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Issue 14

News from the National Guardian



Welcome to this latest edition of Freedom to Speak Up News.

This is my last newsletter, as I will be standing down in September after five years as National Guardian for the NHS.

It has been the most tremendous privilege to work with Freedom to Speak Up Guardians and my team at the National Guardian's Office. The impact of their work is outstanding and has moved the dial on the speaking up culture in the NHS.

Much has been achieved in these five years. There are now over 700 Freedom to Speak Up Guardians throughout health, a third of whom support workers outside of NHS Trusts. These guardians have handled over 50,000 cases since we started collecting data.

The speaking up culture in the NHS has moved in a positive direction. You can read more about this the [FTSU Index Report](#). While there is no single measure of culture, the acid test is the impact this has on patients and the views of workers. Since the introduction of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in 2015 following the Francis Freedom to Speak Up Review, the FTSU Index has improved and risen 3.7 percentage points nationally from 75.5 per cent in 2015 to 79.2 per cent in 2020.

Our learning over the past five years has shown that Freedom to Speak Up is only effective if it is supported by managers and leaders who foster a speak up, listen up, follow up culture. Freedom to Speak Up Guardians told us in [our annual survey](#) that there remains a gap in how valued guardians feel by middle managers compared to senior leaders. Where disadvantageous treatment is indicated as a result of speaking up, managers are also identified as a significant source of this treatment. It is clear that more training is needed for managers so that they listen up and follow up appropriately.

[The Freedom to Speak Up e-learning modules](#) we have developed in association with HEE on the e-learning for health platform are free to access for all. These set out what speaking up is and its importance in creating an environment in which people are supported to deliver their best. The first module – Speak Up – is for everyone. The second module, Listen Up, for managers, builds upon the first and focuses on listening and understanding the barriers to speaking up. A final module, Follow Up, for senior leaders, will be launched later in the year to support the development of



Freedom to Speak Up as part of the strategic vision for organisations and systems. I encourage you to complete all three modules so that you will be able to foster the environment where speaking up is welcomed and business as usual.

When I first took on this role, Freedom to Speak Up Guardians were just being established in trusts. It became clear that Freedom to Speak Up was essential for all parts of the health sector, and in 2019 we began [a project working with primary care providers](#) to understand how the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role could be introduced in primary care and integrated settings. In this newsletter, [Liverpool Primary Care Network](#) share how they have approached this.

Just as patients expect the same high-quality level of care and compassionate service across the system, we found that a universal, integrated approach to Freedom to Speak Up was required. This will provide workers with the same consistency of worker experience, no matter what their role or where they work. The National Guardian's Office vision is that by applying universal principles, we can help to make speaking up business as usual throughout the sector. This consistency will be vital as health and care evolves into more integrated ways of working, where workers may need to speak up about matters across patient pathways.

The pandemic has made me painfully aware of how much we have to be grateful for, and how vital it is that workers are able to speak up safely. With the hope the vaccination programme brings that the worst is over, we find a sector left decimated, with workers overwhelmed and exhausted. As we rebuild, retaining these highly skilled, dedicated workers has never been more essential.

Freedom to Speak Up empowers workers and assures them that their voice matters, that they will be listened to and positive actions taken for the benefit of patients and colleagues. Being listened to means that workers feel cherished, engaged and supported to do the best job they can. While the pandemic may have highlighted that there is still a way to go to make speaking up business as usual in the NHS, it has also shown the powerful impact of listening and taking action.

The role of leadership in fostering and sustaining a speak up culture is highlighted in this newsletter with the perspectives of a [Non-Executive Director](#) and a [Chief Executive](#). I would like to thank all those leaders who have supported and encouraged speaking up. You are the future of the NHS and I am confident that this important initiative will continue to flourish under your care so that speaking up is business as usual in the NHS.

