



Summary of the consultation on the ‘Talk with Me: Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Delivery Plan 2020-21’

Report

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACE: Adverse Childhood Experiences

ALN: Additional Learning Needs

CCPLD: Children's Care Play Learning and Development (qualification)

EAL: English as an Additional Language

EY: Early Years

LA: Local Authority

SLC: Speech, Language and Communication

SLT or **SALT:** Speech and Language Therapy, or Speech and Language Therapist

CONSULTATION REPORT

INTRODUCTION

'Talk with me' is the Welsh Government's draft Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Delivery Plan 2020-21. It aims to drive improvement in the way in which children in Wales are supported to develop their SLC skills. Consultation on the strategy has taken place through two methods: (1) two regional stakeholder workshops held in Llandudno and Swansea during March 2020; (2) an online consultation between 30th January 2020 and 23rd April 2020.

There were a total of 158 responses: 107 from individuals participating in the stakeholder workshops and 51 responses to the written consultation. Of the written responses, one reflected the differing views of 26 staff members, each of whom were given a voice and vote on each question. These votes have all been included in the analysis within the tables.

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Question 1: helping parents

1a. Do you think our suggested actions to promote key SLC messages to parents will help them to understand their role in nurturing their child's early language development?

Table 1.

YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
159	11	11
88%	6%	6%

N=181

The vast majority of respondents agreed the approach will help parents.

Recommendations included:

- the need for a multi-faceted, accessible, bi-lingual national publicity and promotion campaign that offers clear, consistent messages and targets all family members and all stages of childhood
- a campaign that recognises the additional barriers faced by parents with SLC needs, BAME communities and digital exclusion
- effective joint working across agencies that allows for a national sharing of impact and effective practice.

Q1b. What more could the Welsh Government do to enable parents to engage with the SLC key messages?

Key recommendations are:

- the need for strategic planning and funding to build capacity and link the work to key policy areas
- the development of clear, consistent messages across agencies
- the provision of training and support across the early years' disciplines (in health and education)
- support for parents and the extended family to recognise SLC milestones and development phases
- incorporate SLC into the school curriculum to help inform future parents
- the importance of recognising and supporting parents with SLC needs; from non-Western cultures; and those that are hard to reach when disseminating messages.

There was disagreement about making SLC provision a universal support. It was agreed that it can help remove stigma but some respondents identified research that shows it can widen inequalities.

Question 2 – Demand for SLC services

Q2a. Do you think that the suggested activities (1.1 – 1.4) aimed at all parents could result in an increased demand for SLC services (such as speech and language therapy) due to increased awareness?

Table 2.

YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
146	19	16
81%	10%	9%

N=181

Whilst respondents overwhelmingly agreed that publicity would lead to increased awareness and demand, it was commonly qualified:

'I think if it is done right parents will seek support to help their child with SLC, but over time if all parties work with the child, including parents, then this will prevent speech therapy being needed, only when all other methods have not produced the expected outcomes'

It was seen as important that the campaign clarifies what parents, universal and community services can do.

Q2b. If the publicity campaign does increase demand for SLC service, what can be done to manage this?

Respondents recommended:

- strategic planning and joint working building on existing strengths
- locally produced SLC provision mapping
- providing short term funding to plug any provision gaps and longer term funding to build the workforce
- mapping out a clear provision ‘pathway’ approach so that SLC needs are addressed in universal provision and only the most serious needs are referred to SLT services
- exploring and developing effective community based initiatives that support families and provide easy access to advice, including building on Flying Start work
- improving the status and training of the ‘early years’ workforce
- further developing the Language, Literacy and Communication element of the new curriculum to meet SLC needs

Question 3 - Assessment approach

Q 3a. Do you think our suggested approach to improving the assessment of SLC in the early years will help facilitate better SLC outcomes for children and young people?

Table 3.

YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
143	6	34
78%	3%	19%

N=183

The majority of respondents agreed.

Recommendations that were made were:

- ensure the plan is clear about the difference between ‘screening’ and ‘assessment’
- be very clear about whether the plan is for universal screening or not – as noted above, respondents were divided on the value of this with concerns about raising parental concerns unnecessarily and adding to staff workload, being weighed against the benefits of early identification

- the WellComm toolkit is seen as a useful screening tool but there were concerns about the efficacy of the tool for some children, for example autistic children
- create a Welsh language screening tool
- develop/use a single screening tool across all sectors and across the stages of a child’s development
- any assessment of the Care Inspectorate of Wales’ training needs around early years’ language development should include Estyn (as they do joint inspections) and Welsh language provision
- provide parents with information on ‘normal’ development stages.

Q3b. Is there anything missing from our suggested approach to improving the assessment of the SLC in the early years that we need to include?

Recommendations included:

- a consistent approach to screening across Wales that sets out at what age it should start and how it should be prioritised and administered
- the work should add to current provision, not divert resources away from it
- broaden the membership of the Clinical Excellence Network (CEN) to include early language development officers to aid the strategic delivery of the SLC delivery plan
- a common (across agencies) screening tool that is holistic; linked to education phases; fully bi-lingual; supports EAL; and recognises differences in cultural norms (e.g. around play) – this may mean looking beyond WellComm
- develop joint working across agencies with adequate resourcing for workforces

Q.3c. Do you feel the WellComm screening tool is as effective as it could be? If not, how could it be improved?

Table 4.

YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
38	88	55
21%	49%	30%

N=181

A third of respondents were unsure about the effectiveness of WellComm. Its strengths were described as providing a good starting point and clear indications on how to progress in working with a child. The weaknesses identified are that it only allows for screening at a specific point rather than a process over time

(compromising accuracy); that it is not available in Welsh; it is less suitable for EAL children or those with other ALN; its language is not always child friendly and it relies too heavily on the experience of the practitioner and feedback from parents.

Recommendations included:

- if the WellComm tool is to be used nationally it should be accessible to everyone including childminders
- there should be national guidance on when screening should take place

‘Whatever tool is chosen it needs to be used across Wales to ensure consistency. If children move between settings or areas a national tool will support their transition.’

Respondents supplied a list of alternative tools that could be considered.

Question 4 – Upskilling the workforce

Q4a. Do you think our actions to upskill the workforce to address SLC needs will result in better identification of SLC issues?

Table 5.

YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
147	17	15
82%	10%	8%

N=179

The majority of respondents agreed.

Recommendations included:

- a focus on joint working, with SLC professional development opportunities extended across all relevant sectors and delivered face to face or online.
- enable childcare settings to access training by funding courses and backfilling staff and offering flexible provision
- provide qualifications for SLC at level 2 and 3 CCPLD courses, as well as level 4.
- provide greater detail on the delivery of workforce development within the plan
- ensure the developments meet the requirements of staff who work in the Welsh language and reflect the range of linguistic backgrounds of children in Wales.

Q4b. Do you think our actions to upskill the workforce to address SLC needs will result in more timely interventions being put in place?

Table 6.

YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
118	12	48
66%	7%	27%

N=178

Two thirds of respondents agreed, and many acknowledged the benefit of this in addressing needs.

Recommendations included:

- improvements to the infrastructure including investing in the existing workforce with suitable resourcing, levels and content of training; and ensuring commitment from all professions
- providing regular, repeated and followed-up SLC training to meet the needs of the changing childcare workforce
- if the early years workforce is being asked to complete SLC training and to take on greater responsibilities for interventions, this should be reflected in their remuneration.
- greater clarity about the mentoring arrangements for newly qualified (CCPLD) staff.
- practitioners in English language settings need training on how to present and support development of Welsh language skills with every child.

Q4c. Is anything missing from our plans to upskill the workforce to address SLC needs?

Respondents provided a range of answers covering workforce training and retention, approaches to practice, monitoring and evaluation and joint working.

Question 5 – Policy making

5a. Do you think we will be able to affect change and drive improvements in SLC in the early years through better policy making?

Table 7.

YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
132	6	41
74%	3%	23%

N=179

Around three quarters agreed this was possible.

