

# The SEND reforms in England:

## Supporting children and young people with speech, language and communication needs

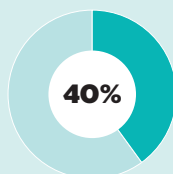
### Background

Following the introduction of the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) reforms in 2014, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) has received mixed feedback from members regarding their ability and capacity to effectively deliver the new SEND system. To gather more evidence and understand the progress that had been made to implement the reforms, in July 2016 we commissioned SQW, an independent research consultancy, to conduct a survey of our members who work with children and young people with SEND and their families in England. The survey was designed to find out more about members' experiences of the SEND reforms, associated successes, challenges and areas for improvement. The survey included questions on a variety of topics including changes in working practice following the reforms, joint working and commissioning of services, and support for children with and without education, health and care (EHC) plans. The survey also sought to gather examples of good and poor practice and capture information regarding speech and language therapists' (SLTs') confidence in delivering the reforms.

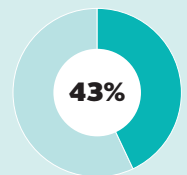
### Survey findings

A total of 350 survey responses were received during the consultation period. Sadly, the survey findings have highlighted mixed progress in the implementation of the SEND reforms and worrying trends:

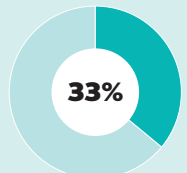
► **Children without EHC plans are not getting the support that they need:** SLTs reported a refocus of resources to support children with EHC plans, which has often been to the detriment of children without EHC plans. Only **40% of respondents said that they had capacity to deliver services to children without EHC plans.** Several commented that these children are receiving reduced support, and in some cases no direct speech and language therapy support, due to capacity challenges.



► **Joint commissioning arrangements are patchy, and in some cases speech and language therapy services are not being commissioned for children and young people:** SLTs reported varied and inconsistent joint commissioning arrangements between health, education and social care agencies at a local level. Furthermore, **43% of respondents commented that speech and language therapy support was not being commissioned either for children aged 0-2 years or 18-25 years.**

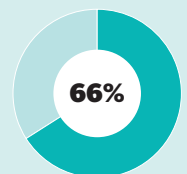


► **SLTs have experienced capacity challenges engaging with the EHC planning process:** SLTs have reported that they lack capacity to attend EHC planning meetings (**more than a third, 33% of respondents said that they or their team felt unable to attend meetings as a result of capacity issues**). Respondents also raised issues regarding a lack of notice being given by local authority colleagues to provide inputs to the EHC assessment and planning processes.

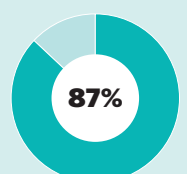


Encouragingly, the survey also highlighted areas of positive practice that can be built upon:

► **SLTs feel confident in delivering the reforms:** **66% of respondents reported that they felt they had either been very or fairly effective at delivering the changes required.**



► **SLTs reported the involvement of parent and carers in decision-making and partnership working:** more than two thirds of respondents reported that parents and carers had been effectively involved in decision-making regarding the support their family received. **The majority of respondents reported that they either worked very or fairly effectively with their health, schools/further education and early years colleagues (87%, 91% and 84%, respectively).**



## Policy recommendations

The RCSLT is committed to working in partnership with national and local decision-makers, commissioners and other agencies to address the challenges highlighted in response to our SEND survey. Working in partnership with RCSLT expert advisers, we have developed the following policy recommendations that can help improve support for children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

### Reductions in speech and language therapy support for children and young people without EHC plans

- ▶ We are calling on the Department of Health, the Department for Education and the Department for Communities and Local Government to issue a joint ministerial circular which will provide clarity on, and reinforce, the responsibilities of local authorities, schools and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to commission services for children without EHC plans.
- ▶ In 2017, the RCSLT will work with the National Association of Head Teachers to develop advice and information for schools regarding how to support children with SLCN and how they can buy in speech and language therapy services directly.

### Variable implementation of joint commissioning and a lack of speech and language therapy support for children aged 0-2 and 18-25

- ▶ **0-2s:** we are calling on the Department for Education to develop guidance and a national framework regarding children's early speech, language and communication skills. We recommend that:
  - The Department for Education's forthcoming early years workforce strategy should set out clear expectations regarding the education and training that all early years practitioners (including in private, voluntary or independent nursery settings) should receive in relation to children's speech, language and communication skills.
  - As part of the Department for Education's forthcoming consultation on children's centres, the Department should develop a national framework which outlines a clear offer that children's centres should provide to support children's early language skills and school readiness.
- ▶ **18-25s:** we are calling on the Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families and the Department for Education to:
  - Provide clarity regarding which local agencies are responsible for commissioning speech and language services for young people aged 18-25.
  - Conduct research which will map gaps in the commissioning of local speech and language therapy services for young people aged 18-25.
  - Identify how existing financial resources can be reallocated to address commissioning gaps regarding speech and language therapy services which support young people aged 18-25.
  - Incorporate a review of how areas are responding to the extension in commissioning for young people aged 18-25, as part of the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission joint SEND inspection process.

*The RCSLT is committed to working in partnership with national and local decision-makers*



### Capacity challenges associated with the EHC planning process

- ▶ We are calling on the Department for Education to recognise the challenges faced by SLTs and other practitioners in attending EHC planning meetings, and the need to increase capacity within the system in order to deliver requirements within the allocated timescales. The combination of inflexibility within the system and high caseloads are leading to poorer results.
- ▶ We are calling on the Department for Education and local government sector partners to develop resources that can support local authority areas with the paperwork associated with EHC planning meetings and resource allocation systems.
- ▶ We are calling on local government sector partners to develop training and resources that can help to support and develop the skills of case workers who are responsible for coordinating and developing EHC plans.

### Continuing partnership working with families and other professionals

- ▶ In 2017, the RCSLT will hold a joint roundtable with social care sector organisations to discuss ways to support partnership working between speech and language therapy services and adult social care colleagues to improve outcomes for young people with SLCN.
- ▶ In 2017, the RCSLT will work with external partners, including SEND support services and voluntary organisations that support children with SLCN to develop resources that can help support greater involvement of children in decisions regarding their care.