

**Getting it right for communication - right support, right place, right time:  
our response to the Department for Education's SEND Review Green Paper  
July 2022**

**Action area 2: Workforce**

**What we've heard from charity partners – STAMMA**

"We've been informed about specific NHS Trusts where highly specialist speech and language therapists working with children who stammer are not being replaced on retirement. We can only assume that such decisions are the result of funding and workforce challenges. But such decisions can have huge, detrimental effects on children who stammer and their families coming into those services, as the service slowly loses its specialist knowledge and developing therapists have no specialist to learn from or oversee their work. The loss of specialisms is the loss of knowledge and expertise."

**What we've heard from speech and language therapists**

"Local demand is outstripping local supply and we cannot fulfill all requests due to recruitment issues. Schools are not even able to commission independent SLT due to lack of capacity."

"Paediatric health services are already working beyond capacity, coping with increasing referrals and complexity of need, higher staff turnover, sickness (and COVID) and workforce issues. To ensure high quality provision, staffing resource, expertise and future workforce need to be considered."

"There is a desperate shortage of therapists. Unless workforce and skills shortages are addressed these policies are going to be pointless."

"Therapists are burning out. After working for a few years the relentlessness of service shortages mean they end up leaving. This isn't sustainable and something needs to change before the profession breaks altogether."

"Even recruiting into newly qualified posts in some areas is difficult."

"There are new innovations in speech and language therapy for vulnerable young people. For example, in CAMHS (child and adolescent mental health services), for care-experienced children, violence reduction units, Liaison and Diversion that result in many new contracts for specialist staff that would have a big impact, but they are unable to be recruited to."

Services need to be able to recruit specialist staff to fill vacancies. But there is currently a serious shortage of available speech and language therapists, with NHS services, schools and independent practices all struggling to recruit.

This has not happened overnight. [For too long, workforce planning in England has not been fit for purpose \(PDF\)](#). This has resulted in speech and language therapy becoming a profession in short supply, as acknowledged in the [NHS Long Term Plan \(PDF\)](#) and in the [Department for Health and Social Care arguing that speech and language therapists should be added to the Shortage Occupation List because the profession is facing a range of pressures including increasing demand \(PDF\)](#).

Specifically on children and young people, the Government have failed for many years to plan for a therapy workforce that meets the needs of the SEND system that crosses health and education boundaries. Indeed, the [Department of Health and Social Care has recently admitted that it has had no specific discussions with the Department for Education on workforce planning for healthcare professionals who work in education settings](#).

We welcome the proposal in the Green Paper to build a clearer picture of demand for the therapy workforce. It is essential that this work is taken forward urgently, if the changes to the SEND system are to be delivered within the next five years.

And more is needed. Speech and language therapists need to be trained, recruited, retained and crucially have their skills developed so they are able to develop clinical specialisms and undertake leadership roles.

**Action required: Government must ensure effective workforce planning and the recruitment, training, retention and skills development of the speech and language therapy workforce, supporting the development of clinical specialisms and leadership. It must work closely with all relevant professional bodies and organisations to deliver this important work.**

[Read the full RCSLT and ASLTIP joint policy statement](#)