The Service is dedicated to reviewing and responding to every post to support patients and their families and this year we responded to 99.7% of stories within 5 days. The Service is also keen to identify learning from the feedback we receive.

Between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, 316 stories were posted on Care Opinion relating to the Service. This is a 52.7% increase from the volume posted the year before. On 25 July 2024 these have been viewed 70,446 times. NHS Fife and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde board areas currently make up just over 38% of the stories posted. Of these posts 48% were posted by the patient themselves.

Of the 316 posts, 76% were uncritical in tone. It should be noted that whilst the remaining 24% will have some form of criticality, this is not necessarily directed towards the Service, with the feedback often involving multiple NHS boards.

Below are some of the most popular phrases received for what was good about the Service this year.

About Care opinion

Care Opinion is a place where you can share your experience of health or care services, and help make them better for everyone.

At Care Opinion we make it safe and simple to share your story online and see other people's stories too. You can see how stories are leading to change.

We think that by sharing honest experience of care, we learn to see the world differently. Working together, we can help make care better.

thinkingacts @redwomenth... · 31 May
Huge thanks to @Scotambservice and, in particular paramedics Gayle and Andy, for coming to the rescue of my 92 year-old father within 5 minutes of alerting them this morning in Fife. What a privilege to have received your services. Thank you is not enough ❤️❤️

Scottish Ambulance reposted

NHS Grampian @NHSGram... · 30 May
Thank you for the kind feedback for our colleagues at @Scotambservice ❤️🇬🇧

John Cooke @JohnPMCoo... · 30 May
Really impressed with Scottish Ambulance Service. Neighbour had problem and paramedics here in minutes in Richmond Terrace, Aberdeen.
@NHSGrampian

Scottish Ambulance reposted

Miss McLaughlan @MissMcLC... · 27 May
Thank you to Courtney from the ambulance service for coming in to talk about her job as a paramedic. 🙌🇬🇧
We even got to do some CPR!
@Scotambservice



PIG-COLLAGE

3. Encouraging and Handling Complaints

On the 1st of April 2017, NHS Scotland implemented a new NHS Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP). This was put in place in an effort to improve and standardise how all NHS Boards handle complaints. There is now a two-stage process in place. If at the end of this process, the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, they are sign posted to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

Make your complaint directly to the NHS Board. The Service will try to resolve your complaint within 5 working days if they can. They may respond to you by phone or in person to try and resolve things. If you are unhappy with the response, you can ask the Service to consider your complaint at Stage 2.

Stage 1 - Early Resolution

If your complaint is complex or needs a more detailed investigation, the organisation may look at your complaint immediately at this stage without going through stage 1. At stage 2 you should receive an acknowledgement of your complaint within 3 working days. You will be given a decision as soon as possible. This should be after no more than 20 working days unless there is clearly good reason for needing more time.

Stage 2 - Investigation

If, after receiving the final decision on your complaint, you are still unhappy, you can ask the SPSO to consider it. The SPSO is an independent and free service. The Service will tell you about the SPSO when they send you their final decision.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

During 2023/24, 978 complaints were received. This is a reduction of 5.87% on the previous year which is welcome.

Of these complaints, 609 were 'Stage 1' complaints and 369 were 'Stage 2' complaints.

To provide some context, the number of complaints received by the Scottish Ambulance Service in 2023/24 represents less than 1% of all the calls we received asking for our assistance.

While complaints handling is co-ordinated and quality assured by the Patient Experience Team, complaints are investigated in each region by local staff who will contact the complainant and any staff members involved to look into the issues raised and resolve the situation.

Early conversations with the complainant help to put in place a proportionate review or investigation into the circumstances that led to the complaint. Local managers have access to report functions in order to understand what is working well and to identify areas for improvement. The Patient Experience Team reviews feedback data at a national level to identify any emerging trends that might relate to systemic issues.

There are a number of assurance groups within the Service to ensure that we take the learning from all complaints and utilise this valuable feedback to improve our services further. We also work closely with other health boards and ambulance services across the UK.

4. Accountability and Governance

We ensure patients and carers continue to have access to a range of feedback options for providing feedback to the Service.

Complaints handling is co-ordinated by the Patient Experience Team, with each complaint looked into at a local level to drive improvement, while identifying any issues that require national consideration.

Complaints trends and themes are shared in a patient experience paper that is a standing item at our Clinical Governance Committee meetings and our Public Board meetings. This enables members of our Clinical Governance Committee and our Board to review emerging feedback and complaints trends and ensure individuals and groups of staff are given responsibility for addressing areas for improvement and embedding good practice.



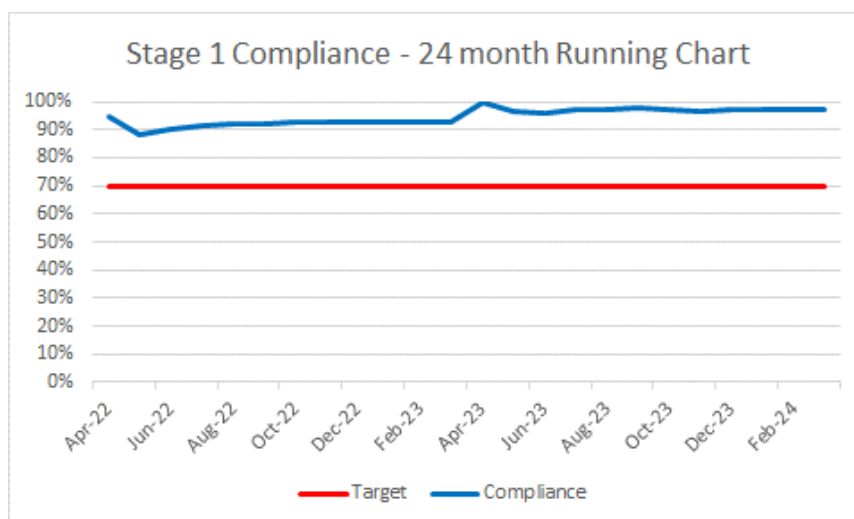
COMPLAINTS COMPLIANCE

Guidance states that all NHS Boards in Scotland should aim to respond to 70% of 'stage 1' complaints within five working days and 70% of 'stage 2' complaints within 20 working days.

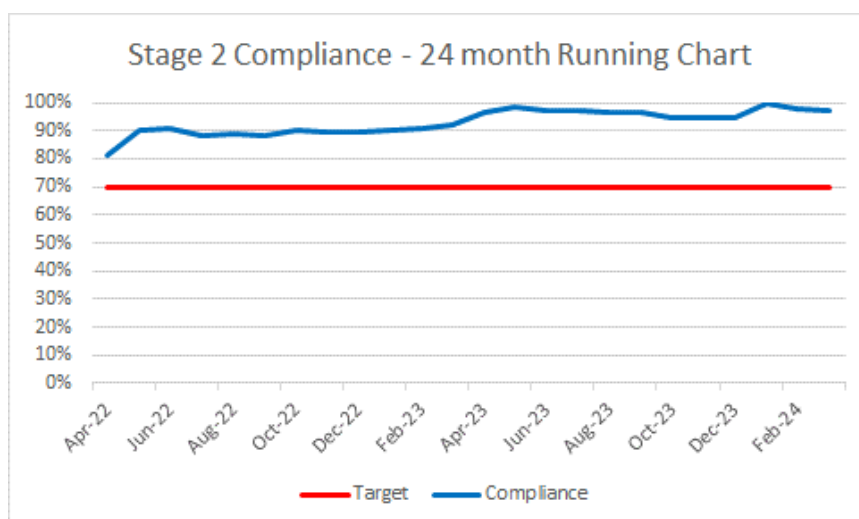
The Scottish Ambulance Service again finished the year well over the Government Target for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints. There is no doubt that this strong performance is down to the hard work, dedication and professionalism shown by the staff who are all involved in the Service's complaints handling.

In 2023/24, Stage 1 compliance was 97.4%, up from 92.5% last year. Stage 2 compliance was 94.6%, up from 91.9% last year.

Stage 1 Compliance Rates 2022/23 and 2023/24



Stage 2 Compliance Rates 2022/23 and 2023/24



Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

The Scottish Ambulance Service continues to have a positive and co-operative relationship with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

In 2022/23 there were 6 SPSO cases fully investigated, this is three more than the previous financial year. The SPSO fully upheld 5 and did not uphold 1. Where cases are upheld or partially upheld, the Scottish Ambulance Service may already have undertaken much of the improvement work and any remedial action suggested by the SPSO in advance of the findings being formally issued. Where this isn't the case, a plan to complete the recommendations will be implemented.

