RCSLT response to the final report of the Milburn Review: From a Welfare State to a Working State

Today the UK Government published From a Welfare State to a Working State: A new settlement for the next generation.

The independent review, led by Alan Milburn, was commissioned by the Government to investigate the causes of the increase in the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Initial RCSLT response

We are encouraged that the report recognises that communication is a foundational skill needed to navigate adult working life: "The best protection against becoming NEET remains doing well at school and being literate, numerate and able to communicate."

We welcome several of the report's proposals, including:

- A renewed focus on school readiness, recognising that prevention starts in the early years, with a more ambitious target for 90% of children in England to achieve a good level of development by 2036.
- A national delivery plan – including speech and language - to ensure that 90% of children reach the expected levels in literacy and numeracy at the end of primary school.
- Faster access to mental health support for young people who are NEET – with speech and language therapy available to those whose needs are more complex or persistent.
- A new locally-led Youth Opportunity Service to support participation.

If these proposals are to succeed, speech and language therapists (SLTs) have a key role to play – in both preventing young people becoming NEET and supporting those who are NEET to successfully transition into education or employment. Many young people who are NEET today have communication needs that went unrecognised and unsupported throughout their time in education.

Speech and language therapists should be a core part of the multi-disciplinary team in the new Youth Opportunity Service. They are vital for delivering vocational rehabilitation

- helping young people manage workplace communication, interview interactions, and neurodiversity-informed social demands. SLTs provide crucial support to enable these young people to access education, employment or training, and provide advice to employers, education and training providers on how they can adapt job roles, implement reasonable adjustments, and remove communication barriers preventing these young people from thriving.

However, this will require an increase in the supply of speech and language therapists, funded posts and career development opportunities. The long awaited 10 Year Workforce Plan must recognise that health professionals such as speech and language therapists are crucial to delivering plans across government departments. Speech and language therapists work across a range of sectors, and demand for their skills is driven by priorities across Government, not just within the NHS. The plan should model that demand and commit to growing supply, funded posts, clear career pathways and retaining existing staff.