

## **Talk With Me: Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Delivery Plan 2020-21**

### **Section 1. What action is the Welsh Government considering and why?**

The Welsh Government recognises that Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) development is an important predictor of later progress in literacy. Children's poor speech, language and communication skills have an impact on a wide range of outcomes including behaviour and mental health, 'school readiness' and employability.

That is why the Welsh Government has prioritised children's speech, language and communication skills as they are essential for positive long term outcomes.

Any child, irrespective of where they live or their family circumstances, might require additional support to address delays or difficulties with SLC. Our aim is to ensure that children throughout Wales have access to high quality, universal, targeted and specialist support in the early years – if required – to develop their SLC skills.

To progress this, we are exploring how we could take the learning from the speech and language therapy services within the well-established Flying Start programme and embed this good practice more widely.

We have developed a national delivery plan which aims to drive improvement in the way in which children in Wales are supported to develop their SLC skills. It has been developed in consultation with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) and the Flying Start SLC Clinical Excellence Network which has helped us identify the actions we need to take over the coming years.

There has been a cross Government, cross-sectoral approach (to include education, health and 'social' policy) that will help to engage families, and build upon existing policies and what works. It is recognised through [commissioned research](#)<sup>1</sup> that Wales does not need to invent a new model for delivery. Instead, there needs to be a strategic approach to make the current activities work across all settings in Wales.

### **Prosperity for all**

The national drive to promote the importance of SLC and in particular early language development aligns with the Early Years commitment in the Programme for

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<sup>1</sup> Study to map the current educational provision of speech, language and communication support in Wales, for learners aged 0-25

Government in ensuring that every child has the best possible start in life and are able to reach their full potential.

## **THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015**

The national delivery plan for SLC will contribute to the 7 well-being goals, in particular:

*A prosperous Wales* - Children who have acquired early language skills have a greater chance of achieving positive outcomes later in life such as a good standard of educational attainment, better mental health, greater employability potential and social equality.

*A healthier Wales* – We know from the evidence base available, that early language development needs to be prioritised as a child well-being indicator and treated as a public health issue.

*A more equal Wales* – Early language acquisition is a key component in creating a society that enables people to fulfil their potential irrespective of their background (including their socio economic background and circumstances).

*A Wales of cohesive communities* – A significant proportion of young people in the youth justice system and long-term unemployed young men have SLC needs. Promoting and supporting early language acquisition will contribute to creating attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.

*A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language* – Promoting early language development in the Welsh language will contribute to the strategy: *Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers*.

### **Five ways of working**

The national delivery plan for SLC has been developed with a strong focus on sustainability and the five ways of working.

We know from research that SLC issues, if not resolved in the early years, can store up problems for young people later in life. These can be inter-generational and we want to do more to break the cycle.

By promoting the importance of playing, engaging and talking with children in the early years to develop language acquisition, we intend to support parents with the skills and understanding that they will carry forward to future generations.

By identifying SLC needs as early as possible and putting in place timely interventions, we can help prevent problems escalating and children getting lost in the system.

By consolidating our existing policies into a delivery plan, we can look holistically at early language development and bring the system together to keep SLC at the forefront of our endeavours to make sure every child has the best possible start in life.

By working with experts in the field of speech and language therapy, we know that we can shape our national direction of travel for SLC, building upon the good practice we know exists in our local authorities as demonstrated through programmes such as the Flying Start and Families First.

We've undertaken surveys with SLC practitioners and parents to ensure our delivery plan reflects their views. In particular, we established from the feedback from parents that they would like to receive SLC key messages via a mixture of channels – digitally and through traditional resources. Our consultation will target practitioners and the general public through our Families First and Flying Start programme teams.

There is no evidence to suggest that we should not proceed with a delivery plan, on the contrary, professionals, such as the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists are supportive of this way forward, to help raise the profile of SLC. This has been underpinned by evidenced research that points to the importance of SLC for our society.

The delivery plan has a dedicated budget to deliver some of the activities around a national promotional campaign and to review SLC screening tools. The majority of commitments in the plan are being progressed and paid for under the individual policy portfolios such as Education and Health.

## **A. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**All** completed Children's Rights Impact Assessments must be sent to the [CRIA@gov.wales](mailto:CRIA@gov.wales) mailbox

### **1. Describe and explain the impact of the proposal on children and young people.**

It is widely recognised that a child's development in the early years is vital. This includes children's acquisition of Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) skills and oracy which underpins a child's ability to read and write and to problem-solve. Positive cognitive development is strongly associated with a child's success in school and entry into the workforce.

The consequences of not supporting children's early language skills, and not identifying long-term or persistent SLC needs are harmful to a child's life chances, impacting on their development, their wellbeing, their educational outcomes and possible job prospects.

Any child, irrespective of where they live or their family circumstances, might require additional support from a range of stakeholders to address delays or difficulties with SLC. Our aim is to ensure that all children throughout Wales have access to high quality, universal, targeted and specialist support in the early years – if required – to develop their SLC skills.

To progress this, we are exploring how we could take the learning from the speech and language therapy services within Flying Start and generic provision and embed this good practice more widely.

We have developed a national delivery plan which aims to drive improvement in the way in which children in Wales are supported to develop their SLC skills. It has been developed in consultation with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) and the Flying Start SLC Clinical Excellence Network which has helped us identify the actions we need to take over the coming years.

Officials have worked collaboratively on the delivery plan to ensure that we take a cross-sectoral approach (to include education, health and 'social' policy) that engages families, and builds upon existing policies and what works. The draft delivery plan aims to drive improvement in the way in which children in Wales are supported to develop their SLC skills.

The next step in this work is to consult on the proposed delivery plan with key stakeholders.

♦ ***How will the proposal affect the lives of children, positively and negatively?***

**The commitments in the draft delivery plan are most likely to have a positive and significant effect on children and families in Wales.** It is recognised that Wales does not need to invent a new model for delivery; it needs a strategic approach to make our current policies and activities work coherently across Wales to support children, their families and the practitioners that support them.

Our ambition is to do more to support children with SLC needs, particularly in the early years, and to build upon what we know works so that every child gets the best start in life. There are four key objectives to the draft delivery plan:

**Objective 1:** Raise Public Awareness – describes how we will reach parents with our key messages about the importance of talking, engaging and playing with babies and young children.

**Objective 2:** Improve the assessment of SLC in children (Early Years) – describes how we will standardise the assessment process, identify SLC issues early and ensure a timely intervention is put in place.

**Objective 3:** Upskill the childcare workforce and relevant health professionals in Wales to address SLC needs – describes how the childcare workforce will be highly trained and equipped with the skills to support interventions for children and families where there are identified needs in the development of SLC.

**Objective 4:** Embed SLC in Welsh Government policies – describes how we will review our policies and strategies to ensure they highlight the importance of SLC in the early years and beyond.

The draft delivery plan will focus on potential actions and/or commitments required of all key partners to ensure children and young people with SLC needs receive appropriate support in order to fulfil their potential regardless of their background.

By consolidating our existing policies into a delivery plan, we can look holistically at early language development and ensure all parts of the system work in harmony to keep SLC at the forefront of our endeavours to make sure every child has the best possible start in life.

- ♦ ***How will the proposal affect different groups of children (e.g. children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), children living in poverty, children with a disability, children living in Welsh speaking households and children in Welsh medium education etc.)***

**Under Objective 3 – Upskill the childcare workforce and relevant health professionals, a key action is to have** an online training package which is being developed for the SLC workforce to help them to be ACE aware and provide advice on working with people whose lives have been affected by ACEs.

SLC is already a core element of the Flying Start programme which is targeted at those families living in disadvantaged areas.

It is recognised specific skills are required for practitioners in Welsh-medium settings employing Welsh language immersion techniques. Training for practitioners working in Cylchoedd Meithrin to develop Welsh language immersion methodologies has been rolled out across Wales in 2019-20. Building on this, we will ensure workforce development is a key component of any further steps undertaken to strengthen Welsh-language immersion provision.

Supporting the development of SLC is essential to realise the four purposes of the new curriculum. Descriptions of learning for early oracy development, including the systematic development of phonological awareness, have been developed as part of the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience. The refined Literacy Framework will provide further detail regarding listening and speaking. Overarching guidance will support settings and schools to develop their

curricula and will include information on Accessibility and Additional Learning Needs (ALN).

♦ ***What evidence have you used to inform your assessment, including evidence from children or their representatives?***

By working with experts in the field of speech and language therapy, we know that we can shape our national direction of travel for SLC, building upon the good practice we know exists in our local authorities as demonstrated through programmes such as the Flying Start and Families First.

We've undertaken surveys with SLC practitioners and parents to ensure our delivery plan reflects their views. In particular, we established from the feedback from parents that they would like to receive SLC key messages via a mixture of channels – digitally and traditional resources. Our consultation will target practitioners and the general public through our Families First and Flying Start programme teams.

