

Profession: Speech and Language Therapy (SLT)

Roles and responsibilities of the professional

SLTs assess, diagnose and provide care and preventative advice to people with disorders of communication and eating and drinking. SLTs work with child and adult clients across the lifespan. These clients may have developmental or acquired difficulties; they vary from those with relatively mild needs to those with complex, profound, lifelong disabilities. SLTs work in a huge range of settings including acute and community NHS settings, education, social care and the independent and voluntary sector. SLTs work in teams with many other professionals and also with SLT support practitioners. SLT intervention takes place not only at the impairment level but also from a social model of disability perspective. Work with families and carers is an important part of an SLT's responsibilities. SLTs have a professional duty to undertake a continuous programme of professional and personal development.

Source: Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (2006) Communication Quality 3 London: RCSLT

Modern Perspective

In the modern NHS SLTs are moving more towards an "enabling" model of service provision. Care is often provided by supporting clients and carers so they can take control of their own lives. Care may be provided indirectly by teaching carers or other professionals the skills for supporting people with communication needs; this is sometimes referred to as the "consultative model". SLTs work collaboratively in many settings and there may be some overlap of roles, for instance in education. Information technology is becoming increasingly important in the delivery of care. Research and education are becoming more prominent in the roles and responsibilities of SLTs. The profession is working towards recruiting a more diverse workforce which will reflect the population which uses its services.

Life Long Journey

Many SLTs start work in generalist or mixed posts. With experience most will become specialist in one or more clinical areas. Career pathways can follow a clinical or management route. It is relatively easy to move in and out of part-time employment and to change clinical specialism within the profession. There is now the possibility of achieving Consultant status. Further specialist professional training is available for many clinical areas however there are few accredited post-graduate routes to higher level qualifications. SLTs are beginning to extend their scope of practice in some areas. More therapists undertake research and obtain higher degrees within their careers. More senior, experienced therapists may move beyond their profession into related work such as management of multi-professional teams.