

The National Guardian Office's Freedom to Speak Up Strategic Framework

Our mission:

To make speaking up business as usual throughout the healthcare sector in England

Introduction

Making speaking up business as usual will enhance the working life of the healthcare workforce and improve the quality and safety of care.

In the five years since the Freedom to Speak Up Review, much has been achieved. There is now a network of over 700 Freedom to Speak Up Guardians supporting more than 400 organisations. Guardians amplify the voices of those who might otherwise not be heard, seek to break down barriers to speaking up, and support the use of speaking up as a valuable opportunity to learn and improve.

Workers have spoken up about patient and worker safety, their day-to-day experiences and negative behaviours that they encounter, including bullying and harassment. Freedom to Speak Up Guardians have listened to them, thanked them, and escalated matters so that appropriate action could be taken. The 50,000+ cases that have been brought to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians have offered 50,000+ opportunities for learning and improvement.

But despite this, much more needs to be done. The pandemic has highlighted that speaking up has never been more important, yet some workers who feared for their safety in this challenging time were let down by leaders who were not listening.¹ NHS and key workers, who were applauded as heroes by the public, are now overwhelmed, exhausted, and burnt out.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/apr/09/nhs-staff-forbidden-speaking-out-publicly-about-coronavirus>

Our most immediate concern is ensuring that speaking up works well now so that our healthcare workforce feels empowered and listened to. Voice is one of the three main pillars of the NHS People Plan; listening and acting upon matters raised means that Freedom to Speak Up delivers on the promise of the NHS as the best place to work.

Our strategic direction is to build on the improvements that Freedom to Speak Up has already made, ensuring that speaking up arrangements work consistently well. The freedom to speak up should be available to everyone in the healthcare system, irrespective of where they work.

Our learning over the past five years has shown that the promoters and barriers of speaking up are universal. A move towards **universal** principles for creating a speak up, listen up, follow up culture – and implementing the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role – is therefore both possible and necessary. This will promote **consistency** and support the development of a more integrated healthcare system.

This strategic framework also sets out a journey towards gaining greater **assurance** about speaking up culture and the quality and consistency of how the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role is implemented.

We have developed our strategy with valuable contributions from our colleagues in national bodies, leaders and workers' representatives – including from outside the healthcare sector – and Freedom to Speak Up Guardians. We are grateful for their input and guidance.

We have themed our strategic framework into four core pillars of support: workers; Freedom to Speak Up Guardians; leadership; and the healthcare system.



How we work:

As we pursue our mission to make speaking up business as usual, we will:

- Work in **partnership**
- **Listen to diverse voices**
- **Embed Freedom to Speak Up in everyday practice**
- **Respond to and influence** the changing landscape of healthcare
- **Use data and intelligence** to inform our decisions
- Regularly seek **feedback** on what we do.

We will role-model the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian values of:

- **Courage:** speaking truthfully and challenging appropriately
- **Impartiality:** remaining objective and unbiased
- **Empathy:** listening well and acting with sensitivity
- **Learning:** seeking and providing feedback and looking for opportunities to improve.

About the National Guardian's Office

The National Guardian's Office works to make speaking up 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.

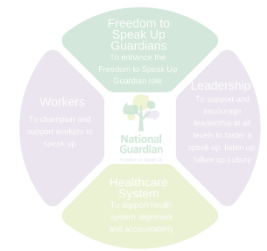
The role of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians and the National Guardian were established in 2016 following the tragic events at Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust and recommendations from Sir Robert Francis QC's Freedom to Speak Up Review.

There are now over 700 Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in NHS and independent sector organisations, national bodies and elsewhere. Freedom to Speak Up Guardians help protect patient safety and the quality of care; improve the experience of workers; and promote learning and improvement.

They do this by ensuring that workers are supported in speaking up and that issues raised are used as opportunities for learning and improvement. They work within their organisations to help ensure that barriers to speaking up are addressed and a positive culture of speaking up is fostered.²

www.nationalguardian.org.uk

² <https://nationalguardian.org.uk/for-guardians/job-description/>



Workers

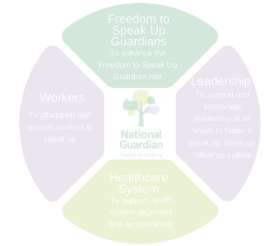
Despite improvement over the past five years, more needs to be done to foster a speak up, listen up, follow up culture, where workers are listened to and appropriate action taken as a result.

