



RCSLT call for action on Alternative & Augmentative Communication (AAC)

“Ensure every person in Scotland has a voice by funding the new rights to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) equipment AND essential AAC support services”.

AAC equipment and associated SLT led support services are essential to guarantee that people with significant speech, language and communication support needs have a voice in their own care and in their lives. SLTs are uniquely placed to help unlock people’s potential and ability, improve their communication and therefore feel heard and included in society.

What is ‘AAC’ equipment and support services?

- AAC equipment AND support services enable people who can’t speak to express themselves.
- AAC is used by people of all ages from toddlers to adults with MND, MS, Dementia, Stroke, or learning difficulties. ,
- **AAC equipment** includes “talking machines” such as that used famously by Steven Hawking and any other method of communicating that replaces or supplements speech when these are impaired.
- **AAC support services, led by speech and language therapists (SLTs), help AAC users select the right equipment to meet their needs; learn how to use and programme the machine; develop skills of teachers, carers, social workers etc. to support the person to use the device to best effect.** Without these support services AAC equipment becomes an expensive and demoralising waste of money
- Quality AAC provision requires **guaranteed funding** to pay for the machinery **and** the **support services**

Scotland NEEDS this because:

- Although the new law¹ is a great step forward – it needs **investment in AAC equipment and support services** to make it a reality.
- There is **unequal and variable AAC service provision** across Scotland.

- People who use AAC have expressed **frustration over assessment times, lack of funding for devices and lack of ongoing access to the support services they need to use the equipment.**
- People are still organising fundraising events to buy the ability to communicate!

An estimated **26,500 people** in Scotland have communication difficulties that could be helped by AAC equipment and support and with an ageing population the numbers are **rising**.

- From research we also know that there are people who could benefit from AAC who are not currently accessing appropriate services.

Delivering on this commitment would mean

Guaranteed fully funded access to quality AAC equipment and support services means:

- **People who need AAC** are able to speak for themselves, to communicate with loved ones, maintain their independence, and enjoy their human rights and equality of opportunity in health, education, employment and the wider community.
- **National and Local Government** can fulfil their moral and legal obligations towards vulnerable children and young people and adults (Laws include Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2015; Equality Act 2010, Human Rights Act 1998 as well as a person-centred approach to care and optimisation of Health and Wellbeing Outcomes).

The problem with the situation in Scotland now:

Paying for the commitment:

- Scottish Government will have new costs associated with the new law guaranteeing communication equipment and support services to anyone who needs it. Total cost is unknown however initial costs of establishing effective infrastructure would reduce over time.
- The impact of this investment however **will realise savings**. A recent independent study found that for every **£1** invested in high tech AAC services **£1.79 is generated** in health related quality of life gains.
- The costs associated with *not* providing quality AAC services include costs to the individual of social exclusion, increased anxiety levels, increasing carer strain and reduced quality of life as well as restricting their educational attainment, employment opportunities. All these things also impact on the general economy not least the higher costs of caring for an individual who is unable to communicate

Useful questions to ask candidates:

- Are you aware of the role of speech and language therapists when someone needs AAC?
- The costs to individuals and services of unmet communication support needs are significant, so what funding will your party make available so that the new rights to AAC equipment and support services becomes a reality?
- Would you take up the case of present and future AAC users if and when you are elected?
- If Scotland is to remain a world leader in AAC provision, how can we make sure that both equipment and support services are provided when people really need them?

For further information, please contact:

Kim Hartley Kean, Head of Scotland Office
Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

Tel: 0131 226 5250

Email: kim.hartleykean@rcslt.org

Website www.rcslt.org.uk
