

Bullying and Harassment Review & Update

September 2025

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Executive Summary

This September 2025 update builds on the January Bullying and Harassment Review and integrates insights from the latest Staff Survey, Values Survey, and Annual Equality Report (AER). It reflects NICE's continued commitment to fostering a respectful, inclusive, and psychologically safe workplace.

Key findings show that while overall reported levels of bullying and harassment have slightly improved, disparities persist, particularly for ethnic minority, disabled, and LGBTQ+ colleagues. Incivility and poor management practice remain common themes, and fear of reprisal continues to be a barrier to speaking up.

Encouragingly, benchmarking data shows NICE compares favourably to both the Civil Service and NHS on inclusion, psychological safety, and confidence in action taken. Staff Survey and Values Survey results indicate cultural improvements since December 2024.

Significant progress has been made across four strategic pillars:

- **Embedding Restorative, Just, Learning:** embedding phase underway; around 50 managers trained; EDI Roadmap Year 2 being delivered.
- **Empowering Staff to Speak Up:** Speaking Up Policy and Pathways launched and embedded; Active Bystander programme in procurement.
- **Developing Inclusive Leaders and Managers:** Inclusive leadership modules rolled out; decentralisation of EDI in progress.
- **Taking Robust Action:** Sexual Harassment Risk Assessment published; new policy framework in development.

This report outlines how NICE will continue to deliver and assure impact through data-driven interventions, staff collaboration, and transparent communication

Forward

- Over recent years, our Staff Survey results have consistently highlighted concerns around bullying and harassment. In 2023, we committed to a deeper investigation to understand the root causes and identify meaningful actions.
- Encouragingly, our latest data (December 2024) shows a reduction in reported incidents and growing confidence in NICE's ability to take effective action. However, the overall prevalence remains unchanged from five years ago, and disparities persist — particularly for ethnic minority staff, disabled colleagues, and LGBTQ+ staff, whose experiences have worsened in some areas.
- This updated report builds on our January 2025 findings and integrates insights from the latest Annual Equality Report (AER). It reflects our commitment to creating a psychologically safe, inclusive workplace where civility and respect are the norm.
- We are grateful to all staff who shared their experiences. Their voices have shaped this work and remind us of the personal and organisational cost of poor behaviour. Our goal is clear: to foster a culture where everyone feels safe, valued, and empowered to thrive.



Approach

This review was conducted between December 2023 and March 2024, using a multi-source evidence base to understand the nature, prevalence, and impact of bullying and harassment at NICE.

We analysed:

- Annual and pulse Staff Survey data
- HR casework and Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) records
- A bespoke Bullying and Harassment Survey (Jan 2024), which invited staff to share lived experiences anonymously
- Insights from staff networks, Unison, FTSU Guardians, and external experts

Sample size context: 35 staff responded to the bespoke survey- approximately 4% of the total workforce. While not representative, this sample provides rich qualitative insight from those directly affected. Their voices are central to this report.

Update for September 2025: This follow-up integrates findings from the latest Annual Equality Report (AER), particularly around disparities in experience by identity group, and reinforces our commitment to psychological safety, inclusive leadership, and early resolution.

•**Note:** Although the original scope focused on bullying and harassment, many respondents described experiences of discrimination and incivility. These have been included to ensure a fuller understanding of the culture and behaviours at NICE.

Definitions

Key Definitions

To ensure clarity and consistency, this review uses the following definitions:

- Bullying:** Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour. It involves an abuse or misuse of power intended to undermine, humiliate or injure the recipient. Bullying is not defined in law but may overlap with harassment if linked to a protected characteristic.
 - Harassment** (*Equality Act 2010*): Unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic (e.g. age, disability, race, sex, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender reassignment) that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.
 - Sexual Harassment:** Unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature that has the same effect as above. It does not need to be linked to a protected characteristic.
 - Incivility:** Low-intensity poor behaviour, often characterised by rudeness, dismissiveness, or microaggressions. Intent may not be clear, but the impact on psychological safety can be significant.
 - Discrimination:** Less favourable treatment based on protected characteristics, including direct, indirect, associative or perceived discrimination.
 - Misconduct:** Behaviour that breaches NICE's values or code of conduct, including inappropriate interpersonal interactions not covered by the definitions above.
- Annual Equality Report (AER) Alignment:** The AER emphasises the importance of recognising the full spectrum of poor behaviours, from incivility to discrimination, and their cumulative impact on inclusion, wellbeing, and retention. This review adopts that broader lens.



