



Submission from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (UK) to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (UK)

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists in the United Kingdom. The RCSLT currently has almost 17,000 members.

We promote excellence in practice and influence health, education, employment, social care and justice policies.

Speech and language therapists play a major role in working directly with children and adults, as well as supporting other professionals in working with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

Our Submission

The RCSLT is pleased to make this submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Our submission is in relation to **Paragraph IV - 19 Legislative obligations: anti-discrimination laws of the General Comment of Article 5 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.**

The submission is focused on the need to broaden definition of disability within the UK's Equality Act 2010, so as to make provision for those who have communication impairment either *accompanying* or *separate* to a physical or mental impairment.

We believe persons with a communication impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on (their) ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities are fully entitled to the same provisions the Equality Act 2010 provides for those with physical or mental impairments.

Communication Disability

Communication disability can occur with or without an accompanying physical or mental impairment.

There are an estimated 2.5 million people in the U.K. with communication problems, and unless they have an additional "physical or mental impairment" they are denied any protection by the Equality Act. This figure includes those with hearing and visual impairment and extends to:

- Those who have had strokes, head injuries, neurological conditions such as Motor Neurone Disease, and Multiple Sclerosis.
- Autistic spectrum disorders, dementia, mental illness, learning disability, certain cancers and physical disabilities such as cerebral palsy.

People with communication support needs have difficulty with:

- understanding the spoken word and / or other non-verbal communication, also the written word;
- expressing themselves through speech and/or writing or other non-verbal communication;
- language functions affecting their ability to express all they want to get over in a meaningful, appropriate and / or socially acceptable ways;
- Interacting with others in socially acceptable ways.

Prevalence of Communication Disability

- It is estimated that between 1 and 2 % of the UK's population¹ at any one time has a severe speech, language and communication disability, requiring specific assistance in order to have their needs met. There is a much larger group; perhaps up to 20% of the population² who may experience some difficulties with communication at some point in their lives relative to the population as a whole.
- The largest group of children – around 7.58%, or two children in every classroom of 30 children³ - have a language disorder that affects the way they understand and express language, **which is not linked** to another condition. In speech and language therapy, this is called 'developmental language disorder'.
- In addition to the 7.58% of children above, an additional 2.34% of children have a language disorder **that is associated** with another condition⁴. These conditions include: learning disabilities, autism, cerebral palsy, brain injury, sensorineural hearing loss, and Down's syndrome.
- Up to 55% of children in deprived areas experience speech and language difficulties at age five⁵. This figure includes children with the range of SLCN identified at birth or during pre-school, primary and secondary school.
- Speech, language and communication needs are the most common type of need in primary-aged children with statements of special educational need. 26.5% all mainstream-educated, statemented children in this age group have speech, language and communication as their primary need.⁶
- Two-thirds of 7-14 year olds with communication difficulties have additional behaviour problems.⁷
- 66-90% of young offenders have low language skills, with 46-67% of these being in the poor or very poor range.⁸

¹ Law, J., Gaag, A., Hardcastle, W. J., Beckett, D. J., MacGregor, A., & Plunkett, C. (2007). Communication Support Needs: a Review of the Literature. Scottish Executive.

² Ibid

³ Norbury, Courtenay Frazier, et al. "The impact of nonverbal ability on prevalence and clinical presentation of language disorder: evidence from a population study." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 57.11 (2016): 1247-1257.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Locke, Ann, Jane Ginsborg, and Ian Peers. "Development and disadvantage: implications for the early years and beyond." *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* 37.1 (2002): 3-15.

⁶ HC 1048-III Health Committee Written evidence from I CAN and The Communication Trust (PH 163) <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmhealth/1048/1048vw156.htm>

⁷ Cohen et al 1998

Discrimination and Communication Impairment

At present between 1 and 2 % of the UK's population with communication problems may be left open to discrimination in the areas of employment, education, access to goods, facilities and services, buying or renting land or property, renting property and for tenants to make disability-related adaptations.

Employers might directly discriminate against people with communication problems and are not legally obliged to make reasonable adjustments to their employment conditions and recruitment policies and procedures.

Service providers might provide services on worse terms to people with communication problems if they do not have to make reasonable adjustments for them.

Suggested Amendments to the Act:

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists believes that the definition of a disabled person used within the Equality Act 2010 is insufficient as to taking into account the invisible and unique nature of communication disability.

The following revision by the UK Government would enable greater recognition and alleviation of the adverse effects of communication disability:

A person (P) has a disability if—

(a) P has a physical or mental impairment, and

(b) the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on P's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Should be amended to:

A person (P) has a disability if—

*(a) P has a **physical mental or communication impairment**, and*

(b) the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on P's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Submission made to the UN CRPD Dated 30 June 2017.

Najmul Hussain

Policy Advisor

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

Email: Najmul.Hussain@RCSLT.org

⁸ Bryan K, Freer J, Furlong C. Language and communication difficulties in juvenile offenders. International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders 2007; 42, 505-520.