
Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response

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Background information about Estyn

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

Estyn's principal aim is to raise the standards and quality education and training in Wales. This is primarily set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, Estyn 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 education and training providers in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

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

Estyn may give advice to the Assembly on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, Estyn has 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 strongly agrees that ensuring all children throughout Wales have access to high quality specialist support in the early years is essential to develop their speech, language and communication skills (SLC). The information provided in the draft delivery plan provides a purposeful rationale for the need to refine the SLC support across Wales, in order to ensure greater consistency and equity in the support provided for all children. The plan also provides useful information for all stakeholders and builds on current good practice from across all sectors. The draft delivery plan highlights appropriately the potential actions and/or commitments required of all key partners to ensure children and young people with SLC needs receive appropriate support in order to fulfil their potential.

Estyn agrees with the suggested actions to promote key SLC messages to parents. This will help them to understand their role in nurturing their child's early language development. It is important for parents and carers to access support and guidance on how to support the language development of their children from birth. It is Estyn's view that these key messages should be strengthened further through multi-agency working, for example by including SLC screening at the 15 month health visitor family health review. This would help to reinforce the important role parents and carers have in developing their children's SLC from birth and help identify issues which may need specialist support.

We support a national approach to the assessment of children's SLC needs across Wales as this would help to achieve greater consistency and strengthen early needs identification. Alongside early identification, it is essential that all practitioners receive appropriate support and training to deliver the interventions in order to improve SLC outcomes for children. Estyn agrees that any future SLC screening tool needs to be made available bilingually to meet the needs of all children. It is also important for the distinct nature of each language to be considered, including how children develop language for in bilingual or multilingual homes and settings.

Estyn agrees that upskilling the workforce to be able to identify children's SLC needs early and to implement appropriate support is a priority. Practitioners need to develop a good understanding of SLC development and in particular, how to vary the support required at different stages of a child's development. The proposal also correctly identifies the specific skills required by practitioners in Welsh-medium settings employing Welsh language immersion techniques. It is important that training for this sector continues to be supported by Welsh Government, to ensure that practitioners are equipped to deliver the proposed increase in Welsh-language provision.

The proposal recognises the importance of aligning the SLC delivery plan with the objectives of Welsh Government's 'Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers' strategy. In particular, it recognises the need to upskill the current workforce who work in the Welsh medium sector as well as informing parents of how to support their children's Welsh language skills. However, it is important that practitioners and parents should have access to support and advice from specialists, such as speech and language therapists, through the language of their choice. This is key to ensuring that there is equality in the provision for SLC support across Wales. The availability of trained staff to support Welsh medium education provision is essential in order to provide targeted support and intervention for children who attend these settings.

Consultation questions

Title: Talk with me

Speech, Language and Communication (SLC): Delivery Plan 2020-2021

Consultation:

Question 1(a): Do you think our suggested actions to promote key SLC messages to parents will help them to understand their role in nurturing their child's early language development?

Yes	No	Don't know
Yes		

Additional comments:

Estyn strongly agrees that ensuring all children throughout Wales have access to high quality specialist support in the early years is essential to develop their SLC skills. It is also important that parents and carers can access support and guidance to enable them to support the language development of their children from birth. It is therefore essential that SLC advice and guidance are explicit in all parenting support materials, such as Welsh Government's 'Parenting Give it Time' (PGiT) campaign and the proposed Public Health Wales' suite of parental information resources. We recommend that these key messages should be strengthened further through the Healthy Child Wales Programme (HCWP), including prioritising SLC at the 15 month health visitor family health review. This would help to reinforce the important role parents and carers have in developing their children's SLC from birth and help identify issues which may need specialist support. The continued delivery of the Time to Talk, Play and Listen campaign is also important to encourage them to take time to talk, play and listen to their children to help their language development and communication skills during their early education. However, it is important for practitioners in schools and non-maintained settings to receive the necessary support and guidance to engage fully with parents and carers on SLC development. A good example of effective practice in ensuring strong parental involvement in non-maintained settings can be found [here](#). Borras Park Infants School Early Education has strong partnerships with parents and carers, which helps children to settle in quickly at the setting. Parents and carers are especially appreciative of the home visits undertaken prior to their child starting at the setting, which allows them to engage in meaningful conversations about their child.

