

Speak Up Review of Experiences Among Overseas-Trained Workers in the NHS: Terms of Reference

Background

Speaking up may take many forms, including a discussion with a line manager, an idea for improvement submitted as part of a suggestion scheme, raising an issue with a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian, or bringing a matter to the attention of a regulator. If we think something might go wrong, it is important that we feel able to speak up so potential harm may be prevented. When things are good but could be better, we should feel able to say something and expect our suggestion is listened to and used as an opportunity for improvement. Speaking up is about all these things.

Overseas-trained workers make up a large and growing portion of the healthcare workforce in England. They come from diverse countries and professions, and their ability to speak up confidently is important to patient care and safety. However, our previous reviews as well as, for example, insights from other national bodies, have highlighted concerns about the extent to which these workers feel free to speak up. In response, we have initiated a review to shed light on these issues, identify barriers, highlight examples of good and innovative practices, and make recommendations for improving the ability of overseas-trained workers to speak up.

Definition and Terminology

The term “overseas-trained workers” used here refers to healthcare workers who obtained their professional qualifications outside the UK. This includes professionals trained and were recruited from outside the UK, as well as those trained outside the UK but not necessarily recruited from there. It should be noted that due to the focus of this review, this definition is based solely on training, qualification, and recruitment, regardless of any other countries where these healthcare professionals may have worked.

In this review, we will use the term 'overseas-trained workers' instead of 'international workers,' or other similar terminology. However, we are mindful that while there is substantial overlap between these terms, there may also be significant differences. We will take these differences into account and note them throughout our review.

Aims

The overarching aims of our review are to:

- Enhance the understanding and improvement of the Speak Up culture among overseas-trained workers in the NHS.
- Develop actionable recommendations to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for these workers.

Objectives

Our specific objectives to achieve these aims are to:

- Shed light on the experiences of overseas-trained workers regarding speaking up, identifying challenges, barriers, and examples of good practice.
- Understand the impact of overseas-trained workers' ability to speak up on patient safety.
- Assess the effectiveness of current understanding of the speaking-up landscape, including confidence levels among overseas-trained workers.
- Highlight and promote ways to support and amplify the voices of overseas-trained workers in the healthcare system, recognising and disseminating examples of good practice.
- Formulate recommendations for enhancing the speak-up culture for overseas-trained workers.

Scope

Our review will focus on the speak-up culture and arrangements within the NHS, specifically regarding overseas-trained workers in primary and secondary healthcare settings. This review focuses on professionals in registered roles, such as doctors and nurses. We will also encapsulate allied health professions with the largest cohorts of overseas-trained workers for an inclusive review.

The review will complement existing initiatives aimed at broader cultural and related improvements.

Approach and Methodology

Given the large number of overseas-trained workers and their geographical spread, our review will primarily be conducted remotely to ensure that as many workers as possible can participate.

We welcome input from all overseas-trained workers. To ensure a focused approach, we will primarily engage with diaspora organisations for workers from countries that constitute the majority of the overseas-trained workforce.

Our approach will involve:

1. Desk-based research analysing publicly available data and intelligence.
2. Engagement with workers, Freedom to Speak Up guardians, healthcare system representatives (e.g., NMC, GMC, HCPC, etc.), and senior leaders in providers (e.g., HR directors), through focus groups, interviews, and surveys, leveraging networks supporting overseas-trained workers.

We have already undertaken the desk-based research and set up an expert advisory group comprising representatives from relevant organisations to ensure our work is collaborative, informed, focused, and yields meaningful results.

We will base our evaluations and recommendations on good practices and relevant guidelines, including those set by ourselves and NHS England. Our review will engage stakeholders, including professional and systems regulators, to promote and embed learning.

It is important to note that we will not investigate individual speaking up cases as part of this review.

Governance and Accountability

The National Guardian for the NHS will oversee the review and publish its findings and recommendations. Progress updates will be shared with our Accountability and Liaison Board (ALB), including ratifying the conclusions and recommendations.

Outputs

We will publish a report detailing our findings.

Leaders and Freedom to Speak Up guardians should use this report to assess and implement local learning and improvement recommendations.

Broader recommendations for national bodies and the system will be promoted, with the National Guardian for the NHS engaging with relevant stakeholders.

Confidentiality

We are committed to maintaining a psychologically safe environment and ensuring the confidentiality of those contributing to our review. We will not disclose identifiable information shared by workers as part of this review with anyone outside the NGO without the consent of those relevant workers.

In circumstances where there is an immediate risk of harm to an individual, we may need to take further action. In such cases, we will act while protecting confidentiality as much as possible. We will liaise with the individual in all cases where confidentiality may be affected.

Timeline

The review is expected to be completed, with the report and recommendations published by the end of 2024.