



## **Cover Sheet**

**Trust Board Meeting in Public: Wednesday 14 May 2025**

**TB2025.42**

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**Title:**                **Freedom to Speak Up [FTSU] In-year Update Q1/Q2/Q3 2024/25**

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**Status:**            **For Information**

**History:**          **TB2024.95 FTSU Annual Report 2023/24**

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**Board Lead:**     **Chief People Officer**

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**Confidential:**    **No**

**Key Purpose:**   **Assurance**

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## Executive Summary

1. This paper presents an in-year update on activity undertaken by the Freedom to Speak Up [FTSU] team at OUH, since presentation of the Annual Report 2023/24. It includes data on cases opened in the nine-month period from 1 April to 31 December 2024 and highlights some other relevant developments.
2. Activity undertaken by the FTSU team at OUH work is pursued in collaboration with colleagues in teams across the Trust, always with the aim of further improving and embedding a healthy speaking up culture throughout the organisation.
3. The full report is **attached** at Appendix 1.

## Recommendation

4. The Trust Board **is asked to:**
  - **Note & discuss** this in-year update on activity undertaken by the FTSU team at OUH in Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2024/25.

## Freedom to Speak Up [FTSU] In-year Update Q1/Q2/Q3 2024/25

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. This paper presents an in-year update, **attached** at Appendix 1, on FTSU activity at OUH in the first three quarters of 2024/25, from 1 April to 31 December 2024.

### 2. Update

- 2.1. Data is provided on the number of formally recorded cases that were opened after staff contact with OUH FTSU Guardians, with a breakdown of the reason(s) for contact in those cases. (**NB** Multiple reasons may be identified in relation to a single case).
- 2.2. Between 1 April and 31 December 2024, OUH FTSU Guardians opened **108 cases** after being contacted for advice and support (compared to 66 cases opened in the same period of 2022/23).
- 2.3. In addition to cases formally opened, there has been a much larger number of staff members across the Trust with whom the FTSU team has engaged through monthly online Listening Events and other initiatives to raise awareness and remove barriers to speaking up, promoting the Trust's **#SpeakUpListenUpFollowUp** culture.
- 2.4. During the annual national Speak Up month alone (October 2024), **1,313 staff** dropped in at FTSU Roadshows held on each of the four main hospital sites and OUH Cowley.
- 2.5. In the [NHS Staff Survey 2024 Benchmark Report](#) the OUH had an overall score of **6.76 out of 10** in relation to the People Promise Element: *"We each have a voice that counts"* (relating to *Raising Concerns*). This is slightly less than last year's score of 6.84, reflecting a nationwide downward turn in scores in relation to this element. The OUH score is better than the **national average (of 6.67)** and it is significantly better than poorly performing outliers (5.95), although with room for improvement to match the score of the best performing trusts (7.14).
- 2.6. Comparisons with national FTSU data are based on the National Guardian – Freedom to Speak Up's most recent Annual Report on [Speaking Up Data 2023/24](#), published in July 2024 (ref 2.11 – 2.15 Appendix 1)
- 2.7. In response to staff feedback, and as part of the Trust's commitment to breaking barriers to speaking up, a major in year development has been the introduction of the [WorkInConfidence anonymous reporting platform](#) [WiC] in November 2024, as an extension of the Trust's existing [Freedom to Speak Up](#) service.

- 2.8. Another in year development – although it falls outside the period covered by this Update Report – has been publication of the [Detriment guide - National Guardian's Office](#) published in January 2025, of which OUH FTSU Guardians will be taking full account.
- 2.9. Also underway, in line with the schedule for 3-yearly review, is an exercise to identify any necessary revisions/updates to the OUH FTSU Policy, which will then be presented for approval by the Board in November 2025.

### 3. Conclusion

- 3.1. OUH FTSU Guardians continue to collaborate with colleagues in teams across the Trust, to further improve and embed a healthy speaking up culture throughout the organisation; in particular through engagement with the Trust's programme for the *Eradication of Bullying and Harassment*.
- 3.2. Furthering improvements to the speaking up culture at OUH, this collaborative working is underpinned by the Board's commitment to embed a healthy speaking up culture throughout the organisation e.g. by breaking barriers to speaking up (introducing the [WorkInConfidence anonymous reporting platform](#) and making it equally simple and accessible to raise a concern with a FTSU Guardian), and by promoting the ['Raising a concern' staff website](#), to make it easier for staff to navigate the various routes and channels available for raising concerns.
- 3.3. This collaborative approach adheres to NHS England's [updated FTSU guidance and reflection and planning tool](#) which emphasises that:  
*"speaking up sits within the wider context of a compassionate and inclusive culture, ... all elements of [which] are closely linked to Freedom To Speak Up, and must be implemented alongside it"*
- 3.4. Using the reflection and planning tool, a gap analysis has now been undertaken by the FTSU Lead Guardian, based upon which an action plan is being developed to support the further strengthening of FTSU arrangements at OUH; ensuring that staff can access the support required to meet their needs in relation to raising concerns.

### 4. Recommendations

- 4.1. The **Trust Board is asked to:**
  - **Note & discuss** this in-year update on activity undertaken by the FTSU team at OUH in Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2024/25.

## Freedom to Speak Up – In-year Update Report Q1/Q2/Q3, 2024/25

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1. The purpose of the In-Year Update Report is to provide an overview of the work of the Freedom to Speak Up [FTSU] Guardians at OUH in the nine-month period from 1 April to 31 December 2024, providing data on contacts made, and highlighting some other relevant developments in that time.

### 2. Recorded staff contacts and cases opened

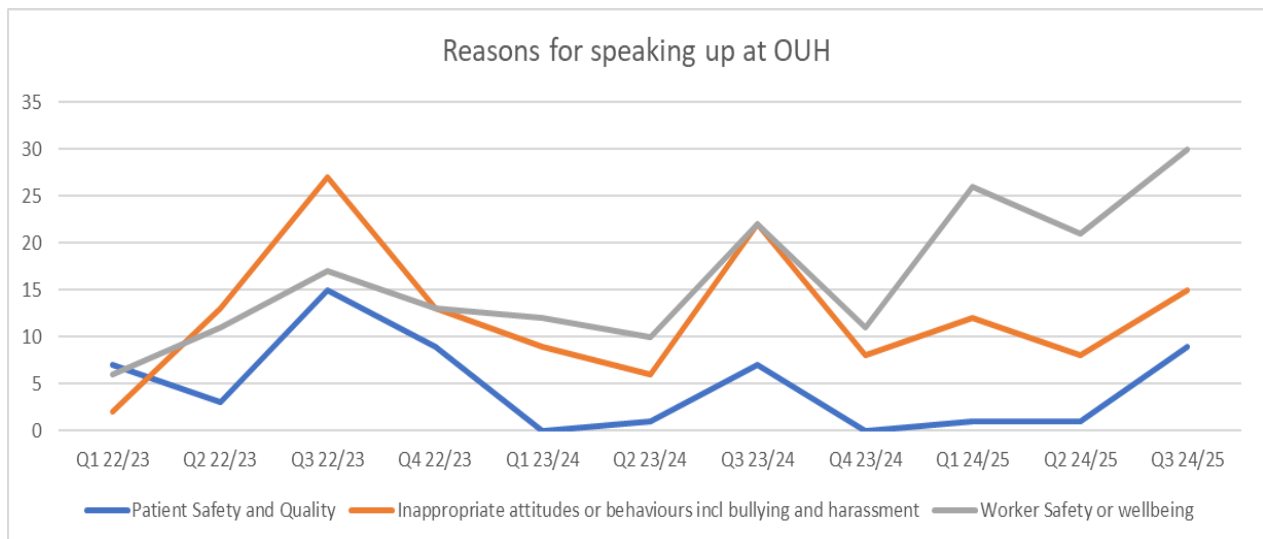
- 2.1. The number of cases formally opened after staff contact with FTSU Guardians at OUH during the period covered by this report is **108** (compared to 66 cases opened in the same period of 2023/24).
- 2.2. The OUH FTSU team has also engaged with a much larger number of staff through a range of initiatives aimed at raising awareness and removing barriers to speaking up, through online Listening Events, induction sessions, walkabouts, and other events.
- 2.3. During national annual Speak Up month alone (October 2024), **1,313** staff members **dropped in on FTSU Roadshows** which were held on each of the four main hospital sites and at OUH Cowley (1,007 in October 2023).
- 2.4. Year on year data on the number of contacts giving rise to a case being opened at OUH is provided in Table 1.

Year	Period covered	No of cases/contacts	
2017/18	8 months		56
		<b>Half year</b>	<b>Full year</b>
2018/19	Q1 and Q2	39	
	Q3 and Q4	54	
	12 months		93
2019/20	Q1 and Q2	86	
	Q3 and Q4	55	
	12 months		141
2020/21	Q1 and Q2	92	
	Q3 and Q4	72	
	12 months		164
2021/22	Q1 and Q2	38	
	Q3 and Q4`	78	
	12 months		116
2022/23	Q1 and Q2	37	
	Q3 and Q4	57	
	12 months		94
2023/24	Q1 and Q2	30	
	Q3 and Q4	65	
	12 months		95
2024/25	Q1 and Q2	67	
	Q3 ( <b>NB 1 Qtr only</b> )	41	

Table 1 - Number of contacts (Source: OUH Lead FTSU Guardian)

### Themes/Elements present in concerns raised

- 2.5. At OUH, the most reported theme during Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2024/25 has been “staff safety or wellbeing”, featuring in 77 cases (71% of cases).
- 2.6. During the same period, “bullying and harassment” was cited as the reason for contact with OUH FTSU Guardians in 24 cases (22% of cases).
- 2.7. “Inappropriate attitudes or behaviour” was an element in a further 22 out of the total of 108 cases formally opened at OUH during Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2024/25 (20% of cases).
- 2.8. In the same period, only 11 cases raised contained an element of “patient safety and quality” (= 10% of cases).
- 2.9. Trends in the reasons why people have spoken up at OUH over the past eleven quarters are represented in Graph 1.



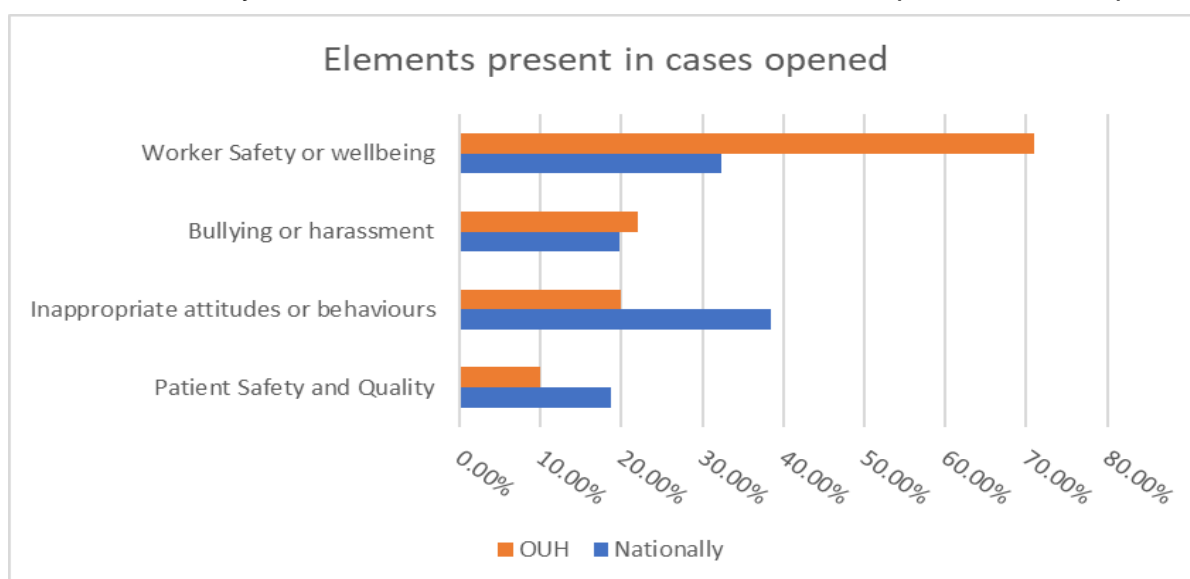
Graph 1 – Reasons for speaking up at OUH 2022/23, 2023/24 and Q1/Q2/Q3 2023/24  
(Source: OUH Lead FTSU Guardian)

### Some comparisons with national data

- 2.10. The most recent [NGO Annual Report on Speaking Up Data 2023/24](#), published by [The National Guardian's Office - Freedom to Speak Up](#) in July 2024, showed that across the country, 32,167 cases were raised with FTSU Guardians during the whole year 2023/24. This represented a 27.6% increase on 25,382 cases recorded nationally in 2022/23, which had been a 25% increase on cases in 2021/22.
- 2.11. This rate of year-on-year increase in the number of cases raised nationally was not being reflected in OUH data up to the end of 2024, with only a small increase from 94 cases at OUH in 2022/23 to 95 in 2023/24. However, this did arrest a year-on-year decrease observed at OUH since

2021/22, and the number of FTSU cases opened at OUH in the first 3 quarters of 2024/25 alone already stands at 108.

- 2.12. Nationally, the most reported theme has remained inappropriate attitudes or behaviour, which was reported as an element in 38.5% of cases (up from 30% in 2022/23) and bullying and harassment was reported to be an element in a further 19.8% of cases (*down* from 22% in 2022/23).
- 2.13. The theme of staff safety or wellbeing was reported as an element in 32.3% of cases reported across the country (up from 27.4%), and 18.7% of cases nationally involved an element of patient safety and quality (down from 19.3%).
- 2.14. A comparison with the breakdown of reasons why people spoke up nationally and at OUH in Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2024/25 is provided in Graph 2.



Graph 2 – Comparison of the elements present in cases nationally and at OUH  
(Source: The [NGO Annual Report on Speaking Up Data 2023/24](#) ( and OUH Lead FTSU Guardian)

### Anonymous reporting

- 2.15. Feedback received via the annual national NHS Staff Survey and at OUH People Plan listening events has indicated that some colleagues are more likely to speak up anonymously.
- 2.16. In response to that feedback, and as part of the Trust's commitment to breaking barriers to speaking up, the [WorkInConfidence anonymous reporting platform](#) [WiC] was introduced in November 2024 as an extension of the Trust's existing [Freedom to Speak Up](#) service.
- 2.17. As an established, leading provider of secure, anonymous communications systems in the NHS, WiC is completely independent of the Trust and the reporting platform is 100% confidential – no-one at OUH can know which members of staff have registered or used the service.

- 2.18. Any member of staff (including temporary staff) can use the WiC platform to raise a concern anonymously, by starting a 2-way conversation with a FTSU Guardian, or with the Chief Executive or the Chief People Officer. Concerns may be so raised - directly and anonymously - about anything which the member of staff feels is getting in the way of them providing high quality care or doing a great job. (Any concern relating to sexual safety at work may also be raised directly and anonymously with the Trust's Safeguarding Lead).
- 2.19. In Q1 of 2024/25, there were no cases raised anonymously at OUH, and in Q2 there were four cases which were initially raised anonymously.
- 2.20. In Q3, with the introduction of the [WorkInConfidence anonymous reporting platform](#) in November 2024, the number of cases raised anonymously rose to 21 (= 51% of the 41 cases in total that were raised through FTSU at OUH in that quarter).
- 2.21. By comparison, 36 cases were raised in total during Q3 of 2023/24, of which 4 were raised anonymously (=11%).
- 2.22. Over Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2024/25 at OUH, 23% of all cases have initially been raised anonymously, which is higher than the 17.9% of cases that were reported anonymously at OUH in all of 2023/24, and significantly higher than the national average of 9.5% of cases raised anonymously in that year.

**Breaking barriers: guaranteeing anonymity to those who want it, improving accessibility, maintaining responsiveness, making a difference**

- 2.23. It is too early to identify what proportion of conversations have been started on the WiC platform mainly because of its ready accessibility and simplicity; and how many might not otherwise have been raised at all, without the guarantee of anonymity.
- 2.24. Importantly, the OUH FTSU Guardians have been working to ensure that it is just as simple and accessible to raise a concern directly with them, as it is via WiC. There is now a new streamlined form to book an appointment for a confidential chat available on the ['Contact us' page of the Freedom to Speak Up intranet](#) and it is proposed that staff will soon be able to raise a concern with a FTSU Guardian *via* WhatsApp.
- 2.25. Initial signs would seem to indicate that the introduction of an independent platform that makes it easier to raise concerns with a guarantee of anonymity has proved something of a catalyst to encouraging more people to speak up, and that it is certainly one of the important tools for breaking barriers to speaking up.
- 2.26. At the time of writing, there has been a high level of engagement with the [WorkInConfidence anonymous reporting platform](#) across the Trust, with

982 WiC accounts activated since launch, and 62 conversations started – 33 of which are open at the time of writing, and 29 of which have been closed.

- 2.27. The average time for first response to a conversation raised through WiC is reported as 2 days, and the average time to close a conversation is reported as 34 days.
- 2.28. The volume of concerns raised via the [WorkInConfidence anonymous reporting platform](#) - and the total number of concerns raised with FTSU Guardians at OUH - will continue to be closely monitored so as to gauge whether capacity – both within the FTSU team, and across the organisation – is sufficient to maintain an acceptable level of responsiveness **and** follow up; recognising the importance of being able to demonstrate that speaking up can make a difference.

### **Learning from concerns raised; making a difference**

- 2.29. The FTSU Guardians meet regularly with colleagues in divisional management, who confirm that this helps them to triangulate FTSU data with all other available sources of intelligence, so as to gain a better understanding of what key issues of concern need to be addressed.
- 2.30. A common theme in concerns raised in Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2024/25 has been the element of ‘worker wellbeing/worker safety’, which has been the reason most often cited for raising a concern.
- 2.31. Concerns related to staff safety and wellbeing have been linked to issues around workload, and clinical capacity to address increased patient demands, as well as to the personal impact of organisational change to support greater organisational efficiencies.
- 2.32. Key learning and improvement opportunities for the Trust include:
- the importance of prioritising better communication;
  - the need to include provision for support and regular feedback to staff on issues they raise with regard to their wellbeing;
  - the need for better engagement between management and employees in co-creating solutions for change; allowing for consideration to be given to what are the best options to mitigate the adverse impact of changes on staff welfare.

### **Learning from concerns raised; some case studies**

#### **Case study 1**

- 2.33. A member of staff raised concerns regarding frail patients being woken up at around 05.30 so that they could have a wash and their medications- this was primarily to reduce the workload for the day staff. The member of staff who raised the concern felt that some staff had lost focus on the

experience of their patients and their responsibility and commitment to keep them safe and comfortable under our care.

- 2.34. After this concern was escalated to the Matron, she sent out an email to all Ward Staff, reminding them of the importance of delivering compassionate centred care for their vulnerable patients, and that it was not acceptable to wake patients up for personal care and to give medications outside of prescribed times. She did stress that she understood that mornings were busy and staff on nights may have perceived that they were helping the day staff, however patients' comfort and their dignity must be prioritised over convenience for our work routines. (A distinction was made for instances where a patient was due to go home that day and needed to be moved first to the Transfer lounge; they could be woken up at 06.30 so that they could be washed and dressed ready for transfer). The Matron was very clear that she expected the practice of waking up patients merely for the convenience of work routines to stop with immediate effect.
- 2.35. **Impact:** an email was received from a senior member of staff who worked on the night shift, to say thank you for addressing this issue. When it then became apparent that this practice was continuing on other wards, their Matron similarly took action to reaffirm the need for prioritisation of patients' comfort and dignity over the convenience of work routines.

## Case study 2

- 2.36. Initially, a group of staff sent a joint letter to the senior nursing management team, raising some patient safety concerns around the clinical practice of one of their colleagues. Feeling that they had not seen any evidence of improvement in their colleague's conduct and behaviour, they then escalated their concerns about patient safety and a healthy working environment.
- 2.37. In the meantime, an investigation had been started following report of a clinical incident involving the individual. The Divisional Director of Nursing and her Deputy needed to consider whether the concerns being raised had any bearing on the terms of reference for that investigation.
- 2.38. In parallel, confidentiality had to be observed, and due process followed, in pursuing an HR case in which the individual was involved.
- 2.39. With advice and support from the FTSU Guardian, the Divisional Director of Nursing sent an email directly to all those who had raised concerns, to thank them for doing so, and to reassure them that their concerns were being taken seriously. They were also informed that, due to the significant number of signatories to the letter, it would take some time for everyone to have an opportunity to discuss their concerns further, informally and confidentially. Staff were asked to be patient, and reassurance was given

that further updates would be provided when possible, as more information became available. Without breaching confidentiality, staff will have seen also that action was taken to change the individual's normal shift pattern (from nights to day shift).

- 2.40. Impact: Emails of thanks were received from a few staff who had received the email, indicating cause for hope that good communication should help to instil confidence within the group and alleviate anxieties. There is recognised to be a difficult balance between addressing concerns raised and dealing with a confidential HR case which is still being conducted, and which will be going to a hearing in the near future.

### **Detriment**

- 2.41. The Trust is committed to protecting staff from experiencing detriment, disadvantageous or demeaning treatment as a result of having spoken up.
- 2.42. During Q1, Q2 and Q3 of 2023/24, the FTSU team at OUH recorded four cases indicating "detriment" (= 3.7% of cases at OUH, compared to a national average in 2023/24 of 4%).
- 2.43. It may be noted that – while it falls outside the period covered by this Update Report - the [Detriment guide - National Guardian's Office](#) was published in January 2025, of which OUH FTSU Guardians will be taking full account.

## **3. Assessing our speaking up culture: We each have a voice that counts**

- 3.1. Since 2021, the principal measure of the health of a trust's speaking up culture is how well it scores in the annual NHS Staff Survey on the element of the **People Promise** that measures (out of 10) how well an organisation can demonstrate that ***"We each have a voice that counts (relating to raising concerns)"***.
- 3.2. The health of a trust's speaking up culture will depend upon how well the organisation as a whole demonstrably encourages all staff to have confidence that they will be listened to if they raise a concern about anything getting in the way of them doing a good job, or of good patient care. In a healthy speaking up culture, it should be part of "business as usual" to raise concerns (and/or suggest improvements that might be made) in relation to any issue, including *for example* experience of poor behaviours, or a sub-optimal environment adversely affecting staff wellbeing, as well as instances of poor clinical practice.
- 3.3. **In the results of the [NHS Staff Survey 2024](#)** the OUH had an overall score of 6.76 out of 10 in relation to this People Promise Element.

- 3.4. This is better than the national average of 6.67 and – while it is a deterioration on last year's score of 6.84 for OUH - the general picture is one of slight deterioration in the scores of even the best performing trusts.
- 3.5. OUH performance is still significantly better than poorly performing outliers, with room for improvement to match the best performing trusts.
- 3.6. Year on year comparison of the overall score is provided in Table 2.

				2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>NHS Staff Survey National average</b>			<b>(Score 1-10)</b>	<b>6.67</b>	<b>6.65</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>6.67</b>
<b>Highest and lowest performers</b>				Best: 7.31 Worst: 6.16	Best: 7.14 Worst: 6.16	Best: 7.16 Worst: 6.21	Best: 7.14 Worst: 5.95
<b>OUH Staff Survey Result</b>				<b>6.82</b>	<b>6.78</b>	<b>6.84</b>	<b>6.76</b>

Table 2 – Overall score for “We each have a voice that counts (relating to raising concerns)”

Source: NHS Staff Survey 2021 to 2024

- 3.7. Each trust's score is based on responses to four key questions in the Staff Survey, with answers reflecting the experience of responders to the organisation as a whole, not specifically to the FTSU service. In the 2024 Survey, OUH responses to all four questions had deteriorated slightly, reflecting a nationwide downward turn in scores in relation to this element. In all cases, OUH responses were better than the national average. The four questions are:

- “I would feel secure raising concerns about unsafe clinical practice”
  - 71.24% affirmative OUH responses in 2024 Survey (compared to 71.86% in 2023) and a national average of 70.44% in 2024;
- “I am confident that my organisation would address my concern”
  - 56.73% affirmative OUH responses in 2024 Survey (compared to 58.5% in 2023) and a national average of 55.91% in 2024;

- “I feel safe to speak up about anything that concerns me in the organisation”
  - 62.98% affirmative OUH responses in 2024 Survey (compared to 64.07% in 2023) and a national average of 60.29% in 2024; and
- “If I spoke up about something that concerned me, I am confident my organisation would address my concern”
  - 50.15% affirmative OUH responses in 2024 Survey (compared to 52.41% in 2023) and a national average of 48.65 in 2024%.

#### 4. Learning and Improvement

- 4.1. The FTSU team continues to promote the training modules developed by Health Education England working with the NGO, which are available on *My Learning Hub*:
  - Module 1 “Speak Up” ([Speak Up](#)) – available for all staff
  - Module 2 “Listen Up” ([Listen Up](#)) – for all leaders; and
  - Module 3, “Follow Up” ([Follow Up](#)) - for senior leaders including executive and non-executive directors, and governors; to be undertaken after completion of Modules 1 and 2.
- 4.2. All staff are encouraged to undertake the ‘Speak Up’ e-learning module (with the support of the BAME Staff Network, take-up by its members has been particularly targeted).
- 4.3. All line managers should be supported to complete both the Speak Up and Listen Up modules, so that they can then support junior and other frontline staff in raising concerns.
- 4.4. To promote and maintain a demonstrably healthy speaking up culture at OUH, it is considered to be essential that senior Trust leaders and senior clinical staff across the Trust engage with the training available, to complete all 3 modules and model the Trust’s **#SpeakUpListenUpFollowUp** culture.
- 4.5. This approach is intended to encourage knowledge about how to speak up in all staff groups, while particularly targeting vulnerable groups and empowering senior leaders and middle managers to support the promotion of a healthy speaking up culture.
- 4.6. All members of the FTSU team have undertaken the e-learning modules.
- 4.7. The FTSU Guardians also completed updated Guardians’ training, launched by the NGO, and have regularly attended and shared learning at meetings of the Regional FTSU Network.

## 5. Conclusion

- 5.1. OUH FTSU Guardians continue to collaborate with colleagues in teams across the Trust, to further improve and embed a healthy speaking up culture throughout the organisation; in particular through engagement with the Trust's programme for the *Eradication of Bullying and Harassment*.
- 5.2. Furthering improvements to the speaking up culture at OUH, this collaborative working is underpinned by the Board's commitment to embed a healthy speaking up culture throughout the organisation e.g. by breaking barriers to speaking up (introducing the [WorkInConfidence anonymous reporting platform](#) and making it equally simple and accessible to raise a concern with a FTSU Guardian), and by promoting the ['Raising a concern' staff website](#), to make it easier for staff to navigate the various routes and channels available for raising concerns.
- 5.3. This collaborative approach adheres to NHS England's [updated FTSU guidance and reflection and planning tool](#) which emphasises that:  
*"speaking up sits within the wider context of a compassionate and inclusive culture, ... all elements of [which] are closely linked to Freedom To Speak Up, and must be implemented alongside it" (see [pages 36-44 of the guidance 'Building widespread cultural change' - the transformational information you need for culture and behavioural change](#))"*
- 5.4. Applying the reflection and planning tool, a gap analysis has now been undertaken by the FTSU Lead Guardian, based upon which an action plan is being developed to support the further strengthening of FTSU arrangements at OUH; ensuring that staff can access the support required to meet their needs in relation to raising concerns.
- 5.5. The FTSU Lead Guardian and team will continue to work in alignment with the Trust's Strategy and the People Plan, contributing to the staff engagement programme, to help meet the on-going challenge to promote, create and sustain an open and transparent culture of speaking up, listening up and following up at OUH.

Lindley Nevers

OUH Freedom to Speak Up Lead Guardian