
Speech, Language and Communication Workshop

Key Speaker: National Lead Marie Gascoigne

Friday 13th October 2017

On Friday 13th October 2017, a number of stakeholders met for the fourth time in order to further consider how to improve access to Speech, Language and Communication Services. The majority of the attendees were representatives from providers of health and education. There was one representation from the Parent/Carer forum and a school based setting (a Multi Academy Trust). Given that it is widely acknowledged that Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) impacts on health and wellbeing, educational progress, employability beyond school and that there is a high prevalence of SLCN amongst young offenders it was agreed that it is important to look at ways to increase active participation from all stakeholders in this project.

During the introduction to the day it was acknowledged that this project:

- Has started at a time when there is a national drive towards joint commissioning of services.
- Is being undertaken at a sensitive time in Devon as the process of re-procurement of some children's and young people's services has begun. As a result, all providers present were encouraged to put aside organisational differences and drivers in order to focus on establishing how to '(a) promote the well-being of children or young people in the area who have special educational needs or a disability, or (b) improve the quality of special educational provision'.
(Legislation.gov.uk. (2014). *Children and Families Act 2014*. [online] Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted>).

In theory, the results of this project could help to inform both of these aspects and ultimately improve outcomes for service users through ensuring that the service is needs led, sustainable and effective.

Marie Gascoigne, an expert on speech, language and communication needs policy and its implementation at national, regional and local levels was the key speaker and facilitator. In recent years Marie has supported over 20 Local Authorities and NHS Commissioners to audit, analyse and improve commissioning of services and their delivery.

In order to ensure everyone had a shared understanding of the national context for speech, language and communication needs Marie provided an overview of legislative developments, reports, recommendations and examples of good practice. A key message within her presentation was that it is essential to ensure that provision and support is based on needs rather than demand. This necessitates:

- Establishing and analysing a baseline of population need across the county in order to inform the level and type of support that is necessary for prevention, early help and intervention
- Regularly reviewing this information in order to ensure that needs remains the driving force rather than demand.

Within her presentation Marie explained that the method she employs is a theoretical and evidence based whole system approach and framework known as the Balanced System[®]. This system provides a 'map' to consider the current provision in addition to audit tools to evaluate the findings and identify areas for improvement. It aims to help 'improve the commissioning and delivery of services which benefit from an integrated approach to delivering outcomes' (<https://www.thebalancedsystem.org/>).

Key features of this system include:

1. Ensuring that the follow key components are in place in order to deliver appropriate and effective outcomes for Children and Young People (CYPs).



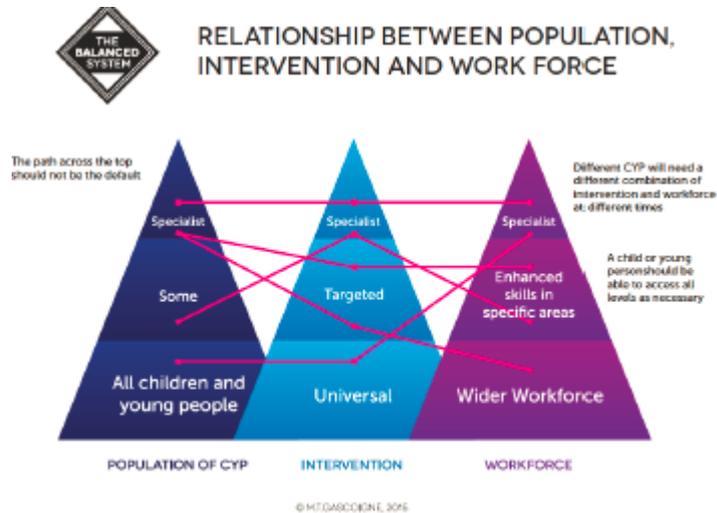
2. Ensuring that within all 3 tiers of provision (universal, targeted and specialist) the following aspects are all addressed and supported:



THE BALANCED SYSTEM[™] SPECIFICATION LEVELS

Children and young people & their parents and carers	• Are supported with appropriate information and skills to enable them to be proactive in making choices and in supporting speech, language and communication skills.
Environments	• In which children and young people spend time for learning and leisure are communication friendly and have the appropriate enhancements and adaptations.
Workforce	• Using specialist knowledge and expertise to build skills in the wider workforce in order to ensure that speech, language and communication skills are appropriately supported across universal, targeted and specialist tiers.
Early Identification	• Is efficient and accessible systems enable early identification of speech, language and communication needs, including training of others to identify and providing pre-referral advice within community settings.
Intervention	• Is appropriate and timely, which may include direct or indirect work with individuals and groups of individuals, delivered in the most functionally appropriate context relative to specific need.

