



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government Integrated Impact Assessment Summary

Title of proposal:

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

Department:

Education and Public Services - Children and Families Division

Cabinet Secretary/Minister responsible:

Julie Morgan AM, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services

Start Date:

30 January 2020

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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](#)¹ 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.

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

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 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.

Conclusion

How have people most likely to be affected by the proposal been involved in developing it?

The draft delivery plan has been developed in consultation with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and the Flying Start Speech Therapy Clinical Excellence Network. These two highly respected stakeholder groups reflect the interests of the people and diverse communities they serve. We know that Flying Start is making a difference to the lives of families who live in disadvantaged areas where SLC delay and difficulties are more prevalent in the early years.

The public consultation we are about to undertake will be targeted at groups who support children who have early language difficulties for example: ALN coordinators in schools.

The cross-Government policies which are included in the delivery plan have been agreed with the relevant Ministers and lead policy officials in the Welsh Government. There has been a focus on the Welsh language to reflect the Welsh Government's strategy to increase the numbers of Welsh speakers (Cymraeg 2050). Existing policies in the delivery plan have already been subject to impact assessments – where appropriate - or are scheduled for further assessment.

Children in Wales representatives are involved in the Flying Start and Families First network and have been engaged in discussions about the development of the delivery plan.

Working with our networks has ensured that views of people with protected characteristics have been considered however, we will target the various groups in our national consultation which will provide us with further feedback to inform the final version of the delivery plan.

What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

The publication of the delivery plan will raise further the profile of speech, language and communication and the importance of early language acquisition. Through early engagement with professionals in the field, namely Speech and Language Therapists and Flying Start early years' practitioners we have collaborated to develop a delivery plan which consists of 4 important objectives (or themes):

Objective 1: Raise Public Awareness

Outcome 1: Parents² will be better informed and equipped to understand the importance of Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) in their child's early years.

Objective 2: Improve the assessment of SLC in children (Early Years)

Outcome 2: We will identify early signs of SLC needs and ensure that we deliver appropriate interventions universally at the point of need.

Objective 3: Upskill the childcare workforce and relevant health professionals to address SLC needs

Outcome 3: The childcare workforce and relevant health professionals in Wales 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

Outcome 4: The Welsh Government will ensure that relevant policies and strategies reflect the importance of SLC from the early years and beyond. All future policy initiatives will encompass an aim to support citizens in Wales to address adverse issues around SLC, where they are identified.

The fourth objective has been developed by an internal policy stakeholder group and agreement has been sought to continue to collaborate across Ministerial portfolios to ensure SLC remains in the spotlight as a key priority for the Welsh Government.

7 well-being goals

The national delivery plan for SLC will contribute to the seven 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.

² The collective term parents is used throughout the document however, this does include foster carers and adoptive parents/guardians.

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.

Increased publicity around speech, language and communication and the importance of early language development may result in some unintended consequences. As parents may become better informed about early language acquisition they could become worried, sometimes unnecessarily, about minor delays in their children's language development. This could result in an increase in demand for support services and put pressure on resources.

Taking the good practice from the Flying Start SLC teams and embedding it more widely across Wales could also place a greater expectation and pressure on services outside of Flying Start. To transition to an equitable service built upon the standards set by Flying Start may require further investment, particularly in training for existing staff.

Work to improve the assessment of SLC in children (Early Years) could take some time to bear fruit. At present all 22 local authorities in Wales take a slightly different approach in screening young children for language development. It will take time to map how and why each local authority adopts a different approach to screening and we will need to reach a consensus on the most appropriate way forward. This could include a consistent model to use across Wales. Without such a model it could mean that there is a greater difficulty in achieving a system for benchmarking with meaningful data to monitor progress nationally.

There is a risk that unless robust programme board governance is put in place to ensure the delivery plan is implemented effectively the initial impetus may fade. This could result in a lack of progress being reported leading to criticism by key stakeholders.

In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal:

- **maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals; and/or,**
- **avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?**

The SLC delivery plan has been based upon the Welsh Government's commitment that every child has the best possible start in life and is able to reach their full potential. As part of the work undertaken to produce the delivery plan and to agree the commitments going forward the Welsh Government's well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals have been reflected.

Why is language development important? Positive early language and literacy development can give children a window to the world, helping to ensure that each child can seize his or her potential for future success. During the first 3 years of life, the brain undergoes its most dramatic development and children acquire the ability to think, speak, learn and reason.

The delivery plan's key objective is to amplify the core messages to parents about talking with your child from the very beginning. A national publicity campaign providing advice and tips to parents will increase awareness and encourage additional support. This will ultimately benefit children in Wales by increasing their chances of being able to learn from the earliest age possible and enable them to better access the school curriculum.

From the information available to them, parents will know when and where to seek help in cases where a child appears to have delays or difficulties with SLC. Early intervention is vital and using our improved assessment procedures of children's language needs, our highly trained professionals will be able to provide the appropriate levels of support throughout Wales.

We will work with our networks of professionals including Health Boards to put in place measures to mitigate the impact of a potential spike in demand for SLC services as a result of increased publicity. We will take the lessons learned from previous campaigns around mental health which resulted in an increase in demand for services.

As part of our plans to embed the good practice developed by Flying Start SLC teams more widely, we will examine how we can make SLC an integral part of our Early Years Integration Transformation Programme. Our commitment to the Early Years is outlined in [Prosperity for All: the national strategy](#). Pathfinder Local Authorities taking part in our Early years Integration Transformation Programme have the opportunity to build on the successes of existing programmes such as Flying Start, Families First and the Healthy Child Wales Programme, the work being undertaken to test different approaches/models to support the development of a more integrated and responsive early years system in the area, will be instrumental in informing our thinking on what a national framework for early years transformation may look like, ensuring families receive the support they require at the right time and in the right way. This integration is essential if we are to achieve our ambition to give every child the very best start in life.

To take forward improvements in the way in which children's SLC needs are assessed, we have established a working group from the Flying Start Clinical Excellence Network and we will work with researchers to understand the steps we must take to develop a screening tool available in both English and Welsh language.

We will establish a Programme Board which will include key stakeholders to ensure robust progress monitoring is in place to ensure the delivery plan is implemented and tangible results are reported.

How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?

The necessary programme governance will be put in place to ensure that all partners discharge their responsibilities in delivering the commitments in the final plan following consultation. Regular progress updates will be provided to relevant Ministers to ensure this important work remains firmly in the spotlight.

We will commission a progress reports at regular intervals following the publication of the delivery plan. The review will be used to inform future plans.