



National Guardian's Office

Guidance

Freedom to Speak Up Champions and Ambassadors

Guidance for Freedom to Speak Up Guardians

November 2023



Introduction

The role of Freedom to Speak Up guardians and the National Guardian for the NHS were established in 2016 following recommendations from Sir Robert Francis' Freedom to Speak Up Inquiry. 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, the issues they raise are responded to and that the person speaking up receives feedback on the actions taken.

Freedom to Speak Up guardians are appointed by the organisation they support and abide by the guidance issued by the National Guardian's Office. They work proactively to support their organisation to tackle barriers to speaking up. Guardians come from a wide range of professional backgrounds and seniorities.

Freedom to Speak Up guardians cannot be effective in isolation. Their role requires them to work in partnership throughout their organisation to support speaking up and translate this learning to improve the safety and experience of all. This requires the time, commitment and support of everyone responsible for fostering a speak up, listen up, follow up culture.

Many organisations have developed internal networks of Freedom to Speak Up champions/ambassadors to raise awareness and promote the value of speaking up, listening up and following up. Many guardians rely on these networks to address challenges posed by organisation size, geography and the nature of their work and to help them support workers, especially those who may face barriers to speaking up.

This guidance sets out principles for the development and support of Freedom to Speak Up champion/ambassador networks. It is aimed at Freedom to Speak Up guardians to inform the work they do in partnership with their organisation to consider the needs of workers and how to meet them.

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Acknowledgements

The National Guardian’s Office would like to express our gratitude to the guardians and organisations who kindly shared their learning and experience with us, allowing us to observe and ask questions. That learning has informed this guidance and the accompanying materials.

We hope that you find them useful whether you are looking to refresh your approach or are just starting on your Freedom to Speak Up journey.

If you have any questions or would like to provide feedback, please contact us at enquiries@nationalguardianoffice.org.uk

What is the role called?

The terms Freedom to Speak Up ‘Champion’ or ‘Ambassador’ should be used to describe the role which is designed to raise awareness and play a key part in making speaking up business as usual. We do not recommend using term ‘advocate’, as this can create confusion and a false expectation that there is a personal representative element to the role.

Using either ‘champion’ or ‘ambassador’ helps to create a clear distinction between these roles and that of the Freedom to Speak up Guardian.

We use the term ‘champion’ throughout this guidance for ease of reference.

The purpose of the Freedom to Speak Up Champion role

Freedom to Speak Up Champions have a vital role in:

- Awareness raising – Ensuring workers understand the importance of speaking up, listening up and following up.
- Signposting – Discussing concerns with workers and providing details of speaking up routes as stated in their organisation’s Freedom to Speak Up Policy.
- Promoting a positive speaking up culture- Supporting their organisation to welcome and celebrate speaking up.

The National Guardian’s Office recommends a clear distinction between the roles of champion and guardian.

Only Freedom to Speak Up guardians, having received National Guardian’s Office training and registered on the NGO’s public directory, should handle speaking up cases. This ensures quality and consistency in how workers are supported when speaking up.

Principles

We expect the following principles to be applied:

Awareness raising

- Being visible and accessible
- Promoting speaking up within groups, departments and locations – particularly those that may be remote from other parts of the organisation.
- Role modelling the values and behaviours associated with speaking up, listening up, and following up ([See Freedom to Speak Up e-learning here](#))

Outcome

Workers are reminded of the importance of speaking up and encouraged to make it ‘business as usual’.

Signposting

Detailed knowledge of local speaking up policy and process including escalation routes and useful contacts including the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and providing information on options to the worker to speak up.

However, if it is identified that there is a patient safety or safeguarding risk, the Champion should follow their organisational Safeguarding policy.

Outcome

Workers are thanked and informed about the options available and feel empowered to act themselves.

Feedback

Share themes of any feedback from workers with the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian

Outcome

Workers' feedback helps improve the support offered to everyone. Workers feel listened to and that their voice counts.

Learning

A Champion network is formed locally to ensure that issues/themes are captured and communicated sensitively with the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian for wider learning.

Champions may wish to use the template Activity Log in annex 1 to share themes and details of any awareness raising activity with their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians should determine the frequency that themes are shared with them. The NGO recommends a minimum of quarterly.

Speaking up is an opportunity to learn and improve.