Key findings

Our analysis reveals that while overall reported levels of bullying and harassment have slightly improved in the past year, they remain broadly unchanged over a five-year period. The data also highlights persistent disparities in experience across identity groups and teams.

Headline insights:

- **7%** of staff reported experiencing bullying or harassment in the past 12 months- broadly unchanged from 2018.
- **Ethnic minority (17%), disabled (15%), and LGBTQ+ (8%)** staff report significantly higher rates of bullying and harassment.
- **Managers and team leaders** are cited as the source in around 50% of cases; middle managers are frequently named in bespoke survey responses.
- **Incivility and poor management practice** are often perceived as bullying and harassment, even when intent is unclear.
- **Fear of reprisal**, lack of trust, and power dynamics are major barriers to reporting.
- **Variation across Directorates** suggests cultural inconsistency and links to organisational change.

AER Alignment: These findings reinforce the AER's call for inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and targeted interventions to address disparities and cultural hotspots.

Key findings

Disparities in Experience

Our Staff Survey data continues to show that certain identity groups experience bullying, harassment, and discrimination at significantly higher rates than the overall workforce:

- **Ethnic minority staff:** 17% reported experiencing bullying/harassment (vs. 7% overall); 15% reported discrimination.
- **Disabled staff:** 15% reported bullying/harassment; 14% reported discrimination, though these figures have decreased from previous years, they remain disproportionately high.
- **LGBTQ+ staff:** 8% reported bullying/harassment, a notable increase from earlier in 2024.

These disparities are consistent with findings in the **Annual Equality Report**, which highlights:

- Unequal experiences of psychological safety
- Lower confidence in reporting mechanisms among minoritised groups
- Higher rates of non-declaration historically, though improving

Implications: These findings reinforce the need for targeted interventions, inclusive leadership, and culturally competent support mechanisms. They also highlight the importance of intersectional analysis, understanding how overlapping identities may compound disadvantage.

Management Practice and Incivility

A substantial proportion of experiences described in the bespoke Bullying and Harassment Survey relate to poor management behaviours and incivility—often perceived as bullying or harassment, even when intent is unclear.

Common themes include:

- Belittling or dismissive behaviour in meetings, including sarcasm, eye-rolling, and exclusion from decision-making.
- Micromanagement, excessive scrutiny, and lack of trust in staff capability.
- Inconsistent application of policies (e.g. flexible working, career progression).
- Lack of empathy or support during personal challenges.
- Unequal access to development opportunities and favouritism.

These behaviours were frequently attributed to **middle managers**, and in some cases, **senior leaders**. While some examples may reflect poor leadership style rather than intentional harm, the impact on psychological safety is significant.

It is also important to note that many described behaviours on the face of the findings appear to be legitimate and reasonable management actions, interactions and requests.

AER Alignment: The AER calls for a renewed focus on inclusive leadership and psychologically safe environments. These findings reinforce the need for leadership development, 360 feedback, and clearer expectations around respectful management practice.

Identity-based bullying and harassment and discrimination

Only a small number of experiences described by respondents to the Bullying and Harassment Survey relate to identity or might fall within a definition of discrimination

Of these, most related to disability/ long term health conditions and neurodiversity

Specific experiences included:

Disability related - reasonable adjustments not in place; adjustments challenged when manager changed

Neurodiversity - lack of acknowledgement of preferences or needs of individual

LGBTQ+ - persistent misgendering

Ethnicity - microaggressions, for e.g. not brought into conversations

Sexism - inappropriate behaviour towards women and use of discriminatory language

Sexual harassment- inappropriate behaviour on work premises

There is a reluctance to ‘call out’ poor behaviour ‘in the moment’ and blockers to reporting issues

Evidence from the free text of our Staff Surveys, as well as from the Bullying and Harassment Survey, tells us that there are several reasons why staff are reluctant to call out or report poor behaviour.

