

**The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists' response to the  
All-Party Parliamentary Group for Education inquiry on how well schools are  
preparing young people for their future careers**

**1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 The ability to communicate is an essential skill for effectiveness in the workplace. Poor communication skills in childhood affect children's life chances, are closely linked with social disadvantage, and associated with long-term unemployment in adulthood.<sup>i</sup>
- 1.2 The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) believes that there should be a strong emphasis upon supporting children's speech, language and communication needs within schools, as developing children's communication skills is integral in preparing young people for employment and enabling them to fulfil their full potential.
- 1.3 To enhance young people's employability in later life, there is a need for early intervention to promote and support communication skills throughout childhood and young adulthood. The RCSLT believes that there is a need to:

**Support children's early language development and school readiness:**

- Promote programmes, tools and resources which teach parents how to support their child's early language development.
- Train the early years workforce, so that all practitioners understand children's typical language development and how to support children with early language delay and speech, language and communication needs.

**Provide language rich environments in schools and ensure that children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) receive appropriate support:**

- The Department for Education's special educational needs and disability (SEND) initial teacher training framework should include a strong focus upon the importance of communication, so that trainees can confidently and effectively create communication accessible environments and carry out specific interventions under the supervision of a speech and language therapist (SLT).
- Where appropriate, schools should make use of devolved budgets to purchase speech and language therapy services to provide specialist support to children with complex needs and support training of staff in their work in developing communication accessible environments and undertaking interventions.

**Make communication skills everybody's business**

- Train the wider workforce, so they are able to identify and appropriately refer on children with early language delay to local support services such as speech and language therapy.
- Provide consistent public health messaging which promotes the importance of communication and which reinforces parents' knowledge and skills regarding language development.

## **2. About the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists**

- 2.1 The RCSLT is the professional body for speech and language therapists, speech and language therapy students and support workers working in the UK. We promote excellence in practice and influence health, education, employment, social care and justice policies. The RCSLT currently has almost 17,000 members, 60% of who work with children and young people.

## **3. About speech and language therapists**

- 3.1. Speech and language therapists assess and treat speech, language and communication problems in people of all ages, including children and young people, to help them communicate better. Using specialist skills, SLTs work directly with young people, their families, and other professionals to develop personalised strategies which support people with SLCN, including providing alternative and augmentative communication aids. Speech and language therapists also provide training to the wider workforce and develop strategies so that they can improve the communication environment of young people with SLCN, identify the signs of SLCN and deliver appropriate interventions under supervision.

## **4. The importance of communication**

- 4.1 Communication is crucial to children's development and outcomes in later life. Early language skills provide the building block upon which children's literacy skills develop, are a key indicator of educational success and influence life chances.<sup>ii</sup> Research indicates a direct link between children's communication skills and their employability in adulthood. Vocabulary difficulties at age five are significantly associated with poor employment outcomes at age 34.<sup>iii</sup> Furthermore, one study has indicated that up to 88% of long-term unemployed men have speech, language and communication needs.<sup>iv</sup>
- 4.2 Poor communication skills in childhood affect almost one in four children, 23% of those entering school at the age of five do not meet the expected level of language development.<sup>v</sup> Furthermore, speech, language and communication needs are closely linked with social disadvantage, and over 50% of children in socially deprived areas may start school with impoverished speech, language and communication skills.<sup>vi</sup>
- 4.3 In addition to supporting children who experience early language delay, it is also important to meet the needs of children who have long term or persistent SLCN. Around 10% of children have long term or persistent SLCN either as their primary need or as part of another special educational need.<sup>vii</sup>

## **5. The importance of communication skills in the world of work**

- 5.1 Schooling provides the foundation for the development of all children's communication which is then built upon in employment. Employers seek individuals who have the ability to develop strong working relationships and communicate effectively with a range of audiences.
- 5.2 A skills survey conducted by the CBI, the representative body for commercial businesses in the UK, and Pearson Education in 2015, found that *"approximately half of employers had concerns with young people's communication skills (49%) and 46%*

*of firms reported that they wanted to see primary schools developing children's communications skills and other skills that will unlock their learning potential.”<sup>viii</sup>*

- 5.3 The RCSLT believes that schools have an essential role to play in promoting children and young people's language and helping to prepare them for employment. The ability to communicate effectively is an increasingly important factor within the labour market, according to the CBI:

*“Most jobs created in the decade 2012 to 2022 are expected to be high-skilled ones. Almost half of all employment is set to be in managerial, professional or associate professional roles by 2022. And the growth in caring and personal service jobs calls for different and better levels of skills – such as communications skills – from those required by many traditional jobs.”<sup>ix</sup>*

## **6. Solutions which can help to support children's speech, language and communication skills**

- 6.1 Speech and language therapists have specialist expertise in supporting children with delayed language and/or speech language and communication needs. Speech and language therapists assess and treat children with speech, language and communication problems and provide training to other professionals, such as teachers and teaching assistants, so that they can develop strategies which help to support the needs of children with communication difficulties.

- 6.2 The RCSLT believes that there is a need for early intervention and comprehensive support for children with speech, language and communication difficulties across their life span. Building upon local best practice we recommend that there is a need to:

- 6.2.1 **Support children's early language development and school readiness:** early language skills are crucial to school readiness and are a key indicator of educational success. However, research indicates that children are arriving at school without the expected level of speech, language and communication skills.<sup>x</sup> To ensure that all children start school with strong language skills, the RCSLT recommends that:

- The Department for Education's upcoming early years workforce strategy should include a strong focus upon supporting children's language and communication development. It is important to ensure that the early years workforce receives appropriate training, so that all practitioners understand children's typical language development, are skilled and confident at identifying children who are developing in line with age related expectations and those who are not, and how best to support these children.
- Building upon the model of Stoke Speaks Out, a successful citywide initiative that promotes children's early language development, the Department for Education should promote tools and resources which teach parents how to support their child's early language skills. Parents play a crucial role in supporting their children's early language and development, but many lack confidence in how to support their child's early learning.<sup>xi</sup>
- Stoke Speaks Out has highlighted that the key actions that have caused a shift in parental behaviour in terms of parents talking and playing with their babies and children include:

- co-production: using national resources and tailoring these to support the needs of the local communities, for example, outreaching to lone mothers in deprived communities as well as parents in more affluent areas and demonstrating through play ways to support children's communication development.
- providing consistent public health messaging: which reinforces parents' knowledge and skills using multi-faceted approaches, such as social media and training of the wider workforce.

### 6.2.2 **Provide language rich environments in schools and ensure that children SLCN receive appropriate support:**

- It is important that teaching staff can confidently and effectively identify and support pupils with SLCN and, where appropriate, refer them on to specialist support such as speech and language therapy. In line with this, we recommend that there should be a strong emphasis upon the importance of SLCN within the Department for Education's SEND initial teacher training (ITT) framework.
- As the Department for Education develops its SEND ITT Framework we hope that the document will seek to develop trainees':
  - **Knowledge and understanding:** ensuring that trainees understand typical language development for school aged children and are skilled and confident at identifying children who are developing in line with age related expectations and those who are not, and how best to support these children.
  - **Skills and practice:** ensuring that trainees are aware of how to create classroom environments that best supports speech, language and communication (physical environments and learning context) and create language learning opportunities (opportunities in the classroom to support language development).
  - **Partnership working:** supporting the interpersonal skills of trainees so that they effectively engage in multi-agency working and liaise with SEND/SLCN specialists such as speech and language therapists where children with SLCN require additional support.

### 6.2.3 **Making communication skills everybody's business**

In order to reinforce learning in schools, and to make sure that children's speech, language and communication skills are reinforced outside of educational environments, we recommend that there is a need to:

- Train the wider workforce, so that they are able to identify and appropriately refer on children with early language delay to local support services such as speech and language therapy.
- Provide consistent public health messaging which promotes the importance of communication and which reinforces parents' knowledge and skills regarding language development.

Please see below a case study on training for the wider workforce which summarises the successful Stoke Speaks Out programme.

## **Case study on training for the wider workforce: making communication everybody's business**

### **Local best practice: Stoke Speaks Out**

Stoke Speaks Out is a multi-agency initiative developed to tackle a high incidence of language delay identified in children in Stoke-on-Trent. The programme takes a strategic approach to bring all relevant agencies together to look at the underlying issues of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and places it on all key agendas, for example, local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments.

**Workforce development:** the multifaceted programme includes multi-agency training and tools which support the whole workforce to identify refer and, where appropriate, support SLCN – over 6000 practitioners have been trained. The programme includes partnership working with health visitors and midwives, and training is embedded into core training for nursing, midwifery and children's centres.

**Impact:** as a result of the project, between 2004 and 2010 the city saw a dramatic improvement in children's language development – the percentage of 3-4 year-olds starting nursery with language delay reduced from 64% in 2004 to 39% in 2010, following funding cuts the percentage of children with early language delay increased to 46% in 2014. Given this, the service has recently received substantial extra funding to support early language skills across the city and reduce the percentage of children with language delay.

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<sup>i</sup> All Party Parliamentary Group on Speech and Language Difficulties (2013) The links between speech, language and communication needs and social disadvantage, RCSLT: London

<sup>ii</sup> Department of Health (2013) Chief Medical Officer's annual report 2012: Our Children Deserve Better: Prevention Pays, Department of Health: London

<sup>iii</sup> Law J et al. (2009) Modelling developmental language difficulties from school entry into adulthood: literacy, mental health, and employment outcomes, *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research*, 52(6): 1401-16.

<sup>iv</sup> Elliott N (2009) An investigation into the communication skills of long-term unemployed men, PhD thesis, University of Glamorgan

<sup>v</sup> Save the Children (2015) Ready to Read: Closing the gap in early language skills so that every child in England can read well. London: Save the Children

<sup>vi</sup> Locke A, Ginsborg J, Peers I. (2002) Development and disadvantage: Implications for the early years and beyond, *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 37(1), pp. 3-15.

<sup>vii</sup> I-CAN (2011) Speech, language and communication in Secondary Aged Pupils

<sup>viii</sup> CBI (2015) Skills emergency could 'starve growth' – CBI/Pearson survey <http://news.cbi.org.uk/news/skills-emergency-could-starve-growth-cbi-pearson-survey/>

<sup>ix</sup> CBI (2015) Skills emergency could 'starve growth' – CBI/Pearson survey <http://news.cbi.org.uk/news/skills-emergency-could-starve-growth-cbi-pearson-survey/>

<sup>x</sup> Save the Children (2015) Ready to Read: Closing the gap in early language skills so that every child in England can read well. London: Save the Children

<sup>xi</sup> The Key (2016) State of Education Survey Report: <http://www.joomag.com/magazine/state-of-education-survey-report-2016/0604114001462451154?short>