

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY IN THE UK

Speech and language therapists (SLTs) work with people of all ages who have communication and/or swallowing disorders. Although interest in communication problems has existed probably for as long as humans have been able to speak, the speech and language therapy profession in the UK as we know it today can be traced to the 19th century. The publication of John Wyllie's book *The Disorders of Speech* in 1894 is credited with bringing widespread publicity to the burgeoning field. SLTs practising at the turn of the 20th century were largely self-taught and came from two main groups: those interested in oratory, who worked as elocutionists with a focus on speech correction, and medical practitioners with an interest in speech disorders resulting from organic causes.

Formal training was introduced gradually. Many elocutionists, or teachers in the art of speech, came from a theatrical or teaching background and were offered some training in remedial speech by the Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art (Central School), which established a separate Department of Speech Therapy in 1925. Hospital-based schools of speech and language therapy were established in London in 1926 and 1932, and SLT education began in Glasgow in 1928, becoming formalised as the Glasgow School of Speech Therapy in 1935. From 1945, with the establishment of the College of Speech Therapists, a UK-wide three-year qualification became established at educational institutions across the UK.

Early SLTs mainly worked in voluntary or private practice (now called independent practice). Throughout the 20th century they gradually came to be employed by education authorities, hospitals and special education schools, as well as by the NHS.

Two professional organisations were formed in the 1930s, representing the two main types of SLTs at the time. The Association of Speech Therapists represented the artistic, while the British Society of Speech Therapists represented the medical groups of SLTs. Although they held differing views on the role of speech and language therapy, these two bodies both held competent practice at the core of their professional identity, and agreed to amalgamate following the Second World War. The College of Speech Therapists (CST) was established in 1945. It was renamed the College of Speech and Language Therapists in 1991, and in 1995 it was awarded the Royal title, becoming the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) that we know today.

The speech and language therapy profession had an early connection with the UK's royal family, which is now well known thanks to the book and film *The King's Speech*. King George VI had a special relationship with his speech therapist, Australian Lionel Logue, from the 1920s to the 1940s, and awarded Mr Logue the honour of Commander of the Royal Victoria Order for his services. Mr Logue was one of the founder fellows of the unified College of Speech Therapists, and asked King George VI to become its royal patron. Following the king's death, his widow, Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, became patron of the professional body in 1959. Her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex succeeded Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother in the role in 2003.

Core speech and language therapy practice has changed significantly since the early days of the 20th century, largely due to innovations and the application of new evidence in disciplines that underpin speech and language therapy practice, including medicine, psychology and linguistics. External societal changes, such as government policy on health and education and developments in technology, have also contributed to the radical development of the profession. Early client groups

for speech and language therapy in the UK included people who stammer, people with aphasia and children with cleft lip and palate. The number of client groups and clinical areas covered by SLTs has increased over the decades and continues to expand – clinical areas today include aphasia, autistic spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, cleft lip and palate, dementia, developmental language disorder, dysarthria, dysfluency, dysphagia, head and neck cancer and voice.

For further information on speech and language therapy history, please contact info@rcslt.org