

## Steve Jamieson speech

Lord Boateng, thank you, both for your opening words and for sponsoring today's event. We are all very grateful.

Today, I stand before you not just in my capacity as the CEO of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists but as an advocate for a cause that touches the very fabric of our society — speech, language and communication.

The ATLAS Leiden Manifesto has laid down a critical challenge: to put children's language front and centre.

Over 10% of children and young people have long term communication needs; even more face obstacles that hinder their ability to communicate. In the UK and across Europe, language difficulties remain an invisible barrier to many, affecting their educational outcomes, social integration, and future employability.

These children and young people are not just statistics; they embody untapped potential - future leaders, thinkers, and contributors whose abilities may remain unfulfilled without our intervention.

Our mission is clear: to ensure that every child has the language support they need to thrive regardless of their background or condition. This is not just an investment in the individual; it is an investment in our collective future. By supporting early identification, we can unlock the potential of our next generation, fostering a more inclusive, understanding, and prosperous society.

To achieve this, we must enhance collaboration across borders, sharing research, resources, and best practice.

The ATLAS Leiden Declaration calls us to action — to think language first. Let's rise to this challenge to ensure that all types of language needs are recognised and understood and not a single child is missed. Together, we can build a future where language serves not as a barrier but as a bridge to opportunity and inclusion for everyone.

Thank you and I am now delighted to handover to Professor Karen Bryan.