Outcome

Freedom to Speak Up Guardians and senior leaders have a better understanding of barriers that may prevent workers speaking up within their organisation, an understanding of which routes to speak up are being used and their effectiveness.

Communication

It is vital that workers understand the purpose of the champion role. Clear, regular communications to workers about the role expectations of Freedom to Speak Up champions will help to avoid confusion between the guardian and champion roles.

Appointment

As with Freedom to Speak Up guardians, champions should be appointed in a fair and open way to ensure confidence of workers within their organisation.

Freedom to Speak up Champions should have agreement from their line manager to undertake the role who should also be aware of the role expectations and the potential time commitment to carry it out.

Local processes must offer assurance that there are no real or perceived barriers to anyone applying for or being appointed to the champion role

We recommend encouraging applications from groups who may face additional barriers to speaking up. Examples include workers with a disability, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, agency or shift workers, junior doctors and trainees.

Looking at existing speaking up data and canvassing views of workers, existing networks and diversity groups will help inform your approach. Engaging with human resource, equality, diversity and inclusion and union colleagues as well as Workforce Race Equality/Disability Standards Teams, if your organisation has them, may encourage wider participation.

Training

We expect all champions to complete the [Freedom to Speak Up e-learning modules co-produced by the NGO and Health Education England for workers and managers](#). This will ensure that champions understand speaking up and the expectations about responding well when someone speaks up.

This should be supplemented with an information session delivered by their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian to ensure they are fully aware of the role expectations, the escalation routes available to workers as stated in the organisations Freedom to Speak Up Policy, safeguarding training to help champions identify any safeguarding concerns discussed with them and to know where and when to escalate these concerns to. To help with this, the National Guardian's Office has produced [a presentation template](#) which can be adapted locally.

Training needs are an ongoing conversation which should happen regularly to ensure that the needs of the champions are being met.

Support

Speaking up roles are not easy and require regular support. Whilst champions will not be handling cases, they are still likely to be contacted about and affected by difficult and distressing issues.

Champions should therefore be given appropriate support and as a minimum, there should be regular opportunities for:

- Buddying
- Organisational champion network meetings

- Regular meetings with the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian
- Training
- Access to an employee assistance programme

This [case study](#) highlights examples of how one organisation has supported their network of champions.

Confidentiality

Workers may approach champions wanting to speak up, so it is important that everyone understands the extent of the champion role and that they do not handle cases. Their role is to thank and signpost people to available routes to speak up, including, where appropriate, the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

Champions must not record or report identifying details of the workers who contact them unless legally obliged to disclose information shared with them, for example a Subject Access Request (SAR) of an email trail with a worker exploring speaking up routes.

In exceptional circumstances, confidentiality may need to be broken, for example, if there is an immediate risk of harm to an individual. However, there may be other ways to protect confidentiality, even in situations when the champion must take action to safeguard an individual, for example, if the person contacting them does not take that action themselves.

Champions will share numbers of contacts and thematic information with the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian to enable wider learning.

Monitoring the use and effectiveness of champion networks

We encourage Freedom to Speak Up Guardians to regularly review their local champion networks to ensure they continue to meet the needs of workers and members of the network, taking action to address any issues that arise. This could include:

- Regular opportunities for champions to feedback how well it works for them and for workers.
- Review of speaking up data and survey data/ feedback from workers so that the needs of all workers are met.
- Decisions about network size and composition and how regularly this is refreshed.
- Decisions about frequency and format of meetings.
- How information and learning is shared.

If the champion is not adhering to guidance or their circumstances have changed and they no longer wish to undertake the role, the Freedom to speak Up Guardian may arrange a conversation to offer support or step them down from the role.

Summary of Principles

- Use the term 'Champion' or 'Ambassador'.
- Distinguish between the role of guardian and champion.
- Champions do not record identifying information.
- Champions and their line managers understand the role expectations and potential time commitment of the role.
- Champions are appointed in a fair and open way and barriers to appointment are identified and addressed.
- Champion networks should reflect the diversity of your workforce.
- Champions undertake NGO/Health Education England [Speak Up, Listen Up, Follow Up](#) training.
- Champions are provided with regular training and support.
- The use and effectiveness of local Freedom to Speak Up networks are regularly reviewed.

