



At RCSLT 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 and investment into roles.

The RCSLT continues to urge Welsh Government to deliver sustained increases in training places number for the future to ensure we are able to meet the needs of our most vulnerable young people.

As the case of youth justice reveals, there is an urgent need to improve workforce planning for Allied Health Professions 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.

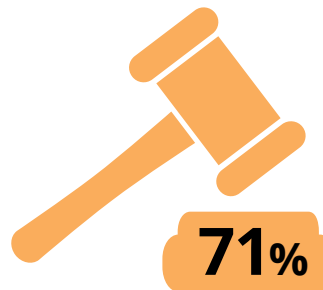
This is an issue that sits on the jagged edge, with many overlapping devolved and reserved responsibilities.

KEY ISSUES AND STATISTICS

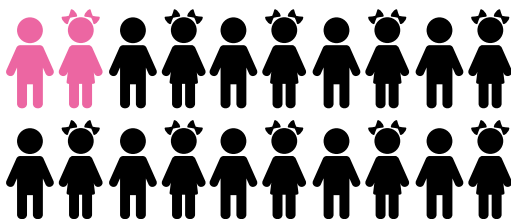
JUSTICE & YOUTH JUSTICE

There is strong international evidence that incidence of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) is much more prevalent in the offending population than in the general population.

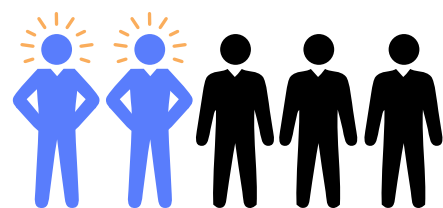
Those who enter the youth justice system (YJS) often do so from settings where there is a heightened risk of people having communication needs which may not have been previously identified.



The most recent figure shows that 71% of children sentenced in England and Wales had SLCN.



Only 5% of young people with communication needs had their needs identified prior to their entry to the Youth Justice System.



40% of young people in contact with the justice system find it difficult to access and benefit from verbal interventions and programmes.

The most established speech and language therapy youth justice team in Wales at Neath Port Talbot and Swansea, revealed in their 2023-2024 annual service report that 89% of the young people within the service have been identified with SLCN.



The implications for a young person with SLCN within the YJS can be profound. Within the YJS, young people with SLCN are faced with situations in which they require the ability to understand and retain complex information in stressful circumstances.

They need to understand the processes they are subject to as well as communicate and interact proficiently with a wide range of individuals. Not only do the SLCN of young people contribute to their entry into the criminal justice system, but once in the YJS, young People with SLCN

can experience difficulties with many processes that require the ability to understand complex information in stressful situations.

Young people with SLCN often struggle to provide narrative information in a logical and sequential manner. This skill is important in police interviews and court processes and misunderstanding can lead to young people making uninformed choices which may lead to inappropriate admission or sentencing. This is significant as 80% of magistrates surveyed said that the attitude and demeanour of a young person influences their sentencing decision to some or a great extent.

Whilst there has been an increase in the number of speech and language therapists employed within youth justice services in the last year, there continues to be no speech and language therapist posts funded by youth justice services in North Wales. Many of the newer posts in other parts of Wales have been funded on a fixed term basis via Turnaround Programme funding from the Ministry of Justice. This funding is due to end in March 2025 and no further funding stream has yet been announced.



We have reviewed recent youth justice inspection reports and youth justice plans in Wales.

HMIP actively considers speech, language and communication provision as part of the inspections regime despite it being a non-statutory requirement for youth justice teams. Services which employ speech and language therapists such as Carmarthenshire and Newport are commended.

Conversely, those that do not provide speech, language and communication provision are criticised within reports. Access to speech language and communication support for children was a theme across recent inspection reports from Conwy and Denbighshire, Gwynedd and Ynys Môn and Flintshire.

All three youth justice partnerships had direct recommendations to address the gap in speech, language, and communication provision for children and ensure that services are provided which assess and respond to children's communication needs.

The benefit to young people in the justice system that receive early access to SLTs is clear, both in terms of service delivery, and outcomes for those in the justice system.

WORKFORCE PLANNING

Despite concerns over the number of young people with SLCN in Wales, the Welsh Government rejected vital recommendations to expand access to speech and language therapy for this vulnerable group, citing a lack of therapists rather than addressing the need.

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) kept commissioning figures for speech and language therapy at 49 from 2020 to 2023 in the HEIW Education and Training Plan (ETP) despite the commencement of a second undergraduate course at Wrexham Glyndwr University with only ten places. At the same time, there was a reduction of the commissioned places at Cardiff Metropolitan University. We have made some progress with commissioning numbers over the last year, with an increase of 6 additional places in 2023/24 and a proposed increase of 3 in 2025/6.

We have significant concerns about the viability of such a small course in Wrexham. It is also a concern that we are not training the same number in Cardiff Met as previously, neither course is at capacity for teaching work.

Intelligence gathering from higher education institutions in Wales suggests there is a high demand for the speech and language therapy course. We do not anticipate that we would struggle to fill an increased number of commissioned spaces.

We are also aware that student places have increased significantly in other nations. RCSLT membership records suggest that the number of SLTs qualifying in England has doubled in the last decade.

Our membership data reveals that there are fewer speech and language therapists per head of the population in Wales than any other part of the UK.

RCSLT WALES ASKS



- Sustained increases in commissioning number for speech and language therapists in Wales and better workforce planning for the profession in Wales as part of an Allied Health Professional workforce plan.
- Speech and language therapists should be included within every Youth Offending Team across Wales. This would facilitate multi-agency and multi-disciplinary team development of the appropriate interventions to support young people with their speech, language and communication skills.
- Write to the Ministry of Justice for an update on Turnaround Programme funding post March 2025 and whether future funding streams will prioritise speech and language therapy.