Showcasing the wide-ranging roles of support workers

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Profile 1: Speech, voice and swallowing service

Sam is working in a speech, voice and swallowing service.

What is your job title?
The role is of an SLT assistant, but I go by the job title Technical Instructor.

What do you do?
The main bulk of my job is organising, prepping, and running three out of the four outpatient clinics that we have each week. During those clinic, I operate the endoscopy equipment and also act as a second pair of eyes for the speech and language therapist (SLT).

With some patients we see a palsy/paresis or a general thinning of the vocal cords. For these patients we have a joint clinic with an ENT consultant once a month, which is dedicated to injecting the effected vocal cord with a filler under local anaesthetic. During those clinics I essentially have the role of a scrub nurse – prepping the instruments tray, handing items as needed to the consultant and recording timings of the procedure.

Outside of the clinics I do the admin, typing and booking-in of patients for the three clinics that I look after. Additionally, if there are any physical or software problems with the endoscopy stacks themselves, or new parts to install, I carry out these repairs – often on the fly in the middle of a clinic to keep our clinics running.

What do you like best about your role?
The variety, no two days are the same.

What training and support have you had in the role?
Training has mainly been through observation of endoscopies and querying what I saw. From this I've gained a lot of clinical knowledge and I can now act as a second pair of eyes to flag up anything that I have seen that could potentially be contributing to the dysphonia, and that hasn't already been mentioned. Future training is working on improving the therapy side of my knowledge so that I can provide initial therapy sessions to patients.

What did you do previously and what made you decide to take the job?
Previously I worked in IT but had also studied as a sound engineer (wiring up recording studios/recording bands). The job was mainly advertised to look after the endoscopy stacks and help in voice clinics and so, with having an IT background and an interest in sound, the job seemed the right move.
Profile 2: Adult learning disability service

Alice works in an adult learning disability service.

What is your role and job title?
My job title was assistant speech and language therapist (Band 4), with other professions in my team also using the same term of ‘assistant’ (eg, assistant psychologist). I supported adults with learning disabilities in the community, usually in a supported living placement or family home.

What do you do?
I would support the SLTs with a range of tasks, including:
  • producing various communication resources such as daily timetables, Now and Next boards, social stories, and easy read information.
  • producing guidelines to go alongside resources to support carers with how to use them.
  • preparing and delivering training sessions for external staff teams, including signing training and communication training.
  • visiting individuals in the community to carry out various simple communication assessments, go through communication resources and gather a general wellbeing update.
  • regular communications with carers/family for updates around the individual’s wellbeing and engagement if given new communication resources.
  • observations for both communication and dysphagia in community settings (home/ school/ day centre) to report back to SLT.
  • attending meetings for individuals, either with or on behalf of the SLT.

What do you like best about your role?
What I liked best about my role was how varied my working day could be! I could be out on visits 1:1 with individuals, working in collaboration with the multidisciplinary team (MDT) or producing communication resources. I enjoyed the innovation to tailor resources or assessments to individual needs and goals to motivate engagement.

I also enjoyed working as part of an MDT and collaborating with others to ensure the best support was provided for the individual, for example producing psychology resources in an easy read format more suited to for the individual.

What training and support have you had in the role?
I had basic communication and dysphagia training as part of the trust induction for all staff. There was no specialist speech and language therapy training for new starters, although the SLTs I worked for would carry out informal training sessions around different areas (eg, the use of visual timetable/ social stories etc) for the team.

I had regular supervisions and felt well supported by my SLTs, however when I first began, I felt it took some time for the SLTs to incorporate my role into their working day.

What did you do previously and what made you decide to take the job?
I studied psychology at university and then worked at a SEND college as a learning support assistant (LSA). Here I saw SLTs, occupational therapists (OTs) and physios working and the difference their support made for the learners. After observing the speech and language therapy team around the college, I became really interested in speech and language therapy and was
able to shadow the team one day a week. I began to research the profession, then applied and secured an assistant role in the community.

Profile 3: Bilingual skills in a children’s team

Rhuksana works in a children’s team using her bilingual skills in Mihrpuri Punjabi, as well as her support worker competencies.

What is your role and job title?
I'm a speech and language therapy assistant (SLTA). Originally, I only worked with children where families needed support in home language. In recent years my role has extended to work with all children and families, though most of the families I work with value my bilingual skills.

What do you do?
I have a wide range of duties, mainly with younger children, but also some teenagers who stammer. Most of the time I'm offering a package of early language support for families – how to help foster language development.

What do you like best about your role?
I enjoy working with the children and seeing them make progress.

What are the barriers/frustrations?
The high level of staff turnover in local settings – the training role is never completed!

What training and support have you had in the role?
ELKLAN and occasional sessions with team members on a therapy approach. It is mostly learning on the job, but I've learnt a lot.

What did you do previously and what made you decide to take the job?
I worked for the occupational therapy department. I was interested in language development. I also wanted to work more closely with nursery settings – one day I hope I might be a nursery teacher.
Profile 4: Adult team

Suzanne works in an adult team.

What is your job title?
Adult speech and language therapy clinical assistant (SLTA), Band 4

What do you do?
I work as an SLTA with adults in the community and work with a varied client group with communication and/or swallowing difficulties.

My role covers the following areas:
- Progressive neurological disorders, such as Parkinson's disease and motor neurone disease (MND)
- Acquired neurological disorders, such as stroke and traumatic brain injury (TBI)
- Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)
- Voice banking
- Voice
- Dysphagia
- Videofluoroscopy

What do you like best about your role?
My focus is to ensure that I can help to build an effective patient-centred relationship and provide a holistic approach to care. This is achieved through discussion with the patient, family, carers, and the multidisciplinary team (MDT) support. The counselling part of the role is very important. I often see clients when they are feeling vulnerable and anxious about their future, and it is vital that I can support them with their distress whilst managing my own feelings/reactions to their situation.

What are the key skills needed in your role?
Key skills needed for my role include being organised, having good time management skills, being patient-centred, being a team player, flexibility, creativity, being good at problem-solving, having good communication skills, and being patient.

What training and development?
The focus has been on competencies needed in my role. In terms of competencies, I had to complete general communication and dysphagia competencies within six months of starting my role. I have not completed any formal competencies relating to voice and was given in-house training to help when working alongside this client group. I do not have any further formal competencies that I have to sign-off as part of my annual appraisal or continued professional development.
Profile 5: Early years intervention in the community

Lucie works in an early year’s intervention service in the community.

**What is your job title?**
Communication Support Worker

**What do you do?**
I work in paediatric speech and language therapy in the community, with children 18 months to 4 years. I visit patient homes where I support parents by modelling and coaching interaction strategies and often work to specific targets, such as ‘develop pretend play skills’ or ‘follow one word level instructions’. I run parent and child communication groups at Family Hubs. I support PVIs in using Wellcomm toolkit to support all children in their setting, not just those with SLCN.

**What do you like best about your role?**
I enjoy how varied my role is so that every visit and every day is different. I enjoy making a difference to families lives and having a positive impact on children's outcomes.

**What are the barriers/frustrations?**
Frustrations are that at present there is no progression in the service unless I do a speech and language therapy degree, which I don't want to as I don't want to be an SLT.

**What training and support have you had in the role?**
Shadowed other CDWs when I began, attended Elkan training when I started this job and when funding became available attended HANEN training. I have biweekly supervision with band 7 and have peer supervision three times a year which is facilitated by band 7 SLT.

**What did you do previously and what made you decide to take the job?**
I was a nursery deputy manager and special educational needs coordinator (SENCo). I wanted a more stable job (working for NHS rather than private company) and one where I could specialise in something that I take great interest in.
Profile 6: DLD children’s service

Philippa is working in a children’s service.

What is your job title?
Senior SLTA - developmental language disorder (DLD)

What do you like best about your role?
- I love working with the children, families and schools when they are engaging with us.
- I like making a difference and helping the children to understand that they can improve with the right support.
- I love seeing the children's faces when they have achieved something that they thought they would never get.
- I like being able to be creative and design very bespoke resources on tricky grammar, syntax, etc.
- I like being listened to, as I tend to be the one who works with the children the longest and get to know them very well.
- I like to have my experience, both personal and professional, taken into account when discussing children.
- I love working with the amazing SLTs. They are a fount of knowledge and eager to teach and work with assistants.
Profile 7: Development lead

Clare is development lead total communication (band 5) for her service.

What does your role involve?

