

# Use of ultrasound for swallowing and upper airway assessment

June 2022

**RCSLT updated statement: We continue to advise our members not to initiate the use of airway or swallowing ultrasound for routine assessment and clinical decision-making.**

In spring 2020, an international group\* of multidisciplinary clinicians came together to explore the utility of ultrasound in the assessment of swallowing and laryngeal function. A rapid systematic review was published by this group in January 2021<sup>1</sup>.

While there is growing evidence to support the use of ultrasound as an adjunct to speech and language therapy assessment of swallowing and laryngeal function, the current literature does not support its use as a stand-alone clinical tool. Further work is required before ultrasound assessment can be safely and effectively translated into widespread routine speech and language therapy clinical practice.

Work to support the translation of ultrasound into clinical practice is underway but will take time. The priorities for this work were published in February 2022<sup>2</sup>. Reliability, validity and normative data are key areas for research while development of training protocols and engagement with stakeholders are considered vital to progressing ultrasound into practice. We aim to publish an initial framework for use of ultrasound by speech and language therapists later this year.

The international working group will continue to keep RCSLT members updated with progress and outcomes as it continues to work towards the safe, effective and evidence-based implementation in speech and language therapy practice. In the interim, the RCSLT continues to advise its members **not to** initiate the use of airway or swallowing ultrasound for routine assessment and clinical decision-making.

1 Allen JE, Clunie GM, Slinger C et al (2020) Utility of ultrasound in the assessment of swallowing and laryngeal function: A rapid review and critical appraisal of the literature. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1460-6984.12584>

2 Allen JE, Clunie GM, Ma K-Y et al (2022) Translating Ultrasound into Clinical Practice for the Assessment of Swallowing and Laryngeal Function: A Speech and Language Pathology-Led Consensus Study. *Dysphagia*: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00455-022-10413-9>

\*Current active members of the International Ultrasound Group

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