

**Written evidence submitted by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists**  
**(PRI0027)**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists is pleased to provide a submission to the Justice Committee.
- 1.2. Due to the high prevalence of speech, language and communication needs and other complex needs in the prison population, the entire prison workforce must have an understanding of these vulnerabilities and how to respond to people with these needs.
- 1.3. Whilst positive progress has been made with the inclusion of speech, language and communication needs and autism into the Unlocked Graduates programme, not all prison staff enter prisons via this route.
- 1.4. There is a strong case for making changes to the basic training so that all newly recruited prison officers receive training on the vulnerabilities that many people present with including speech, language and communication needs.
- 1.5. There is also a case for providing all existing staff with the knowledge and skills on the vulnerabilities that they will encounter and reviewing this at regular interviews.

**2. About the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT)**

- 2.1. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists is the professional body for speech and language therapists working across the United Kingdom. The RCSLT currently has around 20,000 members. We promote excellence in practice, provide leadership, set professional standards and influence health, education and justice policies.

**Response to the questions**

**3. How effective is the initial training, professional supervision, and continuous professional development provided to prison staff?**

- 3.1. Evidence suggests that over 60% of people in prisons have speech, language and communication needs (Bryan, 2004, Bryan, 2007) (McNamara, 2012) and that these are higher than in the general population. Many conditions which are strongly associated with language and communication difficulties, such as learning difficulties, autism and psychiatric conditions, are very prevalent in the adult prison population (Bryan, Adults in the Prison Population, 2021).
- 3.2. However, despite the prevalence of these vulnerabilities, prison staff receive limited training on speech language and communication needs and other vulnerabilities.
- 3.3. Nationally, the RCSLT is aware of the following provision:
  - Prison officers joining through the Unlocked Graduates programme now receive 2 x 1hr sessions on autism and speech, language and communication needs.
  - Dr Alexandra Lewis developed a face-to-face training package on autism for the prison officers induction programme.
  - The RCSLT has been working with the Ministry of Justice to get *The Box: communication help for the justice system training* embedded onto the My Learning internal intranet.
- 3.4. In prisons where there are employed speech and language therapist, the prison staff will receive additional training on speech, language and communication needs and other vulnerabilities:
  - AT HMP Polmont the staff receive a 2-hour awareness session co-delivered by SLT and SPS Inclusion Officers.

- HMP Pentonville are trialling the national Neurodiversity Support Managers role. This role provides training to prison staff on autism, ADHD, trauma, learning disability and developmental language disorder (DLD).

3.5. However, elsewhere, there are significant gaps in the training and continuous development provided to prison staff around complex needs and vulnerabilities.

#### **4. Do the prison officers have the tools and support they need to carry out their roles effectively? If not, what do they need?**

4.1. Prison staff work with people with extremely complex needs, and they are not equipped with the tools, skills or strategies to support these people effectively. Prison staff need practical training and support to recognise and support people with speech, language and communication needs and other vulnerabilities, given that over half of the population are likely to have needs in this area.

4.2. The impact of speech, language and communication needs on prison staff and the prison environment is immense (RCSLT, justice factsheet, 2023). Where people cannot understand others and cannot express themselves, this can manifest as:

- Behaviour that challenges
- Disruptive, aggressive and violent behaviour
- Self-harm
- Increased use of physical intervention and restraint
- Segregation

4.3. Screening processes in prisons are ineffective, and there is no nationally used screening tool for communication needs. This has resulted in massive gaps in identification. Prison staff are therefore unaware of how to best engage with and support a person.

4.4. All prison staff need to have the knowledge and skills on the vulnerabilities that they will encounter, such as speech, language and communication needs and how to respond to these.

**4.5. The RCSLT recommend that training on speech, language and communication needs, and other vulnerabilities, must be embedded into prison staff training. We recommend that is part of prison staff induction and as part of their ongoing training and development. Training must also be reviewed at regular interviews.**

4.6. Prison staff would benefit from being able to speak to a professional who can support them to develop their skills, knowledge and flexibility in approaches in working with people with complex vulnerabilities. All prison staff would benefit from access to a speech and language therapist for advice, guidance and support.

4.7. There has been increased provision of speech and language therapy in prisons across the UK over the last 10 years. Evidence demonstrates the benefits of such provision (Chief Medical Officer, 2012; Coles et al., 2017; Snow et al., 2017; N. R. Swain, 2017; Nathaniel R. Swain et al., 2020; K. Turner et al., 2019; Woodward et al., 2019).

4.8. Where speech and language therapy is present, this informs what specific adjustments and tailored support need to be made to guide prison staff and support the person.

**4.9. In the absence of a speech and language therapist in a prison, this mandatory training on the identifying and responding to vulnerabilities is even more important.**

4.10. It is worth noting that the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists has received an increasing number of enquiries from prison staff and prison governors to find out more about communication needs. We developed a training package called the Box to provide prison staff with practical strategies to better respond to, and support individuals, with speech, language and communication needs <https://www.rcslt.org/learning/the-box-training/#section-3>

Submitted by Claire Moser, on behalf of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.

*January 2023*