



The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) in Wales response to the Health Education Improvement Wales consultation on health degree apprenticeships

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a written response to the consultation and to meet with the team leading on apprenticeships as part of a grouping of AHP policy officers on 18th October 2023. Our short response sets out our position on apprenticeships in Wales, why we feel this route to qualification may have particular importance for our profession, our expectations of any pre-registration speech and language therapy apprenticeships and learning from implementation in England.

Our position on apprenticeships

The RCSLT actively supports the development of pre-registration speech and language therapy degree apprenticeships in Wales and across the UK. As a profession in short supply¹, the apprenticeship is a valuable additional training route.

The RCSLT Board of Trustees has agreed apprenticeships could offer important new opportunities for career progression to those already working in healthcare settings and to the existing speech and language therapy assistant workforce. In addition, apprenticeship routes may appeal to a new cohort of students who had not previously considered speech and language therapy as a career. We know from data about current students that 60% start their degree course over the age of 21; it is a profession people often come to after some life experience. An apprenticeship has the potential to support mature students to learn while they work. We hope to also see widening participation from the apprenticeship route into a profession that is not currently diverse across many indicators such as gender, ethnicity or socio-economic².

Currently in Wales, opportunities to train as a speech and language therapist are fairly limited and restricted to two full-time undergraduate three-year courses in Cardiff Metropolitan University and Wrexham University. There are no part-time or postgraduate speech and language therapy pre-registration courses. We believe given this context, the apprenticeship route may have particular appeal.

Expectations of any pre-registration SLT apprenticeship

The RCSLT has an important role to play in the accreditation of all speech and language therapy pre-registration programmes; ensuring that the RCSLT curriculum guidance is reflected in all pre-registration degrees and apprenticeships. An apprentice who successfully completes an RCSLT accredited programme will also be eligible to join the RCSLT as a certified member³, have access to professional clinical standards and guidelines, undertake preceptorship learning and be supported with CPD. This works in parallel with the HCPC processes.⁴

These features should be taken into consideration in the design of apprenticeship programmes, or of any Government specification or standard required for the development of new apprenticeships. Future accreditation of any pre-registration apprenticeship by the RCSLT will need to:

- provide at least a degree-level qualification that will capture graduate-level learning outcomes to achieve RCSLT accreditation;
- adhere to curriculum guidance published by the RCSLT, which includes international mobility under the Mutual Recognition Agreement;
- reflect the breadth of UK speech and language therapy practice; with clients of all ages and in all settings, and be explicit about the range of learning that needs to be demonstrated and assessed, including relating to practice-based learning;
- be of sufficient length to cover the expected learning outcomes;
- define a high-quality learning experience and support for apprentices;
- align with HCPC requirements for eligibility to register to practise as a speech and language therapist (SLT) in the UK and to use the protected title.

Learning from England

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education approved an apprenticeship “standard” for speech and language therapy in England in 2019, which has been updated this year to reflect the new HCPC SOPs from September 2023. We are delighted that three universities are so far working with employers to offer the apprenticeship in England, and more are interested in joining them.

We believe there is potential to utilise this standard beyond England and urge that SLT pre-registration apprenticeships are also developed in Wales to support a new route into the profession and to help address shortages in the profession in Wales.

The profession, and potential new apprentices, have much to gain from this new additional route to qualification, and we are committed to supporting it across the whole of the UK.

Further information

Please contact us if you would like to discuss our position on apprenticeships further.

Yours sincerely,

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