



STATEMENT

Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A plan for improving social mobility through education 14 December 2017

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) welcomes the new plan, *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A plan for improving social mobility through education*, which has been published by the Department for Education.

We are pleased that this plan includes closing the ‘word gap’ in the early years, with a particular focus on early language and literacy skills, as the first of its four key life-stage ambitions.

As the plan acknowledges, vocabulary at age five is a key predictor of whether a child from a disadvantaged background is likely to succeed at school and become socially mobile in later life. And yet we also know that in areas of high deprivation, between 40% and 56% of children start school with language delay^{1,2} and in a recent survey, 97% of school leaders reported that speech, language and communication was an issue which caused concern for children not considered school ready³.

We strongly welcome the commitments to ensuring more disadvantaged children are able to experience a language rich early environment, and to improve the quality of early years provision by spreading best practice. Speech and language therapists, as the experts in speech, language and communication, have a vital role to play in delivering both of these aims; and by extension, given the fundamental and foundational nature of early language, have a key role to play in the successful delivery of the entire plan.

Kamini Gadhok, Chief Executive of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists said today that “through supporting children’s language in the early years, we can enable them to fulfil their potential. We look forward to working with the Government to bring about the ambitions we share to give all children strong foundations, and break the intergenerational cycle of social disadvantage.”

Read the RCSLT’s factsheet on the intergenerational cycle of speech, language and communication outcomes and risks:

www.rcslt.org/speech_and_language_therapy/docs/factsheets/communication_capacity

Notes

1 Locke, A., Ginsborg, J. & Peers, I. (2002). Development and disadvantage: Implications for the early years and beyond. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 37(1): 3-15.

2 Law, J., McBean, K. & Rush, R. (2011). Communication skills in a population of primary school-aged children raised in an area of pronounced social disadvantage. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 46(6): 657-64.

3 NAHT & Family and Childcare Trust (2017). School Ready? A survey of school leaders by NAHT and Family and Childcare Trust. Available online: <http://www.naht.org.uk/welcome/news-and-media/key-topics/pupil-wellbeing/school-readiness-survey/>

For more information, please contact Caroline Wright, RCSLT Policy Adviser:
caroline.wright@rcslt.org