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The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication: Scotland Edition

I CAN Talk Series - Issue 3



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COMMUNICATION IS FUNDAMENTAL
“...for learning and development

Children and young people with a **communication disability** cannot **express** themselves, **understand** others or build **relationships** because of problems in **one or more** of these areas: ...understanding and finding the **right words**...producing, ordering and discriminating between speech **sounds**...using **rules** about how **words, phrases** and **sentences** are formed to **convey meaning**... **using** and **understanding language** in **different social contexts**

One in ten children and young people struggle with this **invisible disability** Without the **right help**, at the **right time**, they will be **left out** and **left behind**”

The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication: Scotland Edition

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Summary

In October 2006, I CAN published a report as part of its *I CAN Talk* Series entitled *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication*.¹

The report outlined three of the contemporary issues in children's communication: the growing recognition of the scale of children's poor communication; the increased awareness of the need for early intervention and the importance of skills development for the entire children's workforce.

The report then considered the cost of poor communication skills to the individual, the family and to the nation. While highlighting the financial impact the paper summarised the strong evidence of the devastating effect of communication difficulties on life chances.

The report also summarised the interventions that have been shown to work. Skilled and confident carers, focused early intervention programmes, integrated approaches and a skilled and confident children's workforce are all key factors in the successful development of children's communication skills and support for children with difficulties.

***The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication* summarised evidence from international sources, but the analysis of cost and the practice referred to was, in the main, limited to England. In calculating this cost, the number of young people who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training at 16-18) was considered.**

Given that Scotland has the highest proportion of NEET young people in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), I CAN has decided to publish a Scottish edition of *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication*. This gives an overview and update of the original report, but provides additional information and cost analysis related specifically to the Scottish context.

Communication Support Needs (CSN)

The term *communication support needs*, a relatively new term, comes from a social model of disability. It is used in Scotland to encompass the experience of a wide range of communication difficulties associated with a number of different disabilities, and replaces the term *communication disability* used in the original report.

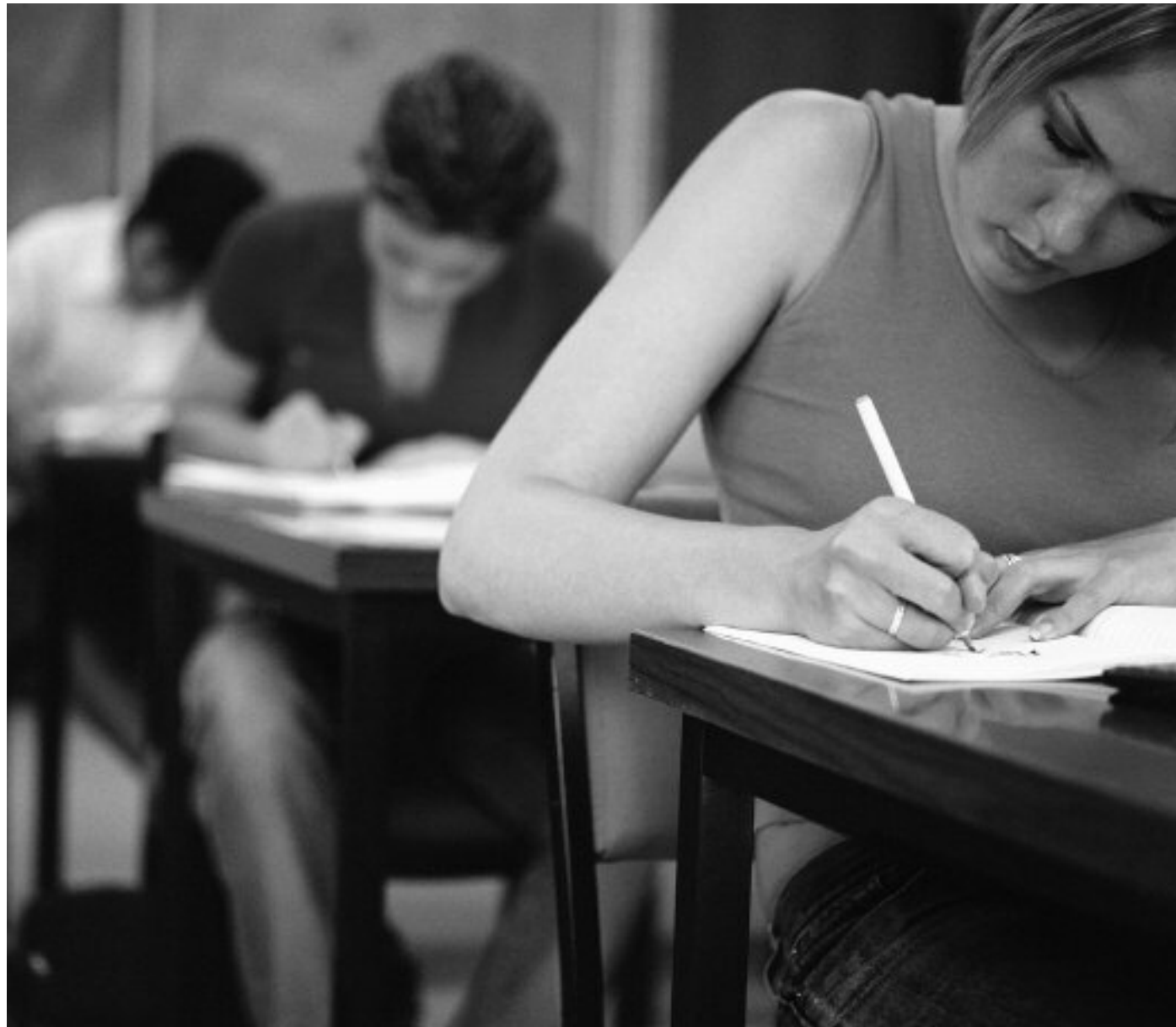
Children with communication support needs may have problems with production or comprehension of spoken language, with using or processing speech sounds, or with understanding and using language in social contexts.

