



NORTHERN IRELAND AMBULANCE SERVICE

SERVICE USER FEEDBACK TEAM

ANNUAL REPORT

2022/23



Service User Feedback

Annual Report 2022-2023

Foreword



As the Director responsible for service user feedback in the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS), I am pleased to present this annual report for

complaints and compliments received during 2022/2023. On behalf of the organisation I would like to thank all those who provided feedback about our services including our patients, patient's relatives, carers, advocates and others. We place a very high value on the learning that complaints and compliments bring to improving our services and the experience of our patients.

During the period 2022/2023, we received 208 complaints, this is a decrease from the 266 complaints received in 2021/2022 and represents a complaint rate of 0.06% of all (349,112) emergency and non-emergency ambulance attendances. It is so important for us to understand the individual experiences in each of the complaints that we receive, we know that behind the numbers and themes are the real life experiences of our patients and their families and carers and we acknowledge that they have not always been positive.

We are committed to learning and when issues have been identified or improvements are required, we have processes in place to put actions in place to address these so that we can aim to do things better in the future.

In addition to learning from complaints we also hugely value the compliments that we receive. 406 compliments were received during 2022/2023 which is an increase from 375 compliments received in 2021/2022. Compliments provide us with important information which helps us to understand why an experience was positive and this helps us to continue to shape our services to provide the best care possible. As an organisation we share every compliment with the staff that have been involved and this sharing has a tremendous impact on them. It is particularly valued at this time when the Health and Social Care system is under such pressure.

Lynne Charlton
Director of Quality, Safety and Improvement

Facts & Figures

In the year 2022/2023:

225,182 emergency calls received (12% increase on previous year)

176,517 emergency responses (1.6% decrease)

158,289 non-emergency journeys (7.8% increase)

208 complaints were received
This represents a complaint rate of 0.06% of all (334,806) emergency and non-emergency ambulance attendances, and 0.09% of all emergency 999 calls received.

99% acknowledged within 2 working days

278 complaints were closed

36% (101) of complaints were responded to within 20 working days

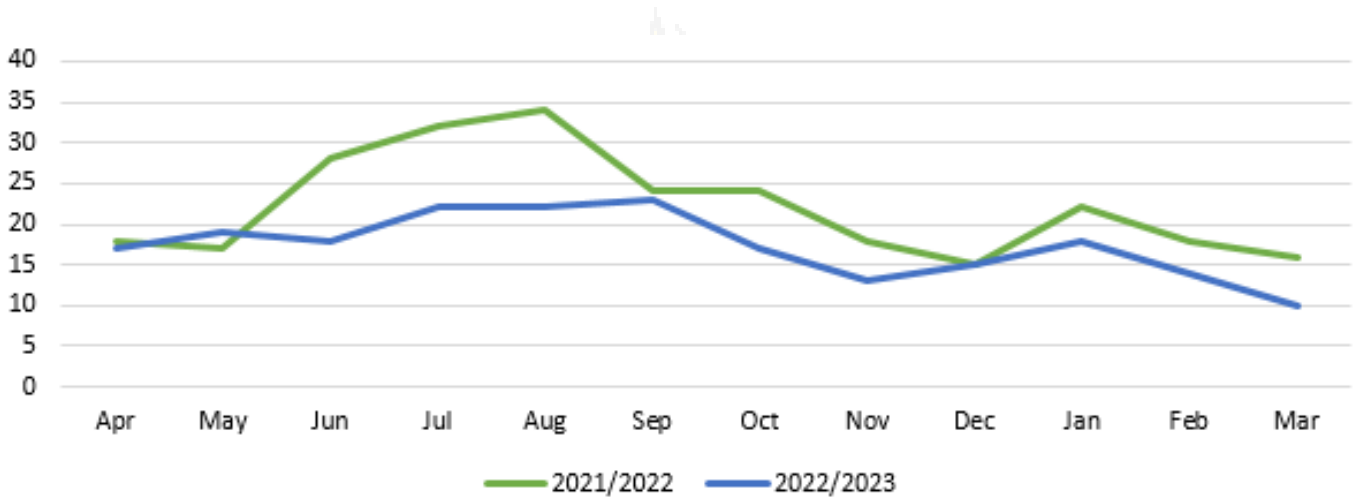
3 top issues of complaint were
1) Delays in emergency ambulance response;
2) Quality of Treatment & Care
3) Staff Attitude/ Behaviour

406 compliments were received



Complaints This Year

During 2022/2023, the Trust received **208** complaints, which is a decrease from the previous year's total of **266**.



With the exceptions of May and December 2022, the graph above shows a decrease in complaints received month on month when compared to the previous year.

Regrettably, challenges with our operational performance in relation to response times continue. This is likely to remain challenging until the Clinical Response Model implemented in NIAS in November 2019 is fully resourced.

Operational capacity is also significantly impacted by the current HSC system wide pressures which results in protracted waiting times for ambulances and patients waiting outside Emergency Departments for admission.

Consequently, these same ambulances and staff are unavailable to respond to those requiring emergency ambulance response in the community.

Nonetheless, the most notable decrease in complaints received relates to a reduction in concerns regarding delays in the provision of an emergency ambulance. The reason for the reduction in this category is unknown but could be due to increased public awareness of the pressures across the NHS system.

N.I.A.S.

What People Complained About

Some complaints are multifaceted which results in a higher number of concerns (238) recorded compared to the number of complaints received (208). The chart below shows what people complained about during 2022/2023 compared with the previous year.

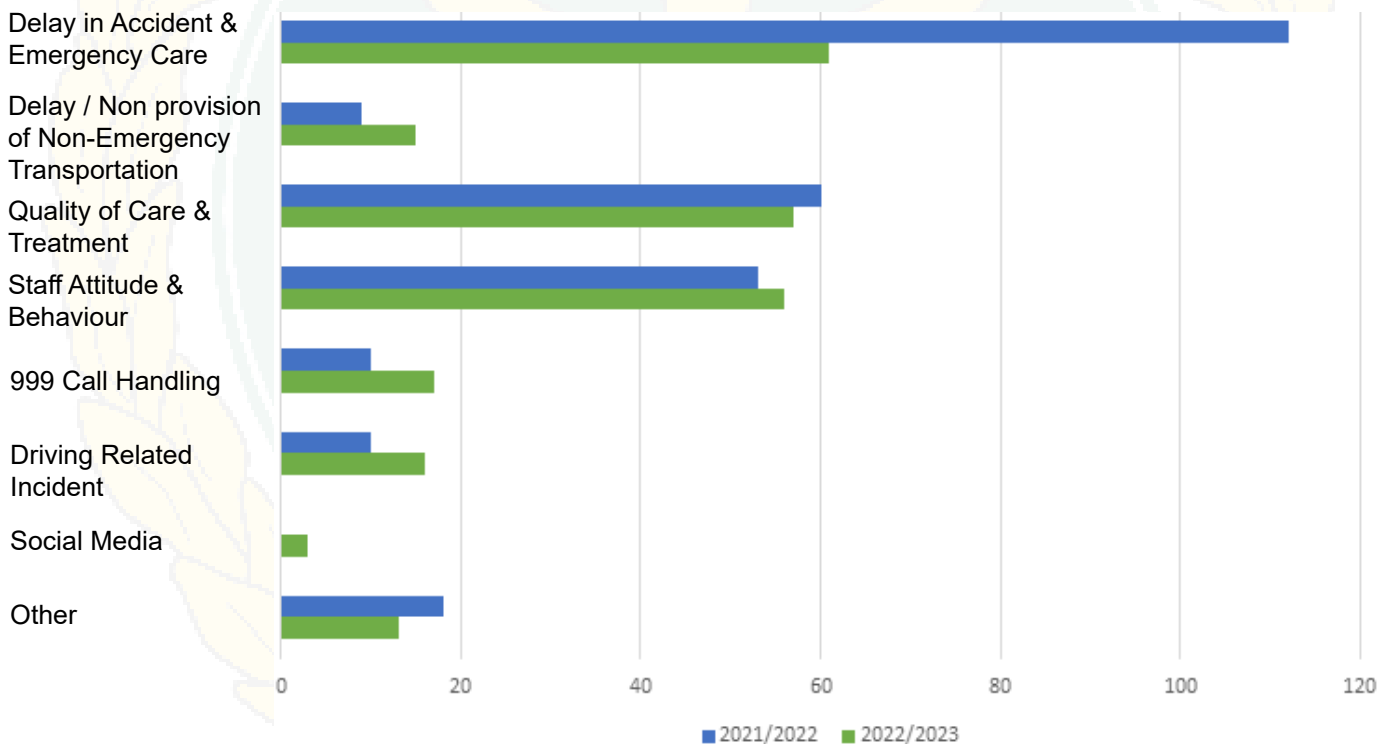
The top three areas of concern raised in the past year were:

- Delay in Accident & Emergency Response (61);
- Quality of Treatment & Care (57) and,
- Staff Attitude & Behaviour (56).

These top three themes remain unchanged from 2021/22.

The most notable change seen was the decrease in complaints related to delays in accident and emergency ambulance response from 112 in 2021/22, to 61 during 2022/23.

Other notable changes during 2022/23 include an increase in both driving related concerns and concerns relating to 999 call handling as illustrated in the below chart.



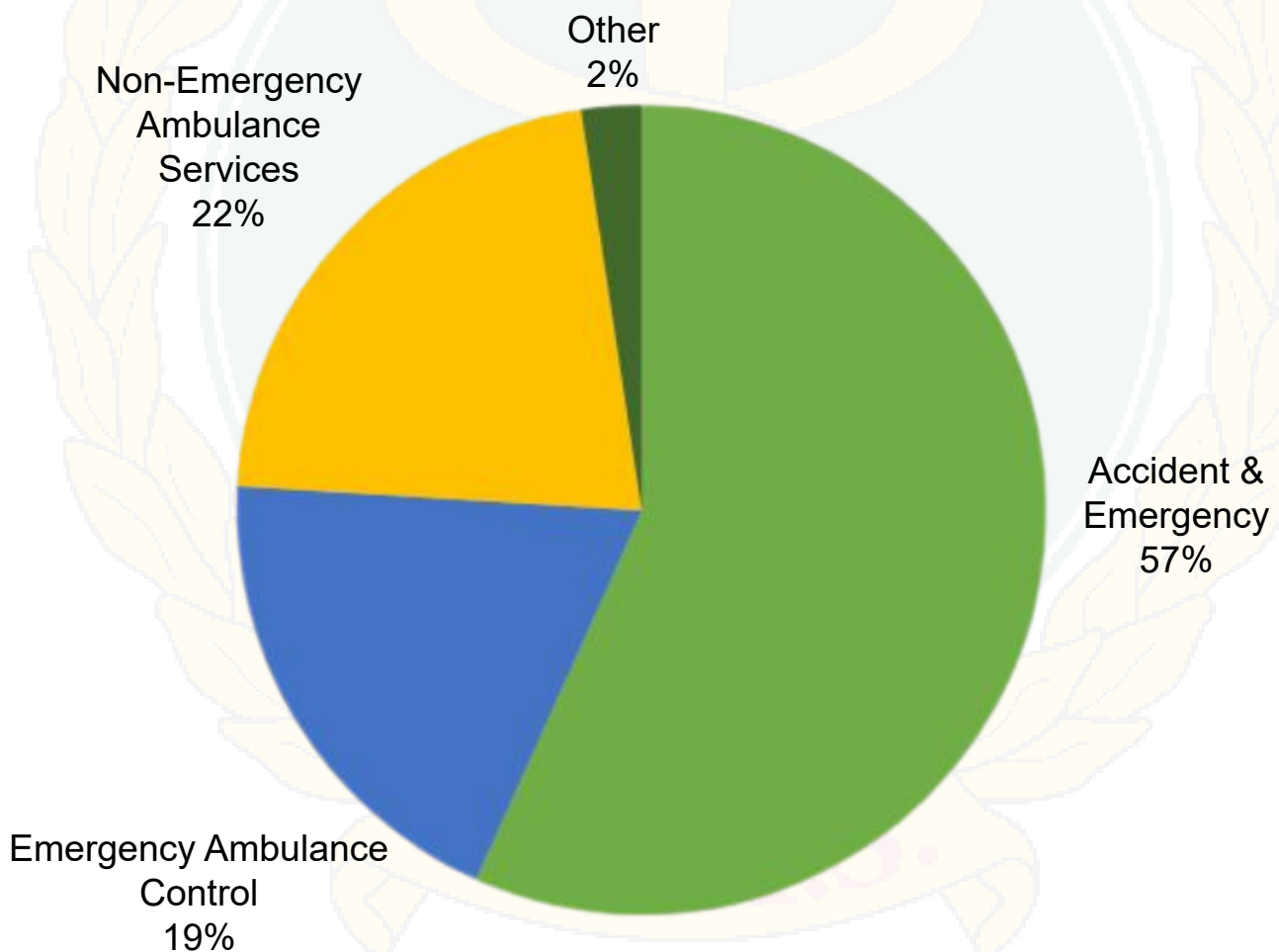
Area of Complaints

This chart shows the breakdown of the complaints received for 2022/2023 by service area.

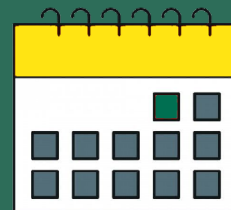
Of the 208 complaints received by the Trust:

- 57% (118) related to Accident and Emergency services;
- 19% (40) related to Emergency Ambulance Control services, such as call handling and call categorisation;
- 22% (45) related to non-emergency ambulance services, used to transport patients to appointments and transfers between hospitals.
- The remaining 2% (5) related to other speciality services within the Trust.

Service Area of Complaints 2022/2023



Timeliness of our Response to Complaints



99% of all complaints were acknowledged within the target of 2 working days.

The table below details the timeliness of our response to complaints closed during 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 where N is the number of complaints closed.

Timeliness of Closed Complaints	Performance 21/22 N=265	Performance 22/23 N=278
% of complaints closed within 20 working day target	17% of 265	36% of 278
% of complaints that took between 20 and 40 days to close	8% of 265	10% of 278
% of complaints that took over 40 days to close	75% of 265	54% of 278
Timeliness of open cases		
Average number of day cases open 14 July	187 days	45 days
Reopened cases		
% of closed cases reopened	2% of 265	3% of 278

*It should be noted that the number of complaints closed within 22/23 differs from the total number received as a volume of complaints received in the previous year will be included in the closed complaint total number.

Like our colleagues across Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland, NIAS faced system wide pressures that created challenges for the timeliness of completing complaint investigations. Whilst NIAS saw the number of complaints that took over 40 working days decrease from its 2021/22 position, the Trust remains committed to focusing on the quality of its complaints handling processes as well as improving the timeliness of resolving these complaints.

If People are Dissatisfied

Sometimes people are dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigation into their complaint. We encourage people to let us know if the complaint response does not answer all of their concerns or if they have continued concerns. We routinely offer to meet complainants, as this allows the opportunity for more detailed discussions, face-to-face. We also advise complainants of the free confidential advice and advocacy support offered by the Patient Client Council.



Ombudsman

For those people who remained dissatisfied, they had the option to approach the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) directly to undertake an independent investigation of the Trust's complaints handling process. During 2022/2023, one complaint was escalated to NIPSO which was reviewed and not accepted for investigation.



Complaints Training

The Trust provides comprehensive complaints handling training to a wide variety of management staff in the form of both online e-learning and supportive practical training sessions.

All staff employed by NIAS are required to undertake mandatory training in Complaints Awareness every three years. During 2022/2023, 502 of our staff completed this course, all achieving a 100% pass rate.

The online course is an introduction to the issue of handling complaints and basic customer care. It is completed as part of a new staff member's induction process and as refresher training for existing staff on a 3-year rolling basis. More recently, the Trust have provided regular complaints awareness training for operational managers required to undertake complaint investigations that focuses on the practical 'how to' elements of the complaints procedure.



Learning from Complaints

We value complaints so that we can learn lessons and improve our services. We use this information to feed back to patients and staff on the changes and improvements made.

Complaints are discussed with the staff concerned and often the issues are brought to Trust meetings for discussion as to how services can be improved. The learning from complaints (and compliments) is also shared at the Trust's quarterly Learning Outcomes Review Group as well as the Trust's Education & Learning Development Group.

