



**National
Guardian**
Freedom to Speak Up

Speaking up to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians: Q1 – 2 2020/21 Interim Data

National Guardian's Office

The [National Guardian's Office](#) (NGO) provides training, support and guidance to an expanding network of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians.

The NGO challenges and supports the health system in England on all matters related to speaking up.

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians

Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) Guardians support workers to speak up, as well as working with others in their organisation to tackle barriers to speaking up.

There are around 600 FTSU Guardians across NHS trusts, independent health care providers, national bodies and primary care organisations. The NGO maintains a [directory](#) of FTSU Guardians. It includes contact details for FTSU Guardians that have received training in line with NGO requirements.

FTSU Guardians submit non-identifiable information to the NGO about the speaking up cases raised with them.

The data in this report is based on **interim** figures for Q1 – 2 2020/21. FTSU Guardians will have an opportunity to reconcile their data for the year (2020/21) in April – May 2021.

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Speaking up to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians: Q1-2 2020/21

Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) Guardians have reported a record number of cases brought to them by workers. Between 1 April and 30 September 2020, FTSU Guardians reported receiving 9,754 speaking up cases, an increase of 33.7% on the same period in the previous year.

The data FTSU Guardians submitted for Q1 – 2 2020/21 showed that:

- There was a 12.4% increase in cases from Q4 2019/20 to Q1 2020/21 (April – May 2020) and a 3.6% decrease from Q1 2020/21 to Q2 (June – August 2020).
- Nineteen per cent (19.4%) of cases raised included an element of patient safety/quality, which was lower than the same period in 2019/20 (25.3%). Similarly, a smaller percentage (30.1%) of cases included an element of bullying and harassment compared to the same period in the previous year (37.5%).¹
- Twelve per cent (12.2%) of cases were raised anonymously; a decrease from 13.1% in the same time period last year.
- Perceptions of negative treatment for speaking up was indicated in 2.9% of cases; a decrease from 3.5% in the same reporting period in the previous year.
- The biggest portion of cases (30.4%) were brought by nurses and midwives, followed by administration, clerical and maintenance/ancillary workers (20.8%).
- Most cases (78.1%) were brought by individuals in the ‘worker’ professional level, with the remaining brought by those categorised as ‘manager’, ‘senior leader’ or ‘not disclosed’.
- FTSU Guardians operating in NHS trusts accounted for 97.4% of the speaking up cases reported, though they account for around two-thirds of FTSU Guardians on the NGO's [directory](#).

¹ A case may include an element of patient safety/quality as well as an element of bullying and harassment.

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Table 1. Interim data on cases brought to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians (Q1 – 2 2020/21)

	Q1 2020/21	Q2 2020/21
Cases that included an element of patient safety/quality	961	931
Cases that included an element of bullying and harassment	1,412	1,528
Cases where there was a perception of negative treatment for speaking up	143	137
Cases that raised anonymously	593	596
Total cases	4,966	4,788

The interim data supports the results of a series of monthly [pulse surveys](#) we carried between April and June 2020. These surveys sought to understand how the pandemic was affecting speaking up and FTSU Guardians, particularly in the context of issues such as personal protective equipment (PPE), and real or perceived anxieties around speaking up.

Most FTSU Guardians who took part in the surveys reported that workers continued to be encouraged to speak up.

Throughout the three surveys, an increasing portion of respondents said the amount of speaking up was staying the same or increasing, rising from around 60% in April to almost 85% in June.

The interim speaking up data (Q1 – 2 2020/21) shows that a decreasing percentage of reported cases included an element of patient safety/care or bullying and harassment. This is a trend we observed in our 2019/2020 [Annual Speaking Up Data Report](#).

The pulse surveys showed workers were speaking up to FTSU Guardians about other issues, including worker safety and wellbeing. Seventy-nine per cent (79%) of FTSU Guardians that participated in the last pulse survey (June 2020) reported that worker safety and wellbeing was a matter being spoken up about to them.

In our 2019/2020 Annual Speaking Up Data Report, we said we would look to broaden the categories of information we ask FTSU Guardians to record and report beyond patient safety and bullying and harassment in future data recording guidance.

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Feedback

Feedback should be sought from workers about their speaking up experience.

NGO [guidance](#) states that FTSU Guardians should seek feedback when a case is closed, even when the individual speaking up may be unhappy with the outcome of their case.