Some of these children have specific and primary speech and language impairments, others may have communication difficulties as part of more generalised learning difficulties or another condition such as hearing impairment or autistic spectrum disorder.

These children are likely to have *persistent* and long-term difficulties. As many as 10% of all children will have communication support needs.

Impoverished Language

Children with impoverished language have speech and language skills that are immature or poorly developed. Their speech may be unclear, vocabulary is smaller, sentences are shorter and they are able to understand only simple instructions. These children are likely to have *transient* difficulties and, with the right support, may catch up with their peers. Upwards of 50% of children have impoverished language on school entry.



¹ I CAN (2006) *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication*
I CAN Talk Series www.ican.org.uk

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Prevalence

Prevalence of communication support needs

Children with CSN experience difficulty expressing themselves or understanding others such that it affects everyday functioning. This group of children are all very individual, with some needs more recognisable than others. The 'needs' of this group may refer both to the individual's needs, and to what society needs to do to support their inclusion.

It is generally agreed that around 10% of all children have CSN which may be long-term and *persistent*.² Around 6% of children have specific and primary speech and language impairments³ – others may have CSN as part of more generalised difficulties or another condition. Referral data collected over the last decade suggests that the number of children and young people requiring speech and language therapy has risen.^{4 5} A recent review of the literature surrounding CSN comments on prevalence statistics in Scotland and indicates that it is 'reasonable to assume that they will be true for Scotland as they are for other countries.'⁶

Language and social disadvantage

There has also been a significant group of children identified, who start school with impoverished levels of language which may be *transient*. Studies in areas of social disadvantage show that in some areas this figure is as high as 84%.⁷ A recent Sure Start report highlights the language differences of children growing up in impoverished circumstances.⁸

A study looking at children starting school in Scotland showed that children from lower income home backgrounds scored lower on language measures.⁹ Likewise, although as a group pre-school children in Scotland have been found to have vocabulary development in advance of the rest of the UK, breakdown of the same data shows that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were further behind than their peers.¹⁰

This finding is supported by parents from lower income families who had more concerns about language development than other families,¹¹ and who spend less time engaged in 'activities with high educational value'.¹²

There is increasing evidence that this association between social disadvantage and language persists well into children's school career.¹³ This is supported by recent data gathered in Scotland showing the literacy skills of nine year old children to be significantly lower in areas of deprivation.¹⁴

In light of this evidence, and given that Scotland has recently been rated as similar to the rest of the UK in terms of child poverty,¹⁵ it is assumed that there is a similar level of impoverished language in children in the early years – over half the children starting school are assessed as having delayed language in areas of social deprivation.¹⁶

The difficulties of this group of children can be described as *transient* in that with the right conditions, many go on to catch up with their peers.

The Cost

The cost to individuals

In the remainder of this report, relevant sections of *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication* are summarised in bold followed by additional evidence, information or practice examples relating specifically to Scotland.

Communication skills are the foundation of children's intellectual, social and emotional development. Crucially, the link between language skills and literacy development has been seen as fundamental to ensuring later academic success, positive self-esteem and improved life chances. This understood, the impact of unresolved CSN is clear in terms of educational attainment, social and personal development, behavioural and emotional control – with the knock-on impact on employability and likely involvement in criminal activity.

There are indications of a correlation between language difficulties and quality of life.¹⁷ In a recent review of CSN in Scotland, the impact of these needs has been summarised in relation to quality of life and life experiences.¹⁸

People with CSN are likely to be disadvantaged on a number of fronts. By comparison with the general population they are more likely:

- to be unemployed or employed at an inappropriately low level
- to experience negative social interactions / communication within education, healthcare, criminal justice system, etc.
- to be misjudged in terms of cognitive and educational level
- to be victims of crime
- to be convicted of crime
- to have difficulty accessing information required in order to utilise services
- to live in socially deprived areas.

Law J. et al (2007) *Communication Support Needs: a review of the literature* Scottish Executive Social Research

The importance of good communication skills to the individual has recently been recognised as being 'at the core of participation and equality in our society', a driver for the development of a strategy for Scotland's languages.¹⁹ Scotland has a high proportion of 16-19 year olds not in education, employment and training²⁰ compared to other developed countries and concerns over the outcomes for young people with CSN has prompted an employability survey by Afasic Scotland.²¹

² Lindsay G. and Dockrell J. with Mackie C. and Letchford B. (2002) *Educational Provision for Children with Specific Speech and Language Difficulties in England and Wales* Cedar and Institute of Education, University of London

³ Law J., Boyle J., Harris F., Harkness A. and Nye C. (2000) *Prevalence and Natural History of Primary Speech and Language Delay: findings from a systematic review of the literature* IJLCD Vol 36

⁴ Reid J., Millar S., Tate L., Donaldson M., Dean E.C., Thompson G.O.B and Grieve R. (1996) *Pupils with Special Educational Needs: the role of speech and language therapists* SOEID

⁵ *A Review of SLT, Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy for Children* (2003) Scottish Executive

⁶ Law J. et al (2007) *Communication Support Needs: a review of the literature* Scottish Executive Social Research

⁷ www.stokespeaksout.co.uk

⁸ Melhuish E., Belsky J. and Leyland A. (2007) *Promoting Speech and Language: a themed study in 15 Sure Start local programmes* Sure Start Evaluation Report 002

⁹ Tymms P., Jones P., Merrell C. and Henderson B. (2005) *Children Starting School in Scotland* Scottish Executive Education Department

¹⁰ *Millennium Cohort Study: early findings 2007* Institute