



**The Guardian
Service**
Here to listen

Speaking Up in 2024: Consistent themes, growing need and future focus

The Guardian Service Data Report April 2024 – March 2025

September 2025

Document classification: **Public**

The Guardian Service Ltd., 8 Devonshire Square, London, EC2M 4PL

Contents

	Page
Foreword	2
Thanks	3
Summary of findings	3
Findings	4-10
• Guardian case numbers continue to rise	4
• Themes and trends – Service type, workforce size	5
• NHS Staff Survey - A widening gap	7
• Case theme consistency – core issues remain unchanged	8
• Who is speaking up - Professional group insights	8
• Listening failures continue to drive Guardian engagement	9
• Case escalation	10
• Feedback from those contacting a Guardian	10
Annex – methodology	11

Foreword

This report draws on the data from 30 organisations collected over the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. These organisations collectively employ around 350,000 workers. This substantial scale, combined with our standardised approach to how the Guardian role is carried out, enables us to provide meaningful and reliable insight into the Guardian caseload. Whilst national reports operate at a larger scale, the huge variation in how the Guardian role is implemented brings into question the reliability of any conclusions drawn.

Over the period we have studied, we have observed consistency in when and why workers seek Guardian support, and the persistent nature of the cultural challenges that drive this. Perceived failings to listen to what workers say remains the primary driver for seeking Guardian support. This is borne out by our repeated observation that organisations with a poorer speaking up culture (assessed through metrics in the NHS staff survey) are the ones where the Guardian caseload is highest.

This year we have taken a closer look at the correlation between organisation size and Guardian caseload. Whilst the overall trend of larger organisations having larger case volumes remains, this seems to mask an inverse correlation with case ‘density’ – in our dataset, Guardian case numbers per 1,000 workers is highest in smaller organisations.

We have also expanded our analysis of speaking up amongst particular professional groups and can now offer some insight not just into how many cases particular groups are raising with Guardians, but also into the broad themes that each group presents, and how this varies between groups.

We have, again, observed that almost half of the cases that are raised with our Guardians do not result in escalation by the Guardian. We believe this both shows the value of providing the independent, impartial, listening ear that is at the core of our service, and how this service gives people the confidence to raise matters themselves. There is, however, work to be done to understand this dynamic more fully.

We hope this analysis will be helpful to our ‘Alliance’ of clients who trust us to provide our independent Guardian service, and to organisations with their own arrangements. We appreciate that we all have the same aim; to create the open culture that is needed so that everyday dialogue flourishes. We are doing this so that life is better for those who provide health and care services, as well as those for whom those services are delivered.

Thanks

We extend our sincere thanks to all of our clients - the members of the GSL Alliance – for their ongoing commitment to our service. We want to express our appreciation to every individual who has chosen to speak up to our Guardians. We recognise the courage it takes to raise a concern, and we remain committed to providing a safe, confidential and impartial service that enables your voice to be heard and respects you and what you say.

