

Fail to Plan, Plan to Fail...

Speech and language therapy workforce planning in Wales

Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) are experts in swallowing and communication difficulties. We work across health, education, social services and justice supporting people at every age and stage of life from neonates to people approaching the end of life.

There are fewer SLTs per head of the population in Wales than other parts of the UK (RCSLT membership data). The RCSLT 2023 vacancies survey revealed that the average vacancy rate has reached **23% across the UK**. Of the managers who responded, **96%** of children services managers and **90%** of adult services managers said recruitment is more or much more challenging than at any time in the

last three years. We desperately need better workforce planning for speech and language therapy in Wales and a sustained increase in student training places to meet the growth in demand. There are social, emotional, educational, employment, health and economic risks to people not getting the speech and language therapy they need.

Growing demand for speech and language therapy:

Care closer to home



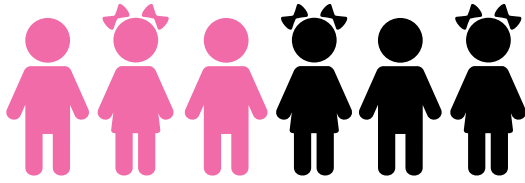
50-75% of Nursing Home residents have swallowing needs.

(O'Loughlin et al, 1998)

The population of over 75s is projected to increase from 9.3% in 2018 to 13.7% in 2028 (Office for National Statistics, 2019).

This will lead to more people with swallowing and communication difficulties from stroke, dementia and other conditions. SLTs are key in enabling people to live well at home by reducing risks when eating and drinking and aiding communication such as with family and health and care professionals. We welcome recent, recurrent investment in Allied Health Professional roles in the community. Demand for speech and language therapy in this area will grow.

Public Health



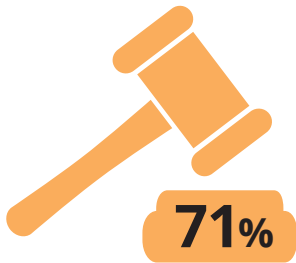
Around 50% of children in areas of high social disadvantage have delayed language or other speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

(Locke et al, 2010)

Speech and language therapists have a key role to play in preventing longer term public health problems.

Early speech and language is one of the four pillars within the Flying Start programme. Speech and language therapists are funded in all services and their impact is well-evidenced. Flying Start expansion will lead to an increase in demand for speech and language therapists.

Justice



71% of children in youth justice services in England and Wales (Apr 2019 – Mar 2020) had SLCN.

(UK Government, 2020)

The 2023 Senedd Equality and Social Justice committee report recommended that:

'Welsh Government should review current provision and work with local authorities to develop plans for embedding speech and language therapists within every Youth Offending Team in Wales.'

(Equality and Social Justice Committee, 2023)

Education

30% of children in Wales with additional learning needs have SLCN. SLCN is the most common type of learning need in Wales.

(Welsh Gov, 2022)



Demand for children's speech and language therapy has increased 30% since COVID).

(Stats Wales, 2023)

Speech and Language Therapists play a key role within the additional learning needs agenda.

We work directly with children, young people and their families to develop personalised strategies to support them to communicate to the best of their ability. We also provide training and strategies to the wider workforce such as teachers and teaching assistants.

What you can do:

Help us call for sustained increases in speech and language therapist training places by:

- Talking to your Local Health Board about having adequate speech and language therapist commissioning numbers in intermediate medium term plans.
- Write to the Minister for Health and Social Services highlighting the issues mentioned in this briefing.
- Write to Health Education and Improvement Wales and emphasise the importance of having a speech and language therapy workforce plan to ensure there are enough to meet the needs of the population.