

Public Sector Equality Duty Consultation
RCSLT response, April 2022

Proposal 2: Embedding Inclusive Communications

The Scottish Government is of the view that a new duty should be placed on listed authorities that goes beyond publications under the SSD regulations, and that seeks to ensure inclusive communication is embedded proportionately across the work of listed authorities when they are communicating with the public. We will also provide a clear definition of what communicating in an inclusive way means, recognising that inclusive communication is about ensuring effective engagement with everyone, including those who understand and express themselves in different ways.

As per Proposal 1, listed authorities would be required to report on how they have met this duty as part of their overarching mainstreaming reporting duty.

To create the conditions for effective implementation of the new duty, the Scottish Government intends to progress work to support this duty through our equality outcome on inclusive communication. This will include working in partnership with other public bodies, stakeholders and people with lived experience, to co-produce a set of national standards and a robust monitoring system. We will also develop best practice guidance and shared resources for public bodies on inclusive communication. This work will also consider cost-effective ways to communicate inclusively. This will seek to assist listed authorities to prepare for the proposed new duty on inclusive communication coming into force.

Question 2.1:

What are your views on our proposal to place a duty on listed authorities to embed inclusive communication proportionately across their work?

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) welcomes this duty as an important step in embedding inclusive communication across our communities.

Inclusive communication is everybody's business. RCSLT [defines inclusive communication](#) as an approach to communication which enables as many people as possible to be included in that interaction. The key to making communication inclusive is the overarching nature of this approach – it's not about identifying specific events or groups of people to target with these measures but instead allowing anyone the ability to understand and express themselves in the way they find easiest at all levels of communication in an organisation.

Most people experience communication challenges at some point because of illness, or stress and anxiety associated with challenging situations, for example, when they are in unfamiliar surroundings or doing an unfamiliar task. For people with speech, language and communication difficulties, communication challenges are a regular experience. For them, inclusive communication is paramount.

Communication disadvantage is strongly associated with socio-economic disadvantage, with communication and literacy difficulties being experienced most in our poorest communities. It is estimated, for example, that 60% of young offenders and 80% of young people not in education, employment or training experience communication disadvantage. It is also experienced by many of those living with disabilities and long-term conditions, including 100% of people with Autism, 100%

of people with dementia, 80% of people with a learning disability and at least 30% of people who have had a stroke. Around 23% of the Scottish population are likely to struggle with written information and a further 325 may be challenged by information that is complex or contains unfamiliar language.

Speech and language therapists (SLTs) see first-hand the many life circumstances in which inclusive communication is essential for individuals to engage with wider society. For example, SLTs support people with learning disabilities and stroke-related aphasia to use their natural or retained communication strengths through inclusive communication strategies to address barriers within a specific context, such as ordering from a menu in a café. SLTs play a critical role in helping these individuals navigate our current world of communication, but this approach can only go so far. Our profession regularly operates within a framework of universal, targeted and individualised offers, and in the case of inclusive communication, the universal offer greatly improves outcomes for those requiring targeted and individualised interventions.

We have already demonstrated how inclusive communication provisions within legislation can have a positive impact on organisations. The Social Security Scotland Act (and Consumer Scotland Act) set out that relevant directorates and agencies “must have regard to the importance of communicating in an inclusive way.” [Social Security \(Scotland\) Act 2018 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#) and [\(Consumer Scotland Act 2020 \(legislation.gov.uk\)\)](#).

Legal duty on Social Security Scotland has driven sustained activity on -

- Establishment of a dedicated, expert led Inclusive Communication Team to drive, support and continuously improve mainstreaming of Inclusive Communication good practice. A senior Speech and Language Therapist is the Expert Adviser to Social Security Scotland, and we believe this is a good model for other listed authorities.
- Leadership and ownership of Inclusive Communication good practice from the Directorate to the Social Security Agency and local delivery.
- Involvement of people who communicate differently (and the organisations representing people who experience communication disadvantage) in the design, development and evaluation of social security services.
- Development of policies, processes, and systems to enable the Social Security service to implement good practice.
- Development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and specific communication resources and support services to enable Social Security service to implement good practice.

Evaluation of impact is ongoing however recent Social Security Charter Measurement Framework indicates positive impact.

