

Press release – For Immediate Response (15.05.2012)

SLCN RECOGNITION AND UNDERSTANDING MUST IMPROVE, SAYS LEADING COMMUNICATION COALITION AS SEN PROGRESS REPORT LAUNCHED

The Communication Trust, a coalition of nearly 50 voluntary organisations specialising in speech, language and communication, has welcomed today's *SEN Progress and Next Steps report* from the Department of Education.

The Trust welcomes the drive towards joined up approaches and efforts to ease the journey for children with SEN and their families but has concerns about the effect of these changes on the 1 million children and young people in the UK with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

Wendy Lee, Professional Director for The Communication Trust, says: "Over the last five years, there has been a 58% increase in the number of children and young people with SLCN as a special educational need. Identification and support is crucial but traditionally the UK has had low recognition and awareness of SLCN.

"Changes in labelling, particularly around the diagnosis of behavioural, social and emotional problems, will need to be managed carefully. Parents and the children's workforce often notice and recognise poor literacy or poor behaviour but may not notice the SLCN difficulty underneath such as poor understanding, vocabulary or conversational skills. We need to work hard to ensure that the 'hidden' difficulties of children with SLCN are identified early across all phases of education.

"When SLCN is not addressed, problems can manifest over the years affecting the individual, their family and wider society. Figures show that more than half of children excluded from school have an unidentified SLCN and in our youth justice system, 60% have SLCN, which has previously been undetected."

The Communication Trust is working closely with the Government on how to support and identify SLCN and is pleased with the strong emphasis on this in the early years and with the focus on workforce development. Specifically, the Trust has:

- Managed and delivered in partnership with Jean Gross, formerly Communication Champion for children, the National Year of Communication (*Hello* campaign) to raise awareness of children and young people's communication development and how to recognise and support SLCN
- Worked to support children's communication charity I CAN to deliver the Early Language Development Programme (ELDP)

- Developed with support from City & Guilds, a new Level 3 Award in Supporting Children and Young People's Speech Language and Communication for practitioners working with children and young people aged 0-19 across education, health, youth justice and social care. With support from the Department for Education, the Trust has developed free resources to support the early identification of SLCN
- Developed for the first time a mandatory unit on speech, language and communication that is included in initial training for early years practitioners as part of the Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People's workforce www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/qualifications
- Released in partnership with Jean Gross, formerly Communication Champion and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT), *Better Communication* – outlining a range of approaches to commissioning around SLCN
- Produced a booklet *Let's Talk about It* aimed at increasing awareness of SLCN to teachers going through initial teacher training
- Recently launched a film aimed at raising awareness of recognising SLCN with youth justice and educators www.sentencetrouble.info/film

Wendy Lee continues: "As schools are given greater flexibility to determine their own policies and practices on SEN and the range of statutory information requirements are reduced, it is vital that schools are scrutinised by Ofsted and by Local Authorities on the services they provide, to ensure that the large numbers of children with mild and moderate SLCN are not overlooked.

"The Trust is concerned that children with SEN risk getting left behind as the new NHS and schools architecture gets embedded. As personalised budgets come to the fore, parents will need extra support to ensure a joined up approach that meets their child's needs across health, education and care."

"As a coalition of nearly 50 voluntary organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication, we understand intrinsically the unique role that the voluntary sector plays. We are pleased this has been championed in the report and look forward to continuing to work with the Government to improve the lives of children, young people and their families."

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Notes to editors

About The Communication Trust

- The Communication Trust is a campaigning voice for children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). It raises awareness, influences policy, promotes best practice among the children's workforce and commissions work from its members.

- The Communication Trust is a coalition of nearly 50 leading voluntary sector and community based organisations.
- It has an extensive advisory and partner network that includes the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT), Achievement for All, Council for Disabled Children, Early Support Programme and specialists across early years, schools and youth justice.
- Recently, the Trust ran the *Hello* campaign (national year of communication) in partnership with Jean Gross in her role as the Government's Communication Champion for children.
- The Communication Trust in 2012 is building on the legacy of *Hello* by showcasing best practice from the voluntary sector around what works to support all children's communication, particularly those with SLCN, and disseminating it to the widest possible audience.
- This work will include launching later in the year a campaign to place communication at the heart of schools' policy and practice.
- For more information, visit www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk