

Autumn Budget 2024 / Spending Review

RCSLT response

September 2024

Introduction

The UK Government has invited representations from stakeholders about the Autumn Budget and Spending Review. There are two parts:

- a 250-word representation
- a fuller briefing

This note combines both submissions the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists has made.

250-word representation

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) urges the Government to allocate significant funding to the speech and language therapy (SLT) services that people with communication and/or swallowing difficulties require.

The funding would:

- address workforce shortages and ensure equitable access, reducing long-term healthcare, education, social care, justice, and worklessness costs; and
- generate social and economic returns and reduce the risk of more public money needing to be spent later because people were not supported earlier.

Investing in SLT would lead to social and economic benefits, supporting:

- people to have a better quality of life and stimulating economic growth;
- children and young people to maximise the communication skills which are vital to their educational attainment and wellbeing;
- working-age adults to return to or stay in work, thus tackling unemployment; and
- older people to live independently for longer in their own homes.

It would generate savings by enabling early interventions that prevent or reduce the risk of more severe and costly health issues developing by helping to reduce:

- the costs of hospital admission and re-admission and, in some cases, end-of-life care, by supporting people to die at home.
- re-offending and thereby the risk of further custodial sentences and secure care placements.

The funding would also support social inclusion and reduce health inequalities, allowing people fully to participate in society and contribute to the economy. This investment is not only a matter of health equity, but also aligns with the Government's broader economic goals by fostering a more productive workforce.

Submission for the Autumn Budget 2024: Investment in Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) Services

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) calls on the UK government to prioritise substantial investment in speech and language therapy (SLT) services in the forthcoming Autumn Budget 2024. SLT services are crucial for addressing the needs of individuals with communication and swallowing difficulties, impacting various sectors including healthcare, education, work, social care, and justice.

The growing demand for SLT services, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has highlighted significant workforce shortages. These shortages threaten the ability to provide timely and effective support to children with speech and language difficulties, neurodivergent young people, older adults with, for example, dementia, and those recovering from strokes or living with other neurological conditions. Without adequate funding, these groups face the risk of deteriorating education, health, and social outcomes, potentially leading to increased pressure on other public services.

Investment in SLT is not only a matter of public health but also of economic prudence. Early and effective SLT intervention can prevent the escalation of conditions that require more costly and intensive support later. Furthermore, SLT enables individuals fully to participate in society, enhancing educational attainment, employability, and overall quality of life, which in turn contributes to economic growth.

The RCSLT urges the Government to allocate sufficient resources to expand the SLT workforce, improve service accessibility, and reduce regional disparities. By doing so, the Government can ensure that everyone who needs SLT services can access them promptly, thereby improving health outcomes, tackling health inequalities, reducing long-term costs, and promoting social equity.

This investment aligns with the Government's broader objectives of fostering a fairer, healthier, and more prosperous society. The RCSLT stands ready to work with the Government to ensure that these vital services are adequately supported in the 2024 Budget.

Background

At the beginning of the year, the RCSLT supported a [petition](#) calling for investment in SLT raised by [Mikey Akers](#). In less than three months, 13,188 signatures were gathered, demonstrating strong support within a short time from people having speech and language therapy, their families and friends, and the people working with and supporting them.

Although the petition did not reach 100,000 signatures, the Petitions Committee still scheduled it for a debate in the House of Commons on 1 July. However, due to the General Election, this debate was cancelled.

Had the debate taken place on 1 July, we would have sought clarification on various points from the Government. These include:

- How would they increase investment in the speech and language therapy services that people of all ages – babies, children, young people, working-age adults, and older people – and their families require?
- What would the timescale be for this increased investment?
- How would they improve the planning for the whole speech and language therapy workforce, no matter where speech and language therapists work, or who employs them?
- How would they improve the retention and continuing professional development of the speech and language therapy workforce?

In recognition of the importance of increasing investment in speech and language therapy services, over 40 organisations supported [a statement on the issues](#). These included coalitions,

such as the Disabled Children's Partnership and the Embracing Complexity Coalition. They included charities covering the entire age range of those who require speech and language therapy, from babies, children and young people, to working age adults and older people, ranging from Ambitious about Autism to the Stroke Association. They also included representative bodies such as the Association of YOT Managers, The National Association of Special Schools, and the School and Public Health Nurses Association. In addition, people having speech and language therapy and their families also expressed support for increased investment in speech and language therapy.