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**Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response**

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<b>Pwnc / Subject:</b>	<b>Response re Talk with me Phase 2: Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Delivery Plan 2026-2030</b>

**Background information about Estyn**

Estyn is the Office of His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. As a Crown body, we are independent of the Welsh Government.

Our principal aim is to raise the standards and quality education and training in Wales. This is primarily set out in the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, we must give regard to the:

- Quality of education and training in Wales;
- Extent to which education and training meets the needs of learners;
- Educational standards achieved by those receiving education and training in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers, including whether the financial resources made available to those providing education and training are managed efficiently and used in a way which provides value for money;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

Our remit includes (but is not exclusive to) nurseries and non-maintained settings, primary, secondary, special and all age schools, independent schools, pupil referrals units, further education, adult community learning, local government education services, work-based learning, and initial teacher training.

We may give advice to the Welsh Parliament on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, we have set three strategic objectives:

- Provide accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales;
- Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government;
- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

This response is not confidential.

## Response

### Introduction

Estyn broadly supports the direction of the proposed *Talk with Me Phase 2: Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Delivery Plan 2026 to 2030*. The extension of the programme to include children aged 5 to 11 is a positive and necessary development, recognising that speech, language and communication are fundamental to learners' access to the curriculum, well-being and long-term outcomes.

The emphasis on a preventative, whole-system approach is particularly welcome. Positioning SLC as a shared responsibility across education, health, childcare and social care reflects the complexity of children's needs and aligns with wider policy priorities in Wales. The focus on universal and targeted support, alongside workforce development, has strong potential to improve consistency and equity of provision.

However, the success of the delivery plan will depend less on its strategic intent and more on the clarity, coherence and rigour of its implementation. In particular, there is a need to:

- define clear expectations for schools and settings, especially within statutory education
- ensure consistent, high-quality workforce capability across sectors
- embed robust evaluation and accountability mechanisms
- guarantee parity and quality in Welsh-medium and bilingual provision

Without these, there is a risk that the programme's expanded scope, particularly into statutory education, may not translate into consistent improvements in learner outcomes.

Overall, Estyn supports the principles of the policy. With stronger emphasis on implementation discipline, evaluation and system coherence, the plan has strong potential to improve outcomes for children and young people across Wales.

### Key messages and policy considerations:

- The extension to ages 5–11 is essential to address gaps in provision beyond early years and improve continuity of support

- Implementation clarity is critical: schools and settings require explicit expectations, practical guidance and exemplification
- Workforce capability is the single most important enabler and must be prioritised across all sectors, including Initial Teacher Education
- Evaluation and impact measurement are underdeveloped and should be strengthened as a core objective
- Welsh-medium and bilingual provision must be systematically embedded, with parity in tools, training and interventions
- Alignment with Curriculum for Wales, ALN reform and well-being policy must be explicit and operationalised
- System capacity (workforce, resources, access to expertise) will determine whether ambitions are deliverable in practice

### Consultation questions

**Question 1: Do you agree with the statement - the name Talk with Me Phase 2 is helpful and relevant to cover the extension of this work to children aged 5 to 11.**

**If not, can you suggest an alternative?**

**Agree**

**Additional comments, please include suggested name changes here:**

The proposal to retain the “*Talk with Me*” branding provides helpful continuity and builds on an established and recognised programme across Wales. This is likely to support engagement from stakeholders who are already familiar with the approach and its focus on promoting speech, language and communication (SLC) in the early years.

However, while the term “*Phase 2*” signals progression, it may not fully convey the significance of extending the programme into statutory education and the distinct contexts of children aged 5 to 11. There is a risk that the programme may continue to be perceived primarily as an early year's initiative, potentially limiting its impact within schools.

Overall, Estyn supports the intention to build on an established programme but encourages Welsh Government to ensure that the naming clearly signals the expanded focus on school-aged children and the role of education settings in delivering improved SLC outcomes.

**Question 2: Do you agree that the suggested approach to raising awareness of the importance of speech, language and communication (SLC) (objective 1) will help facilitate better SLC outcomes for babies and children?**

**Agree**

**Additional comments:**

Estyn agrees that raising awareness of the importance of speech, language and communication (SLC) is a critical component in improving outcomes for babies and children. Increasing understanding among families, practitioners and children themselves has the potential to support earlier recognition of needs, more consistent support, and stronger alignment between home and educational settings.

Estyn agrees that where practitioners and leaders have a clear understanding of the role of oracy and communication in learning, they are better able to design environments and experiences that promote language development across the curriculum. Similarly, engaging families in understanding typical language development and how to support it can strengthen continuity between home and setting, which is particularly important in the early stages of development.

The proposed actions, including national publicity campaigns, practitioner-facing resources and alignment with Curriculum for Wales, are appropriate mechanisms to support this aim. The inclusion of messaging around the impact of screens and technology is also timely and reflects emerging concerns about their influence on children's communication and wellbeing.

