

Statement Rebecca Pow MP parliamentary debate Government response to Gillian Rudd petition

I CAN and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) very much welcome both Rebecca Pow's parliamentary debate on speech, language and communication support for children, and the Government's response to Gillian Rudd's petition on implementing the recommendations of the **Bercow: Ten Years On** report.

Rebecca Pow debate

We are very grateful to Rebecca Pow MP for leading the Westminster Hall debate; we deeply appreciate both Rebecca's support and the support of her parliamentary colleagues for the recommendations contained in **Bercow: Ten Years On**.

The speeches we heard yesterday, often highlighting MPs' personal experiences or the experiences of their constituents, were a powerful illustration of the importance of communication. They also demonstrated broad, cross-party support for the need to ensure that children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and their families are better supported.

We were particularly pleased to hear the Minister, Nadhim Zahawi, pledge his determination, 'to see children and young people with SLCN receive the support they need to achieve in school and in independent life.'

Government response to Gillian Rudd petition

We are very grateful to everyone who has signed and shared Gillian Rudd's petition. To have secured 10,000 signatures in under three months is testimony to the importance people across the United Kingdom attach to securing better support for children and young people with SLCN. We want to put on record our deep gratitude to every person who worked so hard to achieve this. As the petition remains open until 26 September, we encourage people to continue signing and sharing it.

We welcome the Government response to the petition, and are pleased that it reiterates their commitment to ensuring those with SLCN receive the support they need to reach their full potential.

Next steps

However, in order to achieve that more needs to be done. We would highlight in particular:

- **Ongoing support across the age range** – while we welcome the Government's plans to address speech, language and communication in the early years, we also need to help children and young people with SLCN right now, including those over the age of five.
- **Joint working** – we were very encouraged by how strongly the Minister and other MPs talked about the importance of joint working. For this to happen on the ground, it also needs to happen nationally. While we welcome the way in which the Department for Education is engaging with the **Bercow: Ten Years On** report, it is critical that other Departments do the same. In particular the Department of Health and Social Care needs to play its full part. [The reasons for this are detailed in the APPENDIX.]
- **Cross-Government strategy for children** – communication is everybody's business and while we welcome the early years' initiatives the Government is proposing, we reiterate our call for a cross-Government strategy for children, with speech, language and communication at its core. It is only with such a strategy that the 1.4 million children and young people with SLCN in the United Kingdom will get the support they and their families require.

We look forward to continuing our positive discussions with the Department for Education and to having similar discussions with other Departments, particularly the Department of Health and Social Care.

Rebecca Pow, MP for Taunton Deane, said:

- I was delighted to lead the debate on speech, language and communication support for children. As a nation we have yet to grasp the significance that not focussing fully on the importance of speech, language and communication has on younger generations - and therefore society as a whole. As a result hundreds of thousands of children and their families are suffering needlessly. By raising awareness of this issue, and supporting parents and health and education professionals, we can make a real difference to the lives our children are able to live.

Gillian Rudd said:

- I am absolutely thrilled that the petition has already secured over 10,700 signatures. I have been humbled by the dedication people across the United Kingdom have shown in raising awareness of it and securing signatures. It's been fantastic to see and I am very grateful to everyone who has delivered this great result. Let's keep signing and sharing – the petition can never have too many signatures!

Bob Reitemeier CBE, Chief Executive of I CAN, the children's communication charity said:

- The debate marks an important point for all parties involved in Bercow: Ten Years On. We are incredibly grateful for all of the support received for the report, the petition and the debate. Moving forward it is imperative to build on this momentum and ensure that language services for children and young people across the age range are achieved through joint working by MPs, ministers and Departments. A critical foundation for this will be a cross-government strategy for children, incorporating speech, language and communication needs, which is long overdue. This is our shared duty to the 1.4 million children in the UK with communication needs.

Kamini Gadhok MBE, Chief Executive of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists said:

- We really appreciate all the support we have received for Bercow: Ten Years On from MPs and peers of all parties and none, and from parents and carers, professionals and organisations representing children and young people with SLCN. This demonstrates a real desire to ensure that children and young people with speech, language and communication needs and their families receive the support they need. Central though communication is to learning, it is also much more than that. It is our key life skill, essential to building friendships and relationships, central to family life and being part of our local community and wider society. For all children and young people with speech, language and communication needs to achieve their potential, live healthy lives and make their full contribution to our country, we need a cross-Government strategy for children with speech, language and communication at its core.

For more information, please contact Peter Just on peter.just@rcslt.org or 020 7378 3630.

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NOTES

Rebecca Pow's debate can be accessed here: <https://goo.gl/ueWjRz>

I CAN and RCSLT's briefing note can be accessed here: bit.ly/2tVe6rv

Gillian Rudd's petition can be accessed here: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/215643>

APPENDIX

Department of Health and Social Care

The Department of Health and Social Care has a critical role to play in delivering better support for children and young people with SLCN and their families. There are a number of reasons for this.

- First, **the need for specialist services**. The Department of Health and Social Care has responsibility for children and young people requiring specialist support from health professionals. More than 10% of children will present with long-term SLCN (including 7.6% of children with developmental language disorder and 2.3% of children with language disorders linked to other conditions, such as autism and learning disability, and children and young people with a range of other SLCN, including the at least 1% of children who stammer). These young people require timely and often long-term access to specialist speech and language therapy support, but one of the key issues affecting children and families is the availability of specialist support. 55% of parents reported that their child waited over 6 months for their child to get the help they needed and only 15% of people felt that speech and language therapy was available as required in their area. Many children and young people will require intervention beyond five years of age, due to the nature of their specific needs. In particular, developmental language disorder is very difficult to diagnose before the age of five, so any children with that disorder are likely to need help and support beyond the age of five.
- Second, **joint working**. One of the key principles underpinning the Children and Families Act is that services to support children and young people should be jointly commissioned by health and education, yet this is rarely the case in practice. ***Bercow: Ten Years On*** clearly calls for a joined-up message from both the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care. Therefore, ministers responsible for health and social care have a crucial role to play in responding to the report and its recommendations.
- Third, **children and young people's mental health**. An estimated 81% of children with emotional and behavioural disorders have unidentified language difficulties and research shows that young people referred to mental health services are three times more likely to have SLCN than those who have not been referred. Unless these children and young people receive the speech and language therapy support they need mental health support, including referrals, assessments and interventions, may be inaccessible, inaccurate and ineffective. This risks the child or young person's mental health worsening and public money being wasted on inappropriate or failed interventions.
- Fourth, **health inequalities**. ***Bercow: Ten Years On*** highlights recent evidence which shows that children's speech, language and communication is linked to worse health outcomes later in life. Given the higher prevalence of SLCN in children from areas of social disadvantage, identifying and supporting children's SLCN will contribute to the Government's vision for sustained reductions in health inequalities.