



14 September 2026

**Response from the Royal College of Speech and Language
Therapists in Wales - Priorities for the Seventh Senedd Health and
Social Care Committee**

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists (SLTs), SLT students and support workers working in the UK. The RCSLT has 24,000 members (900 in Wales). We promote excellence in practice and influence health, education, care and justice policies.

Speech and language therapy manages the risk of harm and reduces functional impact for people with speech, language and communication support needs and/or swallowing difficulties.

SLTs provide life improving treatment, support and care for children and young people who have difficulties with communication, eating, drinking or swallowing.

The speech and language therapy workforce supports adults with learning disabilities and those with communication, voice and/or swallowing difficulties resulting from many conditions such as stroke, head and neck cancer and dementia. 50%-90% of the learning disabled population have communication difficulties. More than 85% of people living with dementia experience eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties .

Using specialist skills, SLTs work directly with children, carers, teachers, and other professionals to develop personalised strategies. They also provide training and strategies to the wider workforce; such as nursery staff and teaching assistants so that they can identify the signs of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), improve communication environments and provide effective support.



Do the Welsh Government's health and care priorities reflect the most significant challenges facing communities across Wales?

We welcome the Welsh Government plans to publish the first part of an NHS workforce plan in the autumn, and that Health Improvement and Education Wales are developing an Education Strategy to address the education, up skilling and training of the NHS workforce.

Are any important priorities missing?

N/A

What are the main barriers to delivering these priorities and measuring progress?

SLTs as well as the other Allied Health Professionals AHPs (art therapists, drama therapists, music therapists, orthoptics, dieticians, podiatrists, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, orthotists and prosthetists, occupational therapists, paramedics, psychologists and radiographers) are the third largest clinical workforce in NHS Wales accounting for 25% of the NHS workforce in Wales.

However, as AHPs are one of the smaller professional groups, their vital contributions to population health and wellbeing are too often overlooked. As demand for healthcare services continues to grow, as well as the political acknowledgement that care needs to shift closer to home, the need for AHPs in key areas like rehabilitation, mental health, and preventative care has never been more urgent. Any future national workforce strategy must therefore include AHPs otherwise these professions, so key to delivering the primary and community care agenda, risk becoming unsustainable.

Demand for speech and language therapy has grown significantly over the last decade for children and adults, including those with learning disabilities. There are calls for speech and language therapists (SLTs) to expand into areas where there is significant unmet need, particularly because of the benefit that services can have on young



people. However, there are only around 800 registered speech and language therapists in Wales. This is insufficient to meet current education and NHS services.

Best practice example: Transforming acute speech and language therapy services through innovation.

In response to growing demand and no additional resource, from 2023-2025, the Acute Speech and Language Therapy team in Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board undertook an ambitious and innovative transformation of service delivery across three district general hospitals and two community hospitals.

Central to this transformation has been the adoption of the Kate Malcomess Care Aims Framework. This approach has redefined the way referrals and treatment are managed, introducing a centralised “Request for Help” phone line staffed by senior clinicians on a rota. This system ensures that patients and referrers receive timely advice, education, and signposting, while investigations and treatment are arranged when necessary. When treatment is required, care aims are set and progress is monitored continuously. Cases are reviewed in fortnightly group clinical supervision sessions, reinforcing reflective practice as a cornerstone of service delivery. Clinical impact is measured through goal attainment and Therapy Outcome Measure scores, while key performance indicators such as response times and the proportion of patients requiring specialist intervention provide transparent data for service evaluation and planning.

The innovation has optimised existing capacity and delivered measurable improvements in patient outcomes and system-wide performance. For example, demand for follow up appointments per week has reduced significantly from 125 per week in July 2023 to 50 in July 2024 and the percentage of patients achieving the goals set at the start of care continues to increase (from 60% to 90% in 2025). It has also had a huge impact on staff morale.



Freed from inefficiencies, clinicians are now actively participating in local and interprofessional quality improvement initiatives and developing advanced clinical skills which further strengthens the service. This shift has created a culture that values professional growth, collaboration, and wellbeing, ensuring that improvements benefit not only patients but also the workforce and the wider health community.

What should the Committee focus on to make the biggest difference?

We want to ensure that Speech and Language Therapists and the wider Allied Health Professional workforce form an integral part of future Welsh Government workforce plans, especially when considering the part that they can play in the prevention, primary, and community care agenda.

For example, SLTs have a key role to play in preventing deterioration in health and wellbeing which otherwise leads to costly and intensive support later. SLTs can offer services which reduce service demand on medical specialities facing long waits, for example in ENT services they can reduce emergency admissions delivering positive outcomes for people and their families by:

- Front door swallowing assessments as part of frailty services.
- Taking low priority ENT swallowing and voice referrals off waiting lists and offering direct assessment and management.
- Advanced and consultant practitioners in head and neck cancers

We want to see SLTs embedded in all relevant community multidisciplinary teams as part of their standard staffing. Resources should be planned and allocated to ensure speech and language therapy services are available across primary, community and mental health services.

As a profession in short supply additional training places are also needed. We believe that the grow your own model offers important new opportunities for career progression to those already working in healthcare settings and to the existing SLT workforce. 95% of



assistants preference for completing training would be an apprenticeship/earn as you learn model.¹

There is significant learning from the introduction of apprenticeships in England where three universities are so far working with employers to offer the apprenticeship, and more are interested in doing so.

The Allied Health Professionals Federation Cymru (AHPF) also strongly believes that expanding access to the AHP professions through degree apprenticeships is essential for addressing workforce shortages and improving the diversity of the sector. Apprenticeships offer an accessible alternative to traditional university education, allowing individuals to gain hands-on experience while earning a living. This pathway is particularly important for those who may face financial or logistical barriers to higher education. **The Welsh Government should take action to introduce and expand degree apprenticeship schemes within AHP fields.** This initiative will not only create more inclusive routes into health and social care professions but will also support local communities by nurturing a skilled workforce that is attuned to the unique needs of the Welsh population. By increasing training opportunities in this manner, the Welsh Government can enhance healthcare provision, reduce inequalities, and provide more individuals with life-changing career opportunities.

Summary

- **We want to ensure that Speech and Language Therapists and the wider Allied Health Professional workforce form an integral part of future Welsh Government workforce plans, especially when considering the part that they can play in the prevention, primary, and community care agenda.**
- **We want to see SLTs embedded in all relevant community multidisciplinary teams as part of their standard staffing. Resources should be planned and allocated to ensure speech**

¹ [RCSLT-State-of-the-Nation-report-2026.pdf](#)



and language therapy services are available across primary, community and mental health services.

- In order to help expand the SLT and AHP workforce there is significant learning from the introduction of apprenticeships in England where three universities are so far working with employers to offer the apprenticeship, and more are interested in doing so. The Welsh Government should take action to introduce and expand degree apprenticeship schemes within AHP fields.

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