Your Questions Answered

Q. Do we have to have people called Freedom to Speak Up ambassadors or champions or can organisations have champions named something else that helps to promote good culture?

A. Our guidance indicates that the term ‘advocate’ should not be used. It recommends the use of the term ‘champion’ or ‘ambassador’ to promote consistency and enable workers who may transfer across organisations to quickly understand local speaking up arrangements.

Q. We have a Champion who is also a Union rep, would the two roles conflict with each other?

A. It is important to have a diverse network of champions, each have unique insight of barriers that may prevent workers from speaking up.

We are clear within this guidance on the role expectations of the champion, it is important the champion understands in which role the worker is contacting them. For example, a champion should not attend a meeting with a worker to escalate concerns, if they were attending such a meeting, they would need to be clear with all present that they are attending in the capacity of their union role.

Q. Some of our Champions are also line managers, what should they do if they receive concerns?

A. If the worker speaking up is line managed by the champion, then they would receive concerns as stated in the organisations Freedom to Speak Up Policy. If a worker is not line managed by the champion, then the champion would explain their role and remit as a champion and adhere to this guidance.

Q. We approached colleagues in specific groups such as the LGBTQ+ network to ensure the network was diverse and inclusive but those who volunteered have not been through a formal appointment process. Does that mean they have to stand down?

A. No, however, Freedom to Speak Up Guardians should ensure that those who are already in champion / ambassador roles have the confidence of workers in their organisation. This may mean that guardians will want to regularly review the membership of the champion network to ensure it reflects the diversity of the workforce. Our guidance states that champions are appointed in a fair and open way and encourages representation from people in groups who may face additional barriers to speaking up.

Q. As the sole guardian in a large organisation, I do not have the capacity to deal with all the cases on my own, and I have a network of champions who DO handle cases. What should I do?

A. Champions should not handle speaking up cases. If guardians are overstretched with handling cases and carrying out other aspects of their role as set out in the [Universal Job Description](#), leaders need to understand why. Senior Leaders need to assure themselves that they have effective speaking up arrangements in their organisation, including a properly resourced Freedom to Speak Up Guardian function. Support for you as the guardian should be an ongoing conversation with senior leaders to ensure that sufficient time and resource is given to you and everyone in a speaking up role.

Your organisation should complete the [Freedom to Speak Up Reflection and Planning Tool](#) to demonstrate the strength of your organisations Freedom to Speak Up arrangements and identify any gaps that need addressing.

Q. What about cases brought to champions that guardians might have to follow up on?

A. Champions can play a positive role in modelling good speaking up behaviours and empowering workers to act themselves (subject to safety caveats mentioned in the guidance). They can signpost individuals to speak up to guardians – if that is the right route for them and those individuals choose to do so.

Champions do not handle speaking up cases, due to potential complex and sensitive issues, only Freedom to Speak Up guardians who have completed NGO training are recommended to receive cases. The nature of the champion role is to “thank, and signpost to...including, where appropriate, the Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.”

Q. Can champions pass on contact details to the guardian if asked to do so by the people who approach them?

A. Wherever possible we would advise that champions encourage the person who contacts them to contact the guardian directly themselves. This will avoid blurring the lines between ‘signposting’ and ‘escalating’. There is a risk that even what seems like a simple action could result in a champion being seen as part of the escalation route or even being drawn into a case.

Q. Can a Freedom to Speak Up Champion attend my Freedom to Speak Up Guardian network in my absence?

A. No, the networks are open to Freedom to Speak Up Guardians registered on the National Guardian Office’s directory. Champions are not eligible to attend unless they are there to present specific items agreed with their Freedom to Speak Up Guardian and the Network Chair.

Annexe 1

Activity Log for Freedom to Speak Up Champions and Ambassadors

Date period		
No. of contacts		
Themes	Bullying & harassment	
	Patient safety	
	Worker well being	
	Inappropriate attitudes or behaviours	
	Disadvantages, demeaning treatment as result of speaking up	
Signposted to	(e.g. Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, HR, Occupational health, Departmental lead)	
Details of Proactive work	(e.g. 10 th Jan attended staff induction.)	
Feedback received	(e.g. Worker spoke to HR – thanked me for signposting, worker thanked me and felt reassured. Worker found the speaking up policy confusing.)	

Document History

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