

Delegation

Introduction

Delegation is an essential aspect of the role of a speech and language therapist (SLT), contributing to effective service delivery, client care and professional development. Collaborative working across sectors enhances outcomes and ensures holistic support for clients. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) provides comprehensive guidance to support SLTs in safely and effectively delegating tasks to other SLTs, students, support workers, and non-SLT staff.

This guidance is designed for SLT students, newly qualified practitioners (NQPs), experienced therapists, and managers working across the UK.

Understanding delegation

Delegation involves allocating specific tasks to another individual while retaining overall accountability for the outcome. In the speech and language therapy context, delegation can occur when allocating tasks to support workers (who will work to RCSLT's **support worker framework**), to non-SLT staff such as teaching assistants in schools or within speech and language therapy teams. Students may also have work delegated to them by their practice educator as part of their clinical placement framework which will include specific tasks related to **practice-based learning**. The process of delegation is vital to improving efficiency and fostering the professional development of the wider workforce, ensuring that clients receive consistent, high-quality care.

Delegation is distinct from assignment. When a task is delegated, the SLT retains accountability while the individual receiving the task is responsible for its execution. Assignment transfers both responsibility and accountability to the receiving individual. Understanding the nuances of this distinction ensures that SLTs delegate appropriately, safeguarding both the service user and the practitioner. Further information regarding **enabling service users and their families**, and further information around on **upskilling the wider workforce** is available on the RCSLT website.

The importance of delegation

Delegation plays a crucial role in optimising service delivery. By entrusting certain tasks to trained individuals, SLTs can focus on more complex aspects of client care, thereby improving overall efficiency. Delegation also provides valuable learning opportunities for students and support workers, contributing to the upskilling of the workforce. Ultimately, delegation enhances client outcomes by ensuring that services are delivered consistently and effectively across the care pathway.

Key principles of delegation

SLTs must adhere to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) standards of conduct, performance, and ethics. These standards emphasise the importance of delegating tasks safely and ensuring that those receiving the tasks are competent. Appropriate **supervision** and ongoing support must be provided to safeguard the integrity of the delegated work. Regardless of the complexity of the task, the SLT remains accountable for the final outcome, underscoring the need for thorough oversight and clear communication throughout the delegation process.

To ensure delegation within the speech and language therapy workforce is appropriate, the RCSLT recommends that the following principles should apply:

Effective delegation				
Delegation is based on service user's need	The delegation process is risk assessed	There is an appropriate level of skill and competence	There is a clear understanding and agreement that is effectively documented	Effective supervision and support is in place

For full details of the principles of delegation, go to [principles of delegation \(Word\)](#).

When to delegate

Decisions regarding delegation should be guided by careful assessment of the competence and experience of the individual receiving the task. The nature and complexity of the task, as well as the specific needs of the client, must be taken into account. SLTs must conduct risk assessments to evaluate potential challenges and ensure that the delegation process aligns with client care plans. Training and supervision play a pivotal role in maintaining high standards of practice and minimising risks associated with delegation.

Delegation in practice

The delegation process begins with identifying tasks that can safely and effectively be allocated to another individual. Competence assessment follows, ensuring that the person receiving the task has the requisite skills and understanding. Where necessary, training is provided to bridge any knowledge gaps. Regular monitoring and supervision are integral to the delegation process, allowing for feedback and adjustments to ensure that the delegated tasks are completed to a high standard. Evaluating the outcomes of delegated work ensures continuous improvement and informs future delegation decisions.

In settings such as schools and care facilities, SLTs may delegate therapy-related activities to non-SLT staff. In these cases, the SLT retains accountability for the overall outcome while ensuring that appropriate training and support are provided. Collaboration with line managers or supervisors of non-SLT staff helps maintain the quality of delegated tasks and ensures consistency in care delivery.

Clear and thorough documentation is a vital component of safe and effective delegation in speech and language therapy practice. SLTs must ensure that any delegated tasks are accurately recorded, including details of the task, the rationale for delegation, the name and role of the individual undertaking the task, the training and supervision provided, and the agreed monitoring arrangements. This documentation serves as a professional record demonstrating accountability and supports continuity of care, safeguarding, and clinical governance. In the event of any concern or incident, well-maintained records provide evidence that delegation was carried out in line with professional standards and organisational policies.

