

Responding to the impact of COVID-19 on the recovery and restoration of children's speech and language therapy services

March 2022

Context

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by longstanding issues of increased need and insufficient resource, many children's speech and language therapy services are facing significant challenges as they try to balance growing waiting lists with maintaining provision for children already on their caseload. Difficulties in recruiting speech and language therapists mean that even with additional funding, there are no easy solutions.

We're aware that in many areas, services are coming under pressure to reduce waiting times, and service managers, professional leads and clinicians are being asked to implement solutions that they may have concerns about.

Key considerations

We recognise that the situation is hugely challenging, and that the status quo is not acceptable, but urge our members to consider innovative solutions which take account of the following:

- **Outcomes for children and young people** – Will the proposed changes improve or harm outcomes for children and young people? And how will you measure the impact of the proposed changes? Are you using the RCSLT online outcomes tool (ROOT)? If not sign up [here](#)
- **Duty of care** – Do the proposed changes breach your [duty of care](#)? Do they expose you or your colleagues to the risk of referral to the Health and Care Professions Council? See [standards of proficiency for speech and language therapists](#) and [standards of conduct, performance and ethics](#)
- **Guidance** – Are the proposals in line with the RCSLT guidance on [Placing children and young people at the heart of delivering quality speech and language therapy?](#)

- **Consultation**
 - Have you consulted with the children, young people and families that will be impacted by these changes?
 - Have you consulted with other stakeholders that will be impacted, such as schools and other settings, local authority partners and others in the system?
- **Inequalities** – How do the proposals impact on children and families at risk of health inequalities? Have you conducted an equality impact assessment? If you have an Equalities Lead, they should be alerted around any impact on children with protected characteristics.
- **Governance** – Who is signing off on the decision? Have you completed all due diligence? Those with accountability for quality, safety and harm reduction should be sighted on the proposed changes. This may be your Lead AHP or Lead Nurse.
- **Staff wellbeing** – what impact will the proposed changes have on the wellbeing of staff? Have you consulted with them about the changes?

Innovative solutions

Some examples of approaches that have been used in other areas include:

- **Collaborating with other local providers** – some NHS services have sub-contracted independent providers to carry out discrete pieces of work.
- **Holding a stakeholder forum** – bringing together commissioners, providers and practitioners across an area to agree a whole system solution.
- **Options appraisal** – putting all options on the table and systematically evaluating them against the principles for a quality speech and language therapy service
- **Recruitment** – holding online / Q&A sessions for prospective candidates to find out more about the service and meet service managers / leaders before they apply. Consider whether you can offer incentives such as relocation expenses.

RCSLT guidance and statements

In addition to the guidance on placing children and young people at the heart of quality speech and language therapy services, the RCSLT has specific position statements on:

- [Approaches to caseload management](#)
- [Assessment only services](#)
- [Supporting access to and engagement with children's services](#)
- [Saying no - statement on the roles and responsibilities of registered practitioners](#)

Advice and resources for responding to proposed services changes are also available, including advice on influencing decision makers, conducting options appraisals and risk assessments:

[Responding to proposed changes to your service](#)

During COVID-19 surges there may be additional pressures on the workforce – see the [RCSLT statement on redeployment \(November 2021\)](#)

Raising your concerns

If you have done all you can to influence locally but the proposed service changes are still going ahead, you may wish to consider raising your concerns.

Consider who will be the most impactful person in your area. This could be:

- Lead AHP or Lead Nurse
- Safeguarding Lead
- Equalities Lead
- In England, the Designated Clinical Officer for SEND
- In Wales, the Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO)

We encourage you to report any concerns about proposed service changes to RCSLT so that we can keep track of the national picture and report these to Government.

Members can also contact RCSLT for advice and support: info@rcslt.org

Listening and sharing

We don't have all the answers, but we want to listen to the challenges you're facing, connect you with peers who might have tried different approaches, and work together to figure out the best way forward for the children, young people and families we serve.

We will be holding a listening event for managers and service leads of NHS-commissioned children's speech and language therapy services across the UK. To register your interest in the event please click here: <https://bit.ly/3HQ9s1L>

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK. As well as providing leadership and setting professional standards, the RCSLT facilitates and promotes research into the field of speech and language therapy, promotes better education and training of speech and language therapists, and provides its members and the public with information about speech and language therapy.

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