



Making **Freedom to Speak Up**
business as usual.



National Guardian's Office

Annual Report 2020

Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for
Health and Social Care by Command of Her Majesty

March 2021

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Ministerial Foreword

I am delighted that the National Guardian's Office has again seen such positive growth over the past year and to read of the excellent work that Freedom to Speak Up Guardians are delivering throughout England.

2020 was an extraordinarily difficult year for the NHS and its staff and the greatest test of NHS culture. In the darkest and most difficult times, it is more important than ever that everyone working in the NHS feels they can speak up, and that, when they do, they will be heard.

We should never forget what can happen when NHS workers struggle to speak up, or where organisations fail to listen. Tragedies like those at Gosport War Memorial or more recently the Independent Inquiry into circumstances around Ian Paterson have emphasised how important it is to embrace a learning culture in which we welcome speaking up and make it business as usual in the NHS.

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians are now well established in every trust in England, with increasing numbers in Clinical Commissioning Groups, regulators and NHS England and Improvement. They have handled over 35,000 cases over the last three years. But neither the National Guardian, nor I, are complacent. We know from last year's the Freedom to Speak Up Index report that there is more work to be done to ensure NHS staff feel confident they can raise their concerns.

That means excellent staff, managers and leaders who work together to develop a culture that welcomes speaking up, and where action is taken to address anything that gets in the way of providing great care. To speak up and be heard not only improves the quality and safety of patient care, but also, in tackling bullying and discrimination, the health of our vital NHS workforce.

I remain determined in my commitment to ensure that staff feel they can speak up and that their concerns will be taken seriously. I thank the National Guardian and the national network of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, and every member of NHS staff who has spoken up, for helping to make our NHS safer.



Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State
for Health and Social Care

Welcome from the National Guardian

Through our work we can now see clear evidence that a strong Freedom to Speak Up culture at all levels in healthcare has significant benefits. By creating a network of over 600 Freedom to Speak Up Guardians who have handled over 35,000 cases, those workers who might otherwise not have been heard have been supported to speak up.

When leaders listen and act on speaking up, great improvements can be made. Conversely, when they are defensive or victimise workers who speak up, it has a chilling effect, putting patients and workers at risk of harm. Speaking up has never been more important than during the pandemic, and yet some workers who feared for their safety reported they were let down by leaders who were not listening.

The majority of cases refer to a problem or an issue where things are not working as well as they might. So, it's important that leaders both deal with the issue raised, but also apply the learning across the whole of their organisation. Only by taking action can they hope to truly embed the learning gained.

Over the next five years the pressures will increase in the healthcare sector. For the NHS to be able to deliver on the People Plan, leaders need to listen to the ideas and concerns from our colleagues. My annual report should act as a catalyst for change.

Workers need support and protection to speak up safely. Guardians need support and protection to deliver difficult messages. Managers need skills and headspace to be able to listen up effectively. And senior leaders need to listen, believe and take the necessary actions, fostering a positive speaking up culture.

Speaking up is a gift – use it wisely and we can change the NHS for the better.

Henrietta



Dr Henrietta Hughes
OBE FRCGP

National Guardian
for the NHS

Speaking up – the journey so far

Five years have passed since the publication of the Francis **Freedom to Speak Up** Review in 2015. The speaking up culture of the health sector in England has changed with a network of over 600 Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in over 400 organisations.

There is still much more to do and we will build on the learning from the past five years to support further improvements.

This will require all organisations to play their part.

We have made more than 100 recommendations from case reviews. It is time that these are adopted and embedded to prevent the national scandals which are still happening, where, had the voices of workers not been suppressed or victimised, patient safety could have been improved.

From our case reviews significant themes have emerged and we will be focusing our efforts on the voices of vulnerable workers and the barriers they face to speaking up.

We have launched, with Health Education England, training for all workers, and plan training for managers and leaders – everyone needs to take personal responsibility for their actions.

Principles from the Freedom to Speak Up Review are not being followed by all organisations. Regulators are mobilising and taking this more seriously but there is more to do to get a consistent and aligned response to speaking up. This matters to keep patients safe.

As the health landscape continues to evolve with the development of integrated care systems (ICS), speaking up needs to be at the heart of this transformation. We are working with primary care organisations to show how this can work at system level.

By working in partnership with others we will improve speaking up across patient pathways.

The National Guardian's Office

While the mission of the National Guardian's Office is to make speaking up business as usual in the NHS, our broader strategy is to effect cultural change. That is to contribute to our National Health Service leading the way in embedding a **'learn, not blame'** culture that seeks to change and improve.

Speaking up is a key part of that strategy as workers have information and precious knowledge about the way in which our health service operates that cannot be garnered from anywhere else. Supporting NHS workers to speak up, listening to what they say and acting upon that information to improve encapsulates what the National Guardian's Office is trying to achieve.

Any organisation can appoint a guardian. Organisations that provide services under the NHS Standard Contract (which includes but is not limited to NHS trusts and Foundation Trusts) are required to nominate a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

NHS primary care provider organisations are expected to follow NHS England's guidance on Freedom to Speak Up.

In addition, the National Guardian's Office expects health and care leadership organisations and regulators to appoint guardians, and are encouraging an increasing number of non-health organisations that are also appointing guardians.

Individual organisations decide who is best placed to take on the guardian role and some organisations choose to appoint more than one guardian. Guardians need to be able to carry out all aspects of the 'Universal Job Description' developed by the National Guardian's Office and should be able to inspire the trust and confidence of workers and senior leaders.

The office leads, trains and supports this network of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in England. We produce guidance documents relating to areas such as recording cases and reporting data and CQC inspections.

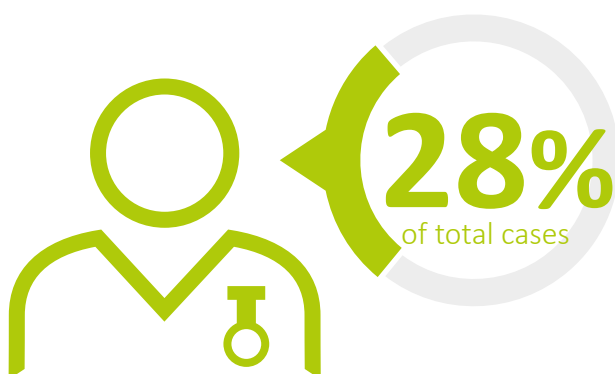
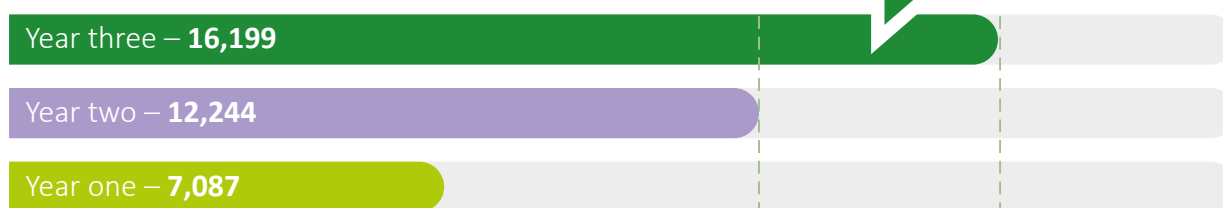


The year in numbers

Speaking Up data from 2019/20

Cases raised to guardians

16,199 cases were brought to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, resulting in a **32% increase**.



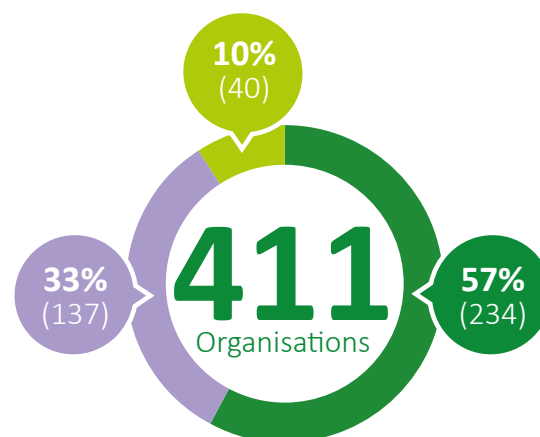
Nurses continued to account for the biggest portion (**28 per cent**) of cases raised with Freedom to Speak Up Guardians.

Administrative and clerical workers accounted for the next biggest portion of cases raised with Freedom to Speak Up Guardians (**19 per cent**), up three percentage points on the previous year.



Guardians and the network

There are now **612** guardians in over **400** organisations.



Trusts

Other providers (all other providers of healthcare, e.g. independent and primary care)

Other bodies (all other bodies with guardians, e.g. Clinical Commissioning Groups, Care Quality Commission, NHS England/Improvement)

Perspectives of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians

Believe people in organisation **do not suffer detriment** as a result of speaking up.

2020 – Agree/Strongly Agree

47%

2019 – Agree/Strongly Agree

48%

2018 – Agree/Strongly Agree

43%

Believe Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role **is making a difference**.

2020 – Agree/Strongly Agree

86%

2019 – Agree/Strongly Agree

80%

2018 – Agree/Strongly Agree

69%

Believe organisation has a **positive culture** of speaking up.

2020 – Agree/Strongly Agree

67%

2019 – Agree/Strongly Agree

62%

2018 – Agree/Strongly Agree

61%

You said, we did: **an International Medical Doctor's** experience



University Hospitals Dorset NHS Foundation Trust

An **international medical doctor** (IMG) came to Helen Martin, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at University Hospital Dorset, deeply distressed.

"She was both isolated and unsupported," said Helen. "She had just moved from India into a speciality registrar post, leaving her family to learn more from our National Health Service and take back the benefits for her patients. She was a lead in her medical field in India.

"Whilst she was exceptionally competent at medicine, her inexperience of how the NHS functions – the countless abbreviations and the secret idiosyncrasies we have – were making her transition very difficult. Her relationships with her team were becoming strained and busy workloads made conversations difficult and behaviours unsupportive.

"Without knowledge of how the system works, I found myself helpless and low in confidence," said the doctor. "This led to low self-esteem which affected my sleep, my emotional and physical stability. My mind was blocked from fear."

Helen suggested she talk to her educational supervisor and write a statement about the behaviours from one particular doctor, which were investigated and resulted in a facilitated conversation.

"When we first met, she wanted to leave and go home but the strength she got from speaking up and calling out this behaviour made her complete her full placement and even stay longer to support the first wave of COVID-19," said Helen.

The International Medical Doctor was happy to share her experience of speaking up with others and filmed a short "you said, we did" video which Helen used to share a staff story at Trust board and used throughout the trust to encourage others to speak up.

Helen also shared the doctor's experience with the medical educational lead to better understand how the international medical workforce was supported. An International Doctors Support Initiative (IDSI) programme was just being put into place and consisted of five key elements including induction, integration and wellbeing forum, teaching programme and career development.

The Freedom to Speak Up team attended this forum to listen to IMGs discuss and raise concerns about various issues including contracts, bullying and discrimination. With the support of the FTSU team, the IMGs' confidence of their medical ability and career choices as well as their health and wellbeing have been restored and loneliness and isolation has been reduced.

One of the IMGs said, "When I was going through a bad time, somebody from the Freedom to Speak Up Guardians checked on me every week and even offered to take me for walks, which made me feel that I have someone to look out for me".

As a result of one person speaking up, a forum has been established to mitigate feelings of culture shock and social isolation by the international workforce and helped to promote a culture of speaking up.



Helen Martin
Freedom to Speak
Up Guardian

Thinking outside the box: Listening up in a different way



Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust

John Walsh, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at Leeds Community Healthcare, was asked by the Director of Nursing to be part of an away day for a team that was having serious difficulties.

When the day started, staff started to speak up about issues and concerns. They also spoke up about away days. "They said they had seen it all before – people coming in who they never see again, post-its are put on walls and there is a lot of talking but nothing really changes," said John.

"This really touched me and I found myself offering to visit the team for a half day once a week for six months to listen, support and raise whatever they wanted to say in an impartial way. Normally I would have simply asked them to contact me as the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian."

The workers accepted John's offer and every week he visited and listened to the workers. "I was humbled to see the great care and compassion the staff had for those who used the service. I met some wonderful people delivering good healthcare in difficult circumstances. I would raise their concerns, struggles and creative ideas for improvement with Director of Nursing and managers.

One day, I happened to see a poster the trust had created based on this work. It didn't say 'You said, We did' but rather 'What We have Done Together'. I recognised the matters as suggestions and issues raised by the team from my weekly emails sent to the Director of Nursing and managers. The poster listed issues, actions and timescales."

As time went on, the concerns got less and less and that service moved to a much better and stronger place.

"This example shows a lesson all organisations need to remember – that the wisdom, expertise and experience within teams and services is where we need to start," said John. "I have also learnt there is rich work outside my usual practice box and this will link us to how Freedom to Speak Up can flow deeply into our organisations for care and culture change."



John Walsh

Freedom to Speak
Up Guardian



Data and intelligence

One of the key areas that the National Guardian's Office has focused on this year is **becoming a more intelligence driven organisation** that takes strategic decisions based upon what it can recognise taking place across the system.

By using data to improve our understanding of the speaking up landscape, we are better able to support improvements in the way speaking up takes place across the whole of healthcare.

One way in which we track the progress of healthcare providers to embed speaking up is by looking at the number of cases raised to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians. The quarterly data we collect from organisations with guardians allows us to recognise themes and provide challenge back.

When there have been no cases reported, we liaise with NHS England/Improvement (NHSE/I) and feed into their broader understanding of what issues may account for this.

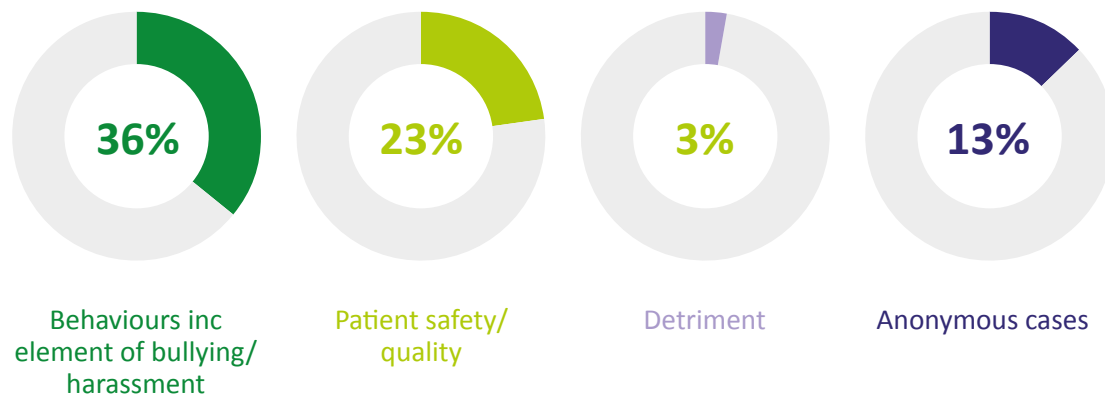
Over the last two years we have also published our Freedom to Speak Up Index Report that draws on answers provided in the NHS Staff Survey relating to speaking up.

We also conduct an annual survey of guardians and that has allowed us to recognise areas we can focus on going forward, including the level of support we offer to guardians, how guardians support each other, and how we can improve our understanding of the impact of the guardian role. These have been outlined in a report published on our website titled, 'Next Steps: Priorities 2020-2021'.

Information gleaned from our survey is also contributing to planned workstreams relating to detriment, vulnerable groups and other barriers to speaking up. Anecdotal information from the survey, when viewed alongside speaking up data – for example with regards to anonymity and detriment – is helping us to develop a fuller picture of how to overcome barriers to speaking up.

We are also working with NHSE/I and other stakeholders on the development of a common data set from a range of sources, including through the NHS Staff Survey, to improve how they capture views on understanding of speaking up culture and arrangements.

Cases brought to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians 2019-2020



Results from our Annual Data Report 2019-20

The other significant area of our work that allows us to make some really deep dives into data and intelligence is our case review process. Where referrals are made to the office about incidents of speaking up where matters may not have been handled in line with best practice, we are able to look in detail to understand what learning can be gained.

All healthcare providers are encouraged to review our recommendations and check whether they can learn from them and make changes.

We now plan to take that a step further and use data more intelligently in the case review process in order to hear the voices of more workers.

One of the most notable changes we have made this year is the inclusion of information on speaking up as part of the NHS E/I Model Hospital digital information service. There is more about our work in this area on page 16 of this report.



A Junior Doctor's experience leads to cultural change



A Large Midlands Acute Trust

A male Foundation Year One doctor from a BAME background made contact with the Trust Freedom to Speak Up Guardian exploring several routes to express their concerns of incivility and discrimination in the workplace.

He spoke about his experience, telling the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, "I felt that my ethnic background and gender meant I was criticised more harshly than the others and so I was hesitant to express my fears. I began to distrust the people I worked with.

"On social media gossip was rife...very quickly I was singled out as I did not participate. I was labelled as quiet and careless and would often be undermined in front of other staff."

When the Junior Doctor witnessed another doctor of BAME background who had just joined the department from a foreign country being bullied by the same people who had treated them badly, they spoke with several other doctors including a registrar, who were very supportive but were not able to help.

"It was only when I contacted the guardian, that I felt like someone was actually listening," said the Junior Doctor. "I finally thought that something could be done to ensure no one else felt the way I felt."

The Junior Doctor did not want to make a formal complaint but was encouraged by the guardian to share their experiences with the Deputy Medical Director, who listened and wanted to ensure that as an organisation something was done. It was agreed that a video would be created about the experiences of an FY1 and how Freedom to Speak Up can help support workers who wish to raise concerns.

The Trust's Medical Director said, "I found the account of the Junior Doctor very distressing and I am sure this is not an isolated incident in the organisation. There is no place for discrimination of this nature within the organisation. We want this to be an organisation where everyone is absolutely valued for the richness they bring to

the organisation and the contribution they make."

The trust guardian said, "The aim of the video will be to bring some positive cultural change with how we treat one another. The organisation have wanted to learn from the experiences of the FY1 and take a learn not blame approach.

"I would like to encourage all FY1s to raise their concerns and speak up if they experience poor attitudes and behaviours in the workplace," concluded the Junior Doctor. "Contacting the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian made me realise that I was not alone, I was listened to and I was supported to speak up."

These concerns were raised during the height of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the disease on BAME workers, the Black Lives Matter protests and death of George Floyd meant that there were heightened emotions about these issues.

All staff received a CEO statement, one that was honest and shared empathy with workers. Listening events took place with the CEO through the BAME Employee voice group, and a Trust Board Development session further held. The Junior Doctor's story was shared along with concerns which had been raised by workers about diversity and inclusion.

In addition, the Trust has appointed to the role of Head of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion to work towards further embedding EDI measures and interventions.

The video will first be shared with the Trust Board as part of the FTSU Guardian's board report and then as a training resource to the Junior Doctors Forum, Consultant Committees and more widely used within the FTSU training the guardian delivers at the Trust in ensuring cultural change. The Trust takes discrimination in the workplace very seriously and is ensuring every effort is made to stamp this out.

A Patient Safety Issue: Recording Allergies



Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust

“I spoke up not because any one person was doing wrong, but because the system wasn't being utilised properly and it could lead to a serious patient safety incident,” says Hannah Cox.

I had been with CPFT for just over a month and I was still getting to grips with all the different aspects of my role in a busy service for older people. I found myself checking patient summaries to make sure that the patients' allergies had been checked before medication was requested for prescription.

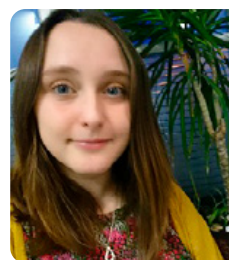
The problem was that allergies were not being recorded on the front page of the patient's electronic record, even when there is a clear icon to indicate if that person has allergies.

There was no standardised process for where allergies should be recorded and being new to the Trust and system meant it was extra difficult for me to check.

There had been a couple of close calls. I'd asked my line manager if they should complete a DATIX as it had the potential to become a serious incident. My line manager said it was a confusing issue that had been going on for some time. Because so many people did it, it felt hard to challenge people on their habits.

I contacted Annie, the Trust's Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. She thanked me for bringing the issue to her attention. I was happy for Annie to share the concerns I'd raised with relevant colleagues. The Clinical Director contacted me straight away. He was very kind in explaining the steps he was taking to standardise the allergy recording process and I appreciated how professional and understanding he was.

My experience has really brought home how Freedom to Speak Up has developed a collaborative environment at CPFT that can solve issues effectively. Our team really listened and thanks to Annie's help and clinicians learning how to input allergies into the system's allergy database, it is no longer an issue. Now when I access patient records, we can easily see the icon highlighting the patient's allergies on the clinical system.



