

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Y 1,000 diwrnod cyntaf | First 1,000 Days

FTD 23

Ymateb gan: AFASIC CYMRU

Response from: AFASIC CYMRU

1. About Afasic Cymru

- 1.1. Afasic is the UK charity representing children and young people with speech, language and communication needs, working for their inclusion in society and supporting their parents and carers.
- 1.2. Afasic is a member organisation that includes parents, young people with speech and language and communication needs, professionals and others who support us. Afasic Cymru was launched in response to devolution and celebrates its fifteenth anniversary this year.
- 1.3. Our vision is of a society which embraces 'communication' as a basic human right, and where all children and young people up to the age of 25, with speech, language and communication needs, get the support they require to achieve their potential and participate fully in society.

2. Information about speech, language and communication needs

2.1 Why are speech, language and communication important?

Speech, language and communication are fundamental life skills and key to the fostering of life chances. Speech, language and communication skills underpin literacy, learning in school and college, socialising and making friends, and are crucial for employment prospects and understanding and regulating emotions or feelings.

2.2 Who needs support?

Many young children struggle to communicate. Some individuals have temporary or transient communication needs, and others have more persisting needs. A speech, language and communication need (SLCN) may be associated with environmental factors, general developmental needs, medical needs, learning disability, or be unexplained without an obvious cause in an individual where other skills are developing in a typical pattern.

Where difficulties with acquiring speech and language skills arise due to reduced developmental opportunities limiting the child's learning of language –these reduced developmental opportunities are commonly linked to social disadvantage. The links between social disadvantage and speech, language and communication needs run in both directions. Reducing the impact of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) reduces the impact of poverty.

UK wide population studies have shown that approximately 10% of all children have persisting speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) which may present as a child's main difficulty or it may be associated with other conditions.

2.3 What type of support is needed?

A child with SLCN may need support to:

- understand what they hear/read
- learn and remember words, and put words together to make sentences
- be understood and articulate speech clearly
- talk and interact appropriately in social contexts

A child with SLCN may have some or all of the above needs; each individual is different.

2.4 Identification

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) may be difficult to spot at an early stage and the nature of the difficulties can change over time. If parents, carers and professionals are not sure what to look out for, instead of recognising the underlying SLCN, people may see children showing poor behaviour, or having difficulties learning or socialising with others.

2.5 Impact

A speech, language and communication need (SLCN) may affect a child's ability to understand, take part in early conversations, manage their emotions, ask simple questions, learn through play, and develop early reasoning.

Children with SLCN typically experience emotional and behavioural difficulties. Some children and young people may become withdrawn or isolated.

Persisting SLCN can cut across the whole of an individual's development. There is evidence from population-based studies that SLCN puts children at risk of a wide range of long term consequences in terms of literacy, school performance, mental health, employment and independence.

3. Cross-cutting relevance

3.1 Our evidence relates across the terms of reference looking at the focus on improving learning and speech and language development through the home learning environment and access to early years' provision, and touching on tackling child health inequalities and supporting effective child development and emotional and social well-being.

3.2 Speech, language and communication skills are fundamental to the wellbeing of all children. A cohesive and cross-sectorial approach is needed by the Welsh Government, drawing together policy areas, to enable a meaningful impact on the life chances of children and young people with speech, language and communication needs in Wales.

3.3 The way that speech, language and communication cuts across policy areas and portfolios was recognised by the People and Work Unit in (as yet unpublished) research commissioned in 2016 by the Welsh Government. This research sought to map the various speech, language and communication support initiatives and developments across education, health and social services in Wales.

3.4 In November 2016 we were pleased to receive an assurance from the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Kirsty Williams that the above report from the People and Work Unit was being finalised for publication on the Welsh Government website. The report may assist the Children and Young People's committee in the addressing the terms of reference of this and other consultations.

4. Speech and language and social disadvantage

4.1 We highlight two recommendations from the All Party Parliamentary Group on speech and language difficulties that examined the links between speech, language and communication needs and social disadvantage:

- There should be a comprehensive programme of initial and post qualification training for all relevant practitioners in relation to children's communication needs.
- Systems for monitoring and responding to the development of children's communication skills over time should be improved.

https://www.rcslt.org/governments/docs/all_party_parliamentary_group_on_slcn_inquiry_report

4.2 We are pleased that the Flying Start programme now includes a detailed guidance document on speech, language and communication.

<http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/cyp/150529-guidance-on-speech-en.pdf>

4.3 Although we are also pleased that a speech and language therapist should now be employed in every Flying Start Team in Wales, we are concerned about the variability of allocation and capacity causing inequalities across Wales.

4.4 We are aware that embedding recommended speech and language guidance across Wales may take time and depend on staffing levels and expertise. We have been contacted by a few Flying Start teams in relation to accessing speech and language training and have been pleased to offer our support in raising awareness and promoting the professional learning of childcare practitioners.

4.5 We remain concerned about the capacity of speech and language therapy and support services to support parents in communities *outside* Flying Start areas across Wales and the existing inequalities in service provision.

5. Early years provision.

4.6 We reiterate the importance of implementing a comprehensive universal programme of initial and post qualification training for all childcare practitioners in relation to children's speech, language and communication in the first 1000 days, and not exclusively to Flying Start areas.

4.7 The accurate and anticipatory assessment of a child's developmental needs is critical to ensure timely support strategies, learning approaches and intervention.

4.8 The importance of all professionals being aware of how to identify early language delays and what to do about it is highlighted by Professor James Law in The Five Language Specific Principles cited in Early Language Delays in the UK (2013).

<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/news/documents/Lawetal2013EarlyLanguageDelaysintheUK.pdf>

References

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- iv. The Better Communication Research Programme: Improving provision for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (2012)
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