Summary of findings

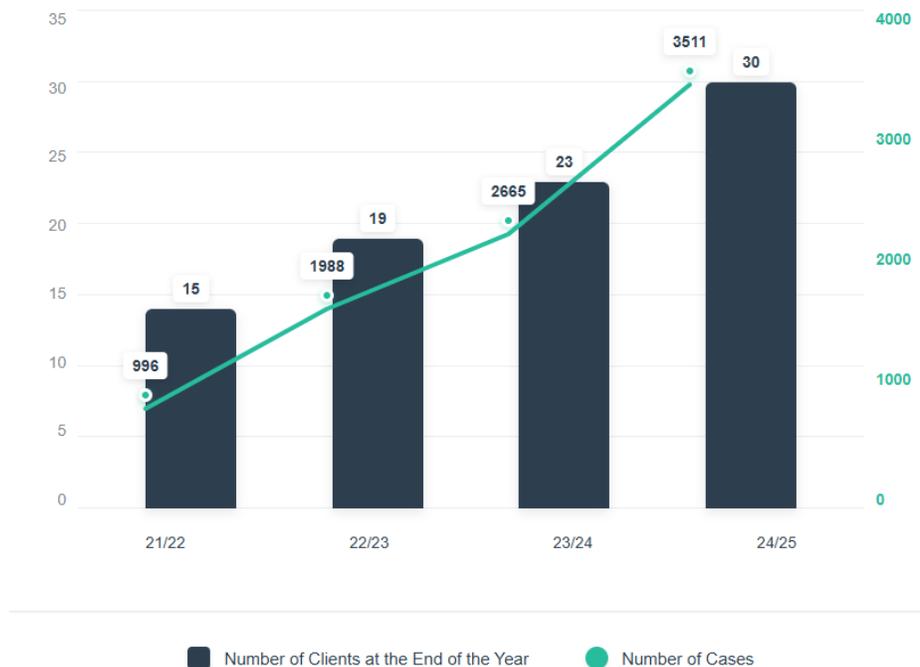
- Guardian case numbers continue to increase
- More cases continue to arise in acute providers compared to non-acute providers
- The issues raised to Guardians remain consistent over time
- The desire for impartial and independent support remains the primary reason workers contact a Guardian Service Guardian
- Perceptions that those who raise matters are not heard continues to drive people to contacting a Guardian
- Deeper analysis reveals distinct patterns in how different professional groups engage with Guardians, with management and systems issues dominating all roles
- User feedback reflects high satisfaction with Guardian Service support – 92% of those who provide feedback describe a positive experience and 98% would recommend the service to colleagues

Findings

Guardian case numbers continue to rise

During the reporting period from 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, we recorded **3,511** cases representing a **32% increase** from the previous year's total of 2,665. This growth coincided with an expansion of our client base from 23 to 30 organisations, with new clients joining at various points throughout the reporting period. Even when accounting for this growth, the data supports the case for an overall increase in case volumes. However, this is not a universal trend. Of the organisations we supported across the last two years, around two in five (44%) saw case numbers increase while around three in five (56%) experienced reductions. This illustrates the complexity of understanding the picture painted by data, whilst national trends show an overall picture, case volumes naturally vary due to a range of factors unique to each organisation.

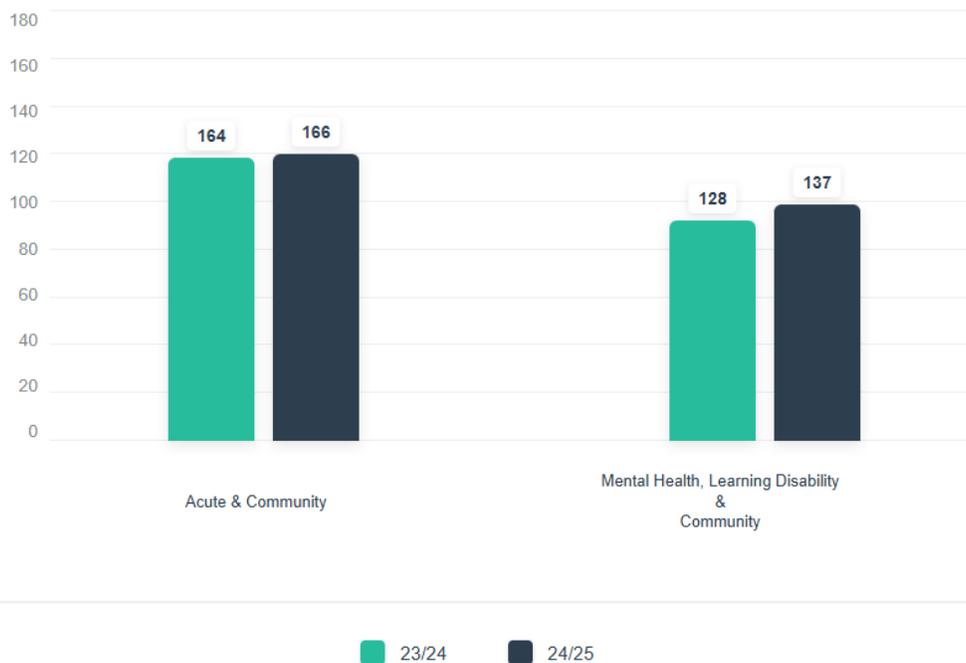
The Guardian Service - All Client Base



Themes and trends

Service type: Trusts providing acute services continue to record higher case volumes than other Trust types, averaging 166 cases over the year compared to 137 for Trusts that do not provide acute services.

