

Working with interpreters

New standards for speech and language therapists working with children and young people in their home language

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Context

We are aware that there are challenges for speech and language therapists working with children and young people, in relation to accessing interpreting services. It is essential that speech and language therapists work with professional interpreters when supporting children in their home language (if other than English or Welsh) in order to provide an equitable service for all learners.

New standards around interpreting

The Health and Care Profession Council (HCPC) has revised its standards of proficiency. The revised standards for each profession came into effect on 1 September 2023.

The following standards of proficiency must be considered in relation to access to interpreters:

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) is the regulating body for the speech and language therapy profession. It is a legal requirement for all speech and language therapists to adhere to the standards of the HCPC.

- **Standard 6.4:** *understand the need to ensure confidentiality is maintained in all situations in which service users rely on additional communication support (such as interpreters or translators)*
- **Standard 7.6:** *understand the need to support the communication needs of service users and carers, such as through the use of an appropriate interpreter*
- **Standard 13.20:** *assess and plan interventions in the service user's home language with the assistance of professional interpreters, and with reference to professional clinical guidelines and evidence-based practice*

Speech and language therapists (SLTs) should make every effort to use appropriate interpretation services when needed. In the case that it is not possible to source an interpreter, HCPC have stated that:

"Lack of appropriate interpreters should not be a barrier to service access. Where an interpreter is not available, registrants need to evidence their approach to working alongside interpreters in consultation with service users to meet the standards. Any fitness to practise referral regarding the provision of an interpreter would be considered on its own merits and taking into account the particular context."

*or the language of education (such as Welsh or Gaelic – see [SLT Assessment and Intervention: Best practice for children and young people in bilingual settings](#))

Best practice in supporting children and young people

The RCSLT has worked with members and parents/carers to co-produce the following guidance which highlights key guiding principles for [placing children and young people at the heart of delivering quality speech and language therapy: guidance on principles, activities and outcomes](#).

“All children and young people should be able to access speech, language, communication and swallowing support that is tailored to their needs, priorities and preferences. This should be designed collaboratively with their involvement and outcomes in mind, and delivered at a time that works best for them.”

(RCSLT, 2018)

RCSLT guidance on bilingualism

[RCSLT guidance on bilingualism](#) highlights the following risks of not using a child's home language:

- Providing an English-only service* is ineffective, leads to poor outcomes for the child, and potentially isolates them from their parent(s)/carers, extended family and community.
- There is high risk of home language loss for bilingual children who are treated in English*, rather than their home language.
- An English-only service could be considered a form of discrimination and should be strongly challenged.

If supporting a child in their home language (if other than English or Welsh), speech and language therapists should, where possible, ensure that *professional* interpreters are involved in all aspects of assessment, providing advice, assessment, intervention, and multi-disciplinary meetings and any decision-making in partnership with the client and family. Legal requirements to provide equitable services ([Equality Act, 2010](#); [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)) should be considered above any financial implications of working with interpreters.

See also: [RCSLT guidance on interpreters](#).

The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality Act 2010 introduced a single Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) that applies to public bodies, including maintained schools and Academies. The duty means that, in carrying out their functions, public bodies are required to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act,
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it,
- Foster good relations across all characteristics - between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

See also: [Guidance from the Department for Education](#).

*or the language of education (such as Welsh or Gaelic – see [SLT Assessment and Intervention: Best practice for children and young people in bilingual settings](#))