Hannah Cox



Annie Ng
Freedom to Speak
Up Guardian



Improving the system

Part of the National Guardian's remit is to provide challenge and learning to the healthcare system in order to effect cultural change. We work together with our stakeholders to provide practical tools to help support the system to make speaking up business as usual.

We are working with colleagues at NHS England and Improvement (NHSE/I), with input from Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, on the development of the culture and engagement compartment on the Model Hospital database.

The Model Hospital is an NHS digital information service designed to help the NHS improve productivity and efficiency. The compartment the National Guardian's Office has contributed to contains a range of speaking up indicators, including data from guardians in NHS trusts on the speaking up cases raised with them.

NHS trusts, including guardians in those organisations, as well as others in the health system, are able to use the culture and engagement compartment on the Model Hospital to compare metrics and identify areas for improvement.

The National Guardian's Office and the Model Hospital team have held webinars and included information in our fortnightly bulletin for guardians to help guardians understand how they can use the Model Hospital to learn and improve.

The CQC is a key partner in helping to underline the importance of good speaking up practices and the role of the guardian. We are working with them on rating characteristics, so that speaking up is properly reflected, as well as speaking up getting proper consideration at the point of registration.

We have also worked with colleagues at the CQC to update our guidance, 'CQC inspections: Information for Freedom to Speak Up Guardians' and we are working with the CQC to deliver training about speaking up to hospital inspectors.

Making Speaking Up business as usual

While there are challenges that the National Guardian's Office faces in embedding speaking up across the NHS, there is also a prevailing wind that has both **helped and informed** the work of the office and the organisations it works with.

Speaking up has become as much a social movement as an NHS initiative. Over recent years, whether in relation to Black Lives Matter or the #MeToo movement, it has become apparent that people feel they deserve the right to speak up and expect to be listened to.

The National Guardian's Office often describes speaking up as 'a gift'. The information that workers can provide should be seen as vital to the wellbeing of the organisation and as a means to change and improve in order to address the issues being raised.

There is also an expectation from workers that their voice should be one of the driving forces in informing change and improvement. The NHS Staff Survey gives workers a voice and the impetus to use that to make things better is implicit.

We can learn much from other sectors and have established a flourishing Pan Sector Network. With a growing membership of over 50 organisations, the network shares learning from diverse sectors including the police, aviation, the arts, the charity sector, financial services, defence, telecoms and retail.

The network shares challenges and perspectives on how to encourage a speak up culture. We in turn share this learning in our regular newsletters to stakeholders throughout health, so that we might learn from the good practice of others.



A Health Visitor's concerns lead to learning and improvement



Hounslow and Richmond Community Healthcare NHS Trust

A member of the Health Visiting team contacted **Graham Rodber, the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at Hounslow and Richmond Community Healthcare Trust**, about their team structure. They were concerned about operational decision making and management of risk and that a high volume of agency and bank staff were working within the team.

Permanent part-time staff were not able to take on additional hours to cover shifts that were vacant and the concerns centred around longer-term agency and bank staff not having appropriate induction, supervision or training. Further concerns regarding the flat structure and lack of senior leaders within the team were also raised.

Graham contacted the Director of Nursing and Non-Medical Professionals who is the responsible director for Freedom to Speak Up within the organisation. An external investigation was commissioned. The worker who raised concerns was supported throughout the process and Graham kept them informed on the investigation's progress.

As a result of the external investigation, a series of recommendations were made including an urgent review of all existing agency staff and their compliance with training, performance issues, supervision and knowledge of the clinical computer system – SystemOne. Further recommendations were to ensure that references are requested from agencies for all future agency recruitment and to prepare an audit of supervision themes for the safeguarding committee.

In addition, it was recommended that the learning from the outcomes of the investigation should be shared with Health Visitor Teams via a learning event using an Appreciative Inquiry approach.

Appreciative Inquiry is a way of looking at organisational change which focuses on identifying and doing more of what is already working, to identify and spread good practice.

Following the conclusion of the investigation, Graham said, "The worker was absolutely right to raise their concerns with me, and I am glad we were able to support them throughout the process. Other workers within the Health Visiting teams will have seen that concerns and feedback are taken seriously, and the organisation acts upon matters raised. I hope that all workers will now feel confident and safe to raise further matters should they arise in the future".



Graham Rodber
Freedom to Speak Up Guardian

Speaking Up creates a happier workplace



SELDOC Healthcare

Integrated Urgent Care Provider, SE and SW London

SELDOC – the South East London Doctors' Co-operative – provides urgent and unscheduled care services in South London. In addition to providing out-of-hours care to seven CCG areas, SELDOC supports A+E Departments, GP federations and the London Ambulance Service.

An anonymous worker raised concerns over the introduction of advanced clinical practitioners where traditionally the service had only used GPs in its clinical workforce. The worker also questioned operational procedures, and cited examples of poor management.

SELDOC CEO, Steven Pink, commissioned an independent investigation which made a series of recommendations.

One was to have a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian as an alternative route for workers to speak up.

The introduction of a Freedom to Speak Up policy and the presence of a guardian external to the organisation from Howbeck Healthcare, created a more formal structure for raising matters, which promoted greater transparency within the organisation. SELDOC also introduced an internal Freedom to Speak Up champion who workers could turn to if they didn't feel able to contact their supervisor or manager.

There is also a dedicated email address for workers to contact Steven, the CEO, directly and confidentially. This has been used and valued by staff. "One team member trusted me enough to chat directly about her maternity leave concerns, which we were able to resolve immediately," said Steven.

He continued: "Ultimately, the process has given us an opportunity to show both employees and customers that they shouldn't be afraid to say what they want. Some people are more comfortable speaking up than others, so it's important we continue to encourage people to speak up using one of the now multiple points of contact."

The investigation process uncovered feelings around acceptable management behaviour, which led to an acceleration of a pre-planned culture of change.

"You can never over-communicate about changes you're making and why," said Steven. "We now have weekly calls with office staff, managers, routine drivers, receptionists... things that were happening once a quarter are now weekly. I also conduct monthly calls in which anyone can join and ask me anything."

These interventions have made a difference. In recent internal staff surveys, scores show SELDOC as a welcoming and inclusive organisation.

"The investigation process was a wake-up call for the organisation," concluded Steven. "Nobody wants a whistleblower scenario, particularly in healthcare. But far worse is that 'stuff stays buried'. We want our staff and colleagues to know they have someone they can turn to at any time. We will always encourage them reach out in order and share concerns so that we can action them appropriately and quickly, with a clear focus on what is best for our patients."



Steven Pink
SELDOC CEO

Embedding the learning

One of the core guardian values is learning, so it is critical to our work that we share learning across the network of guardians and beyond.

Our primary channel for sharing information and learning with the guardian network is through our fortnightly bulletin. This provides a vital means of engaging guardians with the latest news, information and guidance they need to do their jobs in the best possible way.

We also host a monthly webinar series that we have found increasingly popular. Here we can discuss a range of topics such as how to engage with specific groups such as trainees to how to use data to provide Boards with insight and understanding. We now also record our webinars so that those guardians unable to make the webinar session can catch up.

Our Speak Up Month campaign held throughout October every year has also augmented how we spread learning throughout our network and beyond. Guardians from all over England use the month to share what they do to support speaking up in their organisations. This year we devised an Alphabet of Speak Up to encourage contributions from stakeholders across health to share what speaking up meant to them. Over 650 different words were suggested as part of the #SpeakUpABC and the hashtag was used 8,219 times.

A further thread that brings to the fore the very best work of guardians is the Health Service Journal (HSJ) Award we sponsor. In 2019 the Freedom to Speak Up Organisation of the Year Award was won by Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust for 'developing compassionate speak up cultures within and across systems'.

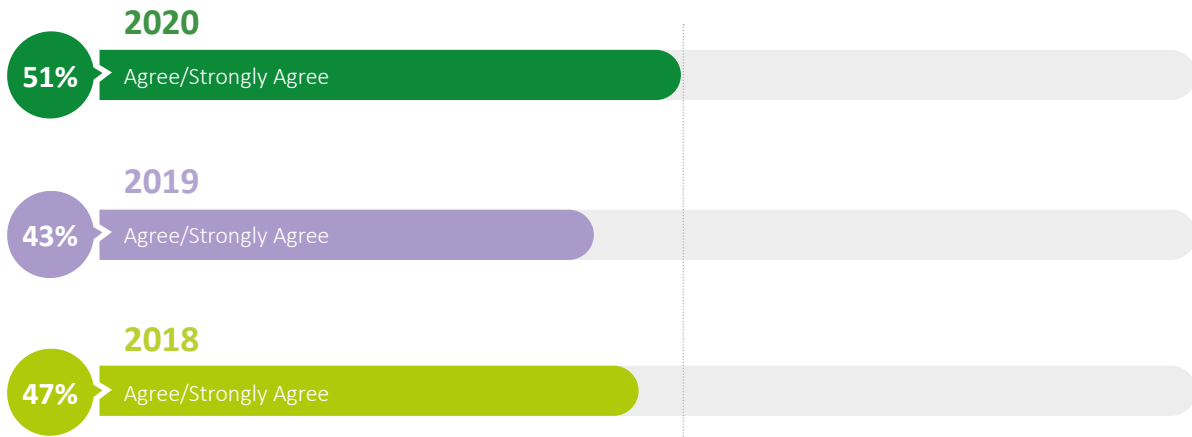


600 people registered to attend
8 Lunch and Learn webinars



767 have 'watched again'
on **YouTube**

Managers support staff to speak up



Freedom to Speak Up Guardian Survey 2020

Recognising and rewarding the efforts of guardians and their organisations to change the culture of the NHS by elevating the importance of speaking up is a key part of our role as the National Guardian's Office.

One of the ways we share learning, and encourage peer support is through network meetings. These bring groups of guardians together on a regular basis, mostly by region, but we also have national networks for ambulance trusts, hospices and non-providers. Together guardians are able to provide support and learning to one another, while also getting updates from the national office as well as taking advantage of the chance to feedback.

More specific advice can be requested through one-to-one guardian surgeries that can be booked with the NGO when guardians have particularly tricky cases they are handling.

Learning is also shared through features detailed elsewhere in this report, such as our training, our case review recommendations and through conferences and events we organise. The latter not only brings together keynote speakers that have included Ministers and senior health officers, but also allows excellent networking opportunities and workshops.



