

Professional development in speech, language and communication:

FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY



Executive summary

This report provides a detailed summary of the findings from a national survey into speech, language and communication (SLC) support for the children and young people's workforce. It is intended as a bank of evidence and source of detailed information for The Communication Trust and our Communication Consortium, as we plan future programmes of work, and will also be a useful resource for organisations supporting the workforce with SLC across a broad range of sectors.

The landscape within which the workforce operates has changed so significantly that it is essential for everyone who supports the workforce to have an up-to-date understanding of their needs. A raft of developments, including an increasingly autonomous schools' landscape, SEND reforms and an increased focus on childcare have led to profound changes for the workforce and their training needs and preferences will have been affected. We need to understand more about the issues in order to plan our programmes effectively. For these reasons, we decided to embark on a large-scale survey of the workforce, to gain a thorough understanding of their needs and to hear directly from them about the challenges they are facing.

We received over 1200 responses to the survey, with all regions of England covered, as well as every educational phase (early years, primary, secondary and further education) and also a range of roles in health and youth justice. Across sectors, respondents were both qualified and unqualified. We publicised the survey extensively and our consortium was fundamental to this. The sample was self-selecting but the number of responses provides credibility to the conclusions.

The findings in their entirety are important, and will have particular relevance for different audiences, but a number of key findings stand out and are worth emphasising.

CROSS-SECTOR FINDINGS:



LACK OF BUDGET AND TIME were highlighted as the top two barriers to accessing opportunities, with a lack of suitable opportunities emphasised as the next obstacle



ONLY A THIRD OF RESPONDENTS FEEL VERY CONFIDENT supporting speech, language and communication development



Two thirds of respondents had **HAD LITTLE TO NO INITIAL TRAINING** in identifying and supporting SLCN



Around half of respondents had had **LITTLE OR NO TRAINING IN SLC**



ONLY 4% FELT THEY HAD SUFFICIENT TRAINING



SUPPORTING PARENTS was widely highlighted as a key area for training



RESPONDENTS FAVOURED FACE TO FACE TRAINING over online opportunities and at the least preferred 'blended' learning approaches that combine face-to-face and online elements

SECTOR SPECIFIC FINDINGS:



ALMOST 60% OF HEALTH VISITORS had little or no training in SLC



70% of early years respondents felt that **LACK OF BUDGET WAS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT BARRIER THEY FACED**



ONLY 25% of respondents from the primary sector felt very confident in their ability to support SLC development; a third had had no initial training



An even higher proportion (**ALMOST HALF**) of respondents from the secondary phase had had no initial training in SLC. A third of teachers across sectors had had no training in SLC



A very high proportion of respondents from the FE sector felt that there were **NOT ENOUGH RELEVANT OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE**



The youth justice sector had the **LOWEST LEVELS OF CONFIDENCE** in their ability to support speech, language and communication accompanied by a very strong acknowledgement of its importance to their role

Clearly, these findings provide an extremely valuable insight into the extent of expertise within and attitudes of the workforce. Some of the findings are very concerning – for example, the high numbers of staff in schools and early years settings who have not had any training – and others demonstrate how we need to shift our thinking to adapt to a changing landscape. Health visitors, for example, are a crucial source of support for SLC and SLCN in the early years but they need adequate opportunities to develop the expertise that is essential.

We also held a seminar with key academic, sector and practitioner representatives where we discussed the findings in detail and developed recommendations which the expert attendees felt would address the issues raised in the responses. The recommendations which are included in this report are consistent with the policy proposals we have promoted as a sector and will provide a framework for our future influencing work.

During 2017/18 we will develop sector specific briefings to set out how the findings should be followed up and to develop the recommendations further – we will involve the workforce and our consortium and partners in this follow up work. The findings presented in this report are also drawn upon in our forthcoming Talking About A Generation report, which provides further analysis of the background to the recommendations included. They are also a source of information for the 2018 *Bercow – Ten Years On* review.

Key recommendations which these findings support include:

- Working with Ofsted to ensure school and early years reports better reflect SLC and SLCN provision, so that its importance is clear and good practice is highlighted
- Ensuring that all SLC and SLCN training includes working with parents and ensuring that nationally this is reflected in relevant strategies as this is a key concern across the workforce
- Promoting the use of the Pupil Premium (PP) and Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) before to support SLC and SLCN and share best practice examples
- Working with the DfE to set out what should be included on SLC and SLCN in initial teacher training
- Ensuring that workforce support provided across the consortium is delivered in such a way that it meets the practical needs of the audience
- Continuing to raise concerns about the budget constraints the workforce is facing in developing the skills to support all children and young people and especially the disadvantaged.

We look forward to working in partnership to develop the recommendations further.

