NHS
Airedale
NHS Foundation Trust

Date of Meeting:	5 February 2025
Meeting:	Public Trust Board of Directors
Title of report:	FTSU bi-annual report 2024/25 – Quarters 1 and 2
Author:	Kate Bell, Freedom to Speak Up Guardian
Previous Forums:	People Committee, January 2025

Purpose of the Report

The report provides a summary and analysis of the speaking up data for quarters 1 and 2 2024. It also gives an update on the actions taken during the first two quarters to improve the speaking up culture at the Trust, the key learning points, and the proposed next steps.

Key Points to Note

- A total of 33 concerns were raised in the first two quarters of 2024-25, which is a significant increase on previous years.
- Less than a third of the cases (30%) referenced bullying or other inappropriate attitudes or behaviours as the primary reason for contacting the guardian. This represents a sizable decrease compared to the same time last year when 54% of cases identified some form of poor behaviour as the main reason for contacting the guardian.
- The data suggests that there is an underrepresentation of ethnic minority colleagues in the speaking up data for quarters 1 and 2, which follows the same trend as the previous two years.
- The age distribution of speaking up cases has changed since last year with a greater concentration of cases in the 51–65-year-old age categories.
- Data for disabled colleagues is not available, as there is a technical problem with the online case recording system.
- There were only two anonymous cases raised during the first two quarters and there was no detriment reported, both good indicators that colleagues have confidence in the speaking up arrangements.
- Safety and confidence in the speaking up arrangements at Airedale has declined since 2021 with a clear downward trend across all the speaking up metrics. We are now trending below our regional peers and the provider median across all the speaking up measures except for the safety indicator where we are equivalent to regional peers and marginally above the provider median.
- The Trust has successfully appointed to a Deputy FTSU Guardian to support the FTSU agenda at the Trust and work with the FTSU Guardian.

The report also provides a summary of what is happening at a national and regional level. It closes with an overview of the actions taken during quarters 1 and 2 to improve the FTSU culture at the Trust, key learning and development and the proposed next steps moving into the second half of the year.

EQIA – Equality Impact Assessment

This report analyses FTSU within the context of the protected characteristics. The Guardian continues to work closely with the Staff Inclusion Networks.

Fit with strategic objective	Population	Patients	People	Partnership	Progressing
			X	X	X

Recommendation

The Trust Board of Directors are asked to receive the report and are invited to discuss and challenge the approach to FTSU at the Trust including any key learning points and areas for future consideration and development.

1 Context/Background

Freedom to Speak Up (FTSU) is core to the delivery of the People Strategy, supporting the development of our culture at Airedale and reinforcing the Right Care values and behaviours.

This bi-annual report provides an update to the People Committee on key themes and progress in the first two quarters of 2024-25. The format is structured to meet the Freedom to Speak Up guidance for leaders published by the National Guardian's Office (NGO) and NHS England in 2022. To ensure compliance with the requirements of the guidance and to support best practice, the report has been structured under the following broad headings:

- Assessment of cases
- Action taken to improve speaking up culture
- Recommendations

2 Executive Summary

This report provides an update regarding the FTSU activity at Airedale NHS Foundation Trust and AGH Solutions for the first two quarters of 2024-25. A total of 33 concerns were raised in the first two quarters of 2024-25, which is a significant increase on previous years (see figure 1 below). Less than a third of the cases (30%) referenced bullying or other inappropriate attitudes or behaviours as the primary reason for contacting the guardian. This represents a sizable decrease compared to the same time last year when 54% of cases identified some form of poor behaviour as the main reason for contacting the guardian.

The data suggests that there is an underrepresentation of ethnic minority colleagues in the speaking up data for quarters 1 and 2, which follows the same trend as the previous two years. The age distribution of speaking up cases has changed since last year with a greater concentration of cases in the 51–65-year-old age categories. Unfortunately, the data for disabled colleagues is not available, as there is a technical problem with the online case recording system.

There were only two anonymous cases raised during the first two quarters and there was no detriment reported, both good indicators that colleagues have confidence in the speaking up arrangements. A new online case reporting tool was implemented in October 2023. This allows colleagues to raise cases anonymously. There was a huge jump in anonymous reporting during 2023-24 after the tool was implemented but this appears to have levelled off now with most people either raising concerns openly or confidentially.

As reported in the 2023/24 annual report safety and confidence in the speaking up arrangements at Airedale has declined since 2021 with a clear downward trend across all the speaking up metrics. We are now trending below our regional peers and the provider median across all the speaking up measures except for the safety indicator (figure 6) where we are equivalent to regional peers and marginally above the provider median.

The Trust has successfully appointed to a Deputy FTSU Guardian to support the FTSU agenda at the Trust and work with the FTSU Guardian.

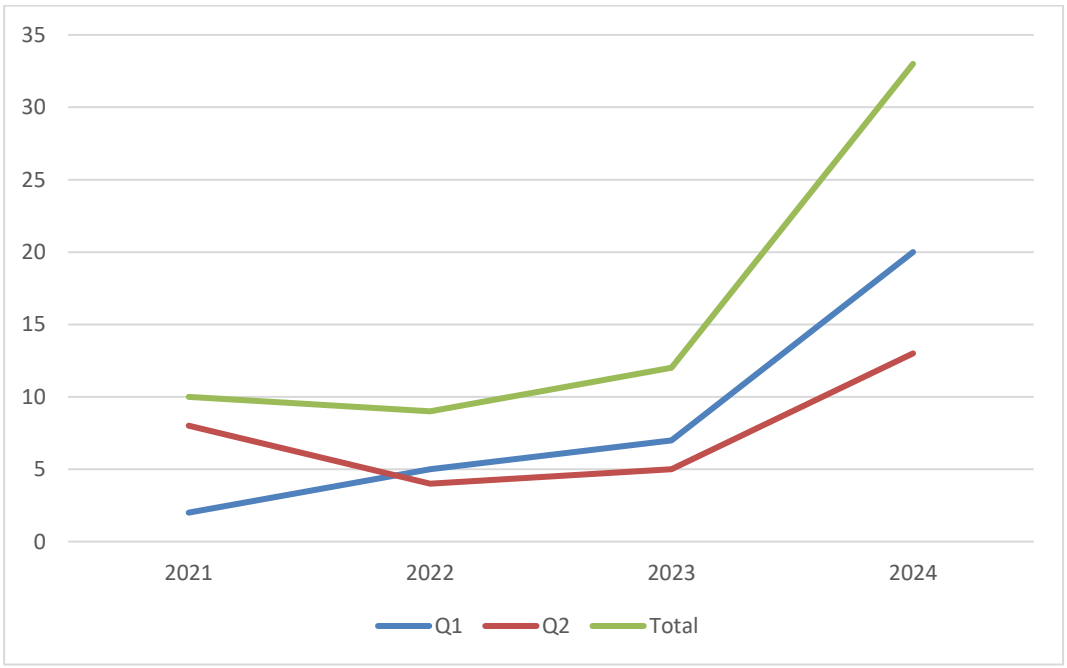
The report also provides a summary of what is happening at a national and regional level. It closes with an overview of the actions taken during quarters 1 and 2 to improve the FTSU culture at the Trust, key learning and development and the proposed next steps moving into the second half of the year.

3 Assessment of FTSU Issues including themes and trends

3.1 Summary of concerns received:

Figure 1 below provides a summary of all the concerns raised at Airedale for quarters 1 and 2 between 1 April 2021 and 30 September 2024.

Figure 1 – FTSU Cases 1 April 2021 – 30 September 2024 (Quarters 1 & 2)

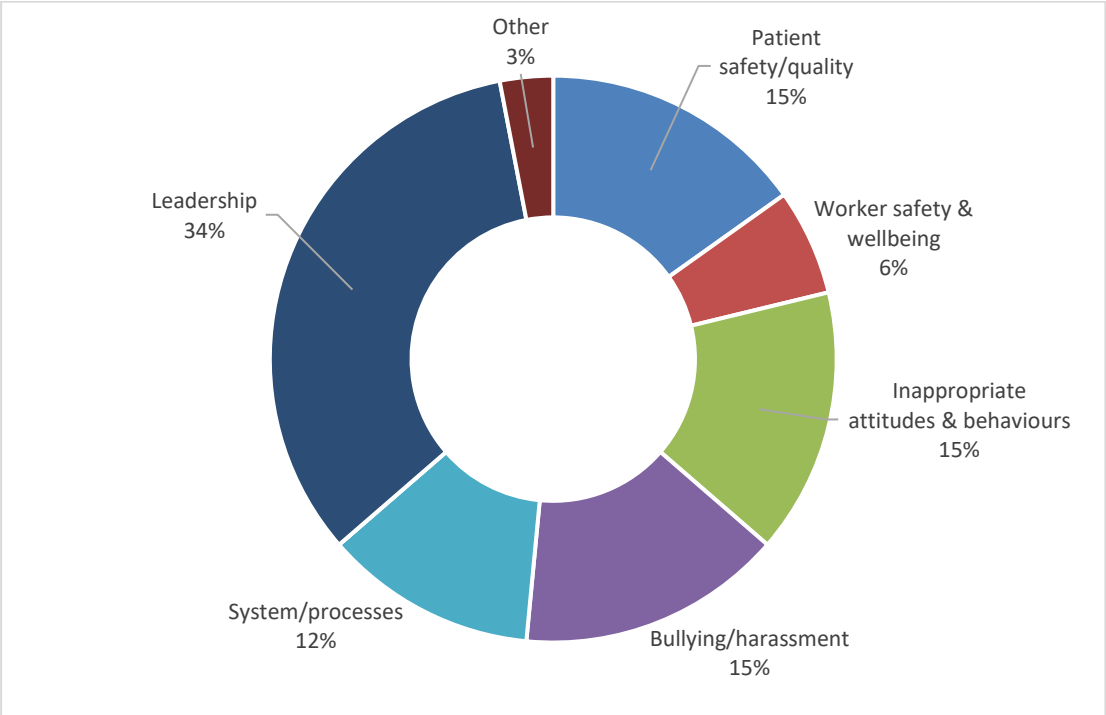


3.1.1 Concern rates

Between 1 April 2024 and 30 September 2024, 33 cases were raised through the FTSU route. This represents a significant increase compared to last year when 12 cases were raised in the first two quarters.

3.1.2 Themes

Figure 2 – Themes for 1 April - 30 September 24 (Quarters 1 &2)



The main theme of the concern is selected by the initial submitter, which is usually the staff member themselves but can sometimes be the guardian.

In the first two quarters of 2024/25, less than a third of the cases (30%) referenced bullying or other inappropriate attitudes or behaviours as the main reason for contacting the guardian. This represents a significant decrease compared to the same time last year when 54% of cases identified some form of poor behaviour as the main reason for contacting the guardian. A third of the cases identified leadership as the main theme in the first two quarters compared to zero cases at the same time last year.

3.2 Themes and trends

The NHS England and NHS Improvement supplementary guidance published in July 2019 specified that themes and trends regarding FTSU must be published within Board updates. To support this, the following themes are

explored: Concerns raised by directorate, staff group and by protected characteristics.

3.2.1 Concerns raised by division

Figure 3 – Cases by division: 1 April – 30 September 24 (Quarters 1 & 2)

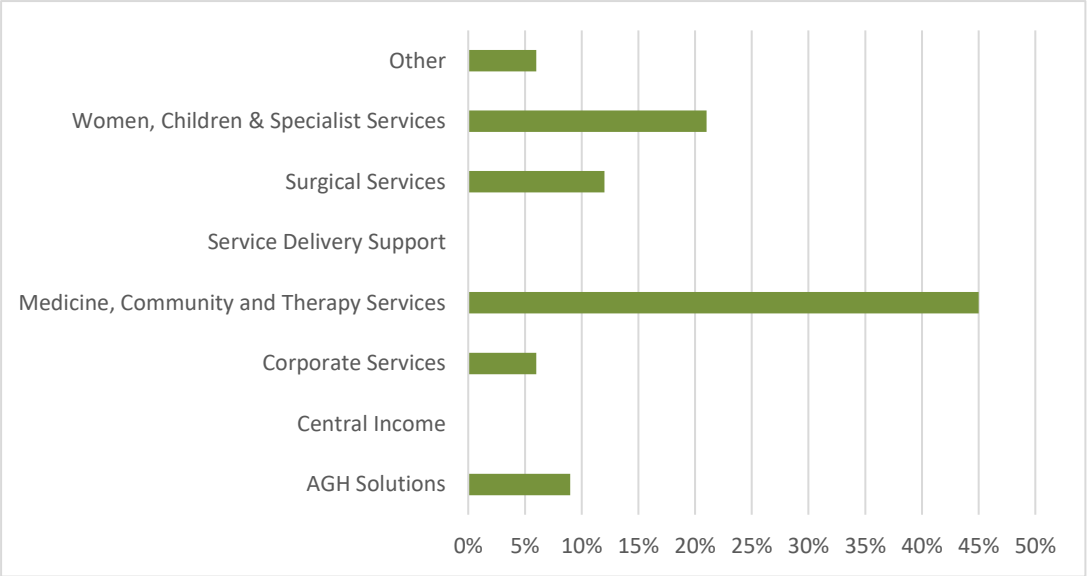
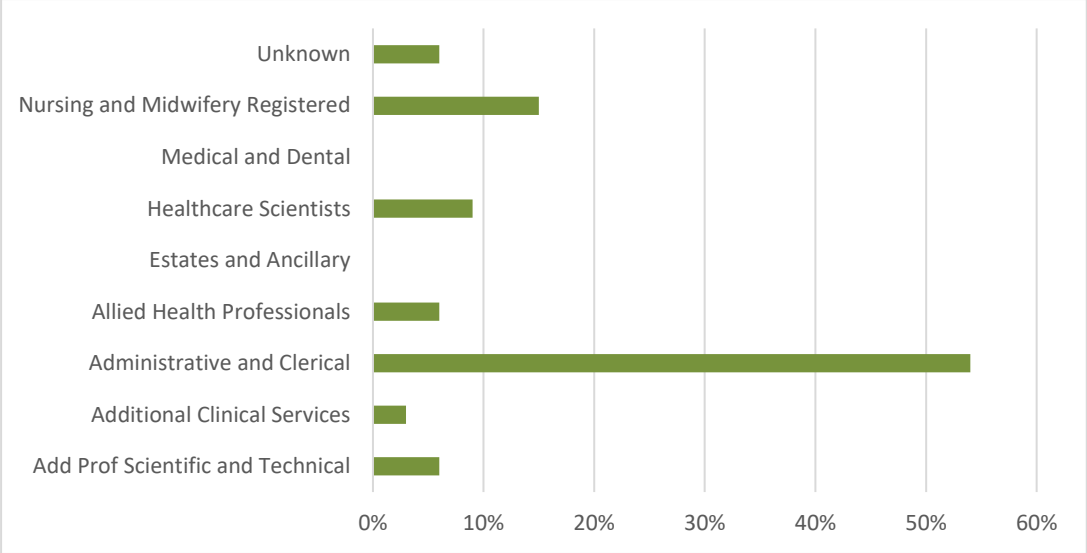


Figure 3 shows a breakdown of cases raised by each division for quarters 1 and 2 2024. The data shows that almost half of all cases were raised by colleagues in Medicine, Community and Therapy Services. This reflects a similar pattern to last year.

3.2.2 Who is speaking up?

Figure 4 - Cases raised by occupational group: 1 April – 30 September 24 (Quarters 1 &2)



Colleagues representing a broad range of occupational groups speak up at Airedale. The data in figure 4 illustrates that administrative and clerical staff are overrepresented in the data for quarters 1 and 2 and exceed the percentage share of the workforce, which is approximately 20%.

3.2.3 Protected characteristics

The Freedom to Speak Up review in 2015 found that certain groups of workers were particularly vulnerable when raising concerns. It specifically referenced ethnic minority colleagues who often feel more vulnerable and excluded and are more likely to experience detriment as a result of speaking up. A case review by the NGO in 2019 at Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals recommended that the reach of FTSU extends to workers who may be at risk of exclusion within the Trust.

The data indicates that there is an underrepresentation of ethnic minority colleagues in the speaking up data for quarters 1 and 2. This is a trend that has been consistent for the last three years. The Guardian and the Director of People and Organisational Development carried out a listening session with the inclusion networks in 2024. Unfortunately, attendance was low but there was a robust and insightful conversation about why colleagues with protected characteristics might feel less able to use the FTSU route. The key points to note from the discussion with the Race Equality Network were perceptions of:

- Heightened fear of retribution for ethnic minority colleagues if they speak up.
- Speaking to another person is a barrier.
- No support in place after a person has spoken up.

Suggested solutions:

- More support and empowerment for the inclusion networks.

- Attendance of FTSU at Induction.
- Additional support and signposting for internationally recruited staff.

The percentage of women speaking up largely corresponds with the percentage of women employed at Airedale. The age distribution of speaking up cases has changed since last year with a greater concentration of cases in the 51–65-year-old age categories.

Unfortunately, there is a technical issue with the data for disabled colleagues, so it is not possible to report on this now. However, the Guardian and the Director of People and Organisational Development carried out a listening session with Enable in December 2024 to understand the speaking up experiences of disabled people at the trust. The key points to note from the discussion are perceptions of:

- Psychological safety is important for all groups – people will disclose that they have a disability and feel confident speaking up if they feel safe.
- Line Managers who don't understand how to support disabled people are real blockers in the organisation.
- Lack of communication from Managers blocks solutions to problems and discourages speaking up.

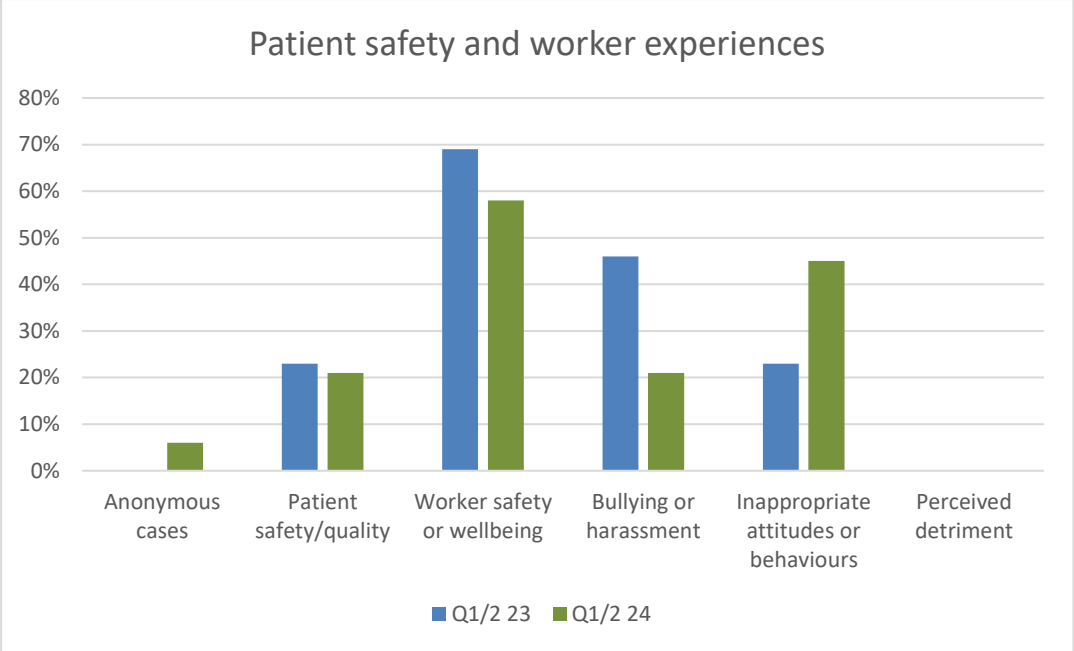
Suggested solutions:

- Line Manager training and skills to include speaking up.
- Leaders being open about their health conditions.
- Simplify the reasonable adjustments process for people to facilitate access to equipment like noise cancelling headphones.
- Implement Civility Saves Lives at Airedale.

4 Patient safety and/or workers experience issues

FTSU processes are in place to support patient safety and improve staff experience. The national data from the NGO indicates that more issues are raised through FTSU in relation to staff experience than patient safety; this is consistent with the experience at Airedale.

Figure 5 – Percentage of cases raised by reporting category for quarters 1 & 2 2023-24



Just under a quarter of cases (21%) in the first two quarters of 2024 included an element of patient safety, which is about the same as the first two quarters of 2023 (23%). This is marginally above the national figure of 19%.

Figure 5 above illustrates that 21% of cases in the first two quarters 2024 referenced some element of bullying or harassment, which represents a significant decrease from the first two quarters of 2023/24 (46%). This is the same as the national average where the NGO reported 22% of cases included an element of bullying or harassment. This large fall in bullying and harassment cases is almost certainly being driven by a concomitant increase in reporting against the inappropriate attitudes and behaviours category. Reports of inappropriate attitudes and behaviours at Airedale rose from 23% in the first half of 2023 to 45% in the first half of 2024, which is above the national average of 30%.

Just above two thirds of cases at Airedale reported an element of worker safety or wellbeing for the first two quarters of 2023. This dropped to 58% in the first half of 2024, which is still well above the national average of 27%. It is not clear why there is such a large difference, so further analysis is needed to understand this better.

There were only two anonymous cases raised during the first two quarters and there was no detriment reported, both good indicators that colleagues have confidence in the speaking up arrangements. A new online case reporting tool was implemented in October 2023. This allows colleagues to raise cases anonymously. There was a huge jump in anonymous reporting during 2023-24 after the tool was implemented but this seems to levelled off now with most people either raising concerns openly or confidentially.

5 National and regional updates

5.1 National update

Independent Culture Review of the Nursing and Midwifery Council

Dr Jayne Chidgey-Clark, National Guardian for the NHS, responds to the Independent Culture Review of the Nursing and Midwifery Council:

"The review of the Nursing and Midwifery Council culture by Nazir Afzal OBE is a shocking and emotional read, and I welcome the response of the board and executive and their immediate actions.

"Where people are fearful of speaking up, it is essential to offer them an alternative route to raise concerns, so I am pleased to see that the NMC is putting that support in place with a Freedom to Speak Up Guardian.

"Regulators must set the tone and model the behaviour they expect of those they regulate. That begins by listening to colleagues and welcoming their voices as opportunities for learning and improvement."

NGO Strategy 2024

In July 2024, the NGO published an updated strategy to support cultural change in healthcare to improve worker experience and patient safety.

Dr Jayne Chidgey-Clark, National Guardian for the NHS, said: "*While progress has been made, there is still a long way to go before we can say that speaking up is business as usual. That is why for our strategic vision we want to move the dial on Freedom to Speak Up. Of course, workers should be safe to speak up – safety is the bare minimum – what we are aiming to achieve over the next few years is confidence. This comes when workers feel not only encouraged to raise matters, but that actions will be taken when they do."*

The National Guardian's Office has set out its six strategic goals to achieve the National Guardian's vision, improving existing services as well as making some step changes to drive further change across the system. These are:

1. Continuing to improve resources and offer to Freedom to Speak Up guardians
2. Developing additional support and guidance for organisational leaders
3. Using the National Guardian's independent voice to champion Freedom to Speak Up and challenge the healthcare system by raising awareness of issues which affect workers' confidence to speak up

4. Using the insight gathered by the National Guardian's Office to drive recommendations to improve speak up measures and culture, for example through Speak Up Reviews, and challenging organisations to do better.
5. Improving partnership working with key organisations to deliver change
6. Improve the organisational maturity and internal infrastructure of the National Guardian's Office to support these ambitions

See the NGO's Strategy on a page

Annual Speaking Up data report 2023-24

In July 2024, the NGO published the latest annual speaking up data report, which summarises the themes and learning from the speaking up data shared by Freedom to Speak Up guardians.

Read the report: Culture is a patient safety issue: Annual Speaking Up data report

Freedom to Speak Up Review for Overseas Trained Workers

In August 2024, the NGO invited overseas trained workers to participate in a review to understand the additional barriers they face when it comes to speaking up.

Lord Darzi's Independent investigation of the NHS in England

In September 2024, the report 'Independent Investigation of the National Health Service in England' by Lord Darzi was published.

Some of the findings were irecognisable particularly around waiting times, the challenges within A&E, and staff engagement. Consequently, a further 'Review of patient safety across the health and care landscape' has been commissioned into six bodies including the National Guardians Office.

The primary task of this review is to assess whether the current range and combination of organisations delivers effective leadership, listening, learning (including investigations and their recommendations) and regulation to the health and care systems in relation to patient and user safety (and to what extent they focus on the other domains of quality). Based on this assessment, the review should make recommendations on whether greater value could be achieved through a different approach or delivery model.

5.1 Has the cultural work been effective at Airedale NHS Foundation Trust?

The National Guardian's Office recommends that we use the following questions in the NHS staff Survey as indicators of our speaking up culture and arrangements. These questions are captured in the Model Hospital System, which allows us to compare our performance with our regional peers.

This data was reported in the annual report for 2023/24. Whilst the 2024 results have been received by the Trust they remain under embargo.

Figure 6: NHS Staff Survey 2023 Speaking Up Indicator (Safety)

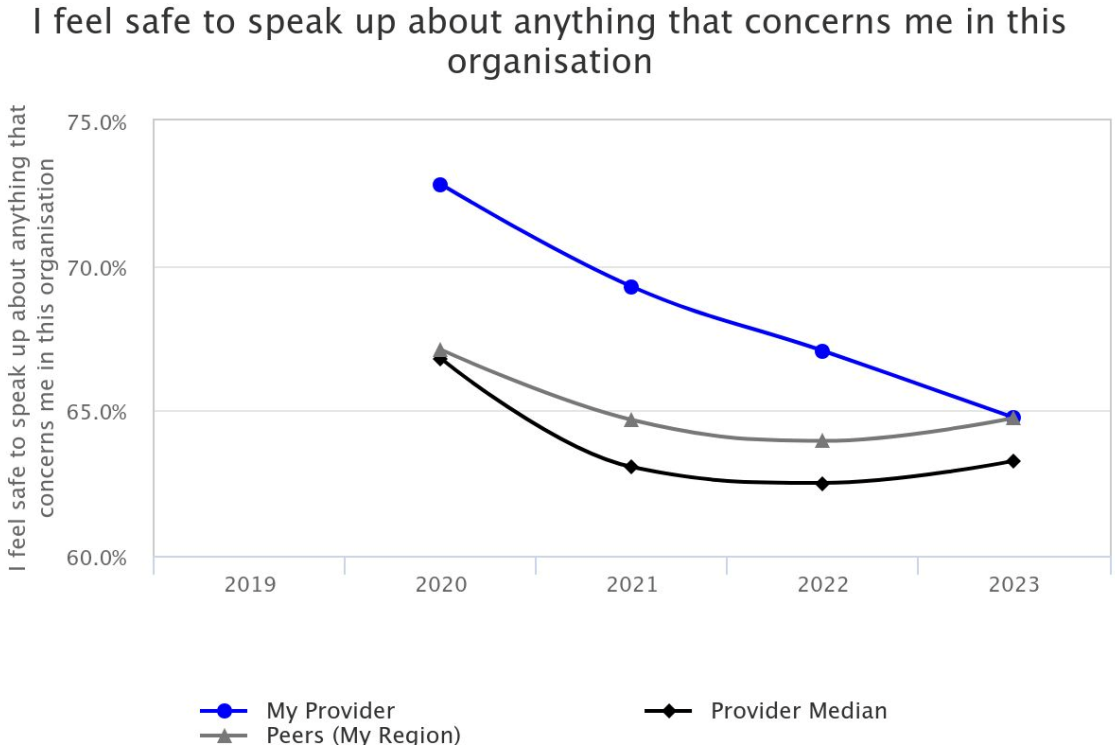
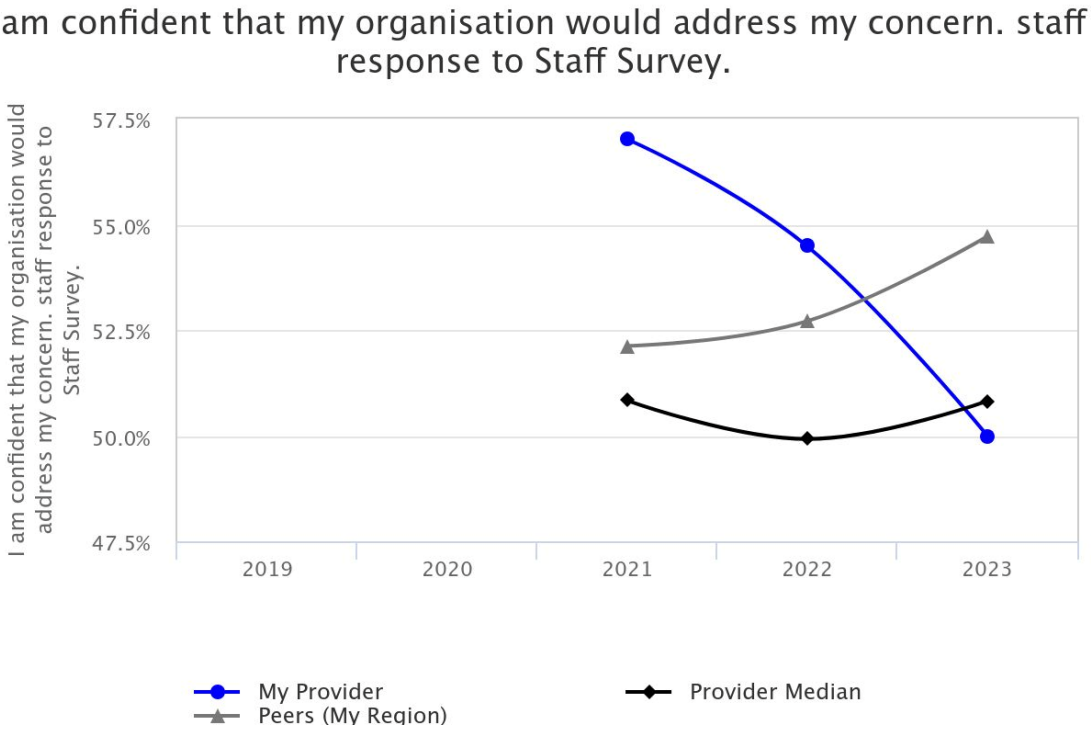


Figure 7: NHS Staff Survey 2021 Speaking Up Indicator (Confidence)



Safety and confidence in the speaking up arrangements at Airedale has declined since 2021 with a downward trend across all the speaking up metrics. We are now trending below our regional peers and the provider median across all the speaking up measures except for the safety indicator (figure 6) where we are equivalent to regional peers and marginally above the provider median.

This decline in workers perception of how safe and supported they feel to speak up is worrying and was flagged in the annual report 2023-24. The new data for the 2024 Staff Survey will be available soon and will provide us with some further insights into whether our actions to improve the culture at Airedale have been effective.

5.2 Regional update

The FTSU Guardian and/or the Deputy Guardian attend the virtual regional meetings and the FTSU peer support where possible. Both the meetings and peer support are held on a bi-monthly basis. They offer an opportunity to discuss FTSU issues and share insight and good practice.

6 Action taken to improve FTSU culture during quarters 1 & 2

A FTSU action plan is in place to support the work to improve the FTSU culture at the Trust. It is important to note that the development side of the role has continued to be a challenge because of an increasing caseload.

However, a new Deputy FTSU Guardian has just been appointed, which will increase capacity and support service development.

Our successes in quarters 1 and 2:

- Reviewed and updated case recording system for FTSU
- Listening sessions with REN and Enable Networks
- Delivered a briefing to the Admin Network
- Delivered FTSU training to Patient Experience Champions
- Raised profile of FTSU service – attended team meetings, working in partnership with AGH Solutions, working with communications colleagues to implement Communications plan.
- Recruitment to the new Deputy FTSU Guardian

7 Learning and improvement

Below is a list providing high level detail of learning points related to the concerns raised within the first two quarters of 2024-25:

- Even though the proportion of FTSU cases that include some element of bullying and harassment, or inappropriate behaviour has fallen, poor behaviour still makes up a significant minority of concerns raised with the Guardian and remains a consistent theme. Psychological safety at work requires a foundation of civility and respect and the significance of a team culture that enables people to speak up without fear should not be overstated. Alongside the resolution policy, other initiatives that support cultural change should be considered such as the implementation of the Civility Saves Lives project.
- As stated in the annual report, Line Managers should be the first point of contact for raising concerns. Line Managers need to feel confident to respond appropriately when workers speak up, to support individuals to speak up, and know where to go for support themselves. There is anecdotal evidence that line managers lack confidence in dealing with speaking up concerns. The ‘Listen Up’ e-learning module has now been mandated for all line managers. However, there is a clear need to offer more support. FTSU should be embedded in the Line Management Development Programme.
- There has been a significant decline in workers perception of how safe and supported they feel to speak up at Airedale. It is clear from the analysis of the speaking up measures in the staff survey that colleagues from several protected groups are less confident in the speaking up culture and arrangements. Given the potential patient safety risks linked to staff not feeling safe to raise concerns, it is crucial to address worker

perceptions in relation to speaking up. Further listening sessions targeted at groups of staff who feel less safe and confident speaking up should be set up and feedback converted into actionable outcomes.

8 Next steps

- Review the draft FTSU strategy and align it to the new NGO Strategy.
- Review the People Experience Champions pilot through a FTSU lens.
- Develop targeted interventions to raise the profile of the FTSU Guardian and improve the speaking up culture with a particular emphasis on those protected groups whose confidence in the speaking up culture has deteriorated.
- Revise the FTSU communications plan.
- Attend listening sessions with executive leads to get a fuller understanding of the data and encourage speaking up.
- Share learning to build confidence among colleagues that the organisation is listening and responding to concerns raised through speaking up channel.
- Support the implementation of Civility Saves Lives.