

Advanced Practice and Consultant practice

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) are actively supporting the development of advanced practice and consultant frameworks across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The RCSLT Board of Trustees considers that these roles will offer important new opportunities for career progression to speech and language therapists (SLTs). They will also make an important contribution to improving service quality and accessibility for service users to timely treatment.

Recent developments

In England and Northern Ireland there have been new frameworks developed to support advanced practice roles for Allied Health Professionals (AHPs). Those in Scotland and Wales are in development. In England a new non-medical consultant framework is also under development. Details of how they will be implemented across professions and across services remain under discussion. In England the new Advanced Practice Academy has consulted on how Advanced Clinical Practice (ACP) and consultant roles will be accredited in future and how those already in these roles will be able to access credentialing of their current expertise. In addition, while the provision of masters' level ACP courses has taken off in the last two years, many are generic and not all are mapped to the frameworks available. The addition of an apprenticeship ACP standard has further added to the array of different routes available and provides an alternative funding route.

The RCSLT has engaged with all these developments and will continue to do so to ensure that speech and language therapy is able to take advantage of the opportunities offered. In doing so we promote:

- ACP and consultant practice as a level of practice rather than particular roles;
- ways to ensure that SLTs already in these roles (whether or not their title reflects that) are able to access credentialing opportunities: in England it is being proposed that it will be possible to demonstrate practice at the required level by means of an accredited portfolio;
- that not being able to prescribe should not preclude SLTs from taking on ACP roles, in some cases patient group direction can provide a solution;
- ACP frameworks cannot contain prescribing as a mandatory requirement if they are to be multi-professional, it must be optional or it will exclude some AHPs;
- greater clarity about where ACP roles fit within career pathways and how they are different from specialist roles – in our view there remains some ambiguity over the distinction between advanced clinical practice and clinical specialism;
- the development of processes and systems that work UK wide for recognising individual practitioners' fulfilment of advanced-level capabilities - or the development of parallel approaches that reduce the risk of misaligned approaches and to achieve clarity for all stakeholders;
- better capture of data on SLTs working in these roles;
- recognition that SLTs can take on ACP roles across a range of settings from acute to community and across adult and children services and that these roles are not limited to taking on roles of other medical staff.

The ACP role for speech and language therapists

RCSLT has previously issued guidance on evolving roles and consultant roles. The development of advanced clinical practice roles and the production of new frameworks means that we need to review that guidance and consider how new roles fit within SLT career pathways.

Taking on an ACP role does not mean not being an SLT anymore. At present there are few SLTs who formally have ACP in their job title. We think there are many more who perhaps do fulfil the criteria, but for whom it is not recognised. The new frameworks will mean that in future it will be necessary to look at the formal accreditation of qualifications or credentialing of experience in order to secure ACP roles. We would encourage SLTs to consider whether the ACP SLT pathway is a career option for them, or for some, whether it is a role they are already undertaking.

RCSLT is therefore producing new guidance that will support SLTs in making the case for ACP level in their service, tips on who to influence, help them to map their roles against the frameworks of capabilities and understand plans for accreditation and credentialing and how to access courses of learning.

You can access the latest frameworks for ACP in [England](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) , together with other information. In England you can also sign up to the [ACP newsletter](#) to receive updates direct from HEE.

RCSLT
September 2019