

Dr Sian Lewis
Managing Director
Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee
Unit G1, The Willowford
Main Avenue
Treforest Industrial Estate
Pontypridd
CF37 5YL

24 August 2022

Dear Dr Lewis,

Re: Serious concerns about lack of capacity within the Speech and Language Therapy element of the Welsh Gender Service

We are writing as a grouping of professional and service user organisations to raise our concerns about Speech and Language Therapy provision within the Welsh Gender Service (WGS). There is a significant impact on both the trans community and the Speech and Language Therapy profession in Wales as a result of inadequate consideration of the appropriate support and capacity building required within the original mapping of the national service.

Voice and communication are repeatedly reported to be a critical factor in achieving congruence (Adler, Hirsch & Mordaunt, 2012; Mills & Stoneham, 2017). 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 non-binary people. SLTs, with appropriate skills, may support voice modification and facilitate gender expression through vocal and communication change and exploration.

As we know you are well-aware, the WGS was established in April 2019 as a service based in Cardiff. The service website states that ‘the Welsh Gender Service are a multidisciplinary administrative and

clinical team, made up of Consultants, Gender Clinicians, Clinical Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists and Management.’ However, there is no SLT listed as part of the WGS.

It was announced in 2019 that, in addition to the service based at St David’s in Cardiff, Local Gender Teams (LGT) would be available in each Local Health Board to ensure care closer to home. The Local Gender Teams were due to be made up of a doctor, and an SLT. There was an expectation at this time that the Speech and Language Therapy needs of this client group would be met by the existing core Speech and Language Therapy service in each Local Health Board (LHB) and not specifically commissioned. Services that have been offered have been available to adult populations only. There is currently no Speech and Language Therapy service available to under 18s within this client group despite potential referrals for such a service.

There has been a very significant increase in referral numbers to Speech and Language Therapy services since the establishment of the WGS. The data below presents further detail on the increase in referrals. We recognise that the numbers referenced below are not large, however, there has been an exponential rise in referrals with no indication that this trend is set to change.

Local Health Board	Actual Increase in gender service referrals to speech and language therapy from 2019-2022	Multiplier percentage increase in gender service referrals to speech and language therapy from 2019-2022
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board	2019-2020 – 29 2021-22 - 47	1.62
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	2019-20 -8 2021-22 - 40	5.00
Cardiff and Vale University Health Board	2019-20 – 15 2021-22 - 69	4.60
Cwm Taf University Health Board	2019-20 – 4 2021-22 - 40	10.00
Hywel Dda University Health Board	2019-20- 5 2021-22 - 36	7.20
Powys Teaching Health Board	2019-20 – 4 2021-22 - 10	2.50
Swansea Bay University Health Board	2019-2020- 1 2021-22 - 17	17.00

Looking beyond capacity to meet referrals, we also have concerns that without appropriate commissioning, we will struggle to develop a robust skilled workforce to meet the need of the client group in line with RCSLT recommendations as input from a highly specialist SLT is required as part of a multi-agency approach.

In response to the increased need, business cases have been submitted to LHBs to increase capacity within services but all but one have thus far been rejected. A number of LHB Speech and Language

Therapy teams have now highlighted that **they are reaching a stage where it will no longer be possible to continue to provide a safe and effective speech and language therapy service to this patient population and services may have to close to new referrals.**

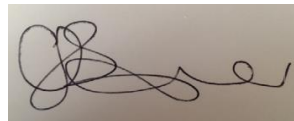
Given these concerns, we approached Stonewall Cymru as an organisation who have been a part of the founding stages of the WGS and continue to engage with both the trans community and policy issues within this area. Stonewall Cymru have expressed their grave concerns that the lack of capacity within the Welsh Gender Service and local SLT teams could have a detrimental impact on the experiences of trans people in Wales and their right to access high quality and inclusive health care. The charity further expressed how a decline in service provision would directly contravene the Welsh Government's commitments to advancing trans inclusion and healthcare made in public statements and the forthcoming LGBTQ+ Equality Action Plan.

Given the urgency of this situation, we are keen to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss a way forward for commissioning speech and language therapy within the gender service as is the case in other nations. Please contact Dr Caroline Walters, External Affairs Manager (Wales) at the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists on caroline.walters@rcslt.org who would be pleased to support the facilitation of such a meeting.

Yours sincerely,



Pippa Cotterill
Head of Wales Office
Royal College of Speech and Language
Therapists



Cara Spencer
Chair
Wales Speech and Language Therapy Advisory
Forum

cc. Eluned Morgan, Minister for Health and Social Services, Welsh Government

Hannah Blythyn, Deputy Minister for Social Partnership, Welsh Government

Ruth Crowder, Chief Allied Health Professions Officer, Welsh Government