

# RCSLT calls for the Senedd election in 2026

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists, speech and language therapy students and support workers working in the UK. The RCSLT has over 22,000 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.

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 speech, language and communication, eating, drinking and/or swallowing.

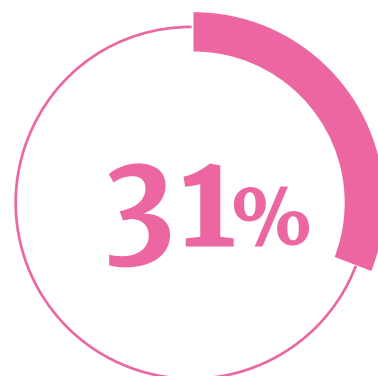
Ahead of the 2026 Senedd elections, RCSLT Wales has identified four actions that must be taken by political parties to ensure better lives for people with communication and/or swallowing needs and their families.

## 1. Ensure better lives for people with communication and swallowing needs by investing in the speech and language therapy workforce.

**It is acknowledged by Welsh Government that there is a shortage of SLTs in Wales.<sup>1</sup>**

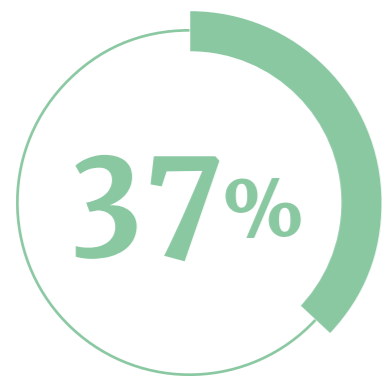
As our recent State of the Nation report<sup>2</sup> revealed, demand for speech and language therapy has grown significantly over the last decade for children and adults, including those with learning difficulties.

Population changes and need predictions mean this growth in demand will continue. There are calls for SLTs to expand into areas where there is significant unmet need, such as mental health, justice and intensive care.

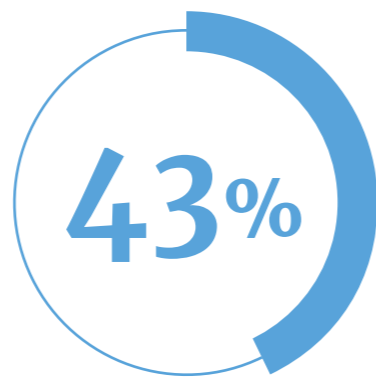


**The average number of children and young people on waiting lists has grown by 31% since April 2019.**

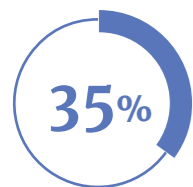
<sup>1</sup>First Minister of Wales (2024). First Minister's Questions, Plenary, Senedd Record of Proceedings 8 October 2024. <https://record.senedd.wales/Plenary/14139>. <sup>2</sup>RCSLT Wales (2025). State of the Nation report – the speech and language therapy workforce in Wales. [www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report\\_English-version-January-2025.pdf](http://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report_English-version-January-2025.pdf). <sup>3</sup>Stats Wales. Data derived from: Diagnostic and Therapy services waiting times by grouped weeks waiting, health board, hospital site and age group, from October 2009 onwards (reviewed August 2024).



The average number of adults on waiting lists has grown by 37% since April 2019.



The average number of people on learning disability waiting lists has grown by 43% since April 2019.<sup>3</sup>



35% of children in Wales with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) have speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN). SLCN is the most common type of learning need in Wales. This figure has increased by 17% since 2022.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the increase in demand, there are only **808** SLTs working in NHS Wales (**649** full time equivalent)<sup>5</sup> and we are only training **55** a year. Data published by Stats Wales shows that speech and language therapy is not keeping

up with the growth of the other Allied Health Professions (AHPs).<sup>6</sup> We are also not keeping pace with developments across the border in England where our membership data shows that the number of SLTs has **doubled** in the last decade.

**RCSLT Wales calls on the next Welsh Government to increase speech and language therapy training places annually and sustainable funding for speech and language therapy services to meet growing demand.**

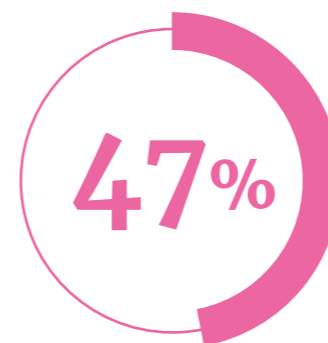
## 2. Widening access to the profession.

Currently in Wales, two, three year, full-time, pre-registration courses for speech and language therapy are commissioned at Cardiff Metropolitan University and Wrexham University. There are no part-time or two-year postgraduate courses available or more accessible routes into learning such as earn as you learn or apprenticeship schemes, as exist in other parts of the UK.

We are acutely aware that the lack of availability of other routes into the profession beyond the full-time, undergraduate course,

is affecting the diversity of the profession and the ability to meet population need. The limited routes into the profession also hinder the ability of local health boards to grow their own workforce.

