

# Freedom to speak up index report 2019

## About the National Guardian Office

The [National Guardian's Office](#) (NGO) is an independent, non-statutory body sponsored by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), NHS England and NHS Improvement. The NGO's remit is to lead culture change in the NHS so that staff 'speaking up' - i.e. raising any issues of patient care quality or safety - becomes business as usual.

The NGO supports the national guardian for the NHS, Dr Henrietta Hughes, whose role was established following a recommendation made by Sir Robert Francis' [freedom to speak up review in 2015](#). Dr Hughes and the office provide leadership, training and advice for freedom to speak up (FTSU) guardians, which every trust has been required to have in place since October 2016. Since 2018, trust boards have also been [required](#) to have named executive and non-executive leads responsible for speaking up.

The NGO also provides challenge, learning and support to the healthcare system as a whole by reviewing trusts' speaking up culture and the handling of concerns where they appear to have not followed good practice.

## Freedom to speak up (FTSU) index

The NGO published a new [report](#) in October 2019 on a FTSU index, which monitors speaking up culture in the NHS based on four questions from the annual NHS staff survey. The NGO has previously published survey reports indicating that a positive speaking up culture is associated with higher performing organisations as rated by the CQC.

The purpose of the index is to enable trusts to see at a glance how their FTSU culture compares with others, in order to promote the sharing of good practice and help trusts that are struggling to 'buddy up' with those that have higher index scores.

The report set out the FTSU index score for every trust in England. Nationally, the median FTSU index score has improved since 2015, and this pattern is reflected for all trust types. The report found that 180 trusts (82%) have made it easier for staff to speak out since 2015. There was a decrease in the index score over the same period in 40 trusts.

The report included case studies from the best performing trusts from each type of trust and those that have made the most significant improvement. These case studies detailed the changes that trusts have

made to engage with their workforce and develop a positive speaking up culture and the impact that this has made.

The NGO has said it will continue to track trusts' progress in developing positive speaking up cultures for their workforce.

As part of the report publication, NHS England announced that it is offering support to those experiencing difficulty finding suitable employment in the NHS as a result of raising concerns at work. The £100,000 scheme will offer staff career coaching, shadowing opportunities, work experience, CV writing advice, interview skills practice, financial advice and resilience training.

## What this means for governors

In NHS Providers training modules we encourage governors to seek third party sources of assurance and this report is such an example. The report is a useful source of information for governors about their trust's speaking up culture, and how it compares with other trusts, which can be viewed together with other information about safety, workforce and culture. Governors can use their holding to account duty to question how their trust is working to develop positive speaking up cultures for their workforce and any new steps their trust's board will be taking in light of the report's findings.