



The Coronavirus Bill 19 March 2020

Executive summary

- In its guidance on what [the Coronavirus Bill](#) will do, the Government is clear: ‘the next few months will present a significant level of challenge for the NHS and anyone working in caring professions.’¹
- The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) welcomes and supports the Bill.
- As specialists in communication and swallowing, speech and language therapists have a crucial role to play, as part of wider multi-disciplinary teams, in supporting people with communication and swallowing needs who contract the virus. Some speech and language therapists also work in [respiratory care](#).
- Speech and language therapists also play a crucial role in ensuring that information about how to prevent infection, what to do if you have symptoms, and information on treatment and care is accessible to those who have speech, language and communication needs.
- We urge retired speech and language therapists and speech and language therapy students near the end of their studies to embrace, where appropriate and if they wish, the opportunity the Bill presents to increase the available health and social care workforce.
- It is important to note that like all other health, education and social care professionals, speech and language therapists will themselves be at increased risk of contracting the virus so it is essential that potential risks to them, their loved ones, and those they care for and work with are reduced as much as possible. The Government has issued guidance for healthcare professionals on this, accessible on the RCSLT’s Coronavirus webpage [here](#). We are also having discussions with national partners on these issues and are developing specific guidance with and for speech and language therapists on protective equipment (PPE) and dysphagia management. This will be published in due course.
- The RCSLT is proud of how our members are already supporting people and will support many more in the weeks and months to come.

What does the Bill say?

The Bill comes into force at the end of the month. Its measures, which are temporary, cover five main areas:

- increasing the available health and social care workforce
- easing the burden on frontline staff
- containing and slowing the virus
- managing the deceased with respect and dignity
- supporting people

Implications for speech and language therapists

The Bill has implications for speech and language therapists. Relevant provisions include:

- **Emergency registration:** Enabling regulators to emergency register suitable people as regulated healthcare professionals. This might include recently retired professionals and students who are near the end of their training. The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) will be writing to former speech and language

therapists who have de-registered in the past three years to inform them they will be added to the COVID-19 temporary register.

- **Indemnity:** Providing indemnity for clinical negligence liabilities arising from NHS activities carried out for the purposes of dealing with, or because of, the coronavirus outbreak, where there is no existing indemnity arrangement in place.
- **Pensions:** Suspending the rule that currently prevents some NHS staff who return to work after retirement from working more than 16 hours per week, along with rules on abatements and drawn-down of NHS pensions that apply to certain retirees who return to work.
- **Hospital discharge assessment:** Allowing NHS providers to delay undertaking the assessment process for NHS continuing healthcare for individuals being discharged from hospital until after the emergency period has ended.
- **SEN provision:** Providing powers to require educational institutions or childcare providers to stay open or relax some requirements around education legislation. This could include relaxing provisions for those with special educational needs.
- **Statutory Sick Pay (SSP):** Giving the Government the power to suspend the rule that means SSP is not paid for the first 3 days of work missed and enables employers with fewer than 250 employees to reclaim SSP paid for sickness absences relating to coronavirus during the period of the outbreak.

RCSLT's position on the Bill

The RCSLT welcomes and supports the Bill.

- **Workforce:** We urge those former speech and language therapists and our final year students to take up this opportunity, if they wish to. For any of our students who take up this opportunity, we will provide free access to our CPD diary and other resources. We would also wish to see clarity about the eventual position for those students in terms of their degree marking and the need to go back to finish exams or placements or not. Similarly on redeployment, if speech and language therapists wish to, we would encourage them to consider being redeployed. It is important they receive appropriate training, supervision and have access to appropriate health and safety equipment. See the Government guidance accessible on the RCSLT's website [here](#).
- **SEN provision:** While recognising the need to ensure schools have the flexibility and support they need to respond pragmatically to the changing situation, it is important that vulnerable children and young people, including those with special educational needs, continue to receive vital support. We would encourage education providers to explore with specialists, including speech and language therapists, alternative methods through which that support could be provided.
- **Administration:** Anything that reduces unnecessary administration is welcome although it is important that patient records are kept up to date.
- **People with communication needs:** It is important that people with speech, language and communication needs are presented with information that is accessible and enables them to communicate in whichever way that they wish. Speech and language therapists are being encouraged to support access and share resources. Examples of such accessible information are available [here](#) and [here](#).

For more information:

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Visit: <https://www.rcslt.org/news/covid-19> which also includes resources on telehealth