While this newsletter is an opportunity for me to reflect on all that has been achieved while I have been in post, it is also a chance to look to the future. I have been humbled and inspired by the commitment of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians and their drive for continuous improvement, not just in their own organisations, but their ambitions for the Freedom to Speak Up network itself. The National Guardian's Office will be publishing its strategy for Freedom to Speak Up in Health and Care to share the work which is underway to make speaking up business as usual. This strategy has been developed in partnership with Freedom to Speak Up Guardians and stakeholders. Its aim is to continue to build upon the learning of the past five years, and to provide a framework for the future for my successor.

Henretta



Annual Report praises the work of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians who have continued to support health workers to speak up throughout the pandemic



The National Guardian's Office published its Annual Report for 2020 in March, highlighting the progress of Freedom to Speak Up in health and the impact of the pandemic on speaking up.

In his foreword to the report, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, said: "I remain determined in my commitment to ensure that staff feel they can speak up and that their concerns will be taken seriously. I thank the National Guardian and the national network of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, and every member of NHS staff who has spoken up, for helping to make our NHS safer."

The report, which was laid before Parliament, shares the work of the National Guardian's Office and the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian network. It illustrates the excellent

work that Freedom to Speak Up Guardians have been doing, supporting workers to speak up throughout the pandemic and making a positive impact on the culture of their organisations. It also mentions the Pulse Surveys, undertaken by the NGO, to ascertain the impact of the pandemic on Freedom to Speak Up Guardians.

The report also features case studies from across England and different healthcare providers, sharing the experiences of people who have spoken up and the difference Freedom to Speak Up Guardians are making.

[Read the Annual Report](#)

[Read some case studies](#)

Our Annual Report highlights the distance we have come since the Freedom to Speak Up Review was published in 2015. But now we are at a tipping point. The Freedom to Speak Up network has grown because of the commitment and passion of guardians. But there is still much more to do and this requires all leaders to play their part.

Principles from the Freedom to Speak Up Review are not being followed by all organisations. Regulators are mobilising and taking this more seriously but there is more to do to get a consistent and aligned response to speaking up. The pandemic has highlighted how much this matters to keep patients and workers safe.

Dr Henrietta Hughes OBE



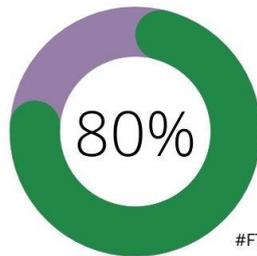
Speaking Up culture in NHS is improving, say Freedom to Speak Up Guardians

But there is still too much variation between organisations and stronger leadership is required, both by providers and those that lead the system.



The Speaking Up culture in the NHS is improving

80% of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians who responded feel that the speaking up culture in the NHS had improved in the last 12 months



www.nationalguardian.org.uk

#FTSUGSurvey

The views of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians give valuable insights into both how the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role is implemented and what further support and learning is needed to truly create a culture where speaking up is business as usual.

This is the fourth year that the National

Guardian's Office has surveyed Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in order to understand how speaking up is supported within organisations. The results also reveal details about their perceptions of the barriers to speaking up, the sources of detriment for speaking up and the network's demographics.

Despite the difficult circumstances of this past year, the expanding network of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians continued to listen and support workers in getting their voices heard.

But there needs to be a more consistent approach from senior leadership throughout the health system to ensure that all workers are listened to whenever they speak up.

Dr Henrietta Hughes OBE

[Read the Survey Report](#)

Guidance on Freedom to Speak Up Champions and Ambassadors

Guidance for Freedom to Speak Up Guardians on the Development of Freedom to Speak Up Champion and Ambassador Networks is now available on our website.

Freedom to Speak Up 'Champions' or 'Ambassadors' support their organisation's Freedom to Speak Up Guardian to support workers, raise awareness and promote the Freedom to Speak Up message.

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

[Read the guidance](#)



Listen Up: Training for all managers launched

The National Guardian's Office, in association with Health Education England, launched the second module of its e-learning package for managers at all levels to give them the tools to foster a speaking up culture in their teams.

The Freedom to Speak Up training – 'Speak Up, Listen Up, Follow Up' – is for anyone who works in healthcare.

Divided into three modules, it helps learners understand the vital role they can play in a healthy speaking up culture which protects patient safety and enhances worker experience.