A number of improvements have been put in place during 2022/2023 following concerns brought to the Trust. Here are some examples:

Emergency Ambulance Control

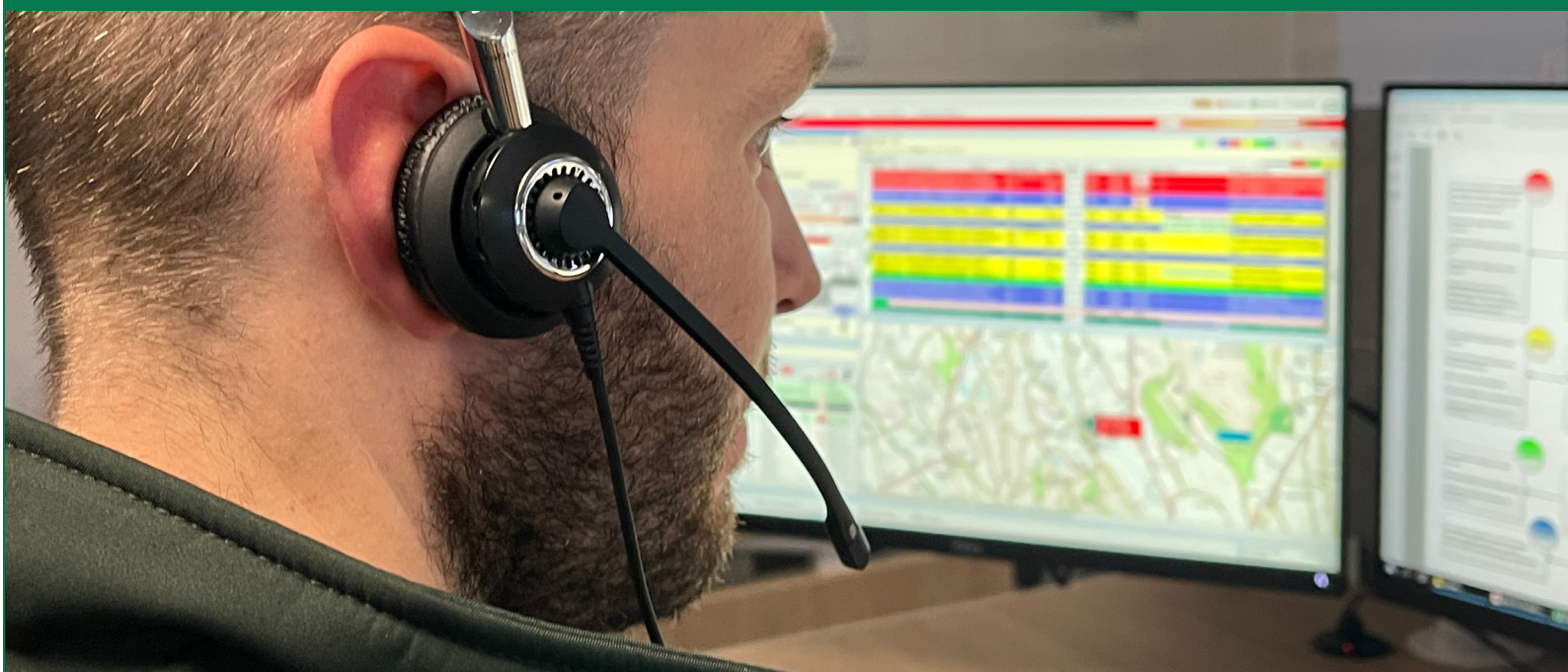
Role of the Mental Health Street Triage Team in South Eastern & Belfast Health & Social Care Trusts **shared**.

Gazetteer (the geographical directory used in ambulance control systems) **updated**.

Standardised range for **identifying where community defibrillators are**.

Staff reminded that **all key information must be recorded and forwarded to crews** through their Mobile Data Terminal.

Staff reminded to **ensure crews are informed when an emergency call originates from a Healthcare Professional**, as this will form part of their assessment and management of the call.



Patient Care Service

Learning for independent ambulance service provider regarding **the safe handling of patient's medication.**

Ensuring **restraints for securing items** in the back of patient care service (pcs) vehicles are **present in all vehicles regionally.**

Independent ambulance service provider's **social media policy updated.**

Reminder to Independent provider's regarding **performance requirements.**



Accident & Emergency Operations

Medicines memo reinforcing the nias policy and procedures for the management of **medicines.**

Learning article in relation to the management of **pregnancy related emergency calls.**

Vital signs article regarding assessment of **patients with learning difficulties.**



Compliments

Whilst the Trust recognises that we don't always get things right, each year the Trust receives hundreds of letters of appreciation and expressions of thanks to acknowledge the excellent services provided.