The Welsh Government's 'Cymraeg for kids' provides useful information for parents and carers who wish to know more about the importance of developing their children's Welsh Language Skills. However, this needs to be aligned fully with Welsh Government's 'Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers' strategy and in particular its aim to '*provide our children with the best start in the language by expanding support for families to transmit the language in the home*'. It is essential, therefore, that Welsh Government engages with all key stakeholders to ensure that all parents and carers throughout Wales have access to support and guidance to support their children's Welsh language skills.

Question 1(b): What more could we do to enable parents to engage with the key SLC messages?

Research shows that providing interventions universally to all families can serve to widen rather than narrow inequalities (for example, Mol and Bus, 2011). Therefore, interventions and support for parents should be targeted appropriately and be proportionate to those who need it most, rather than universally.

Mol, S. E. and Bus, A. G. (2011) 'To Read or Not to Read: A Meta-Analysis of Print Exposure From Infancy to Early Adulthood', *Psychological Bulletin*, 137 (2), pp. 267–96.

Question 2(a): Do you think that a publicity campaign aimed at all parents could result in an increased demand for SLC services due to increased awareness (such as speech and language therapy)?

Yes	No	Don't know
Yes		

Question 2(b): If the publicity campaign does increase the demand for SLC services, what could be done to manage this?

Estyn believes that an approach such as that outlined below could be considered to help meet the increase in demand for SLC.

Following our recent inspection of Flintshire County Council's Local Government Education Services, inspectors reported on the local authority's effective practice in relation to supporting language development in non-maintained settings and schools. Flintshire local authority has developed an integrated approach to Language Development, which offers services and support at a universal, targeted and specialist level. Close collaboration between the local authority's Language Service (CLASS), the English as an Additional Language Service (EAL) and Speech and Language Therapists (SALT) from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has ensured positive outcomes within mainstream and specialist settings.

More information on the effective practice case study can be found on Estyn's website [here](#).

Question 3(a): Do you think our suggested approach to improving the assessment of SLC in the early years will help facilitate better SLC outcomes for children and young people?

Yes	No	Don't know
Yes		

We support a national approach to the assessment of children's SLC needs across Wales as this would help achieve greater consistency and help to identify children's needs early. This will enable suitable targeted intervention to improve children's speech and language skills, which underpin their ability to learn to read and write and to gain access to the curriculum. Alongside early identification, it is essential that all practitioners receive appropriate support and training to deliver the interventions in order to improve SLC outcomes for children.

A review of the current screening programme currently used in the Flying Start programme and in non-maintained settings and schools should include the views of key stakeholders, including Estyn. Estyn agrees that any future SLC screening tool needs be made available bilingually to meet the needs of all children.

The draft delivery plan notes that an assessment of Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) level of training needs in respect of inspectors' knowledge of children's early language development will be undertaken. However, as Estyn and CIW now conduct joint inspections of non-maintained settings that offer early education entitlement, we would welcome involvement in this development. This will ensure consistency in our approach to the inspection of children's SLC skills in these settings.

Question 3(b): Is there anything missing from our suggested approach to improving the assessment of SLC in the early years that we need to include?

Research into early language development emphasises that, although there is evidence that the rate at which children develop language is sensitive to the amount of input they receive from the adults around them, the quality of input that children receive is likely to be more important than the quantity. Therefore, we would suggest this is an important consideration for objectives 1 and 3 in the delivery plan.

