**RCSLT Wales response to the Welsh Government LGBTQ+ Action Plan**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Welsh Government LGBTQ+ Action Plan. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) in Wales warmly welcomes the central ambition of the plan to improve equality for LGBTQ+ people and ‘for Wales to be a nation, where everyone feels safe to be themselves, to be open about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, at home, leisure or work without feeling threatened’. Our response focusses on the improving health outcomes of the plan and in particular, actions 43 and 44 namely:

* Welsh Government will commit to review the Gender Identity pathway for children and young people in Wales following the review in NHS England.
* Welsh Government will continue to develop the Wales Gender Service with GPs able to initiate hormone therapy as part of the adult pathway

**Improving Health Outcomes**

As part of a multidisciplinary team (MDT), speech and language therapists (SLTs) have an essential role to play in ensuring the best possible gender congruence outcomes for trans and gender-diverse people. SLTs, with appropriate skills, may support voice modification and facilitate gender expression through vocal and communication change and exploration. Voice and communication are repeatedly reported to be a critical factor in achieving congruence (Adler, Hirsch & Mordaunt, 2012; Mills & Stoneham, 2017).

When the Welsh Gender Team (WGT) was established in April 2019, there was an expectation that the SLT needs of this client group would be met by the existing core speech and language therapy service in each health board. However there has been a significant increase in referral numbers to SLT services since the establishment of the WGT leading to widespread concerns about the ability of local health boards to provide a safe and effective SLT service to this patient population. Some local health boards in Wales have seen a 400% rise in their referral numbers in the last year alone.  Another health board has reported that the ratio has increased from 1 transgender patient per 100 Ear Nose and throat (ENT) patients to 1 transgender patient to 3.3 ENT patients. We understand that the WGT predict an overall rise of 25% of referrals on top of the existing 300+ new referrals to the team.

Given this context and in relation to action point 44, we believe there is a urgent need to review the performance of the WGT and capacity to meet growing demand, with a particular focus on speech and language therapy services. There is a small group of Speech and language therapists working in this area and we would be happy to support discussions.

In addition to our comments on existing services, we welcome action point 43that ‘Welsh Government will commit to review the Gender Identity pathway for children and young people in Wales following the review in NHS England’. A number of speech and language therapy services are experiencing increasing calls to provide a service to this cohort of children and young people but are at present unable to accept referrals. We would be keen to be included in discussions with regards this pathway moving forwards.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,



**Pippa Cotterill**

**Head of Wales Office**