



Press release

27th May 2021

Freedom to Speak Up Index continues to show an improvement in workers' perceptions of the speak up culture in NHS Trusts

But the disparity between the highest performing organisations and the lowest is increasing

The National Guardian's Office today (27th May) publishes the 2021 Freedom to Speak Up Index.

The Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) Index, is an indicator that can help build a picture of what the speaking up culture feels like for workers. It is a metric for NHS Trusts, drawn from four questions in the NHS Annual Staff Survey, asking whether staff feel knowledgeable, encouraged and supported to raise concerns and if they agree they would be treated fairly if involved in an error, near miss or incident.

Since the introduction of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in 2016, the FTSU Index has improved and risen 3.7 percentage points nationally from 75.5% in 2015 to 79.2%.

Six of top ten performing trusts from last year remained in the top ten list this year and three trusts from last year remained in the bottom ten scoring trusts this year, with a 21-percentage point difference between those with the highest scores and the lowest. More concerning is that the disparity between the highest performing organisations and the lowest has increased this year.

The report also contains case studies from the three most improved Trusts: Isle of Wight NHS Trust; East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust and South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust.

The FTSU Index results can also be viewed on the [Model Health System](#) Culture and Engagement area together with other metrics to help leaders assess the health of their organisation's culture.

The 2020 NHS Staff Survey also asked respondents if they feel safe to speak up about anything that concerns them in their organisation, with 66% of staff "agreeing" or "strongly agreeing" with the statement

The answers to this question show a very strong positive correlation with the FTSU Index. The National Guardian's Office will be looking in more depth into the details of the responses to this question in a future report.

Dr Henrietta Hughes OBE, National Guardian for the NHS said: “While we continue to see an upward trajectory of the FTSU Index nationally, I am concerned about the widening gap between the highest scoring organisations and the lowest. This disparity is why we remain relentlessly focussed on sharing good practice to support improvement.

“I welcome the new question which is more inclusive and relevant to a wider range of organisations.

“The pandemic has shown how vital Freedom to Speak Up is for all workers in health, not just to ensure that patients receive the best care, but also to retain and support workers. To do justice to the tireless dedication of those who have supported the nation throughout the pandemic, it is essential that organisations not only support their workers when they speak up, but also listen and follow up appropriately.”

For more information or interviews contact: comms@nationalguardianoffice.org.uk

>ENDS<

Notes for editors:

About the Report

Freedom to Speak Up Index 2021

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Key Findings

- There has been a continued improvement in the national Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) Index score to 79.2%.
- Six of top ten performing trusts from last year remained in the top ten list this year and three trusts from last year remained in the bottom ten scoring trusts this year.
- An increasing disparity has emerged this year between the highest and lowest performing trusts. The disparity was 21.0 percentage points in the 2020 NHS Staff Survey, up from 17.2 percentage points in 2019.
- The FTSU Index continues to be positively correlated with CQC ratings.
- Ambulance trusts remain the lowest performing organisation type, however they were also the most improved from last year.
- The South East region saw the greatest improvement (1.3 percentage points) in FTSU Index score from 79.6% to 80.9% this year.
- A new speaking up question was included in the 2020 NHS Staff Survey. The new question showed that 65.6% of respondents felt safe to speak up about anything that concerns them in their organisation. The results of this question showed a strong positive correlation with the FTSU Index.

Survey questions and Freedom to Speak Up Index

The FTSU index was calculated as the mean average of responses to the following four questions from the 2020 NHS Staff Survey:

- % of staff "agreeing" or "strongly agreeing" that their organisation treats staff who are involved in an error, near miss or incident fairly (question 16a)
- % of staff "agreeing" or "strongly agreeing" that their organisation encourages them to report errors, near misses or incidents (question 16b)
- % of staff "agreeing" or "strongly agreeing" that if they were concerned about unsafe clinical practice, they would know how to report it (question 17a)
- % of staff "agreeing" or "strongly agreeing" that they would feel secure raising concerns about unsafe clinical practice (question 17b)

There was an additional question included in the 2020 NHS Staff Survey which focused on workers feeling safe to speak up more generally. This question was not

included in this year's index – to allow for comparability to previous years – but has been analysed alongside the index score:

- % of staff "agreeing" or "strongly agreeing" that they would feel safe to speak up about anything that concerns them in their organisation (question 18f)

This question has not been included in the FTSU Index scores to enable comparability to previous years. However, the answers to this question show a very strong positive correlation with the FTSU Index.

Highest Performing Trusts in the FTSU Index 2021

Name of trust	2020
Solent NHS Trust	78.3%
Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust	77.9%
Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust	77.6%
Hertfordshire Community NHS Trust	76.9%
Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust	76.4%
Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust	75.8%
Chesterfield Royal Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	75.4%
Isle of Wight NHS Trust (ambulance sector)	75.1%
Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Foundation Trust	75.0%
St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	74.9%

The Freedom to Speak Up Index for each trust and the CQC ratings are included in Annex 1 of the report. The information is taken from the CQC website and the annual NHS Staff Survey at the time of publication.

About the National Guardian's Office

The National Guardian's Office works to make speaking up become business as usual.

The office leads, trains and supports a network of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in England and provides learning and challenge on speaking up matters to the healthcare system as a whole.

Since the establishment of the NHS National Guardian's Office in 2016 following the recommendation of the Francis Freedom to Speak Up Review there is now a wide-ranging network of over 700 Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in England supporting

workers in over 400 organisations, in primary and secondary care, the independent sector and national bodies.

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, that the issues they raise are responded to, and make sure that the person speaking up receives feedback on the actions taken. Guardians also work proactively to support their organisation to tackle barriers to speaking up. Freedom to Speak Up Guardians are appointed by the organisation that they support and abide by the guidance issued by the National Guardian's Office. They follow [the 'universal job description'](#) issued by the National Guardian's Office.

www.nationalguardian.org.uk

About the National Guardian for the NHS



Dr Henrietta Hughes OBE FRCGP was appointed as the National Guardian in July 2016. She provides leadership and support to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians across England in national bodies, NHS and independent sector organisations to ensure that speaking up becomes business as usual. Previously a Medical Director at NHS England, Dr Hughes continues her clinical role as a GP in central London.