



Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair

Equality and Social Justice Committee

Senedd Cymru

Cardiff Bay

CF99 1SN

19 June 2023

Dear Jenny,

I'm writing to express our disappointment at the recent Welsh Government response to the excellent report by the committee entitled '60% Give Them a Voice – Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) in the Youth Justice System'. We are hugely grateful to the committee for shining a light on this often overlooked topic and wanted to place on record our dissatisfaction with the government response.

We are particularly concerned that the response rejects the two clear recommendations (3 and 6) which would have ensured that young people with SLCN, who are over-represented within the justice estate would have been able to access much-needed speech and language therapy support.

As I know you are aware, at the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, we have consistently argued for higher commissioning numbers for speech and language therapy given the clear evidence base for the expansion of the profession into newer areas such as justice. However commissioning numbers in Wales have remained stubbornly at 49 from 2020 until 2023 despite the creation of a second undergraduate course, sustained increases in other healthcare courses and evidence from higher education institutions that there is both demand and capacity for a growth in numbers. It is therefore deeply frustrating to read in the government response to the report that the reason for the rejection of the recommendations relating to workforce is the lack of speech and language therapists rather than lack of evidence of need. We are calling on Welsh Government to reconsider the number of future training places to ensure we are able to meet the needs of our most vulnerable young people.

We are also concerned that there is a lack of clarity around a number of the recommendations accepted within the Welsh Government response. For example, we are uncertain how the youth justice blueprint on a prevention framework will specifically deliver on the recommendation that a summit is held for key stakeholders and a new work steam created. We also question how, in response to recommendation 2, the Talk with Me programme will support children as they progress from primary to secondary school given its current focus on the 0-5 age-group and proposed end date of 2024. We request further clarification on these areas.

We also wish to highlight our concerns about the Welsh Government response to recommendation 7 around workforce planning. We are pleased to represent allied health professional (AHP) bodies on the Welsh Government Workforce Implementation Board but have raised significant concerns within this forum about AHP actions within the plan and in particular the absence of a commitment to an AHP workforce plan as proposed for other professions. As the case of youth justice reveals, there is an urgent need to improve workforce planning for AHPs and in particular speech and language therapy – a profession which cuts across education, social services, health and justice. This is vital to ensure that future workforce projections meet demand.

We hope the Welsh Government, as a government committed to a more equal Wales, will reconsider its response to this important report and provide greater clarity on the areas raised. We would warmly welcome the committee's support in seeking clarification on the issues outlined above and continuing to push for young people within the criminal justice system to receive the support that they urgently require.

Please do contact me if it would be helpful to have a further discussion about our concerns. We look forward to the Senedd debate on the report next week.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Cotterill', is centered on the page.

Pippa Cotterill

Head of Wales Office