We also think it's important to demonstrate value through leading by example and shared practice and resources. For example, Inclusive Communication Hub and Communication Access UK

Inclusive Communication Hub - <https://inclusivecommunication.scot/>

This excellent resource, hosted by Disability Equality Scotland and in partnership with Sense Scotland, promotes inclusion and accessibility in its content and structure. The hub includes a wide range of resources, studies, blogs and training on inclusive communication.

Communication Access UK - <https://communication-access.co.uk/>

Communication Access UK a freely available initiative, developed by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists in partnership with seven other national charities representing service users with communication needs, promoting accessible and inclusive communication across the UK. The aim of this initiative is to support individuals and services to be more inclusive of people with

communication needs, by providing easily accessible training (eLearning) for individuals and guidance for organisations based on a framework of standards developed to inform best practice when engaging or supporting a person with a communication difficulty (whether face to face, over the 'phone, or even through written communication). These were developed by speech and language therapists in consultation with real people with communication needs.

The training and standards of this initiative ultimately underpin the 'Communication Access Symbol' for the UK, which when displayed would symbolise the availability of a 'communication accessible' service or organisation - giving greater confidence to a person with a communication need to engage or use a service.

Since the launch of this initiative in November 2020, over 8000 individuals and organisations have signed up - including entire NHS Trusts, job centres, building societies, mortgage providers, a multinational corporation as well as a football club and more; and over 25000 people confirmed to have completed the training.

We would welcome clarification as to whether the Scottish Government intends to use the same definition of 'communicating in an inclusive way' with in PSED as it does in three other Acts of the Scottish Parliament. We would also welcome a clear definition of the scope of the proposal. We believe that inclusive communication should go beyond how public bodies communicate at a population level. We are concerned that from the list of 'proposed solutions' the duty may be limited to how written communication is adapted to be more accessible at the population level only. This is of course essential if we are going to be an inclusive nation, but to be truly inclusive, we must ensure that that staff working for these bodies have the skills and knowledge to communicate inclusively on an individual level whether that is face to face, through written communication, on the phone or via virtual methods. We believe that the duty should be clear that public sector workers also need to use inclusive communication approaches in their daily interactions with the public.

We would be interested to find out more about the proposed centralised translation service and what this would provide. In our view 'outsourcing' does not constitute inclusive communication. Transforming an organisation would require change from within, including how all public sector workers value inclusive communication and are able to use it in daily practice.

Some of the barriers cited by listed authorities, provide an insight into how Scotland will have to transform its view of this area. That is, moving from this being 'another thing to do' or an 'add on' to be fully embedded in how they do business.

A robust duty on the public sector that has sufficient checks on compliance can set an example for what we expect across all sectors. We welcome the proposal that listed authorities would be required to report on how they have met this duty.

We understand the concerns about the costs associated with inclusive communication, however, the system needs to acknowledge the broader cost to society of not getting this right for the people we serve. If we fail to meet the needs of people with communication needs this will lead to repeat or ineffective engagements with services and an escalation of need. RCSLT and Camphill Scotland commissioned Fraser of Allander Institute to provide an idea of the costs and benefits of inclusive communication (2021). The report concluded that, 'Inclusive Communications, adopted across the whole of the public sector could see gains beyond those seen within individual organisations and opportunities, for example, through reducing the need for costly crisis interventions, enabling more independence as well as by achieving economies of scale. Inclusive Communications can also be seen as necessary in order to allow all people in Scotland to realise their human rights, which may be

formalised in Scots law in the coming years if the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is legislated for. On the basis of the limited evidence available, there is support for the supposition that Inclusive Communications could lead to savings in preventative spend and hence be cost neutral or cost saving in the future.'

We welcome the proposal to work in partnership with other public bodies, stakeholders and people with lived experience to co-produce a set of national standards and a national monitoring system. It is essential that we focus on whether the changes have been made but most importantly whether the changes are improving the lives of people in Scotland with communication needs. We would suggest that Speech and Language Therapists have unique skills and knowledge to contribute to this process and would be critical to this duty being implemented effectively.

SLTs and our service users must play an integral part in developing this duty. RCSLT and Speech and Language Therapists look forward to working with the Scottish Government, stakeholders and people with lived experience to maximise the effectiveness of this duty.