Overcoming barriers
A workforce briefing

Presenting some of the real-life, innovative solutions around funding, peer-to-peer support and online resources which have helped practitioners overcome barriers to professional development in speech, language and communication.
In 2016, The Communication Trust - a coalition of over 50 not-for-profit organisations across the speech, language and communication sector - consulted with more than 1,200 members of the children and young people’s workforce about their professional development in speech, language and communication. We asked about their experiences, needs and the barriers that are preventing them from accessing professional development in this area. Across the many and varied roles, settings, sectors and education phases, respondents clearly recognised the importance of speech, language and communication skills for children and young people. However, the survey also revealed significant gaps in professional development accessed by the workforce, and a number of consistent barriers were reported, which included cost, staff time, and access to relevant opportunities.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is essential to remaining competent and up to date in your profession or practice and is an ongoing process which continues throughout your career. Learning around speech, language and communication is an essential component of CPD for the children and young people’s workforce, not only to strengthen the skills and confidence of individual practitioners, but to strengthen the workforce as a collective to have a positive impact on the speech, language and communication development of the children and young people they work with, and ultimately on their longer term outcomes, which are underpinned by these vital skills.

This briefing showcases innovative solutions and real-life examples demonstrating the creative ways in which settings are overcoming these barriers and accessing professional development opportunities to improve outcomes for children and young people in speech, language and communication.
Funding solutions

One of the biggest barriers to accessing professional development opportunities for many practitioners is cost. This will not only mean the cost of the training activity but also the cost to cover backfill from their usual role.

Often weighing up the cost-benefit of such activities is a simple process, but sometimes it can be tricky to know how much the investment will impact on practice. In addition, there are often just too many other priorities when it comes to training and development, particularly where there are statutory training needs to meet, and increasingly limited budgets with which to work.

In our consultation, 75% of the workforce felt this to be a major barrier to accessing professional development.

Here are some examples of how settings are overcoming financial barriers to accessing learning opportunities in speech, language and communication:

Grants and funding sources

Pupil premium Grant (PPG) – this is a grant payable to publicly funded schools and local authorities to help raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, looked after children (LAC), post-LAC and those with parents in the armed forces. The PPG takes a number of forms:

- Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)
- PPG – for primary and secondary age children.
- LAC Premium – for looked after children
- FE and Sixth Form College Pupil Premium

> Robert Mellors is a nursery and primary school in outer Nottingham. The setting recognised a link between pupils being eligible for the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) and a higher incidence of Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). They decided to put together some of the PPG funding awarded for individual students and put it towards a range of training programmes in speech, language and communication across the setting.

The training included: Let’s Interact, Talkboost, Oral to Written Narrative and other local training programmes. The result has been that staff are better able to identify and support pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties across the setting and improve outcomes for all children around speech, language and communication.
North Somerset Children’s Centres invested in training a member of staff to become a licensed mentor for the Early Talk Accreditation programme with I CAN. The knowledge gained from the training day meant they were able to support all of their 14 Children’s Centres across the county to develop communication supportive environments and their 3 Children’s Centre Nurseries also achieved Early Talk Supportive Level Accreditations.

The Children’s Centre Nurseries now demonstrate best practice in universal support for children’s speech, language and communication development, a huge proportion of who are vulnerable children with complex home lives and at risk of persistent speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

North Somerset Children’s Centres were able to recover the initial costs of training by offering further accreditations as a ‘paid for’ service to other private, voluntary and independent settings across the county, improving standards of universal support for children’s speech, language and communication on a wider scale.

> Childminder Christine, at Little Elms Childcare in North Somerset, used Top-up Funding to pay for a whole setting, half day workshop with an Independent Speech and Language Therapist. They were able to collate the Local Authority funding received for a child in their setting with speech, language and communication needs to pay for a bespoke workshop on early language development. The setting sought permission from the child’s parents to share reports and therapy targets from the NHS Speech and Language Service to enable the workshop to be tailored to the child’s individual needs.

As a result, staff members now have a better understanding of early language development and of the child’s individual needs and also feel more confident in supporting all children’s early language and communication development. They now also have an action plan in place to enhance their communication environment and feel more confident in carrying out the recommended therapy activities for the child.

Top-up funding
This is part of the High Needs funding given to local authorities and is for settings and schools which require funding over and above core funding to enable a pupil or student to participate in education and learning.

Joint training
Sometimes clubbing together with another local setting or school can help to reduce the cost, particularly if it also means you can save on venue and travel costs of individual members of staff.

Choosing training that could lead to income generation/recover costs
There are a number of training programmes available which enable you to recoup the costs of training by cascading to others as a licensed trainer or tutor. Train the trainer courses not only benefit those becoming trainers but have a greater impact on the wider workforce and create an opportunity to recover initial costs and even generate further income in the future.
Peer-to-peer support

Knowledge sharing between colleagues can be an effective, cost efficient form of professional development, and can support a consistent, whole-setting approach.

There are a number of ways in which knowledge can be shared between peers, below are some real-life examples:

Cascading
Sharing what’s been newly learnt with a team or group of peers is a really effective model of peer to peer learning.

Shadowing
This involves observing a more experienced peer, colleague or professional who is skilled in supporting speech, language and communication development or SLCN. Or, visiting other settings who demonstrate best practice in this area.

“Visiting another setting had a really positive impact on my teaching. As a teacher of a KS2 class in a Speech, Language and Communication department attached to a mainstream school, I benefitted immensely from an informal visit to a specialist school.