Steps in the delegation process:

1. Identify tasks suitable for delegation
2. Assess the competence of the individual
3. Clearly document the decision-making process and the task being delegated
4. Provide necessary training and supervision
5. Monitor progress and evaluate outcomes

Supervision and support

Supervision is a cornerstone of effective delegation, fostering reflective practice and ongoing professional development. Through regular supervision, SLTs can identify additional training needs, monitor client progress, and ensure that delegated tasks are performed competently. Supervision also provides an opportunity to address any challenges or concerns, reinforcing the importance of open communication and continuous learning within the team.

Support should not be limited to clinical guidance or skill development. For delegated tasks to be carried out effectively, SLTs must also consider the wider enabling factors that impact practice, including:

- environmental factors: ensuring that the physical space, resources and tools available are suitable for carrying out delegated activities
- work routines: aligning delegated activities with existing timetables, classroom schedules, care plans, or ward rounds so that they are practical and achievable
- workflows and systems: integrating tasks into established communication channels, documentation processes and multidisciplinary team practices to reduce duplication and avoid gaps in care
- emotional and relational support: recognising the confidence, motivation and wellbeing of the delegated person, and providing reassurance, encouragement, and constructive feedback.

By addressing these broader aspects of support, SLTs enable delegated colleagues to feel equipped and empowered, increasing the likelihood that strategies will be implemented consistently and sustainably.

Legal and ethical considerations

Delegation must align with legal and ethical frameworks to protect both the service user and the practitioner. SLTs are obligated to comply with HCPC standards and fulfil their duty of care. Delegated tasks must reflect the competencies and job descriptions of the individuals involved, ensuring that local policies and guidelines are adhered to. Clear documentation of delegated tasks and their outcomes is essential, providing a record that supports accountability and professional integrity.

Important considerations include:

- compliance with HCPC standards and consideration of RCSLT guidance
- adherence to local policies and job descriptions
- clear records of delegation decisions and outcomes with guidance to be provided within clinical governance frameworks

If there is a concern that someone is delegating inappropriately, this should be reported. This should be to the SLT's line manager, company or supervisor for internal resolution. If inappropriate delegation has put someone at risk, or harm has already occurred, this is a safeguarding issue and should be reported via your local **safeguarding board** or designated safeguarding lead (DSL) in the setting. Inappropriate delegation may breach HCPC's Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics. You can raise a fitness to practise concern via the **HCPC website**.

Professional liability insurance

Professional liability insurance can be the responsibility of the employer and is also supplied by the RCSLT.

RCSLT insurance provides full cover against third party actions and legal defence costs for all members, whether a fully certified therapist or associate member, provided appropriate support and supervision is available and accessed regularly.

All insurance related issues should be clarified before work is delegated. For more information, please see the **RCSLT supporting information (PDF)**.

Enabling service users and carers through delegation

Effective delegation not only strengthens service delivery but also plays a key role in enabling service users, families, and carers. By providing structured guidance, SLTs can equip those involved in a service user's care with the understanding, knowledge and skills needed to support communication and eating and drinking needs in everyday life. Enabling extends the impact of therapy beyond direct interventions, ensuring that service users benefit from consistent, person-centred support. However, SLTs remain accountable for ensuring that delegated tasks are clearly defined, supervised, and aligned with HCPC professional standards. This includes conducting risk assessments, providing training where necessary, and maintaining oversight to safeguard quality and ethical practice. Embedding enabling principles into delegation enhances service user independence and empowerment while maintaining high professional standards.

Enhancing client outcomes through delegation

Delegation empowers SLTs to streamline service delivery, fostering collaboration and skill development across the workforce. By sharing responsibilities, teams can operate more efficiently, leading to improved client outcomes. Delegation also strengthens the capacity of support workers and students, promoting confidence and competence within the wider healthcare environment.

Resources for further learning

For further guidance on delegation, SLTs can access the following resources:

- **HCPC standards on delegation** – Comprehensive standards of conduct, performance, and ethics.
- **All Wales guidelines for delegation** – National guidelines providing insights into best practices for delegation.
- **Upskilling the workforce – RCSLT** – Resources for developing skills across the wider workforce and promoting best outcomes for clients.
- SLT Delegation and Support: **Enabling service users and carers** (ADD NEW LINK)
- **NHS Education for Scotland: Making Delegation Safe and Effective**

Upskilling the workforce remains a key priority, and SLTs are encouraged to engage with training and professional development opportunities provided by RCSLT.

Reflection question for SLTs on delegation

Think about how you currently delegate. Does delegation take into account efficiency and safety as well as professional accountability?

When delegating tasks, how do I ensure that service users, families, carers and colleagues are genuinely involved in shared decision-making, and that responsibilities are clearly understood by all parties?

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