



**National
Guardian**

Freedom to Speak Up

Press release

14th October 2021

National Guardian's Office identifies areas for learning to improve speaking up experiences of health workers in case review

The National Guardian's Office today (14th October) publishes a report which analyses the themes and learning for the whole health sector from its [review of the speaking up culture at Blackpool Teaching Hospitals](#) which was undertaken in 2020.

The National Guardian's Office received information indicating that a speaking up case may not have been handled following good practice. The information received also suggested black and minority ethnic workers had comparatively worse experiences when speaking up.

Reviews seek to identify learning, recognise innovation and support improvement, and, ultimately, improve the experience of workers, patients, and the public.

Based on focus groups and interviews with Trust workers, and analysis of internal processes and data, the report reviews information about the trust's speaking up culture and arrangements and the trust's support for its workers to speak up.

The review found that there were long-standing issues with the trust's speaking up culture. There was a perception among some workers that speaking up was futile. Black and minority ethnic workers - and other groups – also reported facing barriers to speaking up.

Concerns about the trust's speaking up culture were affecting confidence in the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian service. But workers were speaking up to the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, although there had been a drop in cases, and most that provided feedback said they would speak up again.

The review found that work was underway to improve the organisation's speaking up culture, and there was information that this was beginning to make a difference. Changes at a leadership level in the trust were also facilitating that improvement.

The review also found that some workers who had spoken up to national bodies had variable experiences.

The report makes recommendations for actions which national bodies and the healthcare system as whole can take to support organisations, including bringing

national guidance into line with good practice and make that guidance universally applicable.

Following the CQC's lead, the National Guardian's Office is developing the Speaking Up Partnership Group to improve the consistency and quality of responses given to workers who speak up to national organisations.

Russell Parkinson, Head of Office and Strategy for the National Guardian's Office, said, *"The improvements which have already been made to the speak up culture at Blackpool Teaching Hospitals are welcomed. Our findings are that Freedom to Speak Up Guardians cannot work in isolation. To support workers effectively, they must be supported by their leaders, and the system as a whole."*

Our Review highlights that Freedom to Speak Up must be embedded at an organisational and system-wide level. The National Guardian's Office [Strategic Framework](#) outlines how we will support the alignment of speaking up, listening up and following up across the healthcare sector in England.

"NGO case reviews are focused on learning, both for the trust at which the review is carried out and for all organisations – including national bodies - committed to making speaking up business as usual."

"All organisations should use these recommendations to carry out their own gap analysis to ensure they have considered the issues outlined in relation to their own speaking up arrangements."

Trish Armstrong-Child, Chief Executive of Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, took up the post in September 2021. She said: *"I am a huge supporter in Freedom to Speak Up and the role of the National Guardian's Office, working together with our local guardian team, with leaders in the Trust and the system as a whole, to create a more open and transparent culture across the NHS for the benefit of everyone."*

"This report and its recommendations date back to a review around 12 months ago and there is evidence to demonstrate that we have made great progress. However, we recognise there is always more that we can do."

"As we mark and celebrate National Freedom to Speak Up month I want to add my voice and encouragement to this year's theme: 'Speak up, listen up and follow up'."

"All colleagues in Blackpool Teaching Hospitals are encouraged to make their pledge to speak up in any way they feel comfortable about anything at all that is bothering them – and know processes are in place to support you."

"In return, my promise and commitment as new Chief Executive is that myself, the Trust Board as a whole and senior leaders across the organisation will listen up and follow up. Between us I am looking forward to being part of an organisation that values and actively encourages people to raise issues and help to resolve them. I recognise our staff are our greatest asset."

The National Guardian's Office is currently updating its processes and key documents outlining how it conducts Speaking Up Reviews, in order to give as many workers as possible a voice in what we decide to review. In doing so, our aim is to have as much impact as possible by focusing on areas of priority for workers and to continue to improve the understanding of the speaking up landscape in healthcare in England.

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

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Notes for editors:

About this report

A case review of speaking up culture and arrangements by the National Guardian's Office

Published : 14th October 2021

Available from: <https://bit.ly/3DzqqQg>

How the review was undertaken

Focus groups and interviews were held with trust workers and senior leaders through October to December 2020. The review heard from over 70 workers.

Eight focus groups were held, including specific sessions for black and minority ethnic workers as well as those at specific bands/grades. These focus groups sought to create a space where workers felt able to speak up freely.

Workers were also able to approach the National Guardian's Office directly to share their thoughts and experiences.

The National Guardian's Office reviewed documents relating to the trust's speaking up culture and arrangements, including policies and procedures, reports and action plans and liaised with the Care Quality Commission, and NHS England and Improvement.

Key recommendations include for leaders to:

- Work with their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian to identify potential groups that face particular barriers to speaking up, and work towards addressing those barriers.
- Take appropriate action to ensure the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian(s) are appropriately supported to carry out their role, in line with guidance from the National Guardian's Office and NHS England & Improvement.
- Update and implement the trust's equality, diversity and inclusion strategy considering the findings of this review.
- Provide and monitor the uptake of effective speaking up training for all workers, ensuring this meets the expectations set out in guidelines from the National Guardian's Office.
- Develop and begin the implementation of a strategy to improve the speaking up culture across its workforce, in line with guidelines from NHS England and Improvement. The plan should contain measures to identify the main issues the trust should address, clear actions to address those issues and steps to measure the effectiveness of those actions.
- Take appropriate steps to identify and review measures to assure themselves that those with senior responsibility for Freedom to Speak Up have the confidence of the workforce, making improvements as needed.

How the National Guardian's Office decides what to review

The National Guardian's Office considers a range of indicators to inform our decisions as to what we review, including:

- [Freedom to Speak Up Index](#)
- [Freedom to Speak Guardian Speaking Up Data](#)
- Staff engagement data such as [the NHS Staff Survey](#)
- Information shared with the National Guardian's Office

Processes and key documents about NGO speak up reviews are currently being updated.

About the National Guardian's Office

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

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 nearly 500 organisations, in primary and secondary care, the independent sector and national bodies.

www.nationalguardian.org.uk

About the National Guardian for the NHS

The role of a National Guardian for the NHS was a key recommendation from the Freedom to Speak Up Review.

The National Guardian 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.

The role of National Guardian is a unique leadership position in the healthcare sector which requires the courage and skill to speak truth unto power.

A successor is currently being recruited to replace Dr Henrietta Hughes OBE who served as National Guardian from July 2016 – September 2021. This case review was conducted during her tenure.