



**Written evidence from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry into apprenticeship pathways**

**Executive summary**

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to the committee's inquiry on apprenticeship pathways. Our response addresses equity and access to support for learners and the role of Welsh Government in this space.

**Key points**

- Given the status of NHS Wales as the largest employer in Wales, it is essential that we exploit opportunities for apprenticeship pathways within this sector. This is particularly important for shortage professions.
- There is much learning from the rollout of healthcare degree apprenticeships in England which have been supported by Allied Health Professional (AHP) bodies.
- There is a huge potential to explore widening access routes such as apprenticeships for the speech and language therapy profession, as evidenced in our 2024 survey for speech and language therapy assistants.
- Current progress on this issue is slow following the publication of the Health Education and Improvement Wales report on healthcare degree apprenticeships in 2023.
- RCSLT Cymru and the Allied Health Professions Federation Cymru are calling for the introduction of apprenticeships for AHPs in our manifestos for the 2026 Senedd elections.

**About the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT)**

1. RCSLT is the professional body for speech and language therapists, SLT students and support workers working in the UK. The RCSLT has over 20,000 members in the UK (750 in Wales) representing approximately 95% of SLTs working in the UK (who are registered with the Health & Care Professions Council). We promote excellence in practice and influence health, education, care and justice policies.

2. Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) and Speech and Language Therapy Assistants (SLTAs) provide life-improving treatment, support and care for children and adults who have difficulties with communication, eating, drinking and/or swallowing.

### **The RCSLT position on apprenticeships**

3. The RCSLT actively supports the development of pre-registration speech and language therapy degree apprenticeships in Wales and across the UK. As a profession in short supply<sup>1</sup>, the apprenticeship is a valuable additional training route.
4. We know from data about current students that 60% start their degree course over the age of 21; it is a profession people often come to after some life experience. An apprenticeship has the potential to support mature students to learn while they work. We hope to also see widening participation from the apprenticeship route into a profession that is not currently diverse across many indicators such as gender, ethnicity or socio-economic<sup>2</sup>.
5. Currently in Wales, opportunities to train as a speech and language therapist are limited and restricted to two full-time undergraduate three-year courses in Cardiff Metropolitan University and Wrexham University. There are no part-time or postgraduate speech and language therapy preregistration courses. We believe given this context, the apprenticeship route may have particular appeal.
6. In Summer 2024, we held a survey with speech and language therapy assistants (SLTAs) across Wales to understand the degree of interest in undertaking training to become a registered SLT and views on current routes into the profession with a strong response rate.
  - **47%** of SLTAs would consider training as a speech and language therapist
  - **95%** of SLTAs interested in training to become an SLT said their preference for completing training would be via an apprenticeship or 'earn as you learn' model – an option currently unavailable.
  - **98%** said that if they undertook training to become an SLT they would want to work in Wales once qualified.

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<sup>1</sup> RCSLT (2025). State of the Nation report on the speech and language therapy workforce in Wales

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## Learning from England

7. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education approved an apprenticeship “standard” for speech and language therapy in England in 2019, which was updated in 2024 to reflect the new HCPC standard operating procedures from September 2023. We are delighted that three universities are so far working with employers to offer the apprenticeship in England, and more are interested in joining them. We believe there is potential to utilise this standard beyond England and urge that SLT preregistration apprenticeships are also developed in Wales to support a new route into the profession and to help address shortages in the profession in Wales. The profession, and potential new apprentices, have much to gain from this new additional route to qualification, and we are committed to supporting it across the whole of the UK.

## Situation in Wales

8. We and our wider Allied Health professional colleagues have been calling for consideration of apprenticeship routes for entry into professions for some time. We [responded](#) to the Health Education and Improvement Wales consultation on healthcare degree apprenticeships in October 2023. The consultation [report](#) included evidence from Colegau Cymru that the degree apprenticeships approved by Welsh Government to date in Wales have been focused on male-dominated areas. They argued that the introduction of healthcare apprenticeships, which disproportionately attracts female applicants, could help to readdress this balance. We have seen limited progress on degree apprenticeships since the publication of this report. RCSLT Cymru and the newly formed Allied Health Professions Federation Cymru are calling for the introduction of apprenticeships for AHPs in our manifestos for the 2026 Senedd elections.

## Further information

9. We hope this paper will be helpful in supporting the committee’s deliberations. We would be happy to provide further information if this would be of benefit. Please see below our contact details. **Dr. Caroline Walters, External Affairs Manager (Wales), Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists** [caroline.walters@rcslt.org](mailto:caroline.walters@rcslt.org)

## Confirmation

10. This response is submitted on behalf of The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists in Wales. We confirm that we are happy for this response to be made public.