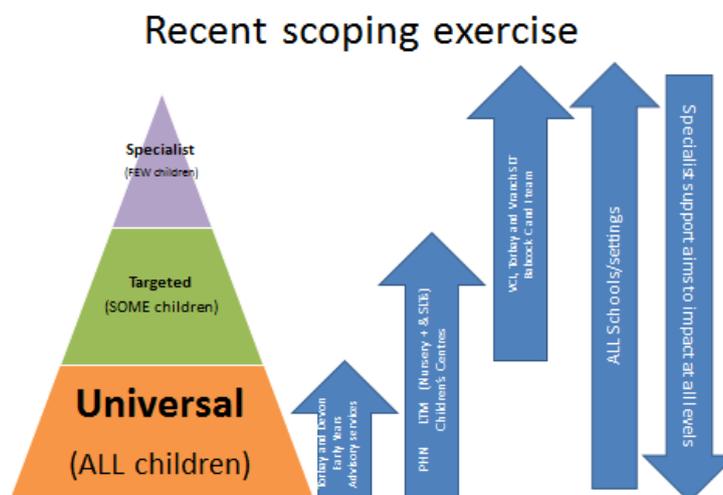
- Ensuring that the relationship between population, intervention and work force is carefully considered at all levels in order to ensure that it is appropriate for each individual CYP. This will enable the right intervention to be provided at the right time for the right reason by the most appropriate person ie a shared responsibility.



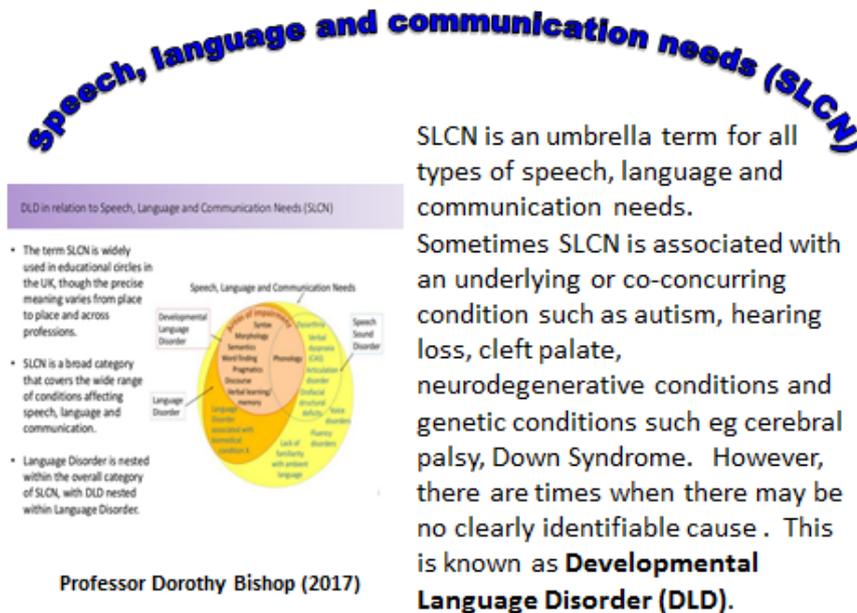
Please see attached for further information regarding the Balanced System.

A brief overview, based on the evidence provided through the initial mapping exercise undertaken in July in addition to the information provided by a number of providers from health and education across Devon, South Devon and Torbay was shared and discussed. Some of the key aspects focused upon included:

- Acknowledging that there are a range of providers that work across and within the separate unitary authorities in Devon.

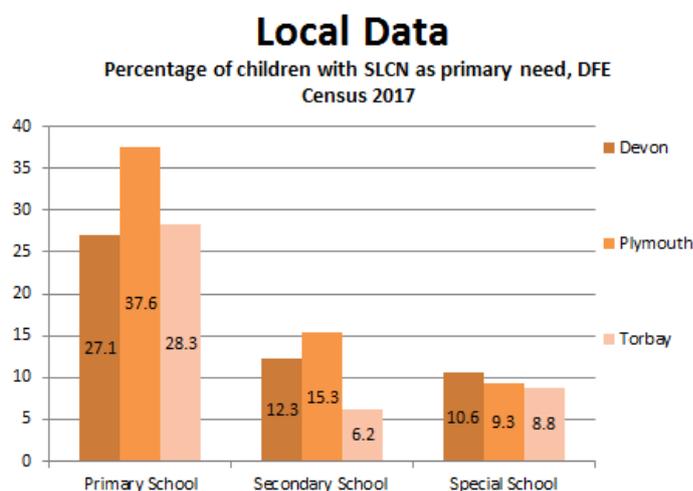


- b) Recognising there is potential for confusion and misunderstanding amongst practitioners and parents/carers regarding the definition of SLCN, the roles of the different agencies/organisations that could be involved, their referral criteria/how and when to access them.



- c) Appreciating that at present every setting has access to screening tools within the Graduated Response Document, however, it is unclear as to how many schools/settings are routinely referring to them to help identify CYPS with SLCN and to inform effective universal provision. As a result, concerns have been raised regarding the potential disparity between the known prevalence of SLCN and the actual number of CYPS identified within Devon. Questions have been raised regarding potential misidentification by practitioners/parents possibly because a focus has been placed on the symptoms being displayed by the CYP rather than understanding the potential underlying cause. It was agreed that failure to identify CYPs appropriately and in a timely manner has the potential to adversely impact on the life chances. For National evidence relating to identification see https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/540327/tct_talkingaboutageneration_report_online.pdf.

- d) Concerns have been raised regarding information sharing during periods of transition (particularly between key stages). Questions were raised regarding why there is such a substantive difference between the percentage of primary and secondary school children identified with SLCN as their primary need.



- e) It was acknowledged that a number of training packages are currently on offer within/across Devon from the different providers, however, there appears to be some duplication and possible gaps. Questions were raised regarding the potential for facilitating ways to develop and deliver joint training between health and education. It was widely recognised that in order for the training to be needs led it would be beneficial to undertake a survey to establish confidence and competence levels within settings. This would also enable commissioners to be able to compare local and national data. See **Communication Trust (2017) Professional development in speech language and communication: Findings from a National Survey.** https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/526748/1_tct_workforce_development_report_final_online.pdf
- f) It was agreed that the Local Offer is an important tool for both parents and practitioners, however, it is a much underused resource. Questions were raised regarding how to ensure it is easy to access, navigate and that it contains relevant and appropriate information.

Janet Kennedy (Head of Service and Professional Lead, Speech and Language Therapy Virgin Care Limited Devon Integrated Children's Services) and Charlotte Child (Clinical Manager for the Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust) presented information regarding referrals to their services. Whilst this information provided an overview of the current referral numbers in both local authorities it was not possible to undertake a direct comparison just based on the data provided; further information would be required.

Finally, the participants were asked to contribute to an action plan based around the following 3 areas:

1. Integration of services
2. Access
3. Information giving and education/training.

The workshop concluded with all participants agreeing that the Accessing Communication Services project is an opportunity to collectively:

- Evaluate the current provision in Devon
- Establish an accurate overview of need across the locality
- Agree how to:
 - Support ability to identify and meet need across all 3 tiers of provision
 - Provide effective workforce development opportunities
 - Enable parents/carers and CYPS to understand the services available and make informed decisions.

It was also agreed that in Devon it is imperative that funding is used to 'increase impact and avoid duplication of effort...allocating resources to follow need and not on historical patterns of spending'

(https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/540327/tct_talkingaboutageneration_report_online.pdf).