

# National Guardian Freedom to Speak Up

## Results of third Pulse Survey (June 2020) – COVID-19

The National Guardian's Office (NGO) leads, develops and supports an expanding network of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, who support workers to speak up and to effect culture change so speaking up becomes business as usual.

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

### Why we have carried out this survey

During this extraordinary time for the health and care sector, the importance of workers being able to speak up freely is more evident than ever.

The NGO has been carrying out monthly pulse surveys to find out more about how speaking up is being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This report details the results of the third and final survey in this series of focused pulse surveys.

The results of the survey show the pandemic was continuing to have an impact on Freedom to Speak Up Guardians and their networks. Almost two-thirds of respondents continued to report they - or someone in their organisation's Freedom to Speak Up network - had been asked to take on other duties to support efforts to respond to the pandemic. The results also show speaking up was continuing. There was a rise in the percentage of respondents reporting speaking up had increased in their organisation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

An increasing percentage of respondents also reported that workers were encouraged to speak up during the pandemic.

We want to thank all workers for all they are doing to support patients and their colleagues during this challenging time. We also want to thank those who took part in this survey.

**June 25, 2020**

## **Methodology**

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians included on the [NGO's directory](#) were invited to take part in the survey, which was open between 3 PM on June 5th until 5 PM on June 10th, 2020.

The third survey consisted of up to 19 questions (see Annex 1).

Of those who received the survey, 28% (151) responded.

Eighty-one per cent (81%) of those who took part in the survey worked for an NHS trust. Fifteen per cent (15%) worked for other providers of healthcare services, and 4% worked for other types of organisations (such as commissioners and national bodies).

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians from organisations based in all regions of the country took part in the survey, including guardians from multi-regional or national organisations.

A. Freedom to Speak Up Guardians/networks

The COVID-19 pandemic was continuing to have an impact on Freedom to Speak Up Guardians or others in their organisation's Freedom to Speak Up networks. However, the proportion of respondents who reported they or someone in their network was suffering from ill-health or self-isolating continued to decrease

**Are you, or is anyone in your organisation's Freedom to Speak Up network, suffering from ill-health or self-isolating as a result of COVID-19?**

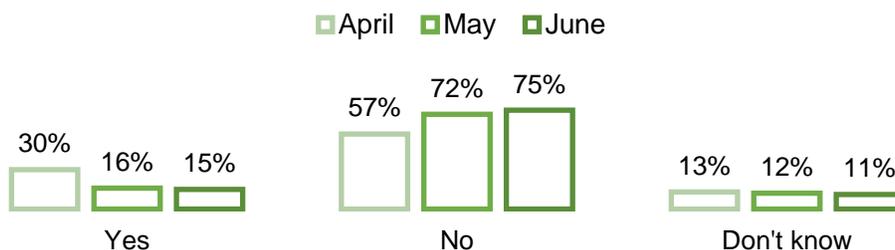


Figure 1

Fifteen per cent (15%) of respondents said they or someone in their organisation's Freedom to Speak Up network had been suffering from ill-health or self-isolating as a result of COVID-19 (figure 1, see above).

**Have you, or has anyone in your organisation's Freedom to Speak up network, been asked to take on other duties to support efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

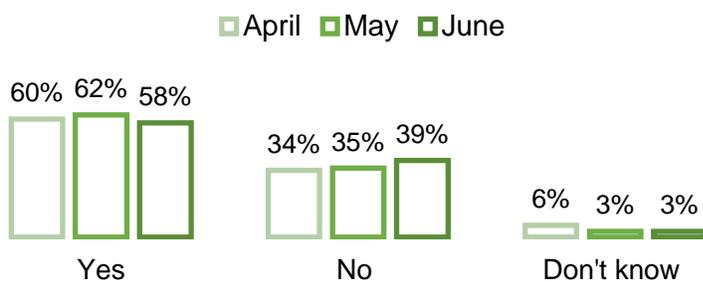


Figure 2

Fifty-eight per cent (58%) of respondents said they or others in their organisation's Freedom to Speak Up network had been asked to take on other duties to support efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic (figure 2, see above).

*"I have been [redeployed]. I have been working more clinical hours to fit in with the shift patterns which has used the...hours of time I used to get each week for Freedom to Speak Up. Having to do the guardian role all in my own time. I don't feel that I have been able to fulfil it properly because I cannot do any Freedom to Speak Up work when on a clinical shift and I need rest time. I am doing what I can when I can."*

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## Workers were as confident as they were before the pandemic to approach Freedom to Speak Up Guardians

Most respondents (67%) reported they thought workers were as confident to approach Freedom to Speak Up Guardians as they were before the COVID-19 pandemic. Twenty-three per cent (23%) of respondents said workers would be more confident to approach them, and three per cent said workers would be less confident.

We invited respondents to explain their response. There were 103 responses. The following are the main themes from the responses:

- Suggestion there was no change in the level of confidence among workers to approach their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian (38 responses)
- Comments about the additional communication efforts to raise the profile of Freedom to Speak Up (26)
- Suggestion there was decreased confidence among workers to approach their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian (16)
- Suggestion there was increased confidence among workers to approach their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian (10)
- Suggestion it was too soon to be able to say what impact the pandemic had on workers' confidence to approach their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian (4)
- Comments about other systems set up during the pandemic to receive concerns (5).

The following are a selection of answers:

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*“More people are expressing and looking for ways to be heard. The role has been published more via trust-wide communications, managers have been showing commitment and advertising the role more. Freedom to Speak Up has been able to tap into psychological wellbeing training, wellbeing as a whole and BAME employee networks. COVID-19 has really helped with exposure of Freedom to Speak Up. Trust Leadership has really supported the exposure of this role in supporting BAME staff and PPE/COVID-19 issues.”*

*“I find that people say they are confident to approach me as a guardian from their [anonymous] feedback...after they have spoken up.”*

*“I am having more issues raised to me, however, more than usual I am being asked to deal with things confidentially - there seems more fear*

*“Staff have received a very rapid response, particularly concerning COVID-19 issues, from both Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and Executive Directors.”*

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*about potential repercussions of speaking up about poor attitudes and behaviours from colleagues and managers.”*

*“It still feels very early in terms of being able to judge the impact of COVID-19 in terms of people speaking up. I think everyone has been extremely pre-occupied with the gravity and reaction to the pandemic. I feel that in many instances, it is only now as we make moves towards a less high alert and perhaps more medium to long-term way of thinking that workers are having a chance to reflect and consider some of the impacts on them, their patients and colleagues.”*

*“Although the trust has not personally dissuaded anyone from speaking, the opposite in fact, the stories in the press of bullying, etc. have had an effect on staff coming forward.”*

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B. Speaking up activity

**Speaking up was continuing with a growing percentage of respondents reporting speaking up was increasing compared to the last survey**

Fifty-one per cent (51%) of respondents said speaking up had 'slightly' or 'considerably' increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirty-two per cent (32%) said there had been no change to the amount of speaking up, while 17 per cent said speaking up had 'slightly' or 'considerably' decreased.

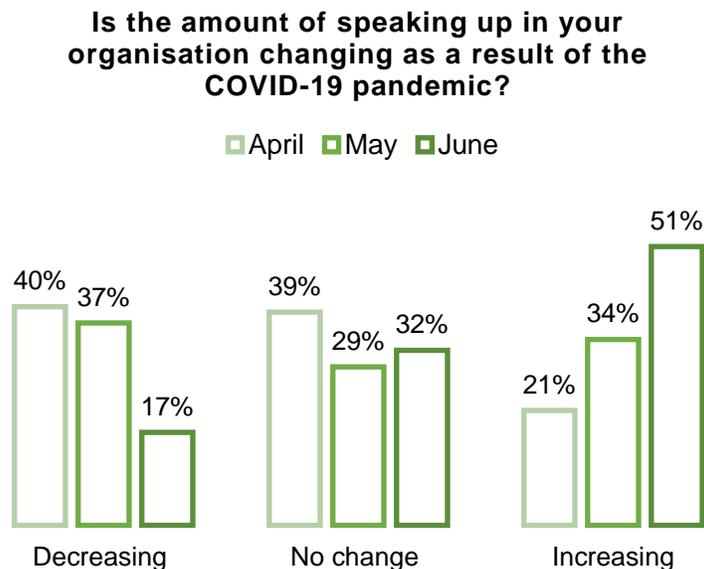


Figure 3

**Workers were continuing to speak up about worker safety and wellbeing**

*“I have had a couple of conversations with staff who feel they shouldn't speak up because their concern is not about COVID-19, which is the current priority. I said the organisation wants to hear all concerns even if the concern is not about COVID-19 and is encouraging staff to continue to report.”*

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Seventy-nine per cent (79%) of respondents said worker safety and wellbeing was a matter being spoken up about, down from 83 per cent in last month's pulse survey. This was closely followed by behavioural issues, including bullying and harassment (74%), up from 57 per cent in last month's pulse survey. Thirty-nine per cent (39%) of respondents said patient safety and wellbeing was a matter being spoken up about, up from 32 per cent in last month's survey.

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### Workers were speaking up about a variety of worker safety and wellbeing issues, including social distancing, personal protective equipment (PPE) and the impact of COVID-19 on black, Asian and minority ethnic workers

We asked respondents who reported worker safety and wellbeing issues were being spoken up about to select the types of worker safety and wellbeing issues workers were raising. There were 115 responses.

Issues to do with social distancing and PPE were the most often selected by respondents (see figure 4, below). There was an increase in the percentage of respondents reporting workers were speaking up about the impact of COVID-19 on black, Asian and minority ethnic workers, and support of returners to the workforce.

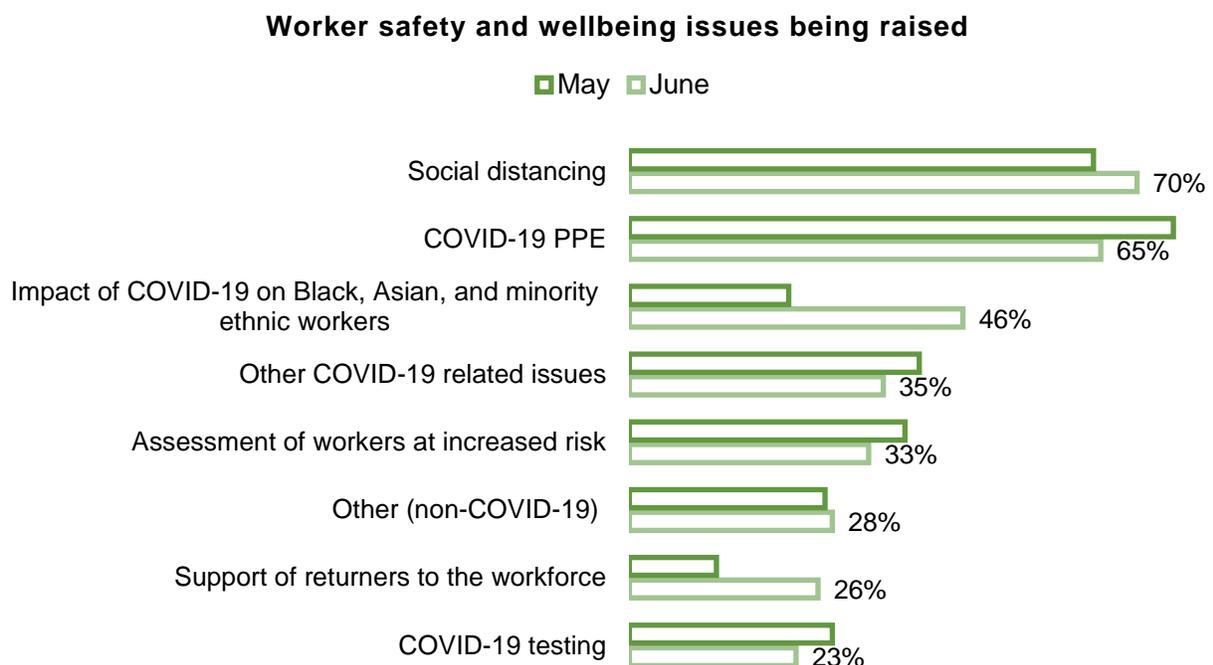


Figure 4

### Workers were speaking up about the availability of personal protective equipment (PPE)

We asked respondents who said workers were speaking up about PPE to specify the types of issues being raised. There were 74 responses.

Seventy-seven per cent (77%) of respondents said the availability of PPE was being spoken up about. Thirty-one per cent (31%) reported workers were speaking up about fit testing, and 35% of respondents said workers were speaking up about other issues to do with PPE.

C. Support for speaking up and Freedom to Speak Up Guardians

Workers were continuing to be encouraged to speak up during the COVID-19 pandemic (figure 5, see below). The proportion of respondents that indicated this continued to increase

Ninety-three per cent (93%) of respondents said workers were being encouraged to speak up during the COVID-19 pandemic. Five per cent (5%) disagreed.

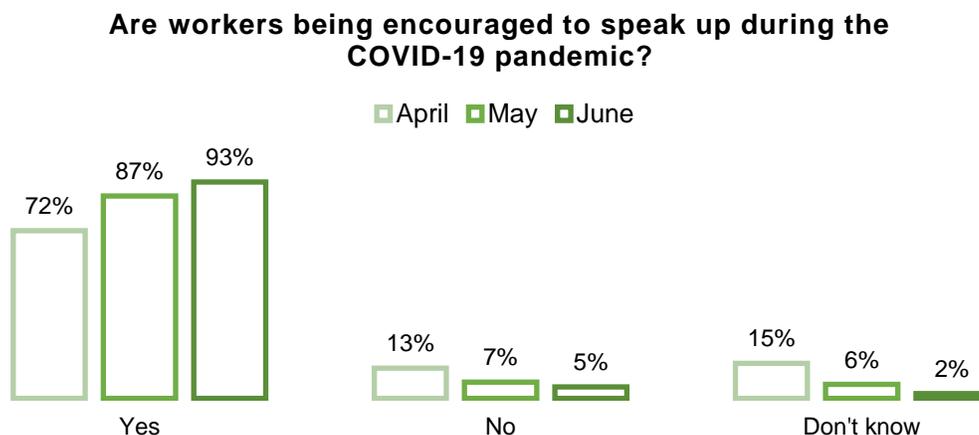


Figure 5

**Most respondents had not witnessed or been approached about workers in their organisation experiencing negative behaviours or messages for speaking up about COVID-19**

We asked respondents whether they had witnessed or been approached about workers in their organisation experiencing negative behaviours or messages (including discouragement, intimidation and bullying) regarding speaking up about matters related to COVID-19 using internal and external (e.g. regulators, professional bodies) channels, as well as social media.

Most respondents did not report witnessing or being approached about such behaviours or messages regarding speaking up (see figure 6, below). However, the proportion of respondents who did report negative behaviours is still a source of concern.

*“An ever-increasing issue is the communication with staff. It is unhelpful of government ministers to announce things on daily press briefings before notifying trust leaders. On at least two occasions, major announcements have come at 5pm on a Friday afternoon and this has resulted in staff contacting me over the weekend to seek guidance regarding the announcement. This causes a lack of trust between staff and trust leaders as staff think info is hidden from them when this rarely turns out to be the case.”*

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**Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you witnessed or been approached about workers in your organisation experiencing negative behaviours and messages regarding speaking up about matters related to COVID-19 using the following channels?**

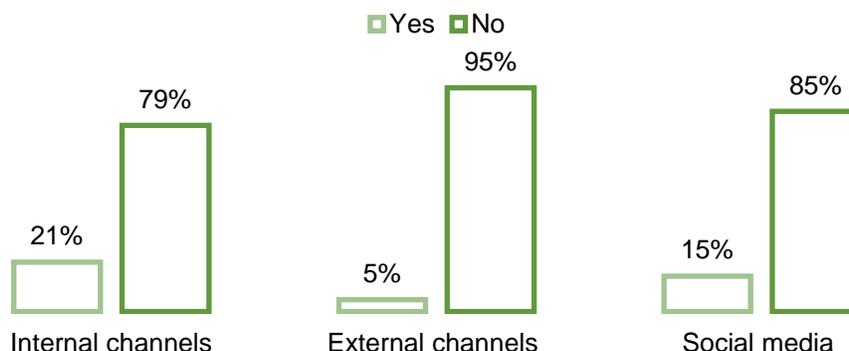


Figure 6

**Most respondents reported no change in the level of support from their senior team. The percentage of respondents reporting reduced support continued to decrease**

Sixty-seven per cent (67%) of respondents said the level of support they were receiving from their senior team had not changed, up from 65 per cent in last month's survey. Nineteen per cent (19%) of respondents said the level of support had increased.

**How would you describe the levels of support you are getting as a FTSU Guardian from your senior team?**

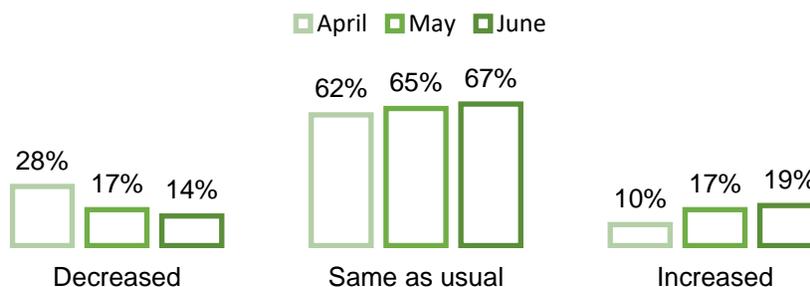


Figure 7

D. Recovery

**Next phase response to COVID-19 recovery discussions were taking place. However, most respondents reported they were not involved in these discussions**

*"I think there is potential for rich qualitative and sometimes anecdotal evidence we have of the temperature of the organisation is being missed, because we are not always linked to the plans for restoring services, for example."*

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Ninety-five per cent (95%) of respondents said they were aware of next phase response to COVID-19 recovery discussions taking place in their organisation. Of those who were aware of such discussions, 56% said they were not involved. Forty-four per cent (44%) said they were involved in these discussions.

We invited respondents to share further information to help us to continue to develop a picture of how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting speaking up. There were 37 responses.

The following are the main themes from the responses:

- Positive comments about Freedom to Speak Up arrangements (11 responses)
- Challenges to Freedom to Speak Up arrangements, particularly regarding home working and social distancing (5)
- Behavioural issues (e.g. bullying and harassment) not being prioritised (or being perceived as not being a priority) (4)
- Observations on recovery discussions (4)
- Concerns about the impact of the pandemic (and behaviours during this period) on worker morale and wellbeing (4)
- Concerns regarding Freedom to Speak Up arrangements or culture (3)
- Concerns about a second peak of COVID-19 infections (2)

The following are a selection of answers:

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*"Staff feel strongly about protecting themselves and others and this has had an empowering effect for some people. However, it has also had a reverse effect for others who feel that behaviours etc. are exacerbated by COVID-19 and so excuse these. COVID-19 has also brought equality issues to the fore, i.e. BAME, Gender, Learning disabilities and the huge impact of mental health."*

*"There is currently a great deal of emotion, anxiety, trauma and loss in our trust. We have lost colleagues and our way of life has changed completely. I am seeing a real impact on people's mental health which does impact on mine as a guardian too. I have good support at my trust"*

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*but it is a difficult and different time to anything I have ever experienced. However, certainly at our trust it appears to have galvanised people to speak up openly and our board have reacted with open arms.”*

*“I really do miss walking the shop floor, we are trying virtual visits but uptake is low. I had to go into work last week and in the space of 25 minutes had picked up three conversations that I just would not have had if not in the right place at the right time.”*

*“In March, concerns were all PPE and ‘lockdown’ or ‘self-isolation’ based. Now in June, we are seeing social distancing, cleanliness and communication of messages from managers up/down to staff about these issues being the main concerns. As one member of staff said, ‘Patients are sorted and safe – now it’s staff who aren’t safe in the tiny spaces we work in.’”*

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## Annex 1

**Q1 Please indicate the type of organisation you work in:**

- Trust or Foundation Trust
- Another provider of healthcare services
- Any other organisation (ALB, commissioning, etc.)

**Q2 In which region of the country is your organisation located?**

- East of England
- London
- Midlands
- North East and Yorkshire
- North West
- South East
- South West
- Multi-regional or national organisation

**Q3 Are you rated by the CQC and, if so, what is your rating?**

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires Improvement
- Inadequate
- My organisation is not rated by the CQC

**Q4 Are you, or is anyone in your organisation's Freedom to Speak Up network, suffering from ill-health or self-isolating as a result of COVID-19?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**Q5 Have you, or has anyone in your organisation's Freedom to Speak Up network, been asked to take on other duties to support efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**Q6 Is the amount of speaking up in your organisation increasing or decreasing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?**

- Decreasing considerably
- Decreasing slightly

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- No change
- Increasing slightly
- Increasing considerably

**Q7 What sort of matters are being spoken up about (please tick all that apply)?**

- Worker safety and wellbeing
- Patient safety and wellbeing
- Bullying and harassment or other behavioural issues
- Other

**Q8 If you selected worker safety and wellbeing, please provide further information (please tick all that apply)**

- COVID-19 personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Social distancing
- COVID-19 testing
- Impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian or Ethnic Minority (BAME) workers
- Assessment of workers at increased risk
- Support of returners to the workforce
- Other COVID-19 related to worker safety and wellbeing issues
- Other (non-COVID-19) worker safety and wellbeing issues

**Q9 If you selected COVID-19 personal protective equipment (PPE), please provide further information (please tick all that apply)**

- Availability of PPE
- Fit testing
- Other

**Q10 Are workers being encouraged to speak up during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**Q11 Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you witnessed or been approached about workers in your organisation experiencing negative behaviours and messages (including discouragement, intimidation, bullying etc.) regarding speaking up about matters related to COVID-19 using INTERNAL speaking up channels (such as raising matters to line managers, senior leaders, or you as a guardian)?**

- Yes
- No

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**Q12 Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you witnessed or been approached about workers in your organisation experiencing negative behaviours and messages (including discouragement, intimidation, bullying etc.) regarding speaking up about matters related to COVID-19 using EXTERNAL speaking up channels (such as raising matters to regulators or professional bodies)?**

- Yes
- No

**Q13 Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, have you witnessed or been approached about workers in your organisation experiencing negative behaviours and messages (including discouragement, intimidation, bullying etc.) regarding commenting on the impact of COVID-19 on SOCIAL MEDIA?**

- Yes
- No

**Q14 Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, how confident do you think workers are to approach you as a FTSU Guardian?**

- More confident
- Same as usual
- Less confident
- Don't know

**Q15 Please explain your response.**

**Q16 How would you describe the levels of support you are getting as a FTSU Guardian from your senior team?**

- The level of support I am getting has decreased
- The level of support I am getting is the same as usual
- The level of support I am getting has increased

**Q17 As far as you aware, are next phase response to COVID-19 recovery discussions taking place in your organisation?**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

**Q18 If you selected yes, are you as a FTSU Guardian involved in these recovery discussions?**

- Yes
- No

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**Q19 Is there any other information that you wish to provide that will help us develop a picture of how COVID-19 is affecting speaking up?**