The latest session – Listen Up – for managers at all levels, builds upon the first module. It focuses on listening and understanding the barriers to speaking up.



In order to foster a healthy speaking up culture, workers need to have the tools and understanding to know how to speak up and who to speak up to. Managers need this base knowledge, as well as understanding why it is important to listen and how they should act after someone has spoken up.

As a leader, Freedom to Speak Up is vital not only in ensuring that staff feel safe to speak up about issues affecting them, but also in helping me to better understand what those issues are so that we can address them, make HEE a better place to work for everyone, and ultimately deliver better outcomes for the people we serve

Dr Navina Evans, Chief Executive, HEE

The Listen Up module includes the following topics: Fostering a speak up, listen up culture; Supporting speaking up and listening well; Perceptions of yourself and others and understanding conflicts of interest; Welcoming feedback as a gift. A final module, Follow Up, for senior leaders – including executive and Non-Executive Directors, lay members and governors – will be launched later this year.

Access the training via HEE's E-learning for Healthcare Hub



Freedom to Speak Up Index Report 2021 published

In May, the NGO published the Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) Index Report 2021. This metric, calculated using four questions from the NHS Annual Staff Survey, can help build a picture of the speaking up culture in an organisation.

Since the introduction of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, the FTSU Index has risen nationally from 75.5% in 2015 to 79.9%.

However, the disparity between the highest and lowest performing organisations has widened to 21 percentage points. This disparity reaffirms our focus on sharing good practice to support improvement for all organisations.

The 2020 NHS Staff Survey included a new question, asking respondents whether they feel safe to speak up about anything that concerns them in their organisation, with 66% 'agreeing' or 'strongly agreeing' with this statement.

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.

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.

Dr Henrietta Hughes OBE

[Read the FTSU Index Report](#)



The Critical Success Factors to embedding a Freedom to Speak Up culture in the NHS, and why your Non-Executive Directors are essential

Anita Day, Vice Chair, Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, and Freedom to Speak Up Board Lead



Many of us are familiar with Freedom to Speak Up. We understand its importance to patient safety and outcomes; both in terms of the care which patients experience directly, but also as regards the environment in which our colleagues work and the impact of poor behaviour on staff retention and quality of care.

But I am still struck by the difficulties which many trusts face in truly embedding the Freedom to Speak Up culture. Whilst the reasons for this vary, in my view there are certain critical success factors which improve a trust's likelihood of success.

Does the Board really care?

Too many trusts have a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian because they have to, not because they actually understand why it is essential, and this can lead to insufficient resource being allocated and/or inadequate Board-level scrutiny. Having a non-executive director (NED) Board Lead for Freedom to Speak Up does not remove the responsibility for all Board members to monitor their organisation's culture, but it does allow greater focus.

In my view, the Board Lead should undergo the same training as all Freedom to Speak Up Champions and wear the lanyard or badge with pride when on-site. They should, where possible, attend meetings with the Freedom to Speak Up Champion network in their organisation. This means that they hear first-hand some of the matters which are being raised by people on the ground, and also demonstrate visible leadership commitment.

At People & Culture Committee meetings, and at Board level, their greater understanding of any issues helps to focus debate and is particularly helpful in ensuring that intelligence from multiple data sources (e.g., National Staff Survey, Friends & Family Test, WRES, WDES, staff networks, patient & volunteer liaison services etc) is triangulated so that trends and emerging issues can be highlighted at the earliest opportunity.

The Freedom to Speak Up NED also has an important role in supporting the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian personally. The guardian is not an easy role, and even the most experienced guardian may require someone with whom to share ideas in a confidential space; and, at times, the NED may even provide an element of restorative clinical supervision to help the guardian process difficult conversations.



What's a good number?

