

Autumn Budget 2026

RCSLT Response

September 2026

250-word representation

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) urges the Government to allocate sufficient 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 physical and mental 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 2026:

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 2026.

The Government recognises the importance of speech and language therapy for children and young people with SEND and we very much welcome the significant investment committed to the Experts at Hand offer, which includes funding for speech and language therapy in mainstream education settings, as part of the Government's plans for SEND reform.

While that is welcome, there is much more to do for all the babies, children, young people, working age adults, and the elderly, their families, and the people working with and supporting them, who could benefit from SLT services.

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 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 or cancer, or those who have Long COVID.

Without adequate funding, these groups face the risk of deteriorating education, health, employment, 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 October 2025 NICE guideline on [Rehabilitation for chronic neurological disorders including acquired brain injury](#) has recognised the impact of speech, language, and communication, noting 'Improved speech, language and communication may also increase participation in education and employment offering broader social and economic benefits.'

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 2026 Budget.

Background

18 months ago, 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 the 27 of October](#).

Our [briefing for the debate was supported by over 40 organisations](#) and by the very powerful contributions from MPs of all parties calling on the Government to increase investment in services and better plan for the speech and language therapy workforce.

We were encouraged by the Government's response and by the pledge the Government made to the Invest in SLT team in March 2025 that they would work with us on an action plan to tackle the issues affecting access to speech and language therapy.

We regret that more than a year later, that action plan has not yet appeared. So, with the Budget in sight, we are calling on the Government to do two things:

- 1) Ensure that the forthcoming Budget provides sufficient resources to the Department of Health and Social Care, the Department for Education, and other relevant Government Departments, so they can increase investment in speech and language therapy.
- 2) Publish the speech and language therapy action plan which they discussed with us in March 2025.