



**Building back better with people who have
communication and swallowing needs
Policy Statement
17 March 2021**

Leading organisations working across education, health, social care, justice, disability, employment and poverty, and including charities and professional bodies, have today (17 March) come together to call on the Government to build back better with people who have communication and swallowing needs.

Coordinated by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT), the coalition of over 80 organisations has sent an open letter to the Prime Minister calling on the Government to improve access to speech and language therapy services for children and young people, adults, and their families and carers.

The coalition urges action now on:

- **National and local recovery policies** must identify and provide appropriate response to an individual's needs and specifically:
 - support for **children and young people's** communication and language development should be central to education recovery plans;
 - support for **adults'** communication and swallowing should be integral to the restart of rehabilitation services; and
 - given the clear links between communication and swallowing needs and mental health, speech and language therapy should be recognised as an integral part of the recovery plan for **mental health services**.
- **Speech and language therapy services** must be appropriately resourced to ensure that:

- the **increase in demand** for speech and language therapy services as a result of the pandemic (including those with long COVID) can be addressed;
- those who have developed a **higher level of need** due to delays in identification and reduced support during the pandemic can be properly supported;
- staff who have been redeployed to other parts of the NHS are able to **return to their substantive posts** as soon as possible; and
- speech and language therapists are able to play their vital role in **protecting and promoting the general mental health and wellbeing** of people with communication and swallowing needs and their family and carers - this could potentially reduce the risk of people then needing to access mental health services.

The letter has been sent after the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists published the findings of a survey into people's access to speech and language therapy during the first UK-wide lockdown between March-June 2020.

Published on 16 March, ***Speech and language therapy during and beyond COVID-19: building back better with people who have communication and swallowing needs*** reported some positive findings.

- Respondents said that SLT makes their lives and the lives of their families and carers better.
- Some people continued to have SLT during lockdown.
- Some people liked SLT on the phone and online/video.

But it also revealed that not everyone shared these positive experiences, far from it.

- 62% of children and young people did not receive any speech and language therapy at all during lockdown. Of those who did receive some therapy, 81% said it was less than they received before lockdown.
- 44% of adults aged over 18 did not receive any speech and language therapy during lockdown. Of those who did, 52% said it was less than before lockdown.

- A higher percentage of people of all ages in the most deprived areas in England received less speech and language therapy during lockdown than in the least deprived areas. In addition, a higher percentage of respondents in the least deprived areas than the most deprived areas received in person speech and language therapy during lockdown.
- For a variety of reasons, some people were unable to access online therapy. People who are deaf reported the particular difficulties they faced with this type of delivery.
- 67% of respondents to the 0-18 survey told us having less speech and language therapy made their education worse. 59% said it made their social life and friendships worse. 45% said it made their mental health worse.
- 56% of people aged 18 and over said their mental health had got worse. 54% said their social life and friendships had got worse. 51% said their home and domestic life had got worse.

People also reported concerns about being able to access speech and language therapy in the future. They are worried about the potential effect on their education, social life and friendships, mental health and home and domestic life if they cannot access therapy.

Kamini Gadhok MBE, Chief Executive of the RCSLT, said: 'As the experiences people have shared with us show so powerfully, COVID-19 has posed significant challenges to people with communication and swallowing needs and to the ability of speech and language therapy services to support them. But these challenges are also an opportunity - an opportunity finally to remove the inequalities of access to speech and language therapy that too many people face. We are very grateful to so many colleagues, from such a broad range of organisations, who are today supporting our call to build back better with people who have communication and swallowing needs.'

FURTHER INFORMATION

The letter to the Prime Minister is accessible here:

<https://www.rcslt.org/get-involved/building-back-better-speech-and-language-therapy-services-after-covid-19/#section-2%E2%80%8B>

The report - ***Speech and language therapy during and beyond COVID-19: building back better with people who have communication and swallowing needs*** – is accessible here:

<https://www.rcslt.org/get-involved/building-back-better-speech-and-language-therapy-services-after-covid-19/>

Online debate can be followed via #BuildBackBetterSLT

For more information please contact Peter Just, the RCSLT's Head of External Affairs, on peter.just@rcslt.org or 020 7378 3630.

List of signatories

The letter has been signed by the following 83 organisations and coalitions.

1Voice
Ace Centre
Achievement for All
Action Cerebral Palsy
Action for Stammering Children
ADHD Foundation
Adult Cerebral Palsy Hub
Afasic
Ambitious about Autism
ASLTIP
Association of Mental Health Providers
Association of YOT Managers
Auditory Verbal
Autism Early Support
BATOD
Better Communication CIC
British Association of Social Workers (BASW)
British Dyslexia Association
British Psychological Society
Business Disability Forum

ChatterPack
Children England
Cochlear Implanted Children's Support Group
Commtap
Communication Matters
CoramBAAF
Council for Disabled Children
David Bateson OBE
Different Strokes
Disabled Children's Partnership
Driver Youth Trust
Dyscover
Elklan
Embracing Complexity
Engage in Their Future
Genetic Alliance
Headlines
Huntington's Disease Association
I CAN
Include.org
Institute of Health Visiting
Intermediaries for Justice
KIDS
Makaton Charity
Max Appeal
Motor Neurone Disease Association
MS Society
NAPLIC
NASS
National Association for Hospital Education
National Autistic Society
National Education Union
National Network of Parent Carer Forums
Natspec
NCB
NCIUA - National Cochlear Implant Users Association
NDNA - National Day Nurseries Association
PACE
Parkinson's UK
Prison Reform Trust
PRUsAP
RADLD
RCPCH
RCSLT
Rett UK
Sen.se

SENSE
SMIRA
Speakeasy
Special Needs Jungle
Speech Bubbles
Stamma
Stroke Association
Symbol UK
Talking Mats
The Challenging Behaviour Foundation
The Childhood Trust
The Children's Trust
The Elizabeth Foundation for Preschool Deaf Children
The National Organisation for FASD
The Swallows
UKABIF
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