Recommendations included:

- greater alignment of policies across related agendas
- adequate resourcing in terms of time, money and staff resources
- more guidance on how the Early Years Pupil Deprivation Grant (EYPDG) - relates to the Pupil Development Grant (sic)
- professionalise and fund the early years workforce
- funding for SLC within youth justice.
- use the Solihull Approach to address ACE's
- use a play-based approach to early years.

Q5b. Other than the ones specified, are there any other policy areas we should include in our plan?

A range of policy areas were highlighted for inclusion covering Health and Wellbeing, Maternity and Early Years, Education (including older children), Children's Rights, Equalities, Welsh and Community Languages, Strategic Planning Joint Working.

Question 6 – Clarity of information

Q6a/b. Is the information provided in the overview clear, if not how could it be improved?

Overall, respondents commented on areas which could be improved.

Recommendations included:

- more details are needed, for example on the publicity campaign, digitised key messages programme and logistics of each area (e.g. how SLC will be promoted and how training will be administered).
- more statistics need to be included such as data relating to the high risk of SLC for premature babies and data on the numbers of speakers of the different languages in Wales.

Question 7 – Additional objectives

Q7. Other than the four objectives contained in the delivery plan, are there any others we should include?

Respondents recommended objectives on:

- creating language environments to support SLC development, relating to home, early years and school settings
- auditing, milestones, outcomes, monitoring and evaluation arrangements for the other four objectives to capture outcome evidence
- prompting effective joint working
- Welsh language support and support for oracy in a monolingual, bilingual and multilingual context.

Question 8 – Impact on the Welsh language

Q8. We would like to know your views on the effects that the delivery plan to further promote and support SLC development throughout Wales would have on the Welsh Language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English. What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

Some respondents highlighted the potential positive effect of the delivery plan including the positive effects that bilingualism can have on a child's developing brain and the potential positive effects of promoting the Welsh language and a bilingual Wales.

Recommendations included:

- the need to embed references to Welsh Language throughout the delivery plan
- clarity on which policies in the delivery plan have been subject to impact assessment in terms of the Welsh language
- ensuring there are sufficient Welsh speaking SLTs and other relevant professionals to implement the delivery plan effectively
- ensuring all documentation and screening, assessment tools and resources are translated into Welsh, and the Welsh medium used for all key messages and publicity.

Question 9 – Using the Welsh language

Q9. Please also explain how you believe the proposed delivery plan to further promote and support SLC development throughout Wales could be formulated or changed as to have positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh Language no less favourable than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourable than the English language.

Recommendations included:

- consulting with the Welsh Language Commissioner on this issue
- ensuring more professionals have sufficient Welsh language skills through, for example, training Welsh language speakers in relevant disciplines, and promoting SLC courses to Welsh speaking students
- increase support for the Welsh Language amongst parents and children such as incentives for parents to learn Welsh alongside their children
- [In contrast to the question] prioritise other languages in areas of Wales where the Welsh language is less prominent (e.g. area specific approach based on levels of demand).

Question 10 – Other issues raised

Q10. We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them (Stakeholder workshop respondents were asked what key messages they wanted to report back to Welsh Government Ministers)

Respondents raised a wide number of issues, which largely reflected concerns raised throughout the report. Other points made, not appearing elsewhere were:

- How will the implementation of the activities be funded?
- Ensure SLC is a long term, funded and cross-department priority/ commitment to ensure sustainability.
- Don't 'educationalise' SLC. This issue is important across all sectors.
- Cross party agreement needed in the Senedd to ensure long-term commitment
- Focus on involving fathers in SLC in the early years.
- Limited detail of who will support the early years childcare providers that do not fall under the local authority funded schemes is concerning
- Consider the implications of rolling-out the activities in the rural areas of Wales.
- Focus on language – needs to include dysfluency.
- Be more directive in telling settings and schools to include SLC in their curricula.
- Introduce Communication Champions.

- There is a need to consider the use of IT and communication aids in this policy as well as all languages spoken, signed, picture and object referenced. A greater emphasis on reading is also needed.
- This is a great initiative for the early years. It would be beneficial to extend this approach up to age 25 in line with the ALN Bill.