



**The Guardian
Service**
Here to listen

Navigating change

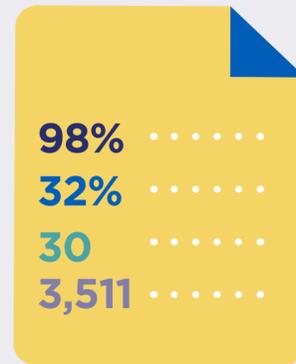
Annual Report 2024-2025



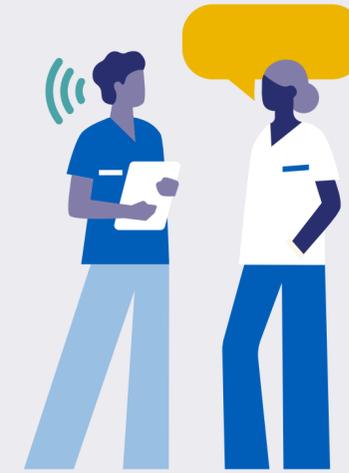
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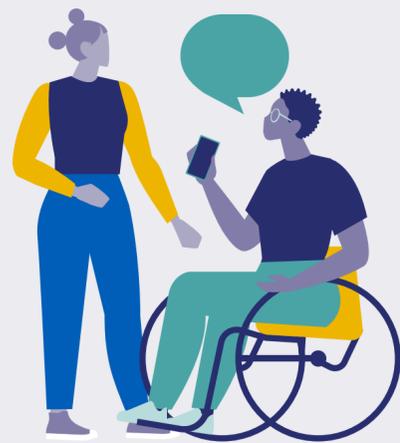
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Foreword

This has been a **year of significant change for the NHS** with the 10-year plan, significant restructuring of the system and Dr Penny Dash's review of patient safety reshaping how speaking up is supported. We are very supportive of Dr Dash's recommendation to abolish the National Guardian's Office and place the leadership and ownership of the Guardian role and speaking up with providers and commissioners. These reforms signal a shift towards greater local ownership of the Guardian role – a change we strongly welcome and are already supporting. National policy has too often measured success in activity rather than impact; by removing national diktats, this new direction creates the opportunity to put local outcomes, culture, and leadership at the centre.

Amid this uncertainty, The Guardian Service has seen **continued growth and delivery**. Our Guardians support over 350,000 members of staff across a wide range of NHS organisations from acute and mental health trusts to regional bodies and our Guardians are now active in primary care. The quality of our offer and approach remains positive, with 98% of people providing feedback saying they would recommend our services to a colleague. We have expanded our training and consultancy offer, launched new tools for improving speaking

up cultures, and reached more clients than ever before. Our free membership support – known as the Alliance – has provided clients with additional insights and discursive sessions throughout the year on multiple topics.

We are ambitious and optimistic about the future.

We will support organisations to open up their culture, no matter where they are on the scale. As leading experts in this field, our clients can draw on our independent and impartial support and consultancy offer. Our Dialogue model – which sensibly combines the importance of speaking up and listening – is already helping leaders and teams to create environments where speaking and listening go hand in hand. Our proactive and flexible approach is shaped by feedback and interaction with our clients, leaders, and experts in the field – as witnessed at our successful Manchester event attended by healthcare professionals from across the UK.

To support our clients and staff, we have continued to strengthen our organisation throughout this year. We achieved ISO 27001 and continued to be Cyber Essentials Certified. We also sustained dedication to our staff by renewing our status as a Living Wage Employer and being Disability Confident Committed.

We believe this demonstrates our commitment to operating with integrity, resilience, and fairness.

We enter the **next 12 months with confidence**: stronger as an organisation, sharper in our focus, and ready to play a central role in helping health and care systems – and beyond – make open culture the everyday norm.

Dr Simon Mac Rory
Chief Executive Officer
The Guardian Service

Growth and delivery

Despite the changes and challenges faced by the UK's health system, we have seen continued growth in the numbers of NHS organisations and staff we support and in cases referred to our Guardians.

With the demise of nationally mandated approaches, we expect demand to continue to grow as local leaders seize the opportunity offered by this new autonomy.

Our year in numbers

3,511

the number of cases handled by GSL Guardians during 2024/25

32%

the increase in case numbers compared to 2023/24

21,000

the approximate workforce size of our largest client

ISO 27001 accredited

6 number of publications

Training Services Framework
Accepted onto a national framework

98%

the proportion of people who provided feedback and said they would recommend the Guardian Service to a colleague

30

the number of organisations GSL Guardians supported in 2024/25

7 number of Alliance meetings/webinars

Toolkit for communicators
launched for GSL 'Alliance' members

Evolution and next steps

We are confident we can continue to march alongside our clients and shape our support and services to meet their needs.

We have long advocated for a different approach to speaking up, moving away from the nationally-mandated and acute trust based model. The approach we favour is one which is increasingly gaining traction due to system changes. The new model mirrors the familiar 'shared service' approach. With this approach, Guardian support becomes a shared service in its own right. We are fully supportive of this flexible and sensible shift of focus in the NHS.

To support our changing client needs, we will expand our consultancy offers this year. To complement our flexible approach to working with clients to open up their cultures, we now have audits ready to deploy to ascertain organisational benchmarks simply and rapidly.

A further product we will be promoting more widely this year is our successful training modules based on our Dialogue model, designed to open cultures.



Open cultures and mindsets are not created by mandated e-learning. It will be no surprise that in fact, many NHS survey results are showing a decline in staff confidence in speaking up.

The national e-learning package portrays speaking up, listening and taking action as three separate links in a chain. Current e-learning also creates artificial and unhelpful divisions between those on the frontline, their managers and senior leaders. Our Dialogue model and in-person and virtual training is different. It recognises that speaking, listening and acting are entirely interlinked and encourages all staff to both speak and listen – which opens up culture.

Our full range of services can be found here: www.theguardianservice.co.uk/our-services

Our website will also be refreshed this year to make it easier for clients to access additional material that is not available more widely such as our toolkits, reports and various analysis documents.

Strengthening our company

Over the past year we've taken significant steps to strengthen our business for the future. In addition to our cyber security, living wage and disability confident commitments we are now registered on a national procurement framework and have achieved ISO 27001 certification.



RM6219 Framework

Secured our position on a national framework for learning and training services for the public sector. This will make it easier for clients to contract with us, and add additional confidence around quality and governance of our learning and training offers.



ISO 27001 certified

The Guardian Service has reached a significant milestone in its information security journey, achieving ISO 27001 certification from the British Assessment Bureau (BAB).

This internationally recognised accreditation demonstrates our unwavering commitment to safeguarding the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of all information entrusted to us.

Our Information Security Management System (ISMS) operates under rigorous governance, and is subject to quarterly internal audits, alongside independent annual re-certification by the BAB. This systematic approach ensures our ISMS remains robust, effective, and continuously evolving to meet emerging security challenges and industry best practice.



Cyber security

The Guardian Service has maintained its Cyber Essentials Certified Status, continuing our commitment to organisation-wide security and maintaining the highest cybersecurity standards. This certification validates the security controls we've put in place to protect against the most common cyber threats. Through independent assessment, we've proven these fundamental controls are properly implemented and maintained throughout our organisation.



Strengthening our company



Living Wage

The Guardian Service is proud to be an accredited Living Wage Employer. This pledge extends beyond our directly employed staff to include third-party contracted staff, ensuring fairness across our organisation.

The real Living Wage is independently calculated annually by the Living Wage Foundation to reflect the true cost of living – significantly higher than the government’s National Minimum or National Living Wage. By maintaining our accredited status, we demonstrate our commitment to social responsibility and economic justice, reflecting the values of our client base.



Disability Confident Committed Employer

We are proud to be a Disability Confident Committed employer. This government-backed scheme demonstrates our commitment to thinking differently about disability and fundamentally improving how we recruit, retain, and develop disabled people throughout our organisation.

As a Disability Confident Committed Employer, we’ve made specific pledges to ensure our workplace is inclusive and accessible. We actively challenge our own assumptions and misconceptions about disability, creating an environment where disabled employees can thrive and reach their full potential. This certification reflects our practical approach to disability inclusion. We recognise that diverse teams drive innovation and better outcomes.



Getting behind the data

National data sets on speaking up can be misleading, as they draw on information provided by a large number of Guardians operating in a wide variety of ways. It is often difficult to know whether data is suggesting a trend or is simply a result of inconsistency.

Our data set is smaller in scale but has the benefits of being the product of consistently implemented Guardian arrangements. Our 2024/2025 caseload still represents 3,511 cases – with us handling over 8% of the Guardian cases recorded in England.

This year the trend of increasing Guardian case numbers continued. We handled 32% more cases compared to 2023/2024. We also saw, again, that higher Guardian case numbers are seen where staff survey results indicate poorer speaking up culture. This inevitably leads to the conclusion that leaders must continue to emphasise the importance of creating an open culture where everyday dialogue flourishes.

7% of our cases related to patient safety or quality issues. This compares to 28% that relate to management issues. This leads once again to the importance of equipping everyone within an organisation to hold effective conversations at every level.

22% of our cases involved issues related to systems and processes, a theme which is not recorded nationally. We believe this omission is a significant oversight, as it leads to a national conversation solely about people or cultural failings without acknowledging the system and process issues staff have to negotiate on a daily basis.

We are delighted to see the extent of the positive feedback we receive from those who use our Guardian service – it is rare for an organisation to be able to say that:

98% of those who provide feedback are willing to recommend their service to a colleague.



Find out more



You can learn more about us on our website:
theguardianservice.co.uk



You can find our research and papers here:
theguardianservice.co.uk/research-and-papers



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