- I work with adults who have a learning disability, their families and support networks in the community.
- I manage my own case load, referrals and waiting list.
- I support with implementation of communication recommendations (following assessment from an SLT).
- There are three main areas of my work: support individual, family and support work to implement communication recommendations; planning and delivering training courses; wider service development to support access to mainstream services.

What sort of duties do you undertake in this role?

- Helping to produce and implement communication tools such as timelines, objects of reference systems.
- Helping the person and their support network to learn new approaches such as intensive interaction or individualised sensory environments.
- Delivering training for support networks on using these strategies.
- Providing feedback, involvement in planning, support around reasonable adjustments as part of the Mental Capacity Act, attendance at multidisciplinary teams (MDTs), safeguarding meetings etc.
- I am a Signalong Foundation Tutor and deliver a number of courses and workshops throughout the year.
- I offer workshops on producing easy read information and making reasonable adjustments.
- I support mainstream services to make reasonable adjustments.
- I audit our commissioned service against the RCSLT 5 Good Communication Standards giving feedback and offering support to meet each of the standards.
- I have worked with other services to improve their engagement with people who have a learning disability and health outcomes. For example, supporting the Sleep Service to develop a ‘reasonable adjustment’ pathway and developing easy read information with the Greater Manchester mayor’s team.
- I produce Easy Read information on a range of topics. Our guides to ‘having a Covid-19 vaccine’ have been adopted by NHS England for use across our region.
Profile 8: Early intervention in children’s centres

Lucie works in an early intervention role partnership with local children’s centres.

What is your role and job title?
I work as a clinical support worker (band 4) in an NHS foundation trust which is part of a Care Alliance. The trust is in one of the most deprived boroughs in England and as a result, children are faced with disadvantage and are at higher risk of delay.

What do you do?
Duties that I enjoy and that are not responsibilities of SLTs include early intervention language groups. These are delivered in partnership with Early Help Practitioners at local Children’s Centres. They are offered to children aged from 18 months to 3 years, who are at risk of a delay in speech, language and communication.

I understand the importance of early intervention and the role parents can play in supporting their child in the most crucial period of brain development. I also provide tailored one to one support to parents in their own homes. This support includes coaching and modelling interaction strategies, giving practical ideas of how to include communication in everyday routine and targeted work such as developing social interactions.

Also, as I work in an area of deprivation, safeguarding is a crucial part of my role. There have been many occasions where I have worked with social workers and other professionals as a multidisciplinary team and made referrals to children’s services following incidents I have witnessed. I find this aspect of my job incredibly taxing, and this duty of care would no doubt increase as an SLT.

Are there opportunities for career progression?
Within my trust and department (paediatrics) there are only band 4 positions available to clinical support practitioners. Across the alliance there are also band 3 positions, however there is no progression in either my trust or care alliance to band 5. This is only available to speech and language therapists, mainly newly qualified. To progress to this band, a clinical support practitioner in my position would have to have a degree in speech and language therapy and be employed as an SLT.

If the clinical support practitioner does not have the relevant qualification, they would need to attend university or complete an apprenticeship. Both these routes incur significant time and financial implications. Progressing to be a SLTs would involve less time working with families and professionals in the community and increased workload of tasks such as clinic work, assessments, and report writing. There is also increased accountability and competencies to adhere to.

Personally, I enjoy my role and would gladly take on more responsibilities in my current post to progress to band 5, as perhaps an advanced clinical support practitioner.

What skills are most needed in your role?
As a clinical support practitioner, I demonstrate a range of skills that I believe should be rewarded. I am adaptable and I use my own initiative to problem solve. I reflect and critically analyse my practice and the effectiveness of the service I provide.
Eileen is working in a children’s service.

**What is your job title?**
Speech and language therapy assistant – children’s community service

**What do you like about your role?**
- Making a difference to children’s lives by being able to deliver interventions and see them resolve some or all of their issues.
- Working with wonderfully talented SLTs and learning best practice from them.
- Band 4, having more autonomy to adjust therapy input to best fit the child’s needs.
- Working in a variety of settings.
- Liaising with schools/nurseries, parents and ward staff (dysphagia only for wards).
- Having the knowledge to support children with a wide range of interventions.
- Having a great clinical lead.

**What are the barriers/frustrations?**
When people leave and no one is there to take on the case and I have no caseload holder to discuss interventions with.

