



## RCSLT call for action on Children & Young People

**“Ensure all Scotland’s children and young people develop the best possible speech, language and communication abilities”.**

Scotland needs to build on the work done to date with a comprehensive and joined up programme of action. This will provide a foundation to the best outcomes in life, address generational inequalities and support Scotland’s economic success.

### Scotland needs this action because:

- 1. Speech, language and communication difficulties are strongly associated with poverty and inequality.**
  - Although there are indications of slight improvement **54% of children from deprived communities still have below average vocabulary at age 3** compared to 20% of their better off peers<sup>i</sup>.
  - It is the **most common area of difficulty for all 3 year olds and marks the biggest developmental difference between rich and poor**. This learning disadvantage persists at age 5 and onwards through school. (*GUS 2015*)
  - **Difficulties are intergenerational**. A child’s speech, language and communication ability is associated with their parent’s speech, language and communication ability. We must address the needs of parents **and** children if we are to break the cycle.
- 2. “Speech, language and communication development is important to the overall wellbeing of all children and young people”** (*Children and Young People’s Act (2014) Statutory Guidance (draft)*).
  - Most children and young people in difficulty have speech, language and communication needs - 60% referred to mental health services, 88% of young unemployed men and 70% of young men in Polmont Young Offenders Institute.
- 3. Speech, language and communication ability is the foundation of literacy.**
  - Save the Children’s *“Ready to Read: Closing the gap in early language skills so that every child in Scotland can read well”*<sup>ii</sup> (2015) highlights the importance of early language skills as the foundation for literacy and education. The report warns that the government’s literacy and education objectives are at risk if more decisive action is not taken.

### Delivering on the commitment would:

- **Help break the intergenerational cycle of speech, language and communication difficulties** which impede access to education, attainment and employment thus contribute to poverty and inequality – generation after generation.
- **Ensure Scotland uses all its assets** – political leadership, trained speech and language therapists and public funds - **to close the attainment gap between rich and poor as fast and as efficiently as possible.**

### **In Scotland right now:**

1. **There are some very positive steps addressing children’s speech, language and communication ability** e.g. “Play, Talk, Read” and Early Years Collaborative. However after significant investment very moderate improvement for 3 years olds in these areas strongly suggest that more needs to be done.
2. **The “Attainment Challenge” and National Improvement Framework with their focus on literacy also provide impetus** to developing speech, language and communication abilities – the essential foundation to literacy. Several local authorities are drawing on SLT expertise to inform their work on attainment (e.g. Dundee and Lanarkshire).

However, use of local the SLT assets is not universal.

3. **Orders and statutory guidance associated with the Children & Young People (Scotland) Act** will highlight speech, language and communication as fundamental to all aspects of wellbeing; recommend assessment of well being includes profiling the child’s or young person’s speech, language and communication abilities and needs and require Named Persons for under 5s to have proven competences in profiling and responding to children’s **and** parents communication abilities.
4. **“Ready to Act”** - The Allied Health Professions Action Plan for Children and Young People promises action on parental and CYP workforce skills and competences.

However, there is no funding available to support this action plan.

5. **Inconsistency and gaps in speech, language and communication provision are leading to missed opportunities.**
  - **In some areas there are reduced commitments to speech, language and communication services.** Since 2014 two local authorities have withdrawn 100% of funding for key SLT services with many others implementing significant reductions of 21% or more<sup>iii</sup>. This will impact on education authorities’ capacity to achieve equality of outcomes for children and young people experiencing social disadvantage.
  - **Disconnection between the growth of health visitors and Family Nurse Practitioners and the capacity of SLT services** to meet the training needs of these colleagues and the referrals they will make to specialist SLT services.

- **Disconnection between teachers working on literacy attainment (in response to National Improvement Framework) and SLTs who could help them boost essential speech, language and communication abilities which underpin literacy** at both primary and secondary school.
- **Gaps in children and young people's workforce competences to promote speech, language and communication ability with no requirement for those working with high risk groups to formally demonstrate competences** such as those working in youth employment and youth justice
- **Under-identification and inconsistent response to the speech, language and communication needs of parents whose children are most at risk** of speech, language and communication underdevelopment.

## **How could Scotland get better at optimising speech, language and communication?**

(1) Establish an expert panel to:

- review the evidence base of what works in relation to optimising speech, language and communication development and communication inclusion review good practice across Scotland
- identify the gaps, disconnects and inconsistencies
- make recommendations for a best evidence based, comprehensive, joined up programme of action to strengthen this key economic and social driver – building on and joining up legislation, regulation and services – and mainstreaming action throughout attainment, youth employment and youth justice work streams.

(2) Invest in:

- Developing the skills of parents and the children and young people's workforce to enable them to optimise speech, language and communication ability of all children and young people at every age and stage.
- Providing practical resources across communities to help parents and workers alike easily play their part. For example, talking games in waiting rooms, buses, playgrounds; Improve communication access to information and services for parents, with literacy difficulties or other communication needs of their own for example, parents who are offenders, have a mental illness or who misuse drugs or alcohol.
- SLT services to develop skills and resources and, where necessary, provide specialist therapy for the children and young people who need it.

### **Paying for a comprehensive, joined up programme of action:**

- **Much more can be achieved with better use of existing SLT assets Scotland has already paid for** including SLTs in employment and unemployed SLT graduates;

- **Some work would cost relatively little and could start quickly.** For example establishing an expert review panel.
- **New costs would be off-set by reduced expenditure - every £1 invested** in enhanced SLT for children with specific language impairment **generates £6.40** derived from improved communication leading to improved educational achievement.

### Useful questions to ask candidates:

- Speech, language and communication skills underpin a person's success in life and the success and cohesion of communities more generally. How will your party ensure that children from the most deprived communities develop speech, language and communication skills required to thrive in school and for the rest of their lives?
- Children and young people need people around them with the competences to help them develop. What resources will your party be putting in place to ensure parents and the children's workforce has the skills and access to SLT to develop speech, language and communication skills in children?
- Will you support the setting up of a national expert panel to look at the best available evidence for improving speech, language and communication skills for all children and young people?

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<sup>i</sup> Growing Up in Scotland latest data October 2015

<sup>ii</sup> [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Ready\\_to\\_Read\\_Scotland.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Ready_to_Read_Scotland.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> see Health and Sports Committee Survey

[http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4\\_HealthandSportCommittee/Annexe\\_-\\_4\\_March\\_paper.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_HealthandSportCommittee/Annexe_-_4_March_paper.pdf)