

May 14, 2020

National Guardian Freedom to Speak Up

Results of second Pulse Survey (May 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 that 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

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues to be an unprecedented challenge to the health and care sector, putting enormous pressure on workers.

The Freedom to Speak Up has never been more important.

The National Guardian's Office is 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 second in this series of 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 reported that 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 that speaking up was continuing, with a rise in the percentage of respondents reporting that speaking up had increased in their organisation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We want to thank all workers for everything 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.

May 14, 2020

Methodology

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians included on the National Guardian Office's directory were invited through email to take part in the survey, which was open between 3 PM on May 1 until 5 PM on May 6, 2020.

The survey consisted of 17 questions (see Annex 1).

Of those who received the survey, 31% (168) responded.

Eighty-one per cent (81%) of those who took part in the survey worked for an NHS Trust or Foundation 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 that they or someone in their network was suffering from ill-health or self-isolating had decreased since the previous survey

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?

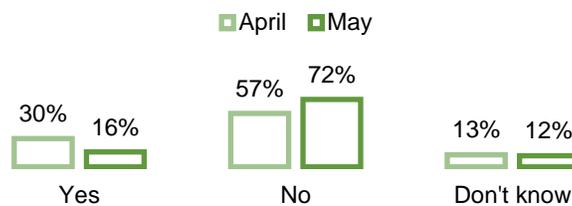


Figure 1

Sixteen per cent (16%) 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

Sixty-two per cent (62%) 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).

May 14, 2020

B. Speaking up activity

Speaking up to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians was continuing with a higher proportion of respondents reporting that speaking up was increasing compared to the last survey

Twenty-nine per cent (29%) of respondents said there had been no change to the amount of speaking up in their organisation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (see figure 3, below).

Thirty-seven per cent (37%) said speaking up had 'slightly' or 'considerably' decreased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thirty-four per cent (34%) reported speaking up had 'slightly' or 'considerably' increased. In comparison, 21% of respondents in last month's survey reported speaking up had increased.

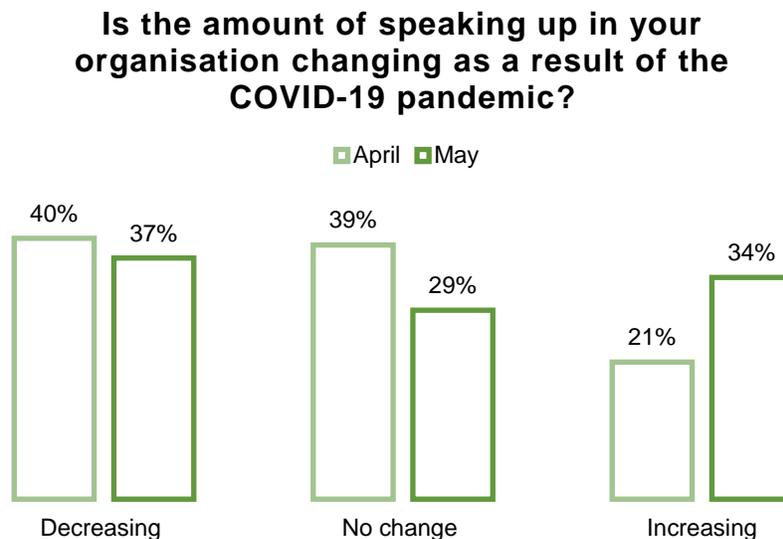


Figure 3

There were mixed views on how likely workers were to speak up during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to before the pandemic started (figure 4, see below)

Thirty-nine per cent (39%) of respondents thought workers were as likely to speak up during the COVID-19 pandemic as before. Thirty-one per cent (31%) of respondents thought workers were more likely to speak up than they were before the pandemic, whereas 24% thought workers were less likely.

How likely do you think workers are to speak up during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to before the pandemic started?