The overwhelming majority (83.9%) of individuals who provided feedback said they would speak up again.² In 2.7% of cases, individuals who spoke up to FTSU Guardians said they would not speak up again.

Table 2. 'Given your experience, would you speak up again?'

	Yes	No	Maybe	Don't know	Total
Q1	1,417	43	80	190	1,649
Q2	1,213	41	113	117	1,484

Common themes from the feedback included:

- Workers who spoke up to a FTSU Guardian often felt listened to and supported in the process of speaking up. Nearly 16% of comments received in the common themes from feedback mentioned workers felt listened to and 13% of comments mentioned workers felt supported by the FTSU Guardian.
- The feedback largely shows positive experiences from speaking up to a FTSU Guardian, including being grateful to have an independent person with whom they could speak. Many individuals stated they would speak up again and wished they had spoken up sooner.
- Nearly a quarter of comments referenced matters regarding the pandemic, including social distancing, personal protective equipment, redeployment of workers and general anxiety around the pandemic (including risk to households). Worker safety and wellbeing during the pandemic was also a key theme, with some individuals noting their reluctance to speak up due to the pandemic.
- Behaviours and attitudes of workers, particularly managers, was a matter spoken about to FTSU Guardians. There were also reports of bullying and harassment of workers, with bullying mentioned in nearly 7% of comments in the common themes from feedback.
- Cases were raised about managers relating to communication issues, leadership styles, being unapproachable and general behaviour matters.

² The time from when a case is opened to when its closed means that cases where feedback is sought to this question does not correlate to the cases received during a given quarter.

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- Policies and procedures (including those relating to COVID-19) were mentioned frequently, with issues around these not being followed, and training on specific procedures being inadequate.
- Matters to do with equality, diversity and inclusion were brought to FTSU Guardians. According to FTSU Guardians, some of these cases were historical, and workers who had raised them had said they had felt able to do so on the back of the Black Lives Matter movement.

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Learning

Speaking up is an opportunity to learn and improve.

In accordance with NGO guidance, FTSU Guardians are asked to record the learning points arising out of each case to enable them to make suggestions for improvement.

The learning points also allow the NGO to spot broader trends and themes.

The key learning points were the following:

- Communication was mentioned in over a fifth of the comments – particularly between managers/leaders up and workers – indicating a potential need for improvement in this area. Specifically, learning in this area included the need to explain the rationale for changes (e.g. to services and organisational changes), the need for communication through various channels and formats to reach all workers, and the need for communication of difficult messages being improved. Attitudes and behaviours of management were also raised throughout the feedback from FTSU Guardians.
- The pandemic was referenced in around a quarter of the comments, including social distancing policies and the continuous communication of the importance of following these policies. FTSU Guardians reported heightened anxiety among workers during the pandemic. There were concerns raised about the availability, suitability and proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE). The pandemic had reduced the ability of FTSU Guardians to do walkabouts within their respective organisations. At the same time, communication with workers who were shielding or working from home was also referenced as an area for learning and improvement. FTSU Guardians commented on the impact the pandemic was having on staff wellbeing, leading to stress and burnout. Workers being redeployed due to the pandemic was also been referenced as an issue, with learning around this having been communicated to workers.
- Some FTSU Guardians have learnt that early intervention and quicker resolution of issues generally leads to more positive outcomes.
- According to some FTSU Guardians, the Black Lives Matter movement had led some black, Asian and minority ethnic workers to bring more cases to them, including historic matters. In some organisations, FTSU Guardians said there had been targeted support for black, Asian and minority ethnic workers, including raising awareness of how to speak up, executive colleagues meeting black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues who have spoken up, and networks established for black, Asian and minority ethnic workers.
- FTSU Guardians noted some cases where individuals speaking up needed a listening ear and reassurance, and not necessarily for action to be taken.

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Next steps

We will share this interim report with stakeholders, including the Care Quality Commission and other systems and professional regulators.

As mentioned above, we are reviewing our guidance for FTSU Guardians on [Recording Cases and Reporting Data](#) with input from FTSU Guardians, particularly to understand more about cases brought to them which do not include an element of patient safety and/or bullying and harassment.

Relevant data relating to NHS trusts will be uploaded to the [Model Hospital](#), allowing NHS trusts, including FTSU Guardians in those organisations – as well as others in the health system – to compare metrics and identify areas of opportunity and improvement.