**What works well?**
Face-to-face is the best, getting parents and school staff on board and really understanding the reason for a specific intervention and what the aims and objectives for the intervention.

**What do you wish was different?**
For COVID-19 to be gone and for me to be able to get back to doing language interventions as well as just racing my way through the phonology waiting list.
Profile 10: Adult services in a hospital setting

Patsy works in adult services in a hospital setting.

What is your job title?
Speech and language therapy assistant

What do you do?
My job entails me doing 50% clinical work – completing tolerance checks of patients on modified diets/fluids, assisting therapists on the wards, assisting with training of other departments, liaising with other professionals and services outside of the trust, completing mouth care and other miscellaneous tasks requested by the therapists.

The other 50% of my job is administration. This involves starting reports and letters for the therapists and sending them out once completed, maintaining the caseload details, answering emails and redirecting if necessary, answering of telephone calls, taking messages and relaying these to the appropriate personnel, designing patient leaflets and gaining trust approval, along with multiple other administrative tasks.

I like the fact my job is varied between clinical and administration, patient interaction is the most fulfilling part of my role.

What are the barriers/frustrations?
Barriers and frustrations include being within a small team and not having the time for training and interaction to develop skills. Also not having a formal universal set of competencies or role descriptions creates barriers with staff being unsure of what I am able to do and not able to do.

What training and support have you had in the role?
I have completed external training for mouth care with Mouth Care Matters and am currently enrolled on the speech and language therapy apprenticeship pathway.

What did you do previously?
Previously I was a secretary, then health care assistant in a neurological rehabilitation centre and then started my career within speech and language therapy.
Profile 11: Specialised children’s service

Louise works in a specialised children's service (a social enterprise).

What is your job title?
Communication and language specialist (CALs)

What do you do?
Deliver therapy programmes, complete admin, conduct observations, liaise with teaching staff, special educational needs coordinators (SENCos) and SLTs, create resources, deliver care plan modelling sessions and sessions to parents/teachers to support them to implement the recommendations on the therapy programme.

What do you like best about your role?
Creativity, relationships that are made between me and the children I see. Delivering fun and engaging interventions.

What are the barriers/frustrations?
People being unsure about my role responsibilities.

What training and support have you had in the role?
Different areas of the service receive different training depending on what the need of the caseload is and then this can change. I've received further training if there is a need to deliver new types of intervention.

Training is wide ranging from how to write case notes to implementing SMART targets written by the SLT.

What did you do previously and what made you decide to take the job?
I started my master's in speech and language therapy (two-year course) and decided to get my post-graduate certificate after one year (mid-COVID-19 lockdown).

I always wanted to become a primary teacher but seeing family/friends struggle with their speech and communication I decided I wanted to support children, making fun interventions to help.
Profile 12: Specialised children’s service

Jo works in a specialised children’s service (a social enterprise).

What is your job title?
Communication and language specialist (CALS).

What do you do?
The role of the CALS is to work alongside the SLT and the school in providing therapy and strategies to support the development of speech, language and communication. This entails carrying out individualised therapy for children with speech sound difficulties or with receptive or expressive language difficulties.

What do you like best about your role?
The best part of my job is the sense of fulfilment and reward from knowing that you have been able to make a positive impact on their communication and language needs.

What are the barriers/frustrations?
Some barriers/frustrations within my role occur when the children are unwilling to work on their therapy targets however training and strategies have been provided to us to appropriately step up/step down therapy programme targets accordingly to best support the child.

What training and support have you had in the role?
Other training provided to us include well known schemes such as colourful semantics to develop expressive language and training to provide group sessions to provide early vocab to younger clients.

We always are supported the lead SLTs as well as specialised SLTS within a particular area, ie autism, who can provide specific advice which could be beneficial for a child we are working with.

What did you do previously and what made you decide to take the job?
I have always had an interest in speech therapy stemming back to when my sister received speech therapy. I feel that the role as a CALS allows you to gain invaluable experience within speech therapy.
Profile 13: Adult services in a hospital setting

Scott works with adult services in a hospital setting.

What is your job title?
Speech and language therapy health care support worker.

What do you do?
I work closely with therapists to support a varied client group of both in and outpatients with speech, language and swallowing difficulties.