5. Our Culture of Learning from Feedback, Comments, Concerns and Complaints

Feedback, whether positive, negative or constructive is something we value deeply within the Scottish Ambulance Service as it is a great opportunity for us to learn, improve and shape our Services. In addition to traditional feedback processes such as compliments and complaints, we actively work in partnership with patients, their families, the public and Third Sector organisations across the country to co-design and improve the services we provide to communities. We have a wide-ranging 'Involving People' network of who work in partnership with our staff throughout the year.

This year, for example, the Scottish Ambulance Service has been working to improve the quality and accessibility of our Scheduled Care and Patient Needs Assessment (PNA). Collaborating with disabled people's organisations and local Access Panels, we aim to identify and resolve any accessibility issues. Our partnerships with Third-Sector organisations, including the Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA), Disability Equality Scotland (DES), and Inclusion Scotland, enable us to gather valuable feedback from their members and our patients to enhance the PNA and Scheduled Care Service.



In another project, we worked with mental health charities, mental health users and our own staff to help improve our services for people calling us for assistance, using their experience and insight to help guide us on how to make their experience better and to ensure we are meeting their needs fully. We also used the opportunity to work with our own staff to identify and develop further training to ensure they could deliver a high-quality service to these patients.

As a result of this engagement, we have developed new training for staff and made an increased number of sessions available for our scheduled care call-handlers. The enthusiasm for this training is high and our new 'train the trainer' sessions will ensure comprehensive delivery across the country.

One of the other needs identified through this engagement was that our call centre staff said they would really welcome the formation of a support network of their peers, who they could go to for advice and support in times of need. Insights from recent engagements with scheduled care coordinators, focusing on their well-being techniques and perspectives on peer support, have informed our approach. We are organising discussion groups across all ambulance control centres to determine the best methods for advancing this initiative for our staff.

Elsewhere, and in partnership with Transport Scotland, we are dedicated to ensuring patients can travel to their appointments smoothly and receive excellent patient care throughout their journey. We are actively engaging with colleagues from the transport and health sectors to align our new strategy with the Government's Transport to Health action plan. Our ongoing partnership with local transport providers ensures we have an up-to-date, active database to direct members of the public to alternative support options when they do not meet eligibility criteria. We rigorously evaluate these transport providers to ensure they can handle the required volume of support, maintaining our duty of care to both those seeking transport and the providers.

Our engagement with wider health stakeholders and patient groups is crucial to ensuring our services are fit for purpose and deliver the best possible patient experience.

We continue to expand our network of patients, members of the public, and third-sector organisations. Our goal is to actively grow this network and build upon these positive relationships to drive service improvement and enhance patient experience. Our efforts have resulted in the addition of two new patient representatives to the Clinical Governance Committee and the recruitment of volunteers for infection control audits.

The response to our annual Mental Health Patient Survey, conducted in partnership with the mental health organization See Me, has been excellent. This survey assesses our performance against expectations and identifies areas for improvement to enhance patient care.

In response to extensive engagement with primary schools, headteachers, and health curriculum coordinators, we have co-designed a series of presentations on important topics such as “Who We Are,” “Calling 999,” and “How to Stay Safe in an Emergency.” These presentations, available through @sas, will support operational staff during school visits by providing up-to-date information relevant to both teachers and students. We are also exploring ways for teachers to deliver these presentations themselves, reducing the need for ambulance staff attendance.

Additionally, we are collaborating with colleagues from the fire service to develop a website that will provide primary school teachers and students with current and accurate information on emergency procedures. We continue to explore innovative methods for obtaining direct patient feedback, leveraging new technology, and working in partnership with regional health boards. Our focus remains on balancing service improvement needs with the sensitivities and legislative requirements of our patients.

The Scottish Ambulance Service remains dedicated to continuous improvement and ensuring that every department remains patient focused. Through these ongoing efforts, we strive to provide the highest quality care and support to all our patients.

6. Conclusion

It is encouraging to see a very high number of compliments continuing to be received across all our feedback channels over the year and that there has also been a reduction in the number of complaints received.

We’d like to thank everyone who has taken the opportunity over the course of the year to provide feedback on our services. This feedback is extremely valuable and is helping us improve the services we provide to communities across the country.

We’d also like to thank the wide network of volunteers, whether it is patients, their families, members of the public or third sector organisations who have worked so diligently in partnership with us to co-design improvements to our approach across a range of our services in Scotland.

We hope that this report highlights some of the ways in which this important feedback is being utilised for the benefit of all.



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