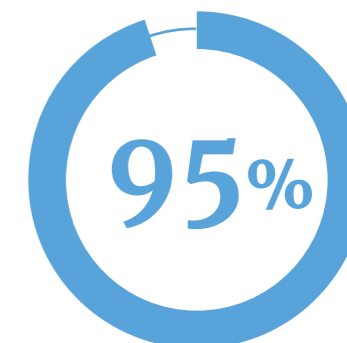
In summer 2024, we undertook a survey with speech and language therapy assistants (SLTAs) across Wales to understand the degree of interest in undertaking training to become a registered SLT and views on current routes into the profession with a strong response rate.



47% of SLTAs would consider training as a speech and language therapist.



98% said that if they undertook training to become an SLT they would want to work in Wales once qualified.



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.

**RCSLT Wales calls on the next Welsh Government to expand access to the speech and language therapy profession through routes such as degree apprenticeships.**

## 3. Workforce planning.

Our recent State of the Nation<sup>7</sup> report confirmed concerns about the lack of data around the composition of the speech and language therapy profession in Wales in terms of Welsh language competency, ethnic background, age and setting in which therapists and assistants work. This significantly impacts on the profession's ability to ensure that we represent the communities that we serve.

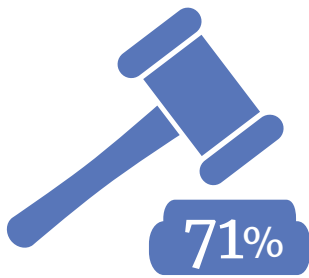
In addition to better data, we also urgently need to improve the workforce planning

process for the speech and language therapy workforce. We understand the importance of Integrated Medium Term Plan (IMTP) figures from local health boards to the process for determining commissioning numbers for professions but given planning processes and the requirement to work within current budgets, we are concerned that these figures do not fully take account of the future workforce needs for the profession and particularly the reality that many speech and language therapy work across sectors including education, social services and justice. These concerns are shared by our AHP colleagues.

**RCSLT Wales calls on the next Welsh Government to introduce a comprehensive national workforce strategy for SLTs and other AHPs in Wales.**

<sup>3</sup>Stats Wales (2024). Pupil level annual school census. <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Schools-Census/Pupil-Level-AnnualSchool-Census/Special-Educational-Needs>. <sup>4</sup>Stats Wales (2024). NHS Wales staff: other non medical staff by job type. <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/NHS-Staff/Non-Medical-Staff/othernonmedicalstaff-by-jobtype-areaofwork-year>. <sup>6</sup>Ibid.

## 4. Speech and Language Therapists in Youth Justice teams.



**71% of children sentenced in the youth justice system in England and Wales (Apr 19 - Mar 20) had SLCN.**

There is strong international evidence that speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are much more prevalent in the offending population than in the general population. The most recent statistics from the Youth Justice Board revealed that **71%** of children sentenced in the youth justice system in England and Wales (Apr 19 - Mar 20) had SLCN<sup>8</sup>. This compares to an estimated **10%** for children and young people as a whole.<sup>9</sup> The implications for a young person with SLCN within the youth justice service can be profound if needs are not identified and supported.

Despite a recommendation from the Senedd Equality and Social Justice Committee in 2023 in the '60% Giving them a voice' report<sup>10</sup> that; 'the Welsh Government should work with local authorities to develop plans for embedding speech and language therapists within every Youth Offending Team in Wales', there has been little progress on this issue.



**50%**  
**Only 50% of youth justice services in Wales have embedded SLTs.**

Only **half** of youth justice services in Wales have SLTs embedded within teams and many posts are subject to short-term funding from the Ministry of Justice. There are **no SLTs embedded within services within mid and North Wales.**

**RCSLT Wales are calling on the next Welsh Government to work together with the UK Government to ensure that SLTs are embedded within every Youth Offending Team across Wales.**

<sup>7</sup>RCSLT Wales (2025). *State of the Nation report – the speech and language therapy workforce in Wales.* [www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report\\_English-version-January-2025.pdf](http://www.rcslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/RCSLT-Wales-State-of-the-Nation-report_English-version-January-2025.pdf).

<sup>8</sup>UK Government (2020). *Assessing the needs of sentenced children in the Youth Justice System.* [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/assessing-the-needs-of-sentencedchildren-in-the-youth-justice-system](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/assessing-the-needs-of-sentencedchildren-in-the-youth-justice-system).

<sup>9</sup>Hartshorne, M (2006). *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication.* ICAN Talk Series, No.2. London: ICAN.

<sup>10</sup> Senedd Equality and Social Justice Committee (2023). *60% Giving them a voice – speech, language and communication needs in the youth justice system.* <https://senedd.wales/media/excbag12/cr-ld15786-e.pdf>.

If you have any questions about the content of this briefing, please contact **caroline.walters@rcslt.org**