One of the hardest things about Freedom to Speak Up is knowing when you are doing it right. In the case of the level of resource that an organisation needs to ensure proper coverage, it's difficult to judge. Most organisations have one guardian and a network of champions embedded across the trust. This model can work well, but it is important to ensure that you have good coverage. Do your champions represent all divisions, all job roles and bands (not just core clinical but students, junior doctors, temporary staff, porters, housekeeping, mortuary, etc.), those staff groups with protected characteristics, volunteers? Are the champions well integrated – and perhaps even merged – with other cultural and staff network ambassadors in the organisation? Experience tells us that:

(1) Workers who are drawn to these roles are probably involved in other initiatives too, so use them to deepen and broaden coverage.

(2) Workers often feel more comfortable raising matters to other staff members who can relate to their experience, so the range and diversity of Freedom to Speak Up Champions is critical.

The other problem is knowing when you are seeing the 'right' number of matters being raised. Lots of concerns might suggest a poor culture; but it might also suggest an environment where people feel confident speaking up. Conversely, a small number of matters being raised might suggest a wonderful culture with few issues; but it might also indicate an environment where people feel fearful to speak up. Triangulation of data from multiple sources and trend analysis is key to understanding what the speaking up data is telling you. The other 'tell-tale' indicator is the number of matters being raised anonymously; if the proportion or number is rising, that might indicate an increase in anxiety or fear of retribution among workers.

Our biggest enemy is complacency

Just because you don't think you have a problem with your Freedom to Speak Up culture today, that does not mean that you won't have next month or next year. In my view, trusts need to be continually on the look-out for potential issues to emerge e.g., every time you reconfigure a ward or service, get a significant intake of workers or students or experience a global pandemic! The key is to be pro-active. Don't assume that all your workers understand Freedom to Speak Up, and the importance of speaking up. Work with your champions to identify and eliminate barriers to speaking up, e.g., an online portal which colleagues can access from home on their phones might be easier than having to schedule a call or write an email during worktime. Make a point of increasing Freedom to Speak Up visibility in areas of unusually high or low reporting. And don't just sit back and wait for matters to be raised...sometimes the most serious issues may require encouragement to be surfaced.

In my view, Freedom to Speak Up is one of the most important tools we have to raise standards of patient care and improve the work experience of our colleagues. As we say at Worcestershire Acute, it's all about 'Putting Patients First'.



Primary Care providers need further support to implement Freedom to Speak Up effectively

Report from National Guardian's Office finds that challenges to implementing Freedom to Speak Up in Primary Care may be overcome by the application of universal principles and working together.

In 2019, the National Guardian's Office began a two-year project working with primary care providers to understand how the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role could be introduced in primary care and integrated settings. This report describes some of the variety of organisations, and the different Freedom to Speak Up models they have adopted.

Through engaging with diverse types of primary care organisations, the National Guardian's Office has identified two models to support primary care organisations in developing their speaking up arrangements, bridging across the silos of GP, dental, optometry and pharmacy.

Models to support primary care organisations develop their speaking up arrangements

Freedom to Speak Up within an organisation

an individual organisation model – such as a GP practice or Dental surgery; or a Clinical Commissioning Group.



Freedom to Speak Up within a network or defined structure

a partnership model – for example Primary Care Network or alliance between opticians; a local support model – e.g., practices supported by their local committee, CCG or NHS Trust; or an Integrated Care System Model.



The report shows that the universal nature of the promoters and barriers to speaking up requires, in response, universal principles for embedding effective speaking up arrangements and implementing the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role.

[Read the report](#)



Implementing Freedom to Speak Up in Primary Care

Dr Cait Taylor, GP and Joint Clinical Director and Chair of the Tackling Racial Inequality Working Group, Central Liverpool Primary Care Network

The formation of Primary Care Networks has provided a huge opportunity for us to help drive the large-scale changes that are needed to tackle health inequalities.

In 2020, Central Liverpool Primary Care Network responded to the Black Lives Matter movement and the impact of COVID-19 on our ethnic minority patients and colleagues by making a clear anti-racism commitment. We are the most ethnically diverse network in Liverpool and there is clear evidence that fair treatment of workers is linked to a better experience of care for patients. We prioritised tackling racial inequality as an ongoing workstream and started looking at interventions that we could implement to address race inequalities and inclusion. It is vital that our workers have a psychologically safe route for raising all concerns, including any due to racial discrimination.

We started having conversations with the National Guardian's Office in 2020 and are very honoured to have since become the first Primary Care Network in England to have appointed a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. We will also be appointing Freedom to Speak Up Champions in each of our nine practices to link in with our Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. Our aim is to encourage all workers to speak up for the purposes of support, improving staff experiences, and also learning as an organisation.

Dr Laura Power, GP and Central Liverpool Primary Care Network Freedom to Speak Up Guardian

I was already very interested in the excellent work from our local Primary Care Network Tackling Racial Inequalities Working Group, so when I saw the job advert to become the first Primary Care Network Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, I immediately knew this was the perfect opportunity to help to make a real difference for my colleagues by utilising my lifelong passion for inclusion and equality.

Naturally, being the very first Primary Care Network Freedom to Speak Up Guardian was daunting at first when I have been so used to simply being a General Practitioner and I was nervous when I started my training. However, when I attended the first training session and listened to the inspirational examples of other guardians, my worries flew away, and I was keen to get started with the role.

We have spent some time perfecting the launch of the service and it will be going live at the end of this month. I'm looking forward to writing another update again in a year to let you all know how we are getting on and perhaps even inspire other Primary Care Networks across the country to appoint their own guardians.



Leeds Community Healthcare Trust wins 2020 Freedom to Speak Up Organisation of the Year HSJ Award

The Freedom to Speak Up team at Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust (LCH) won the Freedom to Speak Up Organisation of the Year Award at the 2020 HSJ Awards.



The aim of the Freedom to Speak Up Organisation of the Year is to showcase organisations with a culture of supporting workers to speak up. This includes having leadership embrace the opportunity to improve and how the organisation has shared its learning and improvement across the wider health system.

The judging panel felt that LCH gave an authentic representation of Freedom to Speak Up embedded in an organisation. The trust worked across organisational boundaries to engage and support with other local organisations and promote an integrated system.

The judging panel added, “This entry demonstrated leadership from the top and a caring approach throughout that ensures that those who face the most barriers to speaking up are listened to and supported.”

The award remains in Yorkshire after Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust won in 2019.

All those shortlisted are to be commended, but a special mention goes to Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust, whose entry was highly commended. We have written case studies from the finalists’ submissions to share the learning wider.

Read case studies from previous winners and finalists



The role of senior leaders and Chief Executives in creating the organisations of the future

Thea Stein, Chief Executive at Leeds Community Healthcare NHS Trust

Without the commitment of senior leadership across the whole of the Board, the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian cannot do their job – it's as simple as that.



The Freedom to Speak Up Guardian can be as open, easy to talk to, accessible, kind and skilled as they could possibly be but without the real, deep and open backing of the most senior leadership within their organisation, the work will be partial and the real change that can be engendered by an open and honest culture will not be achieved.

This is hard work. If it isn't hard and if it isn't challenging, then the work isn't really happening. For leaders at all levels of an organisation to really listen to how workers are feeling and experiencing things in their working lives can be emotionally draining and the instinct for all of us is to push the information away, to argue the "facts" and to talk and not to listen.

CEOs are crucial in setting the cultural expectations of how these conversations should and can take place in the organisation. The CEO needs to model the ability to take open feedback, to be challenged, to apologise – to listen twice as much as they speak. To be accessible. To be humble. To show empathy.

Overall, I have worked to create an emotionally intelligent and psychologically informed organisation. The ability of the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian to work in this way has been critical to our success in embedding this approach as a practice and not simply a position. John Walsh (Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at LCH) has the skills to hold this work emotionally and to work with both those who speak up and those spoken up about within the context of Just Culture. This is the lens and locus of our work.

We constantly strive together to have an emotionally and socially intelligent organisation which is psychologically informed. This means:

- Staff can speak and be understood
- A special focus on working with people and their hopes, stories and struggles
- Leaders and managers seek to listen and hold what others say - acting in dialogue rather than defensiveness. This doesn't come naturally to everyone and so we provide support and modelling to help



- A deep commitment to those who may feel marginalised and excluded
- An *All Teach All Learn* approach
- An alignment of all parts of the organisation to work coherently and constructively in learning and listening
- An organisation of adults where we can work from adult responses and hear and work with the experience of our workers. Always aspiring to move away from hierarchy and always challenging policy to ensure people are heard before policy action
- An innovative approach that sees a gap and lets people create solutions together.

We enable our aspirations through collaborative discussions between different sectors of the organisation and leaders, a *People Before Process* flexible HR approach, deeply supporting the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and the Speaking Up Champions, embedding the concept of *Speaking Up as a Practice Not a Position*, and close work with our trade unions/Staffside colleagues. We seek for all these parts to be held together in unity, creative dialogue and collaboration.

We are not there yet – this is about progress rather than perfection. Yet we think this approach offers a leadership for the 'new normal' with speaking up, listening up and following up at its heart.

This is a leadership which seeks to enable emotionally intelligent and psychologically informed spaces and organisations. It cannot be done by one person. It has to be something everyone works on. It has to be led from the top and it has to be lived and modelled every day.



Guardians recognised for services to the NHS

Two Freedom to Speak Up Guardians have received honours from the Queen



Dr Judith Graham, Director for Psychological Professionals and Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust, was awarded the BEM in the New Year's Honours List 2021.

Dr Graham, who was previously the Freedom to Speak Up Regional Chair for Yorkshire and Humber, received the British Empire Medal for her services to the NHS during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her work included developing an enhanced staff wellbeing programme to support all, especially the most vulnerable, during the pandemic by establishing psychological support hubs, staff networks and support for those who were at home shielding.

[Read Jude's story](#)



Bernie Rochford, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust, was awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in June 2021.

Ms Rochford was part of the National Guardian's Office's first advisory working group before going on to take the role as a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian. The Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role did not exist when Bernie spoke up in 2011. After suffering detriment as a result of speaking up, Bernie was appointed as the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian at Mersey Care in 2018, eager that other healthcare workers did not share her poor experience. Three years on, her services to the NHS have been recognised with this honour.

[Read Bernie's story](#)

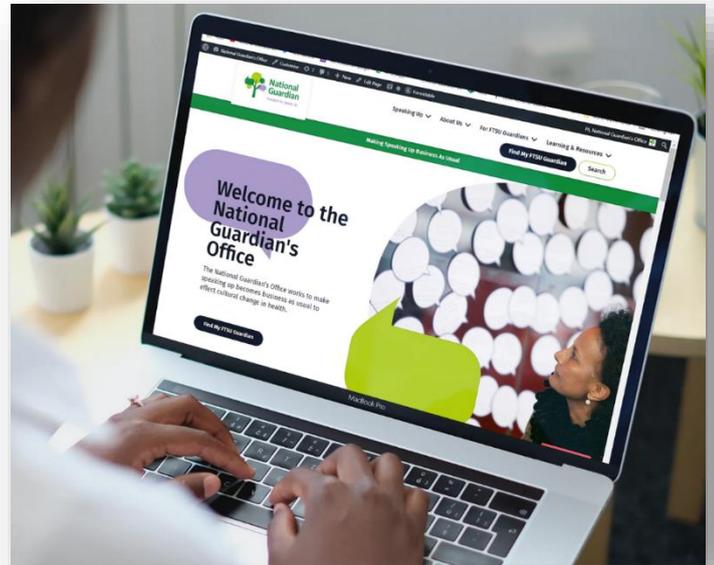


National Guardian's Office launches new website

The NGO has a new website, which includes a 'Find Your FTSU Guardian' map function.

Having listened to feedback about our old website, we decided to undergo a website redesign project. The new website is more user-friendly and features more functionality, such as a 'search' button and a carousel displaying 'Speak Up Pledges' submitted by workers after completing our e-learning.

It also includes a 'Find Your FTSU Guardian' page. This is a navigable map displaying all of the Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in England, which replaces the old PDF directory.



[Visit the website](#)

If you have any comments or queries about this newsletter, please contact the National Guardian's Office enquiries@nationalguardianoffice.org.uk