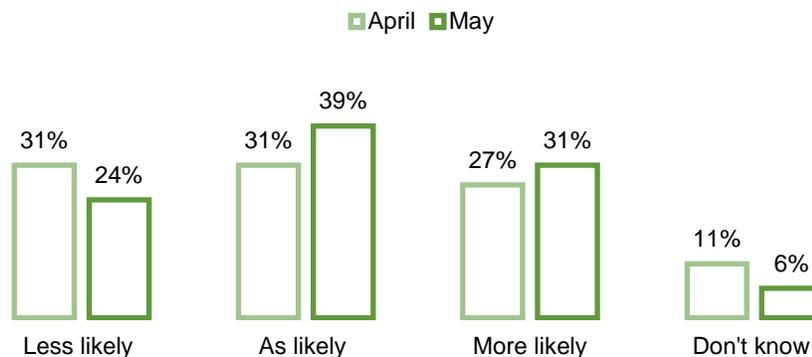


Figure 4

We invited respondents to provide further information to explain their response. There were 117 responses to this question.

The following were the main themes from the answers as to why workers may be more or less likely to speak up during COVID-19 pandemic compared to before.

Nineteen per cent (19%) of respondents said workers were busy and occupied with responding to the pandemic, and that this could have an impact on their likelihood to speak up. Seven per cent (7%) said workers were possibly inhibited by worries that their concerns were not a priority during the pandemic, and this too could affect their likelihood to speak up.

Sixteen per cent (16%) of respondents described the efforts made to encourage staff to speak up during the pandemic. This included increased promotion of Freedom to Speak Up arrangements. Eleven per cent (11%) of respondents said they thought the pandemic might make workers more likely to speak up, particularly because of the risks posed by the pandemic to the safety of patients and workers.

The following are illustrative examples of the answers to this question:

...

“There is a lot of pressure on staff about COVID-19. Especially volumes of positive patients and wearing PPE. Staff are exhausted.”

“I think there is a mindset of 'we just need to get the job done'. COVID-19 has taken over every working hour at the moment.”

“I am concerned that staff do not feel that non-COVID-19 concerns are important enough to raise currently. I am actively promoting this in the trust to ensure all staff know that no concern is too small to raise.”

May 14, 2020

“Increased fears over job/financial security leading to higher levels of acceptance and reluctance to speak up. People feeling that everyone is too busy and under too much pressure and that they would be seen as disloyal in raising any issues at the moment. I am observing a lot of this and it is a huge barrier.”

“Many staff want to raise concerns anonymously.”

“I think COVID-19 prompted more staff to exceed their comfort ‘threshold’ and so more people have been to speak to FTSU Guardians. They feel more validated in raising concerns. And as more staff use the facility, more word of mouth spreads and awareness builds.”

“Staff are being encouraged to speak up more in response to the pandemic. There is a definite increase on focus to look after staff’s mental wellbeing.”

“Workers are speaking up more directly to their line managers and supervisors. We have BAME staff members speaking up to the Equality and Inclusion champion.”

...

Workers were continuing to speak up about worker safety and wellbeing

Eighty-three per cent (83%) of respondents said worker safety and wellbeing was a matter being spoken up about, representing an increase from 76% in last month’s survey. This was followed by behavioural issues, including bullying and harassment (57%) and issues to do with patient safety and wellbeing (32%).

Workers were speaking up about a variety of worker safety and wellbeing issues, including personal protective equipment (PPE) and social distancing

We asked respondents who reported that 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 130 responses to this question.

May 14, 2020

Issues to do with personal protective equipment and social distancing were the most often selected by respondents (see figure 5, below).