What do you like best about your role?
The variety, no day is the same. I can see such a wide range of patients all within the one day.

My morning can consist of seeing a young neurological patient with severe speech difficulties and an elderly patient with mild swallowing difficulties. Then my afternoon can go to assisting the therapist in a busy videofluoroscopy clinic, a severely aphasic stroke rehabilitation patient and a ‘Near Me’ follow up phone call.

What are the barriers/frustrations?
Administrative parts to the job appear to be increasing.

What training and support have you had in the role?
Lots of 'on the job' training which I personally have found useful, I respond well to visual stimulus and seeing theories in practice. Plenty of support from my colleagues and senior staff.

What did you do previously and what made you decide to take the job?
I was a generic health care support worker. I always found communication a very interesting aspect and was keen to explore a role within that.
Profile 14: Children and young people’s team

Monica works in a children and young people’s team in a variety of settings.

What is your job title?
Speech and language therapy assistant (SLTA).

What do you do?
I work across different settings with CYP (children and young people) supporting their communication needs. These settings include primary and secondary schools across our patch, as well as special schools and college students from severe to mild learning difficulties.

What do you like best about your role?
Giving voice to voiceless children, enabling children to communicate with their friends and families, raising awareness and supporting professionals as well as parents/careers.

What training and support have you had in the role?
I have been very lucky since I started in this role in terms of training and support. I had the opportunity to shadow colleagues to improve my practice skills and attend numerous training opportunities within my trust and outside as part of my CPD plan (ASD, DLD, Makaton, bitesizes around Down’s syndrome, child voice…). My latest training, which I am really looking forward to is going to be British Sign Language (BSL) level 1.

What did you do previously and what made you decide to take the job?
My background is in hospitality. I worked in the hotel industry for 10 years as a conference and events manager before considering education and healthcare as a career.

Becoming a full-time mum made me take the hardest decision of changing career paths, but I have never looked back – this was the best decision ever. I first started as a teaching assistant (TA) in a mainstream school and rapidly moved to special educational needs (SEN) specialist TA role within school. This role was the key to a new world, I had the opportunity to work closely with multidisciplinary teams and professionals including SLTs and therapy assistants. I knew then that I was meant to pursue speech and language therapy as my next professional step.

I have been working as a paediatric SLTA for the past four years and I am hoping to become a fully qualified therapist once the apprenticeship is finalised.
Profile 15: Adults in a specialist hospital setting

Samantha works with adults in a specialist area in a hospital setting.

What is your job title?
Band 4, head and neck speech and language therapy assistant.

What do you do?
Although my role is very specialised, I also support other teams in my department and at other hospital sites. Much of my role includes providing communication support and swallowing support for patients who are undergoing treatment for a head and neck cancer treatments, such as chemo/radiotherapy and minor/major surgery.

The support and therapy, especially after head and neck cancer treatments can be very physically and mentally difficult for the patient. Difficulties include pain and physical major/minor anatomical changes. I work very closely with a multidisciplinary team, which includes Macmillan specialist nurses, oncologist, dietitians, ear, nose and throat (ENT) and maxillofacial consultants, nursing staff and occupational therapists and patients' family and friends. I also coordinate the smooth running of a laryngectomy valve changing outpatients' clinic and support with the voice therapy service.

Other aspects of my role include supporting the acute and community speech therapy teams. My role has a heavy number of clinical duties that work in conjunction with the clinical aspect of the job. The role is very varied in the sense that no two days are the same. My workdays have a mix of patient face-to-face contact, both inpatient and outpatient, video support consultation session, administrative tasks, professional discussions, telephone reviews, stock management, outpatient clinics, data/statistical audits, education and training sessions, rehabilitation home visits, clinical discussions to external professionals and supporting laryngectomy support groups.

What do you like best about your role?
Without a doubt, the patient contact. I meet such wonderfully diverse client groups. It's an amazing role where you can see progression in a person's confidence. In addition, I really appreciate how my role has developed and this involves my ability to demonstrate confidence and competencies to do a job with minimal support from my supervisors.

What are the barriers/frustrations?
The main frustration of this role is that there is a high expectation in workload from different specialities. Sometimes the workload I have can be very demanding as individual specialities and sites have their own service needs and support needs required.

The main noticeable barrier within this role (and many other assistant positions) is the lack of external/internal training, development opportunities and career progressions. I feel that assistants need to have more investment, so that there is an opportunity to develop and further support their services. This would encourage confidence in competencies and highlight that assistant's professional developments are valued within a team.
What training and support have you had in the role?
All of my training has been done with an in-house approach. I have competencies in head, neck and voice, communication, and dysphagia. The specialist aspect of my role includes having in house training in supporting and working with total laryngectomy patients and patients who have had maxillofacial and ENT surgeries. This includes communication therapy and rehabilitation for patients to become self-managing/efficient with their individual care needs.

What did you do previously and what made you decide to take the job?
I initially started out as a healthcare assistant working in lots of different directorates. These included working on respiratory, vascular, care of the elderly, diabetic, gastro, stroke, and rehabilitative wards. I also have a degree in three-dimensional design. This has become very useful in my current role as I can use my creative knowledge and skills to create specialist and amazing communication aids.

Prior to my current role I worked as a speech and language therapy assistant within the stroke setting.

I feel that all my occupational history has had a massive impact on my ability to be a great speech and language therapy assistant. The skills and knowledge that I have gained from other roles have helped me with the foundations and people skills that are required to work as an assistant.

In total, I have worked for the NHS almost 20 years now – they say time flies when you are having fun!
Profile 16: Northern Ireland Surestart Job Roles

Responses from 11 staff. Representatives at the focus group from three out of five HSC Trust areas in Northern Ireland.

| What is your job title? | SLTA  
Language and Communication Assistant  
S&L Support Worker  
Speech, Language and Communication worker  
Project Worker |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| What is your role?      | Work in partnership with other agencies  
Support SLT  
Promote SLT in SS+ at project events  
SLC Home visits  
Responsible for universal messages  
Wellcomm  
SLT on social media  
Support targeted work with SLT.  
Recruit and prepare for SLT programmes  
Deliver universal SLC programmes  
Evaluate SLC programmes  
Responsible for all SLC admin  
Put data on project system  
Help to make resources  
Deliver other non SS programmes – Baby Massage, Reflexology. Antenatal events  
Provide cover if SS staff off  
Work alongside SLT  
Identify needs  
Present ideas  
Support Df23YO staff – Hanen strategies and group support  
Relationship build with parents  
Collaborative decision making conversations  
Upskill staff  
Get the SLC message out  
Admin – data/stats/resources/evaluations/outcomes  
Message of month |
| What do you like best about your role? | Delivering programmes – meeting parents, babies and children  
Love variety of work – working with parents, building relationships and rapport  
Getting in early (at young age)  
Learning from the SLT – lovely to feel confident, share advice  
Making link between SLT and SLC Support Worker. |
Lovely to see how children have come on (improved) 
Like to see the children.

‘Parents who have children on the spectrum (ASD) coming back and thanking you, can be difficult but feel you have been a good support’. 
Wide variety of training opportunities in the role. 
Evaluations – participant mentioned use of WhatsApp as tool to obtain feedback. When you get feedback keeps you going. 
Holistic approach of SS. May not just be S+L, can signpost onto other things, building confidence. 
Supporting families. 
Relationship building. 
To help someone to be able to communicate. 
To work along the journey with a family. 
EAL – bringing a social network and community to life.

| What are the barriers/frustrations? | Children with different needs – having time for children who need you the most. 
PPE – parents 2m apart, only allowed 4 parents. 
Wearing PPE. 
Resources – job split between 3 places, have to be well organised. 
Room availability – share rooms in use for clients, setting up to suit needs( SLC). 
Target pressures. 
Used to cover other areas at times when staffing needs arise. 
Wondering about our impact on SLC Waiting list. 
Wish we could support hard to reach families better. 
Time for CPD. 
Working hard to help whole project see the importance of SLC. |

| What training and support have you had in the role? | Supported by Lead SLT – connected networks 
Hanen LL+LI 
Hanen YMTD 
Makaton 
Solihull 
ICAN 
Wellcomm 
Hanen LL+LI Tutor training 
Elklan 0-5 
Intensive Interaction 
ASD training 
DPf23 awareness training 
Hanen Sharing Sensitive News 
Reflexology 
Baby Massage 
Derbyshire 
ACE training 
Inhouse bespoke training from SLT as needed. |