We are proud of our staff and ensure that positive feedback is shared and celebrated. Our staff certainly appreciate feedback from their patients and clients, and knowing when things go well.



In 2022/2023, the Trust received 406 compliments, which is an increase on the 375 compliments received during 2021/2022.

This word cloud illustrates the kind words of appreciation that our staff received.

During 2022/2023, the Trust also introduced a weekly compliments bulletin, as shown below, in order to share the wonderful feedback the Trust receives.



THANK YOU!



A weekly update to share some of the positive feedback the Trust has received.

Each year the Trust receives hundreds of letters of appreciation and expressions of thanks to acknowledge the excellent service NIAS provides. We are proud of our staff and want to ensure that this positive feedback is shared and celebrated among you all.

Here are some examples of the wonderful praise we have received this week....

"you are all underestimated and undervalued.."



I just wanted to say thank you to everyone at the NIAS; watching the new nurses program on BBC iplayer has opened my eyes to the ever-increasing workload you all face on a daily basis. I believe you are all underestimated and undervalued by the present administration, and I hope to see you all compensated for your incredible efforts working within a broken system. My intention with this email is really just to express how very much I deeply respect you all, the work you do, the people you save, as well as the jobs you have to deal with on a daily basis. I hope your mental health is being cared for at work.

"their swift decision making to take him to the RVH saved his life"



We had the pleasure of reviewing a gentleman at the ICU Follow Up Clinic. SU unfortunately suffered a delayed presentation STEMI and had a stormy intensive care stay. He has thankfully recovered remarkably well. He wished to pass on his thanks in particular to the NIAS staff who attended him on the 24th July. He wanted to tell them that their swift decision making to take him to the RVH saved his life and wanted them personally thanked.

"...you are angels in disguise.."



I would like to thank you for saving my mum. She had a heart attack yesterday and the ambulance crew saved her. My mum was unresponsive and had a heart attack. The fast thinking ambulance crew saved her. I couldn't be more grateful you are angels in disguise and you deserve so much more than what you are being given by the NHS and the government. Thank you so much for everything. That was the most amazing job you ever did. Me and my sister are eternally grateful, thank you.

"Their professionalism and kindness was second to none..."



Many thanks to the Ambulance crew who attended my mother at her home in early hours of Friday 18th November 2022. She had a fall and head laceration requiring transfer to A/E for a CT scan and wound closure with staples & sutures. She would like me to pass on her sincere thanks and appreciation for all the help and assistance that the crew gave her. They were also very reassuring at a time when she was feeling most vulnerable. Their professionalism and kindness was second to none and should be acknowledged.

"Thank you for the care that morning..."



I am 14 years old and on the 8th of September I was feeling very unwell so my parent rang an ambulance. The two ladies that came for me were very good and took me to resus. I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes but I am doing well now and just wanted to thank you for the care that morning.

Priorities for 2023/2024

The Service User Feedback Team has a work plan for 2023/24 to continue to improve the overall service user experience, as well as the process of providing feedback about our services.

Some of the key priorities for the team in the year ahead are:

Reduce the average timeframe for complaint response changes to processes in complaint management should support quicker resolution of complaints.

Improve access and information for service users wishing to submit their feedback to ensure the process for submitting feedback is well sign-posted, accessible, informative and straightforward.

Introduce and embed the new NIPSO Model Complaints Handling Procedures which are planned to be introduced across all HSC Trusts, including NIAS, in the latter part of 2023/2024.

Support complaints investigation training ensure that managers investigating complaints have the relevant training to conduct an investigation which is balanced, open and objective.

Review internal mechanisms to improve the use of service user feedback data to inform service improvements, priorities, and strategies.

Introduce a Service User Feedback Survey to capture valuable feedback on the complaints process to inform improvement plans.

Capture and assess demographic data better understand who is complaining and what barriers may exist to raising a complaint.





Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
Health and Social Care Trust



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