Worker safety and wellbeing issues being raised

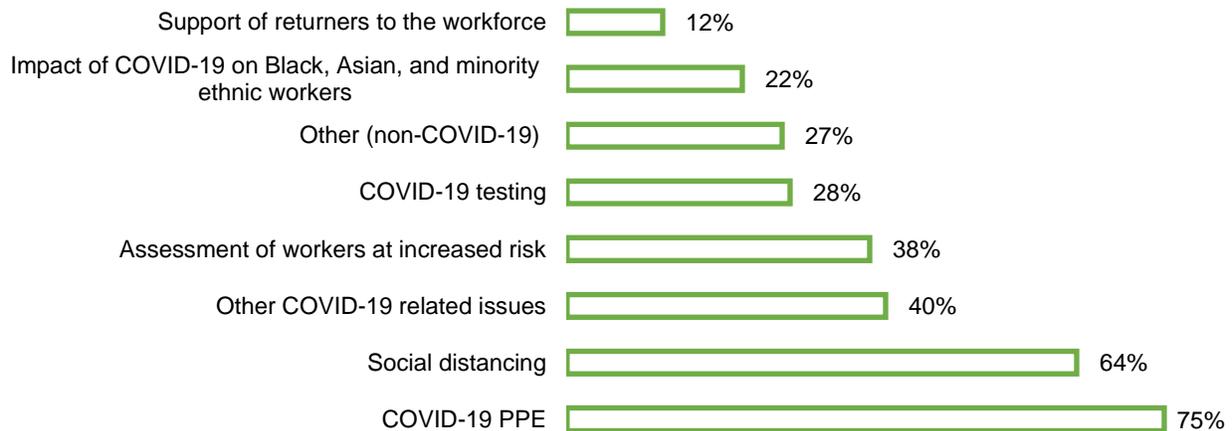


Figure 5

C. Speaking up arrangements and the handling of speaking up cases

Most respondents said the COVID-19 pandemic had not affected the handling of speaking up issues, although a large proportion of respondents had noted changes

Fifty-four per cent (54%) said the handling of speaking up issues had not been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Twenty-seven per cent (27%) said the handling of speaking up issues had 'slightly' or 'considerably' deteriorated, while 19% said it had 'slightly' or 'considerably' improved.

We invited respondents to provide further information about whether and how the pandemic had affected the handling of speaking up issues. There were 126 responses to this question.

Fifty-seven per cent (57%) of those who responded to this question described how the handling of speaking up issues had deteriorated. The following were the main themes from these answers (percentage of total respondents to this question [126] who gave this answer):

- The reduced availability of others (e.g. investigators) and the effect this was having on the handling of speaking up issues (10%)
- The reduced capacity of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians/networks and the impact this was having on the handling of speaking up issues (8%)
- The deprioritisation of non-COVID-19 issues, including behavioural issues such as bullying, and the impact this was having on the handling of these speaking up issues (7%)

May 14, 2020

- The deprioritisation of Freedom to Speak Up and the impact this was having on speaking up issues (8%)
- The impact of homeworking on the handling of speaking up issues (8%).

Forty-one per cent (41%) of those who responded described how the handling of speaking up issues had improved. The following were the main themes from these answers:

- The systems put in place to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and their use to escalate and address issues (8%)
- The effective response to COVID-19 related issues workers were speaking up about (6%)
- The positive support from senior leaders for Freedom to Speak Up (6%)
- The partnering of Freedom to Speak Up with wellbeing initiatives (6%).

The following are illustrative examples of the answers to this question:

....

"I am working from home which makes it harder for me to contact those who would ordinarily be available as limited access to trust network. Also, many wards have closed or changed roles so staff have been moved/changed roles etc. So it takes a little longer to trace the right staff to follow things up."

"I have continued to receive support and timely responses to speaking up issues."

"We constantly promote FTSU and who guardians are. We do get contacted and are able to signpost or support. No change in the COVID-19 period from business as usual period."

"I have been redeployed and do not have the time to follow up some concerns as regularly as I usually would. Also, senior leaders are caught up with COVID-19 and this is taking priority."

"Trust focused on operational procedures and not prioritising staff concerns."

"More difficult to progress cases due to increased workloads of others, and therefore reduced availability."

"COVID-19 issues are being dealt with, but other normal issues are not being prioritised."

"As staff are not available then cases cannot be investigated until staff return and re-deployment staff who would normally have time to help are busy in other areas."

"Harder when you can't meet face to face."

"Initially senior leaders were focused on the pandemic and configuring services, etc. It is now getting easier to contact leaders to discuss concerns and agree a way forward."

