



**National
Guardian**

Freedom to Speak Up

Press release

6 July 2023

Highest numbers of speaking up cases raised with Freedom to Speak Up guardians recorded

Over 25,000 cases have been brought to Freedom to Speak Up guardians throughout 2022/23, but levels of anonymity are reducing

The National Guardian's Office today (6 July 2023) [publishes the latest annual speaking up data report](#), which summarises the themes and learning from the speaking up data shared by Freedom to Speak Up guardians.

The number of cases brought to them last year was the highest recorded, a 25% increase on the previous year. During Quarter 3 of 2022 (October to December), guardians reported the highest ever number of cases raised in a single quarter, 6,947 cases.

There are now over 1,000 Freedom to Speak Up guardians supporting healthcare workers to speak up about anything which has an impact on their ability to do their job if they do not feel able to by other means. Freedom to Speak Up guardians have handled over 100,000 cases since the National Guardian's Office first started collecting data in 2017.

The report also reveals a decline in the proportion of cases reported anonymously, indicating a growing confidence in the guardian route. In 2022/23, 9.3 percent of cases were reported anonymously. This continues the downward trajectory from 2017, when 17.7% of cases were raised anonymously.

Poor behaviour and its impact remains a cause for concern, with the highest proportion of cases – 30 percent - involving inappropriate behaviours and attitudes. A decrease in the percentage of cases related to bullying or harassment (31.8 percent in 2021/22 to 21.7 percent in 2022/23) can be attributed to cases being reported against this new category. One in every four cases raised (27.4%) involved an element of worker safety or wellbeing.

Poor behaviours also have an impact on patient safety. Nineteen per cent (19.3%) of cases involved an element of patient safety/quality this year, up from 18.8% in 2021/22.

Despite the improvement in levels of anonymity, detriment for speaking up remains a concern. Although there has been a drop in percentage (to 3.9%) given the rise in numbers, this equates to 1,000 cases.

Dr Jayne Chidgey-Clark, National Guardian for the NHS, said, *“No one should be punished for doing the right thing. When people speak up it is because they want things to improve – whether that is for the safety and quality of care for patients or the working environment for colleagues.*

“Over four-fifths (82.8%) of those who gave feedback to their guardian about their experience said they would speak up again. It is their comments which highlight why the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian role is so important and the benefits it can bring for worker wellbeing, staff retention and patient care.

“My heartfelt thanks to all those who have spoken up to a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian in the past year. You have provided 25,000 opportunities for learning and improvement for the benefit of patients and colleagues.”

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

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Notes for editors:

About this report

“I felt heard for the first time”: A summary of speaking up to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians 2022-2023

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This report summarises the cases raised with Freedom to Speak Up guardians from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians submit non-identifiable information to the National Guardian’s Office (NGO) about the speaking up cases raised with them. This report is based on this information.

Data tables summarised in this report can be found on the [NGO’s website](#).

Key data:

- Between 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, 25,382 cases were raised with Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, a 25 per cent point increase from 2021/22.

- Quarter 3 (Oct-Dec 2022) had the highest number of cases raised with Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in a single quarter (6,947), a record number of cases.
- Cases raised with Freedom to Speak Up Guardians in NHS Trusts (23,392) accounted for 92.2% of cases in 2022/23. There were a further 1,990 cases (7.8%) raised in other organisation types.
- Workers from a range of professional/worker groups spoke up to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, registered nurses and midwives accounted for the biggest portion (29.0%) of cases raised.
- The proportion of cases reported as being raised anonymously continued to fall, 9.3% in 2022/23, down from 10.4 in 2021/22.
- Cases involving an element of inappropriate behaviours and attitudes were the most reported in 2022/23 (30.0%).
- In 2022/23, 22 percent of cases (21.7%, or 5,506) reported included an element of bullying or harassment, a 10-percentage point fall compared to 2021/22 (31.8%, or 6,471). This large fall is at least in part due to cases being reported against the new category of 'inappropriate attitudes and behaviours'.
- One in every four cases raised (27.4%) involved an element of worker safety or wellbeing.
- Nineteen per cent (19.3%) of cases involved an element of patient safety/quality this year, up from 18.8% in 2021/22.
- Detriment for speaking up was indicated in 3.9% of cases, down from 4.3% in 2021/22 but higher than 2019/20 and 2020/21 levels.
- Over four-fifths (82.8%) of those who gave feedback said they would speak up again.

About the National Guardian's Office

The National Guardian's Office works to make speaking up become business as usual to effect cultural change in the NHS.

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.

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

There are now over 1,000 Freedom to Speak Up guardians in NHS primary and secondary care and independent sector organisations, national bodies and elsewhere that ensure workers can speak up about anything which has an impact on their ability to do their job.

About Freedom to Speak Up Guardians

Freedom to Speak Up guardians support workers to speak up when they feel that they are unable to do so by other ways. 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.

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About the National Guardian for the NHS



Dr Jayne Chidgey-Clark was appointed as National Guardian in December 2021.

She is a registered nurse with more than 30 years' experience in the NHS, higher education, voluntary and private sectors. Prior to her role as National Guardian, she was a non-executive director at NHS Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group where she was also Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

She is the Independent Chair for the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board. She also worked with the NHS England New Care Models Programme for three years as a Clinical Associate and has been working as a consultant and coach with and in the NHS since March 2015. Her specialist clinical area is end of life care in which she was awarded her PhD.