There is no evidence to suggest that we should not proceed with a delivery plan, on the contrary, we have been lobbied by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists to raise the profile of SLC. This has been supported by evidenced research that tells us we cannot ignore the adverse impact that poor SLC has on society, we also know that the other three countries in the UK are taking a stand to drive forward SLC.

♦ ***How have you consulted with children and young people? If you haven't, please explain why.***

Even though we haven't directly consulted with children in the early years (children aged 0-7) the Welsh Government continues to work constructively with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) in Wales to raise the profile of SLC in the early years and put in place measures to remove the barriers which prevent younger children from progressing with early language acquisition.

The RCSLT has told us that we need to take a fresh look at the way in which SLC support is offered and delivered across Wales to ensure that services are equitable and reach all children who may need help. These professionals are representing the needs of the children and their families.

The intention is that through broad consultation with all those working with children, we will agree a detailed delivery plan placing responsibilities on all areas of the system from SLC professionals to the Welsh Government.

**As stated above, we have previously consulted with key practitioners in the sector along with parents in a variety of ways, through the consultation on the new curriculum which has early oracy development and early language and**

skills for their future embedded throughout, to the consultation work around the Additional Learning Needs Act. We have also communicated with the sector through the development of the Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan.

♦ ***What other evidence would inform the assessment?***

It is recognised through commissioned research<sup>2</sup> that Wales does not need to invent a new model for delivery. Instead, there needs to be a more strategic approach to make the current activities work across all settings in Wales.

**2. Explain how the proposal is likely to impact on children's rights.**

As seen throughout the proposal, the consultation on the delivery plan for SLC involves a wide variety of stakeholders from Health, Local Authority, Education, Parents, Third Sector Organisations and Welsh Government. Following the consultation on the draft delivery plan all children and their families will benefit from the proposed ideas to support the development of SLC, leading to improved educational achievements, wellbeing and skills for the future.

Below is a table of the UNCRC articles that are most relevant to the above proposal.

Article Number	Description	Links to proposal
2	The Convention applies to every child without discrimination, whatever their ethnicity, sex, religion, language, abilities or any other status, whatever they think or say, whatever their family background.	The draft delivery plan is looking to explore how we could take the learning from the speech and language therapy services within Flying Start (targeted provision) and generic provision and embed this good practice more widely regardless of their background.
3	The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.	This draft delivery plan aims to drive improvement in the way in which all children in Wales are supported to develop their SLC

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		skills, the child is at the heart of this delivery plan.
<b>5</b>	Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and carers to provide guidance and direction to their child as they grow up, so that they fully enjoy their rights. This must be done in a way that recognises the child's increasing capacity to make their own choices.	<p>A key action within the delivery plan is to promote key messages to parents about the importance of talking, engaging and playing with children in the early years to develop language acquisition.</p> <p>We are also going to undertake a national publicity campaign which will signpost guidance and support for their child.</p>
<b>6</b>	Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential.	It is widely recognised that a child's development in the early years is vital. This includes children's acquisition of SLC skills and oracy which underpins a child's ability to read and write and to problem-solve. Positive cognitive development is strongly associated with a child's success in school and entry into the workforce.
<b>18</b>	Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their child and should always consider what is best for the child. Governments must support parents by creating support services for children and giving parents the help they need to raise their children.	A number of actions within the delivery plan focuses on the support given to parent and those practitioners working closely with children from various services.
<b>23</b>	A child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community. Governments must do all they can to support disabled children and their families.	A key action within the delivery plan is to ensure the childcare workforce and relevant health professionals in Wales are highly trained and motivated so that SLC support is provided to children at the right time and that interventions are monitored to ensure they are making a positive difference to the child's development including SLC training pathway for staff in the childcare workforce, aligned



		with descriptors from the ALN Act.
<b>24</b>	Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.	As above
<b>28</b>	Every child has the right to an education.	<p>As standard practice, the Welsh Government's policies and strategies will be subject to regular review to ensure, as far as possible, they highlight the importance of SLC in the early years and beyond.</p> <p>Within in this action the Welsh Government is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing an integrated approach to early childhood education and care (ECEC) which will be based on key principles of child development.</li> <li>• Developing materials for education practitioners on child development to support the implementation of the new curriculum.</li> </ul>
<b>30</b>	Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.	With regards to the Welsh Language or other languages within the home, the delivery plan seeks to improve practitioner's skills and provide parents with the support needed to develop their child's SLC in their chosen language.