"In some areas it has decreased - i.e. there is much less capacity to deal with the smaller issues over one-to-one behaviours. But the larger safety issues have seen a fantastic response both to

May 14, 2020

issues raised via me but also staff feeling safer to speak up without having to come via me which has been brilliant to see. All done safely and with no detriment."

....

Speaking up arrangements had been adapted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Most respondents (53%) continued to say they, as Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, or their organisations had made changes to their speaking up arrangements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This compares to 47% of respondents who reported no changes had been made to their speaking up arrangements as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We invited respondents to provide further information about how their speaking up arrangements had been adapted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were 88 responses to this question.

Half of the respondents to this question described the impact social distancing was having on their work. This included moving to other methods of communication (such as video and audio calls) to support speaking up. Around a quarter of respondents mentioned increased communication efforts to improve Freedom to Speak Up, including communication aimed at black, Asian and ethnic minority workers. A quarter of respondents described other changes to strengthen their organisation's speaking up culture.

The following are illustrative examples of the answers to this question:

....

"Increased promotion of FTSU – weekly comms and posters are being put in staff areas. FTSU introduction to all new starters including temporary staffing recruited for COVID-19."

"Currently making considerable effort to raise profile of FTSU as some sense that staff may be suppressing some concerns, particularly those that are non-COVID-19 related because they feel the 'emergency nature' of COVID-19 makes their concerns less worthy of consideration at this time. Also, looking to reach out to particular groups, including BAME colleagues as aware of the possibility of potential higher levels of concerns within some groups, particularly around COVID-19."

"We have told people coming forward that all cases are being logged as usual but that action will be prioritised to manage investigators' time."

"Working from home, hosting Skype sessions, many more calls and emails."

"More telephone conversations to maintain social distancing, Reduced walkabout. Lack of teaching opportunities."

...

D. 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 6, see below). The proportion of respondents that indicated this increased compared to the last survey.

Eighty-seven per cent (87%) of respondents said workers were being encouraged to speak up during the COVID-19 pandemic. Seven per cent (7%) disagreed.

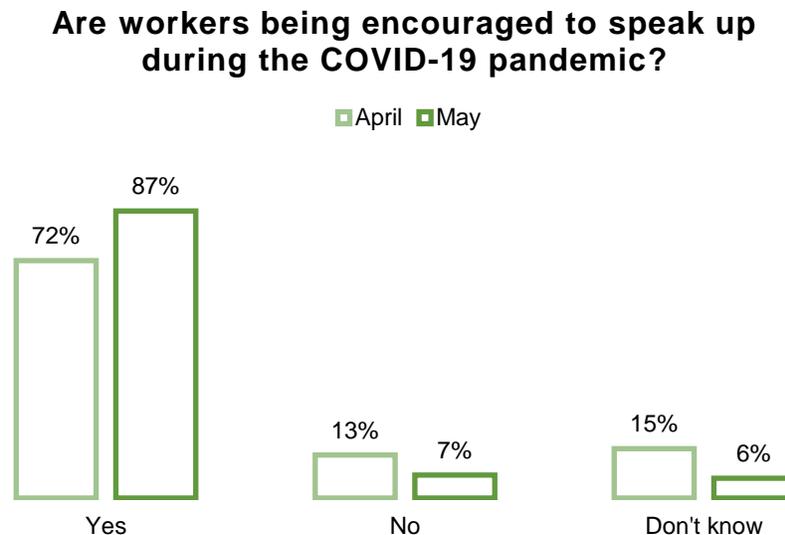


Figure 6

Most Freedom to Speak Up Guardians reported no change in the level of support from their senior team

Sixty-five per cent (65%) of respondents said the level of support they were receiving from their senior team had not changed, up from 62% in last month's survey. Seventeen per cent (17%) of respondents said the level of support had increased. Similarly, 17% said the level of support had decreased (see figure 7, below). The proportion of respondents indicating an increase in support had risen compared to the last survey, with a decline in the proportion indicating a decrease in support.