Dr Navina Evans CBE



Chief Executive, Health Education England

As Chief Executive at Health Education England (HEE), I am delighted that we have recently launched our network of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians. **This is part of our commitment as an organisation to addressing barriers, raising concerns, and continual learning and improvement.**

For me personally as a leader, Freedom to Speak Up is vital not only in ensuring that staff feel safe to speak up about issues affecting them, but also so that I can be made aware of some of the general themes coming out of those conversations that may reflect the need for greater organisation-wide changes.

HEE's FTSU Guardians are supported by the National Guardian's Office, with access to training, support and other resources that enable them to offer support to staff throughout the organisation.

We have also worked with the National Guardian's Office to develop 'Freedom to Speak Up' – a learning resource aimed at all NHS colleagues including volunteers, students and those in training, regardless of their contract terms.

While the aim will always be to create an organisational culture in which workers do not need FTSU Guardians to speak up, we recognise that there will nonetheless be instances in which they prefer to speak up confidentially. Creating a safe environment where workers can raise comments, concerns and feel listened to ensures they feel comfortable at work, and ultimately results in the delivery of high quality care for those that we serve – the people of England.

Senior leaders **support staff** to speak up

2020

80% Agree/Strongly Agree

2019

67% Agree/Strongly Agree

2018

72% Agree/Strongly Agree

Freedom to Speak Up Guardian Survey 2020



Dr Navina Evans
Chief Executive,
Health Education England

Angela Hillery



Chief Executive, Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

Freedom to Speak Up means we are placing safety first as an essential part of our culture and creating the conditions needed to deliver high quality care. **It provides a way for our front line workers to speak up** if they have any worries or concerns about the care they provide or see.

As a leader at NHFT, with over 4,000 staff, I need to know that everyone has a way of speaking up, whether it is a big or small concern, and what their experience is. Every piece of information is invaluable, and it encourages everyone to be a leader, to prioritise safety and to collectively improve care for our patients and improve our staff experiences.

Freedom to Speak Up has enabled us to triangulate data and information, to have early sight of issues and to understand what we need to improve upon. I have been made aware of information that may have not been visible to me, enabling me to explore it further and act. As time has progressed it has become part of what we do here at NHFT – “Let’s Talk” is how we frame it to make it simple and to signal that everyone can contribute.

We have developed FTSU Champions in the Trust who support our FTSU Guardian, and this has really helped us to extend the reach and access to our workers, particularly those who are more vulnerable including students, junior doctors and people with protected characteristics.

Our FTSU Guardian pro-actively promotes the role and has developed many materials to support people. He is highly visible which builds confidence and trust within our organisation and people know who to go to if they need to. He actively listens and recognises how people can feel when they raise concerns by quickly providing reassurance to them.

This is so important in nurturing a culture of speaking up, quality improvement and learning. He can access all people and parts of the Trust and will take forward any issue or concern, challenging where this is needed and confirming that action is being taken. He also provides feedback to anyone who has spoken up which I believe is key, so they know what and how the guardian has acted on their behalf.

The NGO provides resources and information including learning from other organisations. We review all this information to ensure that any external experiences can be considered in our Trust too. The NGO also provides information, training and support for our guardian who networks with others on a regional and national basis and obtains invaluable peer support.

My advice to all leaders is that you need a speaking up culture to ensure ‘safety first’ is recognised as a priority within your organisation. As a leader you need to value speaking up and recognise it as a key feature of any high-quality culture. It will help you to provide and promote continuous quality improvement as well as the importance of being a learning organisation.



Angela Hillery

Chief Executive,
Northamptonshire Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

The future is now

Having looked back at the activities that have defined the National Guardian's Office in 2020, it feels important that this year – **perhaps more than any other** – we should reflect on the coming 12 months.

COVID-19 has hung heavy over everything happening in the country, but particularly in healthcare where it has affected the lives of all workers. At the start of the first lockdown we launched three pulse surveys to gauge the impact of the pandemic on speaking up.

Feedback from guardians who responded was mixed. Some told us that an established culture of speaking up made things easier. Others reported they were told there simply wasn't time to listen to everything workers were raising. There were also anecdotal reports of communications teams advising workers not to speak to the media or use their social media to post comments. With the CQC Chief Inspectors, the National Guardian wrote to all trust CEOs and Chairs to remind them about how important it was to maintain safe speaking up channels for their workers.

We repeated the pulse surveys in May and again in June, and a change in attitudes and perceptions evolved as the pandemic continued. In the first pulse survey, 72 per cent of guardians who responded believed that workers continued to be encouraged to speak up. By June that had risen to 93 per cent.

This was reflected in the feedback guardians provided about whether speaking up was decreasing or increasing. In April there was roughly a 40/40/20 split with 40 per cent saying speaking up was decreasing, 39 per cent saying there was no change and 21 per cent saying speaking up had increased.

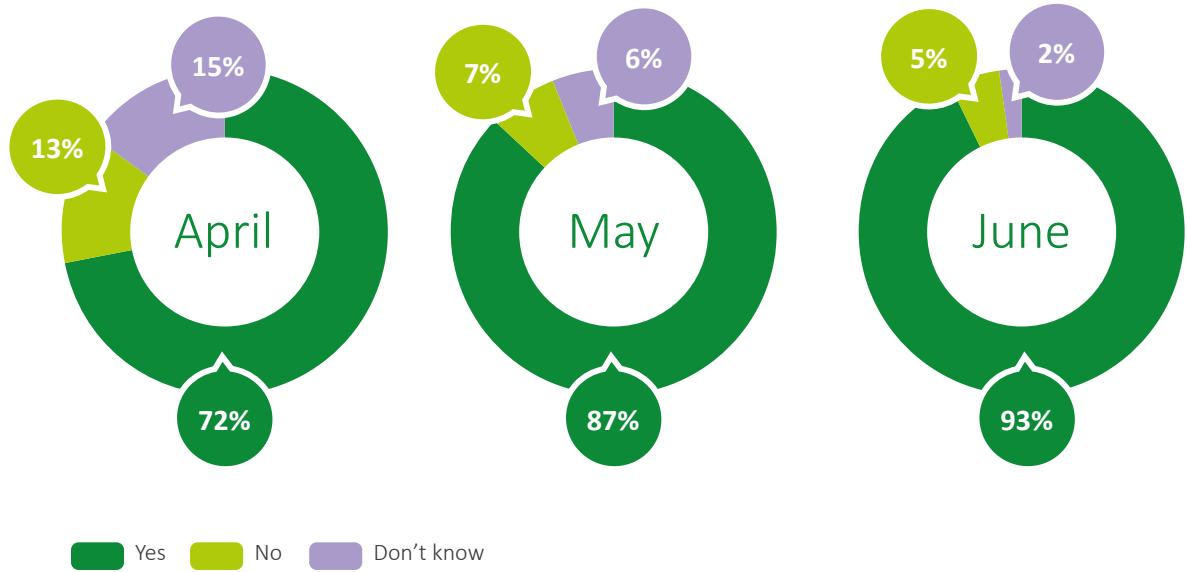
By June, however, just over half said speaking up was increasing. The percentage of those saying it was decreasing dropped by more than half to 17 per cent, with the remaining third saying there was no change.

The types of issues workers were speaking up about showed a significant increase across the three months when it came to behavioural issues, such as bullying and harassment. This rose from 46 per cent in April, to 57 per cent in May and up to 74 per cent in June.

We contributed our findings to the NHS Reset campaign being championed by NHS Confederation and also fed the results into NHS England/Improvement and the Workforce Race Equality Standard Team. COVID-19 will surely impact further on the lives of healthcare workers and what guardians have brought to them as the vaccine rolls out and beyond.

Our work making in-roads into primary care has also taken significant steps forward and will continue to emerge over the next 12 months. Regional Integration Plans have been produced to describe our actions going forward and how we can measure progress and uptake.

Are workers being encouraged to speak up during the COVID-19 pandemic?



Results from our Pulse Surveys run during the first wave of the pandemic.

We have worked closely with stakeholders, such as our Partnership Working Group, to ensure we capture the system learning extracted so far from our work in primary care. As we look to the future we are reassessing our approach both in terms of our own resources and capacity, but also in relation to our work with guardians.

The future of the guardian role is being shaped by new approaches to training, the way in which networks will be managed differently, a more diverse constituency and seeking to gain greater assurance through our systems and processes.

In 2020, we launched Speak Up, the first module in our e-learning package, developed in association with Health Education England, for all workers, so that they might have the tools to speak up. A second module for managers – Listen Up – launched in January 2021. The final e-learning module – Follow Up – developed for senior leaders – will be launched later in the year.



Governance

The National Guardian's Office (NGO) is funded by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), NHS England/Improvement. Senior representatives from the CQC and NHS Improvement form the office's Accountability and Liaison Board (ALB).

Current ALB members are:



Sir Robert Francis QC

CQC Non-Executive
Director



**Sir Andrew Morris,
OBE, Hon FRCP**

NHSI Non-Executive
Director

The ALB meets four times a year. Its responsibilities include:

- › Acting as a 'critical friend' for the office, providing input and guidance on strategic plans and development
- › Acting as key liaison point between the NGO and its funding bodies
- › Reviewing complaints made about the office

This report is laid before Parliament and the National Guardian for the NHS reports annually to the boards of CQC, NHS England/Improvement on the work of the NGO.

The office also receives advice and support from two groups it has developed. The first of these is the Partnership Working Group (PWG), whose

members are senior leaders drawn from the office's funding bodies, as well the Department of Health and Social Care. The PWG's purpose is to support the implementation of the National Guardian's work programme by providing insight and advice on emerging priorities and acting as a sounding board for ideas.

Liaison between the office and PWG members helps ensure the co-ordination of the organisations' respective work to support speaking up in healthcare.

The second of these groups is the Advisory Working Group (AWG), whose members are drawn from a range of backgrounds and interests. Their experience, knowledge and expertise on issues associated with speaking up, and the complexities of implementing change in the NHS inform the development of the office's work.

Structure

The National Guardian for the NHS is supported by a team consisting of 18 London or home-based members of staff as at December 2020.

Finances

The NGO was allocated an annual budget of £1,666,657 and spent a total of £1,349,844 in 2019-20.

Prescribed Person

The NGO is a 'prescribed person' for the purposes of s.43F of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. The office annually reports on the number of 'qualifying disclosures' workers have made to it and how it has responded to those disclosures.

Contacts

For more information about the National Guardian's Office visit www.nationalguardian.org.uk

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