These include:

- The person was a senior manager/ leader
- Fear of repercussions/reprisals, including impact on career progression
- A belief that nothing would be done

Comments include:

- ‘I had no trust that it would be dealt with properly and I worried that reporting it would make things worse for me.’
- ‘Concerned about how it might reflect back on me and my future at NICE’
- ‘It's extremely difficult in a workplace situation to challenge someone who is a senior colleague because of the power dynamic’
- One responder said of an Associate Director ‘no one feels that they can challenge their behaviour without facing repercussions’

In almost all instances, poor behaviour was not called out in the moment by the person experiencing it or anyone observing it

Confidence and Support

Our latest Staff Survey data shows encouraging signs of progress:

- **91%** of staff know how to report bullying and harassment.
- **Confidence in NICE taking effective action** has risen to **64%** (up from 60% in Feb 2024).
- Most issues are resolved **informally**, with only a small number escalating to formal grievance.

Staff report seeking support primarily from:

- **Line managers** (first point of contact)
- **People Team (HR)** and **Freedom to Speak Up Guardians**

While many staff were satisfied with the support received, concerns remain about:

- **Timeliness** of case resolution
- **Consistency** in manager responses
- **Emotional toll** of formal processes

AER Alignment: These findings support the AER's call for:

- Strengthening informal resolution pathways
- Building manager capability and confidence
- Ensuring transparency and fairness in case handling

Implication: Continued investment in restorative approaches, manager development, and clear communication will be key to sustaining progress and building trust.

Variation Across Teams

Staff Survey data reveals significant variation in reported experiences of bullying and harassment across Directorates and teams. These differences suggest that organisational culture is not consistent across NICE.

Key observations:

- 'Hotspots' often correlate with areas undergoing **significant change**, including restructures or leadership transitions.
- A small number of teams show **persistent poor performance** on bullying and harassment indicators.
- In some Directorates, higher rates of bullying and harassment correlate with **increased sickness absence** and **lower engagement**.

AER Alignment: The AER highlights the need for **targeted, data-driven interventions** in areas of concern. This includes:

- Using triangulated data (People Team, FTSU, staff networks) to identify cultural risks
- Providing tailored support and development to affected teams
- Monitoring progress and impact over time

Implication: NICE must move beyond one-size-fits-all solutions and adopt a more localised, responsive approach to culture change, informed by data and co-designed with colleagues.

Colleague Ideas for Positive Change

Colleagues who responded to the bespoke survey shared thoughtful, practical suggestions for improving workplace culture. These ideas reflect a desire for fairness, empathy, and everyday civility.

Key themes include:

- **Consistency and fairness:** Address poor behaviour regardless of seniority or perceived value to the organisation.
- **Awareness and education:** Raise awareness of what bullying, harassment, and incivility look like — especially subtle behaviours like tone, exclusion, and microaggressions.
- **Kindness and empathy:** Encourage leaders and colleagues to show compassion, especially during difficult times.
- **Open dialogue:** Create safe spaces to talk about “low-level” behaviours and promote self-awareness.
- **Mediation and early resolution:** Use restorative approaches to resolve issues quickly and constructively.

Staff reflections:

“No one should feel entitled to mistreat others because of how senior or important they are.”

“More public discussion of tone and microaggressions would help.”

“Just be kind — it makes a huge difference.”

AER Alignment: These suggestions echo the AER’s call for co-created solutions, inclusive leadership, and everyday behaviours that foster psychological safety and belonging.

Survey results tell us that overall levels of bullying and harassment are about the same as 5 years ago. We have seen an improvement over the past year

Staff Survey questions	2018	2019	2021	2022	Feb 2024	Dec 2024	
Have experienced bullying and harassment in last 12 months	6%	6%	5%	7%	10%	7%	Reported levels of bullying and harassment are about the same as they were in 2018, although the % of staff having personally experienced and/or witnessed these behaviours has decreased since February 2024.
Have observed bullying and harassment in last 12 months	9%	12%	6%	9%	10%	8%	
Have experienced discrimination in last 12 months	3%	2%	4%	5%	6%	6%	Reported levels of having personally experienced discrimination have stayed the same as February 2024, with levels remaining below those for bullying and harassment.
Have witnessed discrimination in last 12 months	3%	2%	3%	4%	4%	4%	

Staff survey results show that ethnic minority and disabled staff are more likely to report having personally experienced bullying and harassment than the overall workforce population

		Have experienced bullying and harassment in last 12 months				Have experienced discrimination in last 12 months			
		2021	2022	Feb 2024	Dec 2024	2021	2022	Feb 2024	Dec 2024
All staff		5%	7%	10%	7%	4%	5%	10%	6%
Ethnic minority staff		10%	11%	15%	17%	10%	12%	9%	15%
Disabled staff		16%	24%	27%	15%	19%	16%	23%	14%
LGBTQ+ staff		13%	9%	3%	8%	2%	5%	10%	5%
Gender	Male	-	5%	8%	7%	-	1%	3%	3%
	Female	-	7%	10%	6%	-	7%	5%	6%

Disabled and ethnic minority staff are significantly more likely than the overall workforce population to report having personally experienced bullying and harassment, with levels for ethnic minority staff increasing year-on-year since 2021

Reported levels of bullying and harassment for disabled staff have fallen significantly this year- but have previously reached levels that are especially concerning

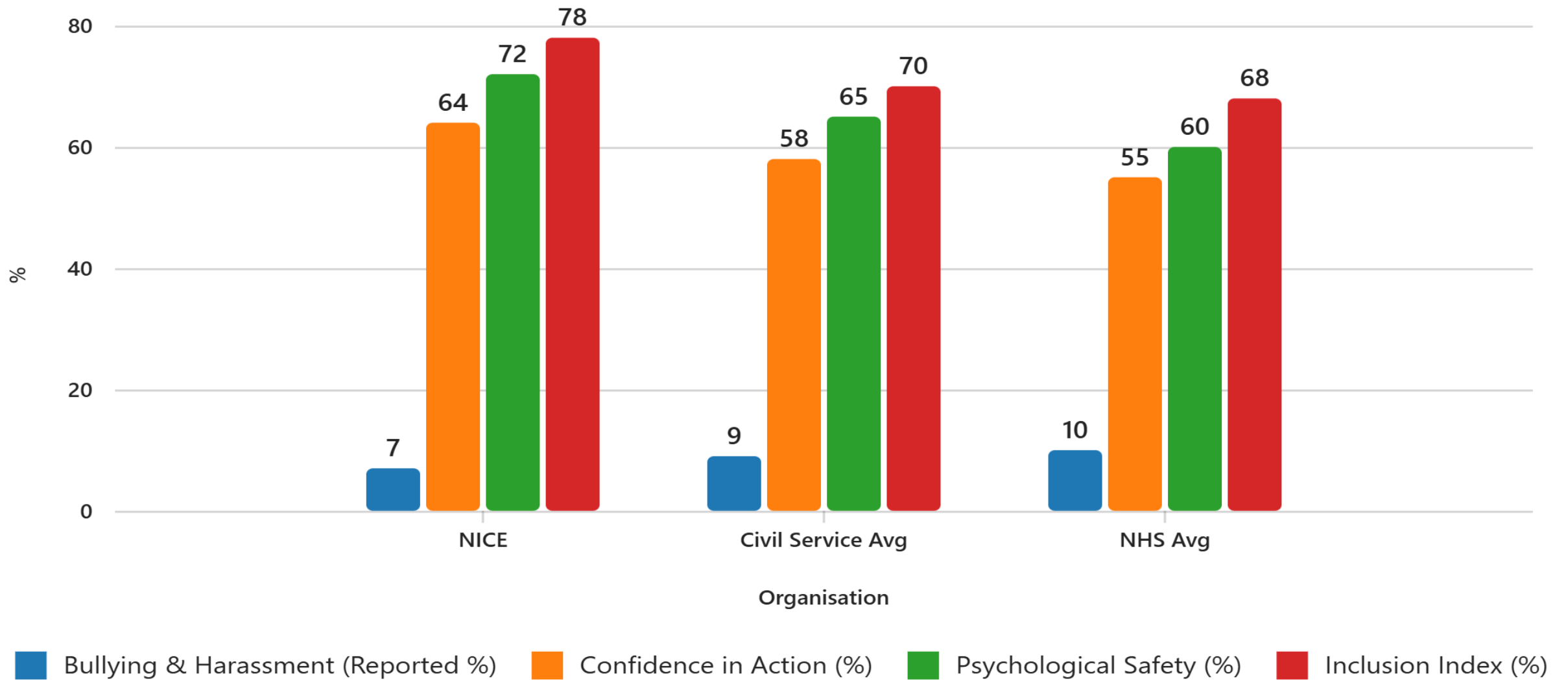
There has been a notable increase in reported levels of experiencing bullying and harassment for LGBTQ+ staff since February 2024

Improved non-declaration rates should be noted

Wider Context: Benchmarking NICE Against Civil Service and NHS

Data from the Annual Equality Report shows NICE compares favourably to both the Civil Service and NHS on key inclusion and culture metrics:

- **Bullying & Harassment (Reported):**
NICE: **7%** | Civil Service Avg: 9% | NHS Avg: 10%
- **Confidence in Action Taken:**
NICE: **64%** | Civil Service Avg: 58% | NHS Avg: 55%
- **Psychological Safety:**
NICE: **72%** | Civil Service Avg: 65% | NHS Avg: 60%
- **Inclusion Index:**
NICE: **78%** | Civil Service Avg: 70% | NHS Avg: 68%
- These trends reflect the positive impact of recent interventions and cultural work and reinforce NICE's position as a leading organisation in creating a respectful and inclusive workplace.



NICE

Strategic Actions and Progress

- Building on the January 2025 report, and aligned with the Staff Survey and Annual Equality Report (AER), we've made significant progress across four strategic pillars:

1. Embedding Restorative, Just, Learning Approach

- **Restorative and Just Learning Culture (RJLC):** Now entering the embedding phase, with circa 50 managers trained in restorative conversations. E-module in development. Co-owned with Unison.
- **Inclusion Charter:** Under redesign and engagement to reflect evolving views and colleague feedback.
- **EDI Roadmap Year 2:** Awareness training delivered or scheduled, including new modules on gender identity, sexual harassment, trans/non-binary inclusion, and pay gap awareness.

2. Empowering Staff to Speak Up

- **Speaking Up Policy:** Launched and embedded, with training delivered to all colleagues. Supporting pathways document published.
- **Active Bystander Programme:** In procurement phase; will be delivered to all staff by end of fiscal year.

3. Developing Inclusive Leaders and Managers

- **Management Development Programme:** Enhanced with inclusive leadership module; now rolled out.
- **Senior Leader Development Programme:** New in-depth Inclusive Leadership module in development.
- **Strategic use of 360 feedback:** Being carefully scoped as part of People Strategy.
- **Decentralisation of EDI:** All People Team colleagues to be upskilled in inclusive practice through all our work.

4. Taking Robust Action When Needed

- **Sexual Harassment Risk Assessment:** Published; further training in development.
- **Policy Framework:** New and updated core policies in design: *Resolving Problems at Work* and *Sexual Harassment*
- **AER & Staff Survey Alignment:**
- Benchmarks show NICE compares favourably to Civil Service and NHS on inclusion and psychological safety.
- Staff Survey and Values Survey show encouraging signs of cultural improvement since the December 2024 Bullying and Harassment Survey.

How we will deliver our recommendations

To ensure our actions have real impact and deliver the sustainable changes which we wish to see, we will:

- ✓ Use data, including from our staff surveys, to identify 'hotspots' of poor behaviour, and use this to focus our activity where it is needed most
- ✓ Commit to better utilising and triangulating data from a range of sources (People Team/ Freedom To Speak Up Guardians/ staff networks/ Unison, and more) to identify potential concerns and resolve issues at an early stage
- ✓ Seek to collaborate with our Staff Networks and Change Agents, taking an OD and/or CQI approach to implementing our work where this adds value
- ✓ Commit to communicating regularly with staff about progress