Suppression of the voices of workers and victimisation of those who speak up are still being reported in some cases.³ This cannot be tolerated. It causes suffering for people who are trying to do the right thing and those they are trying to help. It erodes trust in the speaking up process and fails to prevent avoidable harm or benefit from suggestions for improvements.

To address this, we will support workers by:

- Championing speaking up
- Reflecting the voice of workers in speaking up reviews
- Engaging with partners to promote protection for those who speak up
- Providing training tools for workers to promote a speak up, listen up, follow up culture

³ https://nationalguardian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ftsug_survey_report_2020.pdf



Freedom to Speak Up Guardians

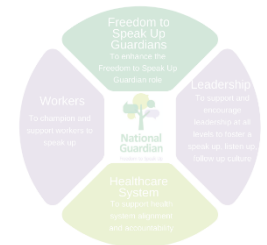
Freedom to Speak Up Guardians perform a vital function in the workplace, as evidenced by the 50,000 cases that have been handled since they have been established. Their role is challenging and the cases they handle can be sensitive and complex. The proactive element of their role requires them to engage with a range of stakeholders, as they identify and seek to remove barriers to speaking up.

To perform their role effectively, Freedom to Speak Up Guardians must have the necessary knowledge, confidence and credibility so that they meet the needs of the workers and organisations they support.

As the network continues to grow and develop, we also need greater assurance of the quality and consistency in how the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role is carried out. This will help promote the quality and consistency of how workers and organisations are supported.

We will support and develop the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role by:

- Regularly reviewing and updating the training, guidance and support we provide Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, reflecting the universality of the role and the organisations appointing Freedom to Speak Up Guardians
- Developing a register of Freedom to Speak Up Guardians that have completed NGO training
- Developing standards and quality assurance mechanisms for Freedom to Speak Up Guardians



Leadership

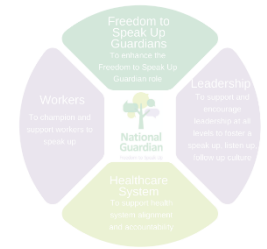
Speaking up is an opportunity to learn, develop and improve. Welcoming speaking up, however it happens, is an integral aspect of leadership. Embracing this allows Freedom to Speak Up to effectively contribute to the safety and quality of care and improvements in the working environment.

Leaders at all levels should understand that they set the tone when it comes to fostering a speak up, listen up follow up culture.

However, Freedom to Speak Up Guardians report that they are not always supported or that speaking up is not always viewed as an opportunity for learning and improvement. Guardians themselves have felt victimised for doing the job expected of them. This must change.

We will support and encourage speak up, listen up and follow up to be natural leadership behaviours by:

- Supporting the delivery of universal guidance and supportive tools for leaders to enable them to improve speaking up culture within their organisation and across the system
- Providing learning to support leaders to recognise and utilise the potential for speaking up to accelerate improvement
- Provide training for workers, including leaders, to promote a speak up, listen up, follow up culture
- Promoting the use of data and intelligence to inform good practice, describing trends and challenges, and encouraging improvement



Healthcare System

Good practice fails to flourish when it is not supported from the top. The systemic drivers to promote effective speak up, listen up, follow up cultures have been inconsistent, uncoordinated and, in some cases, in conflict.

Just as leadership fosters healthy cultures for organisations, speaking up can only become embedded at the organisational level when it is supported by the system. National organisations must set the tone and role-model the good practice they require of others.

There needs to be alignment and consistency so that workers, wherever they are, receive a high quality, consistent response when they speak up.

To promote this, we will:

- Promote universal principles for speaking up and their application across the system
- Produce information on good practice and guidance
- Seek to establish a consistent set of metrics that allows speaking up culture to be understood at the organisational, system, and national level
- Bring national bodies together to develop a consistent and supportive response when workers speak up

The National Guardian Office's Freedom to Speak Up Strategic Framework

Working in partnership

to improve speak up listen up follow up cultures