In addition, the proposed delivery plan, 'Activity 2.3' on p.11 (Welsh Government, 2020) implies a 'single' approved screening tool will be used to assess children's abilities in English and in Welsh. This may not take into account well enough the distinct nature of each language, or how language develops for children in bilingual or multilingual homes and settings.

Question 3(c): Do you feel the Wellcomm screening tool is as effective as it could be?

Yes	No	Don't know
		Don't know

If not how could it be improved?

Our inspection evidence shows that most local authorities use a range of assessment tools to help settings and schools to assess children's early language skills. Our inspectors report on how well practitioners use such assessments to help identify children's needs and to plan the next steps in their learning. Research by Law et al (2017, p.4) identify the challenges of measuring a child's developing language and communication skills because the milestones we expect children to reach span a variety of domains, such as 'babble', 'gesture', 'vocabulary' and 'sentence complexity'. Many assessments (for example, Wellcomm) provide a general sense of a child's communicative abilities in overall scores, rather than sub-scores within each domain. This makes it difficult to identify precisely which aspects of language a child might be struggling with. This should be a consideration when identifying an assessment tool.

An additional complexity is the need to account for children who perform poorly on assessments of language abilities because they speak Welsh or English as an Additional Language (W/EAL). We suggest careful consideration be given to children with Welsh or English as an additional language when taking forward this delivery plan.

Given sufficient exposure to English, the vast majority of children with EAL will catch up with their peers (McKean et al, 2015). However, in the preschool years many will perform poorly on assessments of English Language ability.

In addition, Outcome 2 on p.11 and the subsequent 'key action' to ensure assessments 'are undertaken at the right time' presupposes there is a 'right time' to assess children for possible speech, language and communication difficulties. Law et al (2017, p.18) describe how some children can 'grow out' of their difficulties, but some can 'grow into' them, appearing to have a good start but then falling behind their peers later in development. This 'late emerging' group was evident in research of children of different ages (for example, between 18 and 30 months in Ghassabian et al, 2014 and Henrichs et al, 2011; between 3 and 5 years in Law et al, 2012 and Zambrana et al, 2014; and between 4 and 6 years in Zubrick et al, 2015).

The above considerations would suggest that accurate early identification of children in need of additional support should not be a single event. Rather, it is necessary to monitor a child's progress over time. Bornstein et al, 2016 recommend use of multiple assessment tools. This integrated approach also has the benefit of forming 'a safety net' within which to catch children who not do present as having difficulties at earlier assessment points. This complex picture of individual children's language development pathways is one of the key challenges for objective 2 and the planning of screening and subsequent interventions.

Ghassabian, A., Rescorla, L., Henrichs, J., Jaddoe, V. W., Verhulst, F. C., and Tiemeier, H. (2014) 'Early lexical development and risk of verbal and nonverbal cognitive delay at school age', *Acta Paediatrica, International Journal of Paediatrics*, 103 (1), pp. 70–80.

Henrichs, J., Rescorla, L., Schenk, J. J., Schmidt, H. G., Jadooe, V. W. V., Hofman, A., Raat, H., Verhulst, F. and Tiemeier, H. (2011) 'Examining continuity of early expressive vocabulary development: The Generation R study', *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 54, pp. 854–69.

Law, J. Charlton, J., Dockrell, J., Gascoigne, M., McKean, C. Theakston, A. (2017) *Early Language Development: Needs, provision, and intervention for preschool children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, A Report for the Education Endowment Foundation*. Newcastle: University of Newcastle.

McKean, C., Mensah, F. K., Eadie, P., Bavin, E. L., Bretherton, L., Cini, E. and Reilly, S. (2015) 'Levers for language growth: Characteristics and predictors of language trajectories between 4 and 7 years', *PLoS ONE*, 10 (8).

Zambrana, I. M., Pons, F., Eadie, P. and Ystrom, E. (2014) 'Trajectories of language delay from age 3 to 5: Persistence, recovery and late onset', *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders*, 49, pp. 304–16 and between 4 and 6 years in Zubrick et al, 2015.

Zubrick, S. R., Taylor, C. L. and Christensen, D. (2015) 'Patterns and predictors of language and literacy abilities 4–10 years in the longitudinal study of Australian children', *PLoS ONE*, 10 (9).

Question 3(d): Other than the WellComm screening tool, what other tools would you recommend?

Please see above.

Question 4(a): Do you think our actions to upskill the workforce to address SLC needs will result in better identification of SLC issues?

Yes	No	Don't know
Yes		

Estyn agrees that upskilling the workforce to identify children's SLC needs early and to implement appropriate support is a priority. The Childcare, Play and Early Years Plan recognises the importance of planning to build capacity and capability across the sector, including the importance of understanding SLC by all practitioners in the early years sector. Estyn has recently worked alongside Social Care Wales, Health Education and Improvement Wales and other professionals in the non-maintained and care sectors to develop a level 4 professional practice qualification in as part of the suite of new Children's Care Play Learning and Development (CCPLD) qualifications. This should equip aspiring leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge to support pupils with SLC needs.

Estyn agrees with the proposal to share best practice for speech and language therapists and early language development practitioners. Estyn's website could also be used to signpost practitioners to effective practice in developing children's SLC skills in the non-maintained sector, schools and local authorities. Four useful case studies include

- [Supporting children's speech and language therapy](#)
- [Supporting pupils with Speech, Language and Communication Needs to improve oracy and wellbeing](#)
- [Rapid development of pupils' oracy skills](#)
- [Developing a specialist language support programme for a local authority](#)

The proposal recognises that specific skills are required for practitioners in Welsh-medium settings employing Welsh language immersion techniques. Estyn agrees that it is important to build on the current roll-out of the training already supported by the Welsh Government to ensure that practitioners are equipped to support the proposed increase in Welsh-language provision. For example, the Camau project which provides bespoke training to help practitioners in the childcare, early years and playwork sector to learn Welsh and improve their language skills.

Question 4(b): Do you think our actions to upskill the workforce to address SLC needs will result in more timely interventions being put in place?

Yes	No	Don't know
Yes		

Estyn has recently published two thematic reports which are closely aligned to supporting children with SEN in mainstream schools and supporting those who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACES). The '[Pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools - A good practice report](#)' identifies the importance of early identification of children's needs along with strong partnership working between settings and schools as key drivers in ensuring appropriate interventions are put in place. In most of the schools we visited during the study, these arrangements help to ensure that all staff have a thorough understanding of pupils' needs, interests and abilities before they join the school. In addition, staff use a wide range of approaches to ensure that they identify pupils' needs at an early stage. It is therefore important that staff in non-maintained settings are fully trained in identifying children's needs, including SLC, at an early stage and can engage with stakeholders to implement appropriate support as soon as possible. As a result of an upskilled workforce, SLC issues should be identified early in settings and timely interventions put in place.

Although primarily aimed at schools, the '[Knowing your children – supporting pupils with adverse childhood experiences \(ACES\)](#)' report highlights the importance of recognising the impact of ACES on children's wellbeing and their general development. The proposed action to develop an online training package for the SLC workforce to help them to be ACE aware and provide advice on working with people whose lives have been affected by ACEs is a positive step. This could provide practitioners with an improved understanding of how ACES could have a negative impact on children's SLC development as well as providing targeted support when required.

Question 4(c): Is anything missing from our plans to upskill the workforce to address SLC needs?

Studies have demonstrated that there is a great deal of individual variability in language as it develops, with some children starting well and dropping behind and others starting very slowly but catching up (Law et al, 2007, p.15). Practitioners need to understand if and how the level of need varies at different ages and in relation to factors thought to put children 'at risk' of poor language development, such as social disadvantage, low birth weight or hearing impairment (Objective 3 of the proposed delivery plan).