Average Case Volume by Service



Workforce size: In our analysis of speaking up case data for 2024/25 we continue to explore the relationship between organisational size and case volume, using the National Guardian’s Office (NGO) established classifications: large organisations (over 10,000 workers), medium organisations (5,000-10,000 workers) and small organisations (up to 5,000 workers).

Last year we noted that small organisations recorded 65% fewer cases on average than medium and large organisations, with minimal difference between the latter two groups. This year’s data shows a clearer pattern aligning case volumes with organisational size.

Average Number of Cases by Workforce Size (Trusts)



This year we have also looked at case rates relative to workforce size drawing data from NHS England workforce statistics. This brings to light a striking pattern showing a higher proportion of workers speaking up to Guardians in smaller organisations, compared to larger organisations:



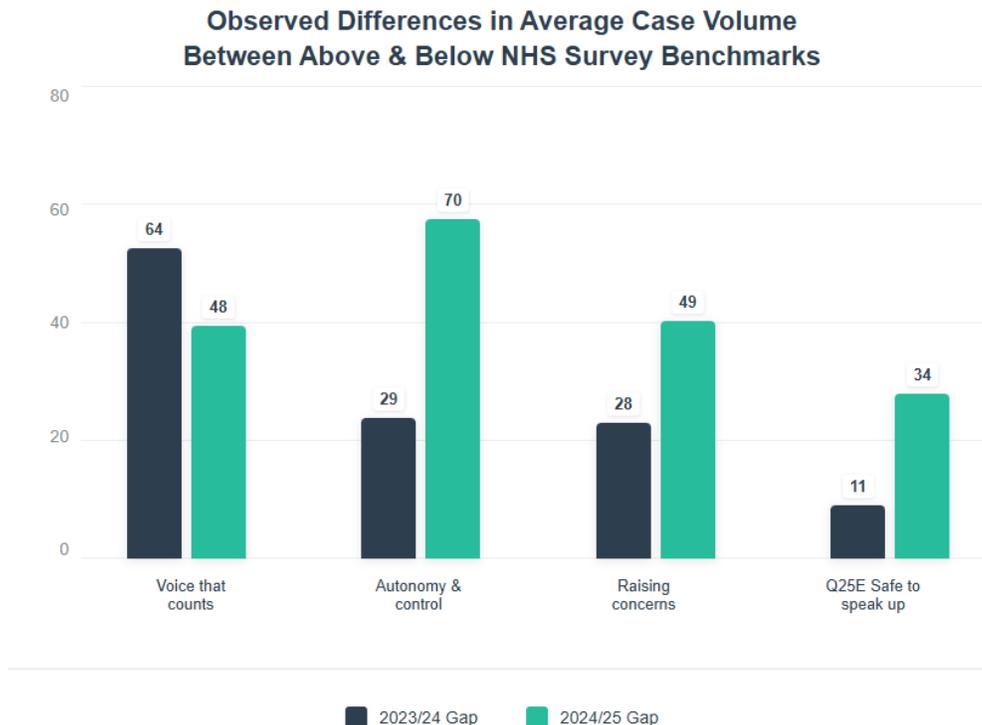
Guardian case numbers per 1,000 workers by organisational size

There may be many factors that contribute to this picture, and we will be looking at this phenomenon in greater detail over the coming year. It may, for instance, reflect the difficulties smaller organisations have in providing confidential spaces for workers to speak up outside of that provided by a Guardian – driving a larger proportion of workers toward the Guardian. It also has implications for the resourcing of Guardian arrangements as, proportionally, Guardians in smaller organisations will be handling greater case volumes per 1,000 workers than those in larger organisations.

NHS staff survey results – a widening gap

Last year we analysed the NHS staff survey, focusing on the “People Promise” element ‘We each have a voice that counts’. We identified trends showing a strong correlation between the overall workplace environment based on this indicator, and the number of cases that Guardians handle. The same trend emerged when we looked at each sub-indicator (‘Autonomy and Control’ and ‘Raising Concerns’) and the ‘key’ indicator question, Q 25e ‘I feel safe to speak up about anything that concerns me in this organisation’.