**Question 3: Do you agree that the suggested approach to improving the identification of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) (objective 2) will help facilitate better SLC outcomes for babies and children?**

**Agree**

**Additional comments:**

Estyn agrees that strengthening the identification of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) is essential to improving outcomes for babies and children. Earlier and more consistent identification increases the likelihood that appropriate support is provided at the right time, helping to prevent needs from escalating and reducing longer-term impacts on learning and wellbeing.

The proposed focus on reviewing current assessment arrangements and exploring evidence-based identification tools is appropriate. Where there is variability in how practitioners identify emerging needs, this can lead to inconsistent support and delays in intervention. A more standardised and evidence-informed approach has the potential to improve equity and ensure that children's needs are recognised across different settings and contexts and at an earlier stage.

The intention to align identification processes across sectors, including education and early years, is particularly important. Effective identification relies not only on tools, but also on practitioner knowledge, confidence and professional judgement. Where practitioners are well-trained and supported, they are more likely to notice subtle indicators of need and respond appropriately.

However, to ensure the proposed approach is effective, it will be important that identification processes are proportionate and do not create unnecessary administrative burden for practitioners. Tools and approaches need to be suitable for use in both Welsh and English, including in bilingual contexts. Where children are identified as requiring support this should lead directly to timely and appropriate actions. In addition, practitioners across all sectors will need to receive sufficient training to use tools consistently and interpret outcomes accurately.

Overall, Estyn supports the proposed direction. Improving identification is a key lever for improving outcomes, but its success will depend on strong implementation, workforce capability and clear links to effective intervention.

**Question 4: Do you agree that the suggested approach to improving support for those with SLCN (objective 3) will help facilitate better SLC outcomes for babies and children?**

**Agree**

**Additional comments:**

Estyn agrees that strengthening access to effective, evidence-based universal and targeted support for children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) is a key factor in improving outcomes. The emphasis on ensuring that support is delivered at the point of need, rather than relying solely on specialist services, aligns with a preventative and inclusive approach.

Where schools and settings provide strong universal provision, such as language-rich environments, effective modelling of communication, and structured opportunities for oracy, many pupils benefit without requiring specialist intervention. In addition, targeted interventions, when implemented consistently and monitored effectively, have a positive impact on learners' progress.

The proposal to review and strengthen the availability of evidence-based interventions for children aged 5 to 11 is important. Historically, there has been greater emphasis on early years provision, and extending this focus into statutory education has the potential to address the gaps in support for this age range of pupils.

Estyn would suggest that there is clarity around what constitutes effective universal and targeted provision in schools and settings and that support is accessible in both Welsh and English, including Welsh-medium and bilingual settings. There should also be clear mechanisms to monitor the impact of interventions on pupils' progress with teachers and staff being supported through professional learning to implement interventions suitably.

Overall, Estyn supports the proposed approach. Strengthening support at universal and targeted levels is likely to improve outcomes for many pupils provided that implementation is supported by strong professional learning and robust evaluation of impact.

**Question 5: Do you agree that the proposed actions to upskill the workforce to address SLCN (objective 4) will result in better identification of, and support for SLCN?**

**Agree**

**Additional comments:**

Upskilling the workforce across education, childcare, health and social care is a critical enabler for improving both the identification of and support for speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

The proposed actions, including strengthening pre-registration training, developing sector-specific professional learning, and providing accessible resources for practitioners working with children aged 5 to 11, are appropriate and well aligned with the ambition to embed a whole-system approach. In particular, extending training beyond the early years into statutory education is an important and necessary development.

Estyn would encourage consideration on how professional learning in SLC aligns with wider priorities, including literacy, ALN reform and wellbeing, to avoid fragmentation and ensure coherence across initiatives.

Overall, Estyn supports the proposed actions. Strengthening workforce capability is likely to have a direct and positive impact on both early identification and the quality of support provided to children with SLCN.

**Question 6: Do you agree that the suggested approach to embedding preventative SLC support across Wales (objective 5) will help facilitate better SLC outcomes for babies and children?**

**Agree**

**Additional comments:**

Estyn agrees that embedding a preventative, whole-system approach to speech, language and communication (SLC) support is likely to improve outcomes for babies and children. The emphasis on cross-sector collaboration particularly across education, health, social care and related services reflects the complex and interconnected nature of SLC development.

Estyn would like to stress the importance of services and practitioners working cohesively, with a shared understanding of children's needs. Where this is successful support is more timely, consistent and effective. Strengthening links with areas such as mental health, literacy and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) is particularly important, as SLC is closely linked to learners' well-being, access to the curriculum and longer-term outcomes.

Estyn agrees that the focus on universal and targeted provision, alongside a preventative model, is appropriate. However, successful implementation will depend on clarity of roles and responsibilities across sectors, effective communication between services, and ensuring that practitioners are sufficiently equipped to deliver this support in practice.

Overall, Estyn supports the proposed approach, recognising that a well-coordinated, preventative system has the potential to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for all learners.

**Question 7: Other than the 5 objectives currently suggested in the consultation document, are there any others we should include? Please provide suggestions in the comments box below.**

**Yes**

**Additional comments:**

Estyn considers that a sixth objective focused explicitly on evaluation, impact and accountability is essential to the success of the delivery plan.

While the current objectives focus appropriately on awareness, identification, support, workforce development and system alignment, there is insufficient emphasis on how impact will be measured, monitored and used to drive improvement over time.

This should include:

- clearly defined national and local success measures
- expectations for schools and services to evaluate impact on learner outcomes
- mechanisms for ongoing data collection and analysis
- arrangements for sharing effective practice and scaling what work

Without a strong evaluation framework, there is a risk that the plan will not generate robust evidence of impact or support continuous improvement across the system.

**Question 8: Other than the proposed actions contained in the consultation document, are there any others we should include? Please provide suggestions in the comments box below.**

**Yes**

**Additional comments:**

Estyn considers that there are a small number of additional actions that could strengthen the proposed approach and support more consistent implementation across Wales. This includes strengthening guidance for schools and settings on what effective universal SLC provision looks like in practice, including examples of language-rich environments and high-quality interactions. Consideration should also be given to developing clearer links with assessment and progression frameworks, to support practitioners in understanding how SLC development aligns with Curriculum for Wales expectations. There is also the need to consider how best practice could be shared to support improvement across the sectors.

**Question 9: What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of the proposed objectives in the consultation document, to further promote and support SLC development throughout Wales, on the Welsh language? We are particularly interested in any likely effects on opportunities to use the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English.**

- **Do you think that there are opportunities to promote any positive effects?**
- **Do you think that there are opportunities to mitigate any adverse effects?**

**Supporting comments:**

The proposed plan has significant potential to support the Welsh language, particularly through early identification and effective support that enables children to develop strong communication skills in Welsh.

However, this positive impact is not guaranteed and will depend on the extent to which Welsh-medium and bilingual provision is fully embedded and resourced from the outset.

There are clear risks if this is not addressed, including:

- limited availability of high-quality Welsh-medium assessment tools and interventions
- variability in practitioner confidence in supporting SLC through Welsh

- potential inequity in access to timely and appropriate support

To mitigate these risks, Estyn recommends that Welsh Government:

- makes parity between Welsh and English provision an explicit requirement
- ensures all tools, training and interventions are available simultaneously in Welsh and English
- embeds bilingual language development and assessment within all workforce development activity
- works closely with Welsh-medium providers to co-construct contextually relevant approaches

A stronger and more explicit focus on the Welsh language throughout the objectives would help ensure equity, consistency and alignment with national language priorities.

**Question 10: In your opinion, could the proposed objectives in the consultation document, to further promote and support SLC development throughout Wales, be formulated or changed so as to:**

- **have positive effects or more positive effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English; or**
- **mitigate any negative effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English?**

**Supporting comments:**

Estyn suggests that the proposed objectives could be strengthened by making expectations around the Welsh language more explicit throughout the document, rather than implicit. This would help ensure that Welsh-medium and bilingual provision is fully embedded from the outset, rather than considered as an additional element.

Welsh Government may wish to explicitly reference the need for parity between Welsh and English in all tools, interventions and resources. This should also include clearer expectations around supporting bilingual language development and assessment, particularly for practitioners working in Welsh-medium settings. Consideration needs to be given to ensuring that workforce development includes a specific focus on SLC in Welsh and bilingual contexts. Making sure that SLC support is fully accessible and effective in Welsh is essential to promoting equity and supporting learners in their SLC needs.

**Question 11: In your opinion, could the proposed objectives in the consultation document be formulated or changed so as to promote positive effects, or reduce any negative effects, on children's rights? Please provide suggestions in the comments box below:**

Estyn agrees that the proposed objectives align well with children's rights, particularly in supporting children's ability to express themselves, access education and participate fully in learning and social contexts. These could be strengthened further by making children's rights more explicit across all objectives.

Welsh Government may want to consider making clearer reference to the UNRC within each objective, particularly the right to be heard and access appropriate support. This includes ensuring that children's views are actively sought and reflected in the design and evaluation of SLC support. Consideration also needs to be given to strengthening expectations around equitable access to support, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. The guidance should also emphasise the importance of timely identification and intervention, to prevent children's rights being compromised through delayed support.

These refinements would help ensure that children's rights are not only acknowledged but actively embedded in the design and delivery of the programme.

**Question 12: We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:**

Estyn supports the overall direction of the proposed delivery plan and its emphasis on a preventative, whole-system approach to speech, language and communication (SLC). In addition to the points raised above, there are a small number of broader considerations that may strengthen implementation and impact.

There would be value in ensuring continued clarity around how this programme aligns with existing policy priorities, particularly Curriculum for Wales, Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reform and wider well-being strategies. Clear alignment will help avoid duplication and support coherent implementation across settings.

Consideration may also be given to how expectations for schools and settings will be communicated, including what constitutes effective practice in supporting SLC across different age groups.

It will be important to ensure that sufficient capacity exists across the system to deliver the proposed ambitions, particularly in relation to workforce development, access to appropriate resources, and the availability of support in Welsh and English.

**Anonymity**

**Responses to the consultation may be published. Your response will be anonymous. However, if you would like your name to be published alongside your response, please insert an x in the box.**

**I agree to my name being published alongside my response to this consultation.**