

**Statement by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists in Wales on the Welsh Government announcement on additional funding for early years speech, language and communication support**

We welcome the announcement by the Welsh Government of an additional £250,000 for health boards and specialist centres to continue to address speech, language and communication needs. This much needed investment will support workforce development and provide funding for key resources supporting services to deliver on the commitments within the Talk With Me: Speech Language and Communication (SLC) plan.

Good early language skills are central to children’s early years development. They play a crucial role in a child’s ability to achieve their life chances. Research shows that there is a strong relationship between poverty and early language delay with a stubborn gap in language skills between poorer children and their better-off peers. Boosting children’s early language skills is critical to narrowing the attainment gap and improving the life chances of our poorest children. This is an even greater priority given the impact of the pandemic on children and families, particularly those living in the most deprived and disadvantaged communities. Additionally, identifying children at risk of SLC needs with a life-long impact at the earliest stage and providing them with early intervention is fundamental..

Pippa Cotterill, Head of Wales Office for the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists said;

‘We were delighted to see the publication of the cross cutting delivery plan last year and the announcement of funding to support developments in this area. Much has already been achieved with regard to training the wider workforce, raising public awareness of the importance of speech, language and communication (SLC), improving the identification of SLC needs in children and providing evidence-based intervention. However, there is much to do if we wish to ensure that every child in Wales has access to the right support if required to develop their SLC skills. We must make it ‘everyone’s business’ to identify and support children’s SLC development.’

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