



# National Guardian's Office Guidance

## Developing Freedom to Speak Up Champion and Ambassador Networks

Guidance for Freedom to Speak Up Guardians

April 2021



## Introduction

The role of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians and the National Guardian for the NHS were established in 2016 following recommendations from Sir Robert Francis' Freedom to Speak Up Inquiry. Freedom to Speak Up Guardians support workers to speak up when they feel that they are unable to do so by other routes. They ensure that people who speak up are thanked, the issues they raise are responded to and that the person speaking up receives feedback on the actions taken.

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians are appointed by the organisation they support and abide by the guidance issued by the National Guardian's Office. They work proactively to support their organisation to tackle barriers to speaking up. Guardians come from a wide range of professional backgrounds and seniorities.

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians cannot be effective in isolation. Their role requires them to work in partnership throughout their organisation to support speaking up and translate this learning to improve the safety and experience of all. This requires the time, commitment and support of everyone responsible for fostering a speak up, listen up, follow up culture.

Many organisations have developed internal Freedom to Speak Up networks to raise awareness and promote the value of speaking up, listening up and following up. Many guardians rely on these networks to address challenges posed by organisation size, geography and the nature of their work and to help them support workers, especially those who may face barriers to speaking up.

This guidance sets out principles for the development and support of Freedom to Speak Up Champion/Ambassador networks. It is aimed at Freedom to Speak Up Guardians to inform the work they do in partnership with their organisation to consider the needs of workers and how to meet them.



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## Acknowledgements

The National Guardian’s Office would like to express our gratitude to the guardians and organisations who kindly shared their learning and experience with us, allowing us to observe and ask questions. That learning has informed this guidance and the accompanying materials.

We hope that you find them useful whether you are looking to refresh your approach or are just starting on your freedom to speak up journey.

If you have any questions or would like to provide feedback, please contact us at [enquiries@nationalguardianoffice.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@nationalguardianoffice.org.uk) or on 0191 249 4400 (between 10am and 2pm)

## What is the role called?

The terms 'champion' and 'ambassador' are often used interchangeably to describe roles which are designed to support workers, raise awareness and promote the speaking up agenda.

Some organisations use the term 'advocate', but this can create confusion and a false expectation that there is a personal representative element to the role. We recommend that this term is not used.

Using either 'champion' or 'ambassador' helps to create a clear distinction between these roles and that of the Freedom to Speak up Guardian, depending on the purpose of the role within the organisation (see below). We will use the term 'champion' throughout this guidance for ease of reference.

## The purpose of speaking up support roles

We have observed that, in practice, champions are fulfilling the following functions which can be described broadly as:

1. Awareness raising
2. Signposting and support
3. Case handling

We are concerned that champions are being asked to manage speaking up cases that would normally be handled by a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, without the appropriate training and support that is required for the Guardian role. The National Guardian's Office recommends a clear distinction between the roles of champion and guardian and that **only Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, having received National Guardian's Office training and registered on the NGO's public directory, should handle these cases.**

## Principles

Whether a champion role is used to signpost, support or raise awareness, we expect the following principles to be applied:

Function	Detail	Outcome
<b>Awareness raising</b>	<p>Being visible and accessible</p> <p>Promoting speaking up within groups, departments and locations – particularly those that may be remote from other parts of the organisation</p> <p>Role modelling the values and behaviours associated with speaking up and listening up (<a href="#">See Freedom to Speak Up e-learning here</a>)</p>	<p>Workers are reminded of the importance of speaking up and encouraged to make it 'business as usual'</p>
<b>Signposting and support</b>	<p>Detailed knowledge of local speaking up policy and process including escalation routes and useful contacts</p> <p>Providing information on options available</p> <p>Escalating issues that must be acted on involving safety or safeguarding</p> <p>Being clear about the importance of and limits around confidentiality</p> <p>Understanding when to sign post, when to escalate and when to seek support</p>	<p>Workers are thanked and informed about the options available and feel empowered to take action themselves</p>
<b>Feedback</b>	<p>Understanding the importance of feedback</p>	<p>Workers feel listened to and that their voice counts</p> <p>Workers' feedback helps improve the support offered to everyone</p>
<b>Learning</b>	<p>Local mechanisms are in place to ensure that issues/themes are captured and communicated sensitively for wider learning.</p>	<p>Speaking up is an opportunity to learn and improve</p> <p>Workers see positive change happening as a</p>

		result of their actions and are celebrated wherever possible
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## Confidentiality

People may approach champions wanting to speak up so it is important that everyone understands the extent of the champion role and that they do not handle cases. Their role is to thank, support and signpost people to available routes that can offer resolution, including, where appropriate, the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

Champions do not record or report identifying details of the people who contact them **unless legally obliged to disclose information shared with them**. In exceptional circumstances, confidentiality may need to be broken, for example, if there is an immediate risk of harm to an individual. **However, there may be other ways to protect confidentiality**, even in situations when the champion must take action to safeguard an individual, for example, if the person contacting them does not take that action themselves.

Champions will share numbers of contacts and thematic information with the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian to enable wider learning.

## Communication

It is vital that workers understand the existence and purpose of the champion role. Clear, regular communications to workers will ensure that they are aware of who they can contact, how and what to expect in terms of support. This will help to avoid confusion between the guardian and champion roles and help workers choose the right route for them.

## Ring-fenced time

As with Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, we recommend that champions are given ring-fenced time for the role taking account of the time needed to carry out the role and to meet the needs of workers in their organisation.

## Appointment

As with Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, champions should be appointed in a fair and open way and should provide assurance that those in a champion role have the confidence of the workers they are supporting.

Local processes must offer assurance that there are no real or perceived barriers to anyone applying for or being appointed to the champion role

We recommend encouraging applications from groups who may face particular barriers to speaking up. Examples include workers with a disability, those from minority backgrounds, agency or shift workers, junior doctors and trainees. Looking at existing speaking up data and canvassing views of workers, existing networks and diversity groups will help inform your approach. Engaging with human resource, equality, diversity and inclusion and union colleagues as well as Workforce Race Equality/Disability Standards Teams, if your organisation has them, may encourage wider participation.

## Training

We expect all champions to complete the [Freedom to Speak Up e-learning modules co-produced by the NGO and Health Education England for workers and managers](#).

This will ensure that champions understand speaking up and the expectations about responding well when someone speaks up.

This may be supplemented with an information session delivered by the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. To help with this, the National Guardian's Office has produced [a presentation template](#) which can be adapted according to need.

Training needs are an ongoing conversation which should happen regularly to ensure that the needs of the network members are being met.

## Support

Speaking up roles are not easy and require regular support. Whilst champions will not be handling cases, they are still likely to be contacted about and affected by difficult and distressing issues.

Champions should therefore be given appropriate support and as a minimum, there should be regular opportunities for:

- Buddying
- Organisational champion network meetings
- Meetings with the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian
- Training
- Access to an employee assistance programme

## Monitoring the use and effectiveness of champion networks

We encourage a regular review of local champion networks to offer assurance that they continue to meet the needs of workers and members of the network, taking action to address any issues that arise. This could include:

- Regular opportunities for members to feedback how well it works for them and for workers
- Decisions about network size and composition and how regularly this is refreshed;
- Decisions about frequency and format of meetings
- Review of speaking up data and survey data/ feedback from workers so that the needs of all workers are met.
- How information and learning is shared

## Summary of Recommendations

- Do not use the term 'Advocate'
- Distinguish between the role of guardian and champion so that only Freedom to Speak Up Guardians handle speaking up cases
- Champions are given ring fenced time to do the role
- Champions are appointed in a fair and open way and barriers to appointment are identified and addressed
- Encourage applications from groups who face barriers to speaking up
- Champions undertake NGO/Health Education England [Speak Up, Listen Up](#) training
- Champions are provided with regular and suitable support
- The use and effectiveness of local Freedom to Speak Up networks are regularly reviewed

## Your Questions Answered

*Q. Do we have to have people called Freedom to Speak Up ambassadors or champions or can trusts have champions named something else that helps to promote good culture. The champions would link in with Freedom to Speak Up Guardians and HR?*

**A.** Our guidance indicates that the term ‘advocate’ should not be used. It encourages the use of the term ‘champion’ or ‘ambassador’ to promote consistency and enable workers who may transfer across organisations to quickly understand local speaking up arrangements. We know that many different types of champion, ambassador and other support roles already exist. In some cases, existing networks have been repurposed to include Freedom to Speak Up responsibilities. Our guidance acknowledges that this can be confusing and can blur the boundaries between what people in those roles might do in relation to speaking up, and what they may do in other aspects of their role. It is important that, whatever title is used, the principles in the guidance are followed to provide clarity and consistency and to minimise confusion.

*Q. We approached colleagues in specific groups such as the LGBT+ network to ensure the network was diverse and inclusive but those who volunteered haven’t been through a formal appointment process. Does that mean they have to stand down?*

**A.** No, however, Freedom to Speak Up Guardians should ensure that those who are already in champion / ambassador roles have the confidence of workers in their organisation. This may mean that guardians will want to look again at their networks. Our guidance states that champions are appointed in a fair and open way and encourages representation from people in groups who may face particular barriers to speaking up.

*Q. I have a network of champions who DO handle cases. As the sole guardian in a large organisation, I don’t have the capacity to deal with all of these on my own. What should I do?*

**A.** The NGO is not expecting immediate action and there will be a year from publication of the guidance to plan and implement refreshed arrangements. Support for you as the guardian should be an ongoing conversation with senior leaders to

ensure that sufficient time and resource is given to you and everyone in a speaking up role. If guardians are overstretched with handling cases and carrying out other aspects of their role as set out in the [Universal Job Description](#) leaders need to understand why. Senior Leaders need to assure themselves that they have effective speaking up arrangements in their organisation, including a properly resourced Freedom to Speak Up Guardian function.

*Q. What about cases brought to champions that guardians might have to follow up on?*

**A.** Champions do not handle speaking up cases. The nature of the champion role is to “thank, support and signpost to...including, where appropriate, the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.” Champions can play a positive role in modelling good speaking up behaviours and empowering workers to take action themselves (subject to safety caveats mentioned in the guidance) They can signpost individuals to speak up to guardians – if that is the right route for them and those individuals choose to do so. The guidance provides that numbers and thematic issues are able to be shared with guardians for wider learning. The intention is that confidentiality is not compromised but potential emerging issues are not missed.

*Q. Can champions pass on contact details to the guardian if asked to do so by the people who approach them?*

**A.** Wherever possible we would advise that champions encourage the person who contacts them to contact the guardian directly themselves. This will avoid blurring the lines between ‘signposting’ and ‘case handling’. There is a risk that even what seems like a simple action could result in a champion being seen as part of the escalation route or even being drawn into a case.

*Q. I include the cases dealt with by champions when reporting quarterly data to the NGO – should I stop?*

**A.** The NGO guidance document on [recording cases and reporting data](#) allows for the situation where cases are currently handled by champions/ambassadors. The end of transition period will coincide with the start of Quarter 1 data in 2022 to allow guardians to reflect refreshed arrangements and the guidance will be updated to reflect this.

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