This year’s data continues to support our core findings: organisations with better speaking up cultures, as reflected in the NHS staff survey results, have fewer Guardian cases, with the gap between organisations above and below the benchmark widening for three of these indicators



Case themes consistency: core issue categories remain unchanged

Analysis of case themes across the past three years reveals remarkable consistency in the proportion of the Guardian case load that particular themes make up. The dominant themes have remained; management issues, systems & processes and behaviour & relationship.

Theme	2022/23	2023/24	2024/2025
Management Issue	31%	31%	28%
System/Process	21%	24%	22%
Behaviour/Relationship	17%	15%	18%
Bullying /Harassment	13%	10%	10%
Worker Safety/Wellbeing	3%	5%	9%
Patient Safety/Quality	8%	9%	7%
Discrimination/Inequality	6%	5%	5%
Other	1%	1%	1%

We should note that, of the 3,511 recorded cases 1,501 (43%) were recorded with more than one theme attached to them. This reflects the complexity of the Guardian caseload and the multifaceted nature of many of the cases handled.

Who is speaking up: professional group insights

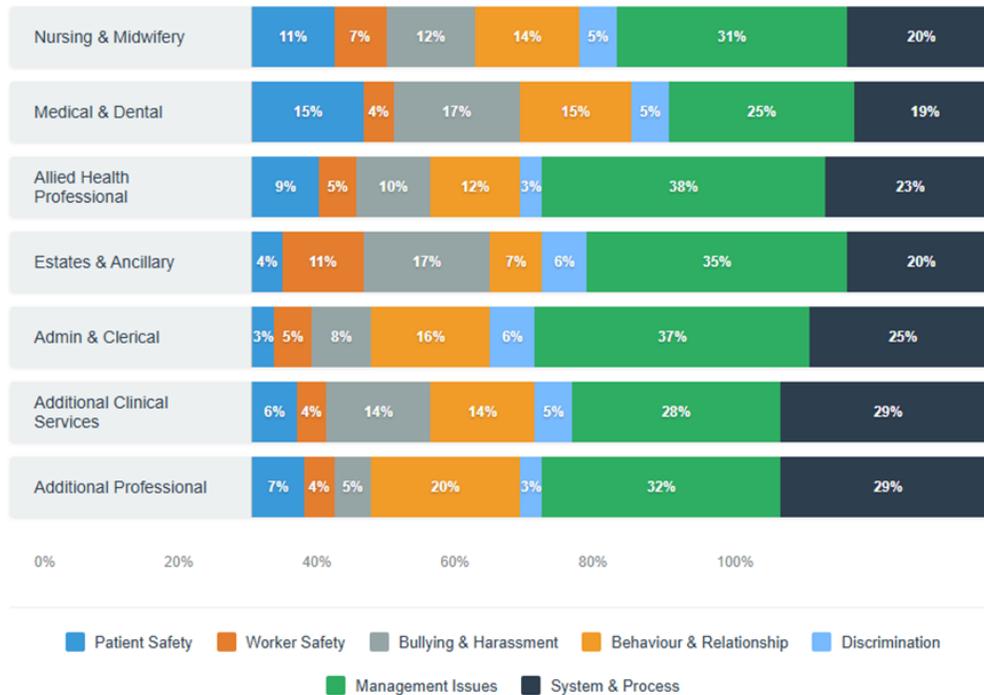
Distribution of cases between various professional groupings has remained largely consistent. Nursing and midwifery workers continue to be the largest source of Guardian cases.

Professional group	2023/24	2024/2025
Nurses and Midwives	30%	27%
Administration and Clerical	24%	23%
Additional Clinical services	15%	16%
Medical and Dental	7%	8%
Allied Health Professional	7%	9%
Estates and Ancillary	3%	6%
Not Known	5%	5%
Additional Professional	5%	4%
Healthcare science	3%	1%
Students	1%	1%

This year we have carried out further analysis looking at the types of cases that each professional group brings. We have found that management issues and system/process concerns dominate across all groups.

It is also notable that patient safety issues are recorded across all professional groups, even those with less direct patient and service user contact. The high proportion of cases related to bullying/harassment, and worker safety recorded from estates and ancillary staff, administration and clerical staff and allied health professionals also stands out.

Case Themes by Job Group



NB: professional groups with fewer than 100 cases have been excluded from this analysis

Listening failures continue to drive Guardian engagement

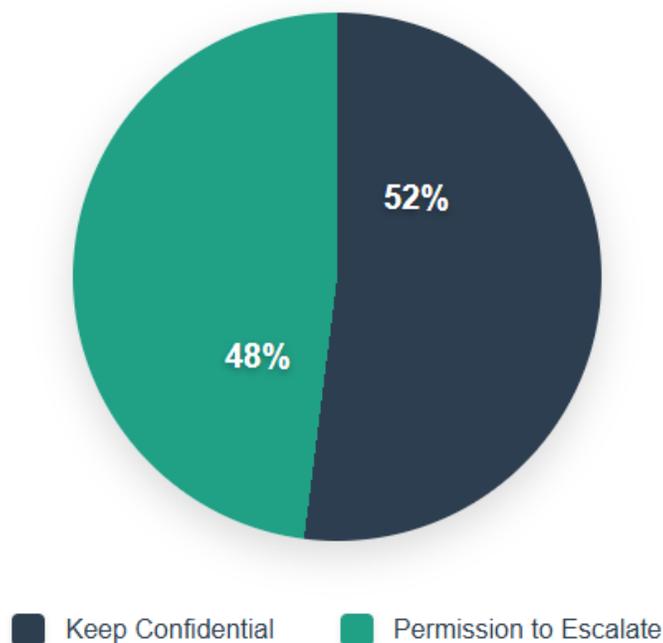
Reasons why a worker contacts a Guardian are not included in the national data collection process. GSL does monitor this, and we have continued to see the need for ‘impartial support’ as a significant reason for Guardian contact – this is cited in over a third of cases (37%).

Half (49%) of those contacting a Guardian do so as they say that they feel that they have not been listened to or doubt they will be heard. This correlates with NHS staff survey data where, nationally, only 50% of respondents agree or strongly agree that, if they did speak up, they are confident that their concern would be addressed (question 25f).

Escalation

Whilst the proportion of cases that are escalated by a Guardian has increased (from 44% last year to 48% this year), nearly half of cases raised with a Guardian still do not result in escalation by the Guardian. We continue to be told by those we support that this is often because, following the confidential and impartial support we provide, they feel able to raise the matter themselves. We are, however, planning further work to look into these cases so we can properly understand how interaction with our service supports onward action through 'regular' channels.

Case Escalation



Feedback

Every case supported by a Guardian provides an opportunity for valuable service feedback. We use the nationally mandated question 'Given your experience would you speak up again?' alongside additional feedback questions to assess service quality and user experience.

Despite a modest 8.5% response rate the feedback we receive demonstrates high levels of confidence in our service. Nearly all respondents (92%) rated their experience positively with 98% willing to recommend the service to a colleague. 93% said they would speak up again given their experience.

Annex

General methodology

To account for changes in client numbers throughout the reporting period, we applied the following approach:

1. **Quarterly Case Calculation:**
We first calculated the total number of cases in each quarter of the reporting year.
2. **Average Case Per Client:**
For each quarter, we divided the total number of cases by the number of clients active during that quarter. This gave us an average number of cases per client for that period.
3. **Quarterly Replication:**
This method was applied consistently across all quarters, allowing us to account for fluctuations in client numbers throughout the year.
4. **Annual Total:**
Finally, we added the quarterly averages together to arrive at the total figure for the year.

Illustrative example

Quarter	Number of organisations at the end of the quarter of the type being considered (e.g. Trusts with a particular CQC rating)	Total number of cases for that organisation type for that quarter	Quarterly figure
	A	B	$B \div A$
Q1 Apr – Jun	10	250	25
Q2 Jul – Sept	10	250	25
Q3 Oct – Dec	12	350	29
Q4 Jan - Mar	14	360	26
		Annual total	105

When considering NHS staff survey figures we have used the results published for 2024 by NHS England.

Percentage increase calculations = $\frac{(\text{New value} - \text{Original value})}{** \text{Original value} **} \times 100$

Percentage difference calculations = $\frac{(\text{New value} - \text{Original value})}{** \text{Original value} **} \times 100$

Where: Average of the Two Values = $(\text{Value 1} + \text{Value 2}) \div 2$