Law, J., Charlton, J., Dockrell, J., Gascoigne, M., McKean, C., Theakston, A. (2017) *Early Language Development: Needs, provision, and intervention for preschool children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, A Report for the Education Endowment Foundation*. Newcastle: University of Newcastle

Question 5(a): Do you think we will be able to affect change and drive improvements in SLC in the early years through better policy making? If No*, please explain.

Yes	No	Don't know
Yes		

Question 5(b): Other than the ones specified, are there any other policy areas we should include in our plan?

Children who experience language difficulties in association with other vulnerabilities may be particularly at risk of poor outcomes. In clinical samples, children who present to specialist services with social-emotional and mental health difficulties are at very high risk of having language difficulties (Bretherton et al, 2014; Lindsay and Dockrell, 2012). Therefore, it is important to consider the effectiveness of approaches that target children's vulnerabilities in social-emotional and mental health, as well as in speech, language and communication.

Bretherton, L., Prior, M., Bavin, E., Cini, E., Eadie, P. and Reilly, S. (2014) 'Developing relationships between language and behaviour in preschool children from the Early Language in Victoria Study: implications for intervention', *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 19 (1), pp. 7–27.

Lindsay, G. and Dockrell, J. E. (2012) 'Longitudinal patterns of behavioral, emotional, and social difficulties and self-concepts in adolescents with a history of specific language impairment', *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 43 (4), pp. 445–60.

Question 6(a): Is the information provided in the overview clear, if not how could it be improved?

Yes	No	Don't know
Yes		

The information provided in the draft delivery plan provides a clear and concise summary of the four key objectives. It provides a purposeful rationale for the need to refine the SLC support across Wales in order to ensure that services are equitable and deliver the necessary support for all children.

Question 6(b): Is the information provided in the overview helpful, if not how could it be improved?

Yes	No	Don't know
Yes		

The draft delivery plan provides useful information for all stakeholders and shows how it builds on current good practice from across all sectors. It recognises what is currently working well and provides a strategic approach to ensure that every child gets the best

start in life. The draft delivery plan highlights appropriately on potential actions and/or commitments required of all key partners to ensure children and young people with SLC needs receive appropriate support in order to fulfil their potential.

Question 7: Other than the 4 objectives contained in the delivery plan, are there any others we should include? Please provide details.

Yes	No	Don't know
	No	

Question 8: We would like to know your views on the effects that the delivery plan to further promote and support SLC development throughout Wales would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

The proposal recognises the importance of aligning the SLC delivery plan with the objectives of Welsh Government's 'Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers' strategy. In particular, it recognises the need to upskill the current workforce who work in the Welsh medium sector as well as informing parents of how to support their children's Welsh language skills. The proposal also identifies the need to produce a bilingual assessment tool that is available throughout Wales. However, it is important to ensure that all supporting resources are produced in Welsh and English in order to help practitioners deliver appropriate intervention strategies. In addition, practitioners and parents should have access to support and advice from specialists, such as speech and language therapists, through the language of their choice. This is key to ensuring that there is equality in the provision for SLC support across Wales.

Question 9: Please also explain how you believe the proposed delivery plan to further promote and support SLC development throughout Wales could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

The draft delivery plan identifies appropriately the need to further share messages with parents and prospective parents regarding Welsh language development. Estyn agrees that this provides a good opportunity to inform families about their role in developing their child's Welsh language skills, as well as the support available to them. However, it is crucial that the assessments and support are available in English and Welsh in order to ensure equity for all children across Wales. In addition, supporting our workforce through bespoke training and sharing good practice is important if we are to deliver high quality SLC provision in both Welsh and English across all settings and schools. The availability of trained staff to support Welsh medium education provision is essential in order to provide targeted support and intervention for children who attend these settings. These include local authority personnel such as support teachers for non-maintained settings as well as challenge advisors who can help schools. In addition, it is very important to ensure that children and families are able to access key

professionals such as speech and language therapists and educational psychologists, through the language of their choice.

Question 10: 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: