

Board of Directors (in Public)
Item 5.1

Subject: Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) 2024/25 Annual Report
Date of Meeting: 29th April 2024
Presented by: Ceri Thomas, FTSU Guardian
Purpose of Report: For Assurance

BAF Ref	Impact on BAF
ALL	The report provides assurance on the arrangements in place to support staff to speak up and to ensure learning from staff concerns is identified and embedded.

Level of Assurance (please tick) To be used to provide the Board / Committee with a guide on the extent of assurance and evidence of assurance provided within the report		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Level of Assurance	Description	
High	There is a strong system of internal control which has been effectively designed to meet the system objectives, and that controls are consistently applied in all areas reviewed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Substantial	There is a good system of internal control designed to meet the system objectives, and that controls are generally being applied consistently.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Moderate	There is an adequate system of internal control, however, in some areas weakness in design and/or inconsistent application of controls puts the achievement and some aspects of the system objectives at risk.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Limited	There is a compromised system of internal control as weaknesses in the design and / or inconsistent application of controls puts the achievement of the system objectives at risk.	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	There is an inadequate system of internal control as weaknesses in control, and/or consistent non-compliance with controls could/has resulted in failure to achieve the system objectives.	<input type="checkbox"/>

1. Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to provide the Trust Board with an update of the work of the Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) Guardians and Champions in supporting the safety culture within the Trust, reflect on the progress made by the FTSU Network in empowering staff to speak up freely and encouraging ongoing positive cultural change.

The paper provides an overview of issues and concerns raised over the last 12 months and updates

from the National Guardian's Office for Freedom to Speak Up with the aim of providing assurance that the local arrangements in place continue to meet best practice and support staff to raise concerns.

This is done in the context of an evolving and maturing national agenda, that is learning from the collective experiences of FTSU Guardians, their champion networks and those at the National Guardian Office.

Good progress is being made against the delivery of the strategic priorities set for 2024/25 which included the new Guardian establishing her role and continuing to develop and grow the Champions network.

The release of the NHS annual Staff Survey results identified LHCH as ranking top for the second year for FTSU.

Listening Up was the theme for FTSU month in October 2024. The Trust used a number of methods in order to raise awareness.

2024 saw the recruitment of 12 new Champions, the total now being 29. Dr Clare Quarterman, Consultant Anaesthetist, Intensivist and Director of Medical Education also stepped into the role of Deputy Guardian.

2. Background

The National Guardian Office for Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) continues to lead the way in improving the speak-up culture nationally. NHS Trusts and Foundation Trusts are mandated to employ a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian (FTSUG), whose role is to provide an alternative channel for workers to raise concerns, ensuring that concerns received are escalated, investigated and followed up to enhance patient safety and worker experiences. The FTSUGs provide the Executive Board of Directors with quarterly and annual reports of the issues raised and updates from the NGO with anonymised thematic speak-up data. Themes and trends of concerns raised nationally are analysed to inform guidance and improvements at a national level.

At a local level, the Liverpool Heart and Chest Hospital FTSU continues to be integrated within the organisation alongside the Trust's other channels for raising concerns such as incident reporting, safety huddle and HALT. This is achieved via awareness raising, linking in with staff networks and offering training. Through a personal speak-up safely pledge, the Trust's Chief Executive Officer encourages all staff to speak up and gives assurance that any concerns raised will be investigated and staff will be protected from any detriment after speaking up.

The FTSU internal network comprises of an FTSU Executive Director lead, Non-Executive Director lead, two Freedom to Speak Up Guardians, a Deputy Guardian, and a network of multi-disciplinary FTSU Champions, which was further refreshed during 2024/25. The FTSUG's work closely with the FTSU Executive Director lead and senior leaders to enable effective escalation, review and triangulation of safety and welfare concerns.

The FTSU Guardians continue to maintain engagement and communication with the National Guardian's Office and the Northwest Regional Network of FTSU Guardians for support and continued learning and updates.

3. FTSU arrangements and speak ups in 2024/25

The FTSU arrangements are embedded across the Trust, and there has been a continued focus on ensuring awareness and access to channels for speaking up. There has been the introduction of post boxes in a number of locations across the Trust for anonymous reporting and Guardian's do

regular walkabouts and support the staff networks.

3.1 Assessment of FTSU issues raised in

A total of 21 concerns were raised through FTSU in the 2024/25 financial year. These are concerns raised directly with the FTSUG / Champions network. Concerns raised through other safety channels e.g. with line managers or through incident reporting, HALT, Safety Huddles are not logged through FTSU unless referred to the FTSU Guardian. In summary

- There were 8 concerns raised where staff perceived an element of bullying or poor behaviour from other members of staff. Each concern was investigated and followed up by the Guardian. Where possible, the staff member who had raised the concern was kept updated.
- Twelve concerns were regarding working policies and related to managing attendance, attending training, appraisal, rota management.
- Only one concern was directly related to patient safety concerning listing practices, attitudes affecting safety, management practices, staff competency.
- In triangulation meetings with HR, a number of the concerns raised that concerned bullying or working practices had also been highlighted to HR.

The themes of the FTSU concerns raised as categorised by the NGO guidelines and outcomes are detailed in the table below.

Table 3.1: Comparative view of concerns raised in quarters 1,2,3,and 4 2024/25

Themes of concerns as categorised by the NGO	Q1 2024/25	Q2 2024/25	Q3 2024/25	Q4 2024/25	Total
Element of Patient Safety or Quality	1	0	0	0	1
Element of Worker safety, policy or Wellbeing	0	2	5	5	12
Element of Bullying or Harassment	2	2	2	2	8
Number of cases where disadvantageous or demeaning treatment (detriment) from speaking up is indicated	0	0	0	0	0
Other: e.g. Poor communication, health and wellbeing	0	0	0	0	0
Total	3	4	7	7	21
Number of cases raised anonymously	1	1	1	1	4

Of the 21 cases, 19 have been investigated and closed (some have been raised via HR and are being managed via alternative policies).

The Trust continues to put patient safety at the centre of its work, with a continuing emphasis on the Be civil, Be kind program, which is in the process of being re-launched. Guardians were invited to contribute to this. The program aims to improve values and behavior with regular digital comms bulletins to highlight trust values / behaviors.

In line with the NGO guidance, comparative views of concerns raised in the reported quarter and the previous quarters, per professional groups are provided below.

3.2 Assessment of those speaking up through FTSU in 2024/25

Guidelines by the NGO require recording of the professional level and category of the speak-up staff where identifiable. The following table reflects the professional level of individuals who raised a speak up in the four quarters, as per the reporting guidance issued by the National Guardian Office.

Table 3.2 Concerns raised by different staff in 2024/25

Concerns raised by staff bands	Worker	Senior Manager	Senior Leader	Unknown/ Undisclosed	Total
Q1 2024/25	3	0	0	0	3
Q2 2024/25	3	0	0	1	4
Q3 2024/25	7	0	0	0	7
Q4 2024/25	7	0	0	0	7
Annual Totals	7	0	0	1	21

The table below reflects the professional groups who raised concerns for the current and previous 3 quarters as per the National Guardian Office guidelines.

Table 3.3: Comparison of concerns raised by different professional groups

Concerns raised by professional groups	Q1 2024/25	Q2 2024/25	Q3 2024/25	Q4 2024/25	Total
Medics	2	0	1	1	4
RGN/ Midwives/ ANPs	0	1	4	2	7
Nursing Assistants & HCA	1	0	0	1	2
Allied Health Practitioners	0	2	2	3	7
Admin, Clerical	0	0	0	0	0
Maintenance/Ancillary/Cleaning/ Catering/ Porters	0	0	0	0	0
Corporate Service Staff	0	0	0	0	0
Undisclosed	0	1	0	0	0
Total number of speak-ups	3	4	7	7	21

The undisclosed group consists of concerns raised anonymously as well as colleagues who contacted the FTSU champions confidentially.

3.3 Comparative data for the past 5 years

The table below shows a year-on-year comparator of concerns raised.

Year	Bullying and Harassment	Worker safety/Working policies*	Patient Safety	Detriment from speaking up	Other	Total cases raised
2020/21	10	-	7	0	17	34
2021/22	7	-	3	4	14	31
2022/23	9	7	2	1	2	26
2023/24	6	12	7	0	2	27
2024/25	8	12	1	0	0	21

*The category of working policies was introduced by the NGO in the 2022/23 year and as such were not previously recorded.

3.5 FTSU Arrangements and Governance

The escalation process is publicised widely, and shared with the FTSU champions, to ensure consistency when a speak up is raised.

Engagement with the FTSU Champions for learning, development, updates and guidance are maintained through quarterly in person workshops. The FTSU Executive Director lead regularly attends the workshops and invites are also extended to the Non-Executive Director.

Regular meetings between the Executive Director lead for FTSU and Guardians provides guidance and support. Concerns are escalated as they are raised for information and also to ensure discussion as required with the relevant Executive Director.

Monthly meetings between FTSUG's and HR Business Partners have been maintained which enables a triangulation of FTSU concerns to be considered with ongoing employee relations cases, along with progress and support to resolve issues raised.

Regular meetings with Guardian's and Staff Side Union Reps provides an opportunity to discuss themes and concerns.

The FTSUG has reported to the Board of Directors on a quarterly basis throughout the year.

3.6 FTSU Awareness Raising Activities

A number of awareness raising activities have been employed in 2024/25

- Updated FTSU policy, network posters with contact information, as well as the Chief Executive Speak-Up Pledge are displayed and accessible on the trust intranet, and notice boards around the trust.
- Regular FTSU awareness raising walkabouts are conducted. Any safety concerns picked up during these walkabouts are escalated immediately or colleagues signposted as applicable.
- Presentations at Trust's monthly Team Brief continue to raise awareness of recurring themes and cascade information from the NGO.
- Guardians attended the Wellbeing Day held by Health Innovation North West Coast to promote FTSU.
- Guardian's attend Staff Network and awareness raising events throughout the year.
- In order to celebrate and raise awareness of Freedom to Speak Up, a number of activities were arranged to take place in October, which is the nationally designated month for FTSU. This year's theme for the month was 'Listening Up'.
 - Several champions manned an awareness raising stand in the main corridor. They highlighted the ways in which staff can speak up and were successful in recruiting several new Champions.
 - Extra walk arounds took place throughout the clinical and non-clinical areas.
 - FTSU was promoted by our comms team with screen savers, information sharing and a short video for the Trust's social media.
 - Weekly screensavers were present to raise awareness.
 - Several quotes of why staff volunteer to be an FTSU Champion were shared.

3.7 Further Development of FTSU in 2024/25

Work has continued with the FTSU element on InPhase, and this will now be widely publicised as another option for raising a concern with Guardians. The module is open for all staff, with the concerns being visible only to the FTSUG's.

Four post boxes were installed around the Trust, providing another platform for staff to raise concerns.

Guardians will attend MDT Micro Teach sessions within ACU regularly, which will support the team and promote speaking up.

Guardians sit on the EDIB Steering Group, Health, Wellbeing and Culture Steering Group and contribute to other meetings such as Sexual Safety, Be Civil Be Kind.

3.8 Highlights from the National Guardian Office

During 2024/25 the FTSU Guardians kept abreast of the guidance released by the NGO and any actions needed. In summary:

- ❖ With LHCH ranking top in the 2023 Staff Survey for Speaking Up, a case study of the Trust was included in the NGO Annual Report which was laid before Parliament in March 2024.
- ❖ The 2025 FTSU conference was held in London in March with a theme of Listening Up – Changing Organisational Culture. The LHCH FTSU Guardian was in attendance at the conference virtually.
- ❖ Monthly lunch and learn webinars are held which provide an opportunity to catch up on a variety of topics such as inclusion, support for Guardians, culture review of ambulance trusts
- ❖ This year's theme for FTSU month in October was 'Listening Up' – removing the obstacles which people feel stop them from speaking up.
- ❖ The NGO launched refresher training for Guardians which was completed by Guardians.
- ❖ The NGO released guidance for NED's for FTSU.

3.9 Speaking Up Culture

Awareness raising for FTSU is ongoing throughout the year with monthly updates on Team Brief and dedicated walk rounds to all areas across the organisation. There are now 29 FTSU Champions, who are situated across most areas in the organisation. The Champions are from many disciplines, departments and levels and represent our LHCH community allowing good access for staff to raise concerns.

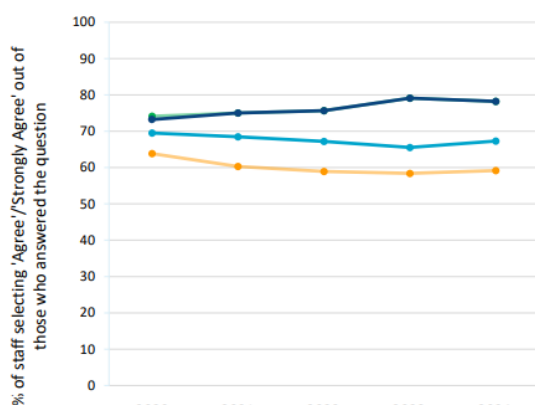
The national NHS Staff survey results 2024 show that LHCH is top in the country for being a place to work.

The following graphs are taken directly from the survey results and demonstrate that LHCH is the best Trust for staff feeling able to speak up about anything that concerns them.

LHCH is the best Trust for staff feeling "We each have a voice that counts," for the second consecutive year.

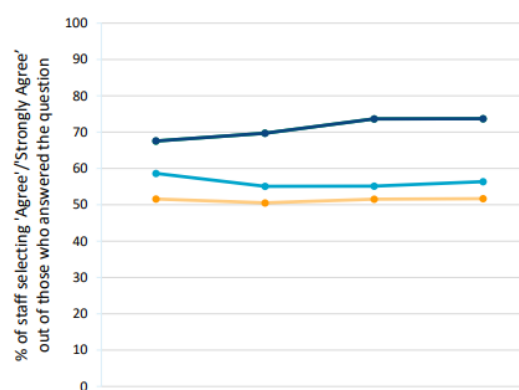


Q25e I feel safe to speak up about anything that concerns me in this organisation.



	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Your org	73.22%	75.04%	75.64%	79.10%	78.22%
Best result	74.12%	75.04%	75.64%	79.10%	78.22%
Average result	69.50%	68.47%	67.22%	65.54%	67.28%
Worst result	63.85%	60.29%	58.94%	58.40%	59.17%
Responses	1099	1015	1236	1202	1144

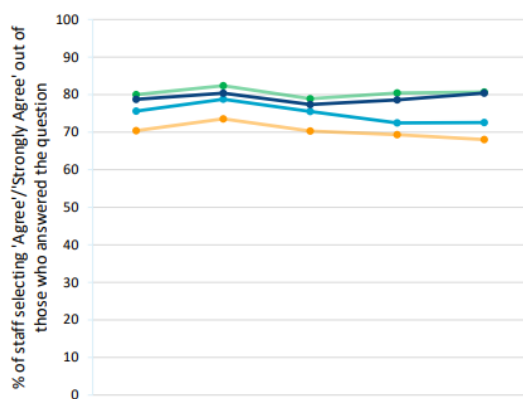
Q25f If I spoke up about something that concerned me I am confident my organisation would address my concern



	2021	2022	2023	2024
Your org	67.56%	69.70%	73.64%	73.70%
Best result	67.56%	69.70%	73.64%	73.70%
Average result	58.65%	55.09%	55.13%	56.39%
Worst result	51.62%	50.54%	51.55%	51.68%
Responses	1011	1235	1204	1147

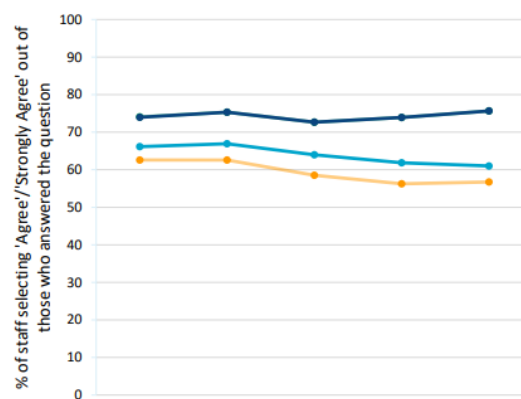


Q20a I would feel secure raising concerns about unsafe clinical practice.



	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Your org	78.74%	80.40%	77.36%	78.60%	80.41%
Best result	80.01%	82.37%	78.90%	80.45%	80.69%
Average result	75.61%	78.77%	75.49%	72.46%	72.57%
Worst result	70.40%	73.55%	70.31%	69.33%	68.03%
Responses	1100	1025	1240	1201	1142

Q20b I am confident that my organisation would address my concern.



	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Your org	73.96%	75.30%	72.65%	73.90%	75.65%
Best result	74.04%	75.30%	72.65%	73.90%	75.65%
Average result	66.15%	66.92%	63.99%	61.86%	61.00%
Worst result	62.59%	62.58%	58.51%	56.25%	56.73%
Responses	1100	1025	1234	1199	1139

3.10 FTSU Strategy Priorities 2024/25

A set of priorities was developed to ensure the continued enhancement to FTSU arrangement. These included:

- FTSU having an input into revising policies and toolkits for Civility and Respect. To include Grievance and Disciplinary policies as well as working closely with Wellbeing and HR to continue to complete walk abouts and awareness raising events to ensure we are more proactive and not just reactive - complete
- The FTSU Guardian will continue to establish her role, promote FTSU and support the Champions - ongoing
- Further develop the Communications strategy – ongoing.
- Positive stories – to find new ways of getting feedback from those accessing FTSU – ongoing.

- Revisit the training and optimise number of individuals who access this. Look at building into communications. Liaise with OD to look at different strategies. Continue to provide awareness / guidance and training to managers and in particular, for identified departments where there is need – Training has been updated and dates to be set for 2025/26
- Guardians to foster good links with staff network groups and have a presence in relevant strategy meetings – complete. Guardian is now invited to relevant meetings.
- To support international staff and other groups we find hard to reach to speak up - ongoing.
- Emphasising the 'no wrong door' policy for staff regarding how and who to speak up to – ongoing.

Progress against the priorities is good including delivery of training to managers; contributing to relevant strategy groups and training and more volunteers coming forward to be Champions. Communications continuing throughout the year with additional opportunities for FTSU month in October.

Links have been made with EDIB and Wellbeing Officer, International Nurse Advocate, OD and HR managers, Staff Side Reps to identify themes and learning.

3.11 FTSU Strategy Priorities 2025/26

- ❖ Completion of the FTSU Self-assessment tool as recommended by the NGO and identify good practice and areas for development / improvement.
- ❖ Continue to promote FTSU and the different options for staff. This will involve “launching” the option to report via InPhase for all staff and FTSU Champions.
- ❖ Foster supportive relationships with Guardians within the LAASP group to provide opportunities for sharing good practice and learning.
- ❖ Detriment – explore experiences of workers who speak up and how the Trust responds to allegations of detriment. Liaising with our People teams to identify possible incidents of detriment, reviewing the exit questionnaire.
- ❖ Roll out the updated FTSU training to managers to offer support, guidance and confidence when addressing speak ups.

4.0 Achievements

- ❖ **NGO ranks LHCH Top for “We each have a voice that counts**
For the second consecutive year, LHCH have ranked top for Speaking Up in the NHS Staff Survey. It is, of course recognised that this is about the wider culture within the Trust and FTSU is a key part of this.
- ❖ **LHCH featured in the NGO Annual Report which was laid before Parliament.**
- ❖ **FTSU Champions**
12 new Champions have joined the network this year, bringing the total number to 29. We are proud that our Champions represent the Trust community.

5.0 Updates from the National Guardian Office

- This year’s theme for FTSU month in October was ‘Listening Up’ – actively listening to hear when someone speaks up.
- The National FTSU conference in March 2025 was attended virtually by the FTSU Guardian. The theme of the conference was Speaking Up – Changing Organisational Culture.
- The job description for the role of FTSU Guardian has been reviewed and updated following consultation with Guardians, People / HR Leaders.
- The NGO have published a new guidance document on Detriment.

6.0 Conclusion

The processes for Freedom to Speak-Up compliments the well-established safety culture in the trust where staff are encouraged to raise concerns. The FTSU internal network provides an alternative channel for staff to speak confidentially or anonymously with assurance that concerns will be escalated and workers are supported while concerns are investigated.

The FTSU Guardian's continue to maintain an active role in engaging with the staff to raise the FTSU profile.

The provision of quarterly and annual reports to the Board of Directors on the concerns raised through the FTSU internal network will ensure oversight of issues occurring across the organisation.

The FTSU Guardian's will continue to engage with the National Office and regional network to ensure LHCH continues to lead the way in relation to best practice.

7.0 Recommendations

The Board of Directors is asked to:

- i) note the 2024/25 annual FTSU report.
- ii) receive assurance that local FTSU arrangements are in place and continue to meet best practice.

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