

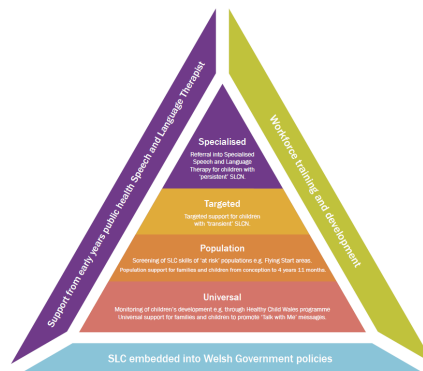


'Talk with Me'



The Welsh Government published its Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Delivery Plan in November 2020 (<https://gov.wales/talk-me-speech-language-and-communication-slc-delivery-plan>). The cross-government delivery plan aims to ensure that children throughout Wales have access to high quality, universal, targeted and specialist support in the early years to develop their SLC skills. This cross-cutting plan is the first of its kind in the United Kingdom.

The plan was developed in consultation with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) and key stakeholders to identify what works to support children with SLC needs (SLCN) and identify future actions.



The delivery plan consists of 5 objectives:

Objective 1: Raising Public Awareness: describes how parents and carers will be reached with key messages about the importance of talking, engaging and playing with babies and young children.

Branding has been devised for the key messages and a communications plan is being developed in order to ensure parents and carers are better informed and equipped to understand the importance of speech, language and communication (SLC) in their child's early years so that they can provide language rich home learning environments for their children.

Objective 2: Improve the identification of SLCN in children aged 0 to 4 years 11 months: describes how the assessment process will be standardised and SLC issues will be identified early.

Work has started to review early identification tools in English and develop a suitable tool for the Welsh language. Standardising the identification process for children aged 0 to 4 years 11 months will ensure children are signposted to the right person, in the right place, at the right time.

Objective 3: Provide evidence-based interventions: ensure timely, evidence-based interventions are implemented for children with identified needs.

Interventions relating to parenting, infant mental health and SLC will be reviewed and published. This will help to ensure that appropriate, evidence-based SLC interventions will be offered at the point of need in order to improve SLC skills and reduce the risk of SLCN impacting on children's development and wellbeing.

Objective 4: Upskill the childcare, health and social care workforce 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.

Bilingual training videos have been developed for practitioners and inspectors. A training pathway for SLC competencies is being developed and The Communication Trust online short course is being adapted into the Welsh context and translated into Welsh. This will help to ensure that the childcare, health and social care workforce in Wales will be highly trained and equipped with the skills to support children and families where there are identified needs in the development of SLC skills. This will ensure that children receive appropriate support from the people closest to them.

Objective 5: Embed SLC in Welsh Government policies: describes how policies and strategies will be reviewed to ensure they highlight the importance of SLC in the early years and beyond.

National SLC Co-ordinators have contributed to working groups on 'Enabling Pathways' (Early Years curriculum) and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) quality framework. Early years funding streams have been supported to ensure SLC is considered in their spending.

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. This will help to spread the message that SLC is 'everyone's business'.

Ministers and officials have worked collaboratively on the SLC delivery plan and this will continue throughout the implementation process in order to ensure that children from all backgrounds have the best start in life and are supported to reach their potential.

How have Welsh Government acknowledged the impact of Covid-19 on children's SLC development?

Welsh Government has acknowledged the significant impact that the Covid-19 pandemic may have had on children and young people's development, particularly in relation to their speech, language and communication skills.

Welsh Government set up a Child Development Fund which was distributed to Local Authorities. The Child Development Fund targeted support to address the following identified needs as a way of supporting children and families recover from the impacts of extended lockdown measures during the course of the pandemic:

- The development of fine and gross motor skills.
- Social and physical development.
- The development of speech, language and communication.

Funding for workforce development of Speech and Language Therapists working for the NHS and in independent practice, resulted in 105 SLT's becoming accredited Hanen 'It Take Two To Talk' tutors; 30 SLTs becoming accredited Hanen 'Learning Language and Loving It' tutors; 18 SLTs becoming Elklan 'Working with 0-3's' Tutors and 5 SLTs becoming Signalong Tutors.

Funding was provided to each of the Health Boards and the three highly specialist SLT services in Wales to support them to purchase resources and training to manage the anticipated increased demand on services.

Additional Covid recovery funds were used to embed SLC in wider early years system work, such as the Early Intervention foundation maturity matrix being adapted for Welsh context (<https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/eif-maturity-matrix-maternity-and-early-years>) and the Care Aims approach being piloted in two areas of Wales.

Welsh Government acknowledges that there is a need to put children and young people at the centre of the recovery plans, include those children and young people in the design of policies and invest in supporting them to overcome the effects of the pandemic to achieve immediate, long-term and intergenerational benefits.