

## Preface

In April 2021, a project group of 13 practitioners (both speech and language therapists and support workers) began work on this project.

### Project objectives

The group reviewed the proposed aim of the framework and suggested adding the following to the project objectives:

- To develop a competency framework to support equitable and consistent training, development and support.
- To offer clear, accessible career progression routes if support workers require them.
- To enable the recognition of the skills and experience that support workers offer SLTs, to enhance both the service and the patient/service user experience.

Health Education England's (now known as NHS England) [AHP Support Worker Competency, Education and Career Development Framework](#) gave impetus to the need to produce a speech and language therapy specific professional framework. Recognition needs to be given to the considerable work which had already been undertaken by NHS Scotland around pillars for learning and ongoing development for support practitioners.

This project has been a significant piece of work (more in-depth than any had anticipated). Throughout, the project group have been committed to producing a final framework which would reach and influence every service employing support workers and those who create roles in the future. This is not guidance to be put on a shelf and forgotten about.

RCSLT undertook a survey of speech and language therapists and support workers in Autumn 2019 seeking to establish the status quo around both the role and the learning and development of clinical support practitioners. RCSLT identified a need to provide guidance around competencies and development and re-visit the RCSLT services on offer to support workers.

The project group considered there was a risk at national level for a group of workers who are critically important to service delivery, as there was little in the way of coherent national guidelines for development of skills available at the start of the project.

Some of the issues considered have been controversial, with agreement that there are no easy solutions, for example the title of 'support worker'. There are many titles which reflect wildly different roles, service needs are such that there can be no consensus here. The term support worker has been utilised in this project to remain in line with the HEE framework.

The outcome of the project is a framework with its foundations with core competencies (based on the HEE Framework) extended into speech and language therapy specific clinical competencies. The term clinical has been used but can easily be adapted to meet the needs of services focusing on universal or educational needs.

This document introduces the support worker framework. It is a starting point. There is recognition that for most support workers, competencies will be acquired through work-based learning, and value needs to be placed on this. Even if funding for training is available (and it isn't everywhere) there are limited formal training opportunities available.

It has been a privilege to work with a unique group of 19 practitioners from across the UK and with a reference group of 90 practitioners. Even within the project group, the diversity of roles undertaken by support workers is considerable. The speech and language therapists in the project group agree that support workers have an evolving, complimentary role to therapists and that there are competencies which are specifically related and strongest in this job role. There have been emotive stories shared about difficult experiences around contributions not always being valued, alongside exemplary practice in both NHS and Independent services.

This is the beginning of a change which the project group envisages will be transformative.

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