Simply observing the environment, how the day was organised and the teaching strategies used gave me much food for thought and resulted in me making positive changes to my approach with my class.

Something as simple as encouraging my team to speak in a very calm, very slow manner when interacting with the children was enough to make a significant impact, resulting in a calmer environment.”

Jenny

“Ladywood School and Outreach Service, have become an Elklan Communication Friendly Setting. This means that two teachers have become Lead Communication Practitioners and have achieved an Elklan Level 4 qualification in supporting their colleagues to implement core communication strategies throughout the school, achieved through the delivery of Elklan’s ‘Communication Counts’. The setting has a longer term plan, for more teachers to be accredited at Level 4 and to become tutors of the Elklan accredited courses. This approach enables the setting to develop its capacity to establish professional expertise, without any further cost of training.”

At the start of every term, a slot is reserved for a member of the team to share their learning from training. This is usually a slot after a large team meeting, so all members of the team are able to access this, regardless of their usual working hours and places of work. This is similar to how a school would usually offer inset days to school staff.

We also have regular hubs, where we can share this information at different parts of the year and may have a specific focus, where a member of the team who has previously attended training in this domain is able to cascade their learning.”

Tamara, Specialist Speech and Language Therapist.
Peer and group supervision

Group supervision with peers of a similar level of knowledge and experience can create a safe environment for individuals to be confident to ask questions, acknowledge gaps in their learning and learn from others. It can also be an opportunity to share new evidence, interesting reading or material around the subject.

Mentoring

Mentoring can be really powerful for both personal and professional development and can enable an individual to make changes to their practice and progress in their career.

“ My early years setting has been lucky to receive funding through ECaT and Spotlight programmes to allow us to spend time receiving training/mentoring.

Myself and my senior practitioners have been able to share this practice (for free) with other settings and mentor their staff to help children/families that they identify with needs. Now, with no funding available other settings occasionally pay for us (when we have time) to go in and help with specific children or mentor staff.

We use a holistic approach looking at the 3 prime areas of development and suggesting activities to make a difference. Sometimes we help by interpreting SLT recommendations given to parents and support colleagues to gain confidence in implementing them.”

Michele Cole, Badingham Playschool

“ We have fortnightly group supervision over lunch, which will either focus upon a particular topic, recently being DLD [Developmental Language Disorder] and if not, we would discuss cases, training, new developments and initiatives within the service. This is usually a two hour slot.

We additionally all try our hardest to return to the office when planning therapy or report writing so we can discuss our ideas freely. We have a ‘buddy’ system in place, so there is an allocated professional where we can discuss any specific cases / referrals or therapy ideas and we have different ‘buddies’ for different settings, depending upon team member specialisms and experience.”

Tamara, Specialist Speech and Language therapist.

- Always have a clear objective of what you want to get out of peer to peer support

- Ask lots of questions – this is your opportunity to get the most out of your time, you can always write them down for the end of the session if it’s not appropriate to ask as you go along

- Reflect – this is a key component to any training, reflect on how your new learning can result in changes to your practice
We know from our consultation that most practitioners prefer face-to-face training to online options. The advantage of online training, however, is that it is often cheaper and more flexible than face-to-face learning.

With use of technology increasing in nearly every sphere of life, online training options are expanding and there are many free options available now.

**Online courses**
The key to getting the most out of online learning is to put what you have learned into practice.

**YouTube tutorials and videos**
YouTube is a great source of information for video tutorials. A note of caution with all internet materials, however, is that you will need to verify the quality of information you are accessing. Always check it is from a reputable organisation.

> The Makaton Charity shares a number of their signs and symbols for free via their YouTube channel; subscribing to their channel allows access to a new sign each week.

**Apps/interactive activities**
There are a number of online tools, apps and websites that are compatible with mobile phones and tablets. The accessibility of these devices makes learning much easier and more readily available.

> The Communication Trust’s Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF) is a free, online self evaluation audit tool which aims to support practitioners with understanding their own strengths and gaps in knowledge around different aspects of speech, language and communication. The SLCF also includes some simple, online activities, which can be completed alongside the audit, for instant, accessible CPD.

> Elklan e-learning is available for the Level 3 Award courses: “Speech and Language Support for 0-3s” and “Speech and Language Support for 5-11s”.

“My journey through the e-learning programme with Elklan was interesting, informative, rewarding, professionally inspiring and at times challenging. I studied the supporting 5-11 year olds course.

This worked in perfectly well within my role, as a KS1 teaching assistant. I have been providing speech and language support for a few years now, but without a qualification and purely from what I have researched, picked up along the way and been given from the NHS. Since completing the course I have moved on greatly with my personal development.

My head teacher and school governors have been very supportive, allowing my passion and newly found knowledge to provide children within my setting a greater chance to be able to communicate and talk with confidence. I will definitely consider another Elklan course sometime in the future.”

Eileen
Online supervision/webinars/Skype
Skype is becoming more and more popular for training and interventions as it can overcome the barriers of both time and geography while unlocking access to the most skilled support.

> **Mable Therapy** uses technology to deliver professional development to teaching staff via a number of digital platforms including webinars. By booking on to one of the many available online sessions practitioners can attend at times that suit them, without giving up their valuable time to travel and without being impeded by their location.

“Webinars offer the advantage of your being able to see the speech and language therapist delivering the session while overcoming the barriers of time and geography.”

**Martha Currie, CEO of Mable Therapy**

There are a number of charities that offer information, advice and sometimes free learning resources on speech, language and communication.

For more information visit our consortium page on our website.

[www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)