



Employing a speech and language therapist – what you need to know

How can speech and language therapists support children and young people?

- A [recent study](#) found that 7.5% of children starting school, or two children in every class of 30, had a language disorder that impacted on their ability to learn in the classroom ([Norbury et al 2016](#)).
- Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are the second most common type of primary special educational need (SEN) – 20.9% of children on SEN support had this primary type of need in 2015/16 ([Department for Education, 2016](#)).
- In some socially deprived areas more than half of children may start school with impoverished speech, language and communication skills ([Locke et al, 2002](#)).

Ways of working

Using specialist skills, speech and language therapists (SLTs) work directly with children with SLCN and their families and provide them with tailored support for their speech, language and communication. They also work closely with staff in schools, providing education, training and advice on specific strategies to enable children with SLCN to access learning and develop their social communication skills.

As a result, there are different models for the delivery of therapy in schools. However, all therapists are expected to liaise with key people involved in the pupils' education to ensure that information is shared.

- Some therapists might withdraw pupils for individual therapy sessions.
- Others may include working with groups of pupils or in the classroom.
- Some therapists will work in the classroom using a collaborative model with other education staff.

It is worth noting that SLTs have a legal obligation with regard to consent which is set by the regulator, The Health and Care Professions Council ([HCPC](#)) – in particular to obtain consent before any assessment or therapeutic intervention is carried out, agree whose responsibility it is to gain this consent and gain it before contacting other professionals involved with a student. SLTs can usually provide an outline consent letter and form for the school to adapt for their needs.

Pay scales for Speech and Language Therapists

Employers are able to define their own pay policies, but may find the [NHS pay scales](#) helpful as a guide.

Accommodation, equipment, resources and other costs

Much of an SLT's work can be done in a classroom setting, however it's important to provide access to a suitable space for them to carry out administration duties or to work with individuals and/or groups. It would need to be available without interruption for the duration of the SLT's visit, and comply with health and safety requirements. If pupils are seen in small groups, the room should accommodate up to eight individuals, an SLT and a classroom assistant.

A school employing an SLT would be expected to provide equipment, working space and access to a range of resources and clinical assessment tools.

The costs of providing appropriate levels of supervision and CPD (see below) also need to be taken into account when employing an SLT.

Professional qualifications

The title 'speech and language therapist' (SLT) is protected in the UK. All SLTs must have completed a [registered, accredited degree-level course](#) in order to be able to practise in this role. These courses can be completed at either undergraduate (BSc Hons) level or postgraduate (PG Dip or MSc) level and usually take between 2-4 years to complete.

Registration and regulation

The HCPC regulates the UK speech and language therapy profession. It is a legal requirement that all practising SLTs must be registered with the HCPC. All SLTs must meet the following standards in order to remain on the register:

- [Standards of proficiency](#)
- [Standards of conduct, performance and ethics](#)
- [Standards of continuing professional development](#) .

You can check [online](#) whether an SLT is registered and if they are currently under any sanctions. The HCPC refers to RCSLT's professional guidance and best practice advice as part of investigations of speech and language therapists who are referred to them e.g. Communicating Quality Live www.rcslt.org/cq_live/introduction .

HCPC and Insurance requirements

By law, practising SLTs must have a [professional indemnity arrangement](#) in place as a condition of their registration with the HCPC. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) provides both professional indemnity insurance and legal fees expenses for members.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and support to SLTs

It is recommended that all SLTs are members of the RCSLT. The RCSLT is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the UK; providing leadership and setting professional standards for more than 17,000 members who work with children and young people and adults with SLCN and swallowing needs. The RCSLT facilitates and promotes research, better education and training of SLTs and provides information for its members and the public about speech and language therapy and speech and language, communication and swallowing needs. The RCSLT provides a range of services to support speech and language therapists including access to professional networks, CPD,

professional guidance, research and evidence-based practice including 1,800 journals. RCSLT membership also includes professional indemnity insurance (see above). Details of some key areas of professional guidance are highlighted below.

Professional Guidance on SEND

The RCSLT has produced guidance for its members [on their roles and responsibilities under the Children and Families Act 2014 and associated code of practice](#), (RCSLT, 2016) - we encourage all SLTs supporting children and young people with SEND in England to read this guidance.

Professional Supervision

Supervision is an essential component of a good quality speech and language therapy service, ensuring SLTs are up-to-date in their knowledge and skills and are able to manage clinical risk. It is a formal arrangement in which an SLT can discuss their work regularly with someone who is experienced and qualified.

Please see the RCSLT website https://www.rcslt.org/cq_live/resources_a_z/supervision/overview for more detailed information on supervision requirements.

Schools may be able to buy-in supervision from their local NHS service or private therapists in their area. The [Association of Speech and language therapists in Independent Practice](#) (ASLTIP) has a list of private practitioners.

Employing a newly-qualified practitioner (NQP)

Newly-qualified practitioners (NQPs) are expected to complete the RCSLT Newly-Qualified Practitioner Framework. The framework aims to 'bridge the gap' between students and practising SLTs in a similar way to the induction for newly qualified teachers.

The length of time NQPs require to complete the framework can span from nine months to two years. During this period, NQPs should receive more frequent supervision by a certified member of the RCSLT with appropriate experience of supporting new graduates.

The RCSLT considers that any breach of the requirements around supervision of NQPs may pose a significant risk to service users, to the NQP and their employer. If these requirements are not adhered to the indemnity insurance that NQPs have as part of their RCSLT membership may be invalidated.

Continuing professional development (CPD)

CPD is the means by which SLTs maintain and develop skills in order to continue to practice safely, effectively and legally. The RCSLT expects that SLTs in full-time employment will undertake at least 30 hours of CPD per year.

As part of their re-registration with the HCPC, all SLTs must sign a declaration to confirm they are undertaking CPD.

The RCSLT strongly recommends that employers commit sufficient time and financial resources to support SLTs to meet their CPD requirements.

National policy briefings

Along with information on its influencing activities, the RCSLT provides its members with briefings and email updates regarding the latest policy news from different government departments.

Advertising for SLT roles

If you're ready to advertise for an SLT, the RCSLT can advertise the role via its monthly Bulletin magazine and online jobs website. Visit the RCSLT website for more information www.speech-language-therapy-jobs.org.

Find out more

For more information, including example job descriptions and more detailed information about supervision and the Newly Qualified Practitioner (NQP) framework, please visit the RCSLT website www.rcslt.org or contact info@rcslt.org.