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

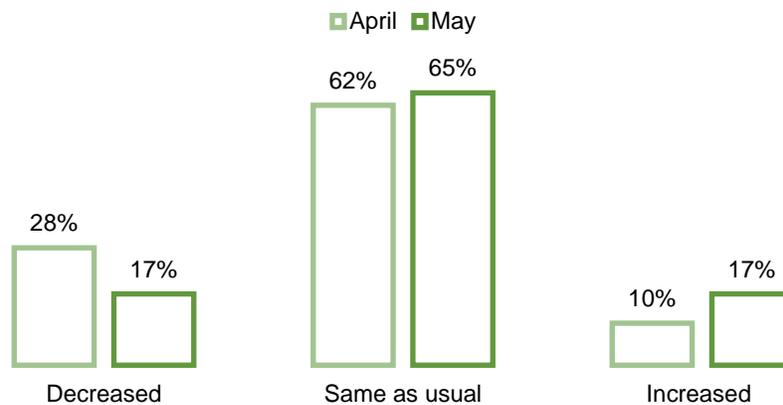


Figure 7

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

There were 69 responses to this question.

The following are a selection of these answers:

...

“Staff members are speaking up but using the lines of communication within their working environment; to supervisors, managers and HR. The Exec team are being very visible via communication in this time and we know staff have emailed the Execs including the CEO and Head of People in the Trust. We believe we may get more speaking up issues once staff members have more time, especially when they have the time to reflect on their experiences.”

“I feel the pandemic has highlighted the importance of having a dedicated service for speaking up, as teams are currently under enormous pressure and escalation routes may not be the same as pre-pandemic, especially for re-deployed and temporary staff.”

“COVID-19 has helped to highlight the inequalities in the wider NHS and how this impacts on our patients.”

“The speed at which concerns have been dealt with has improved and staff are really seeing that they are being listened to. They were before, but the response rate is so much better. The trust board are fully supportive and there has been an increase in the promotion and encouragement to all staff to speak up and continue to do so.”

“We are in the process of reverting to some extent to a 'new normal'. Imagine this will have a considerable impact on FTSU work as quite likely that more concerns will start within FTSU if the 'Command and control' is removed/reduced. Overall, I do feel worried about the potential

May 14, 2020

unintended consequences of the way the COVID-19 response has been handled by the government including, in particular, the presentation of NHS workers as 'heroes'. I am concerned that this presentation increases the already considerable burden on NHS workers and could make staff self-censor/feel pressured to refrain from raising concerns. I would prefer to see a more realistic presentation of staff as the normal dedicated workers they are (many of whom I know frequently undertake shifts in normal times where they don't have a break/a drink/go to the toilet because they're so busy!) being asked/trying their best to do even more extraordinary things in difficult circumstances rather than as 'heroes'. To me, the expectation of being a 'hero' conjures up unrealistic expectations and could lead to potentially unsafe practices. I feel worried for many NHS workers that I know were experiencing high levels of stress/burnout in their work prior to this pandemic, let alone what they have been subject to over the last few months. I feel concerned about the long-term impact on staff and whether the support will be there in the long-term to look after them as well as they have cared for patients.”

May 14, 2020

Annex 1: Survey Questions

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

May 14, 2020

- Decreasing slightly
- No change
- Increasing slightly
- Increasing considerably

Q7 Has the handling of speaking up issues been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Improved considerably
- Improved slightly
- No change
- Deteriorated slightly
- Deteriorated considerably

Q8 Please explain your response.

Q9 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

Q10 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 issues
- Other (non-COVID-19)

Q11 Is your organisation, or are you as a FTSU Guardian, making any changes to your speaking up arrangements as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Yes
- No

Q12 If yes, please describe.

Q13 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

May 14, 2020

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

Q14 Are workers being encouraged to speak up during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Q15 How likely do you think workers are to speak up during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to before the pandemic started?

- Less likely than they were before the pandemic
- As likely as they were before the pandemic
- More likely than they were before the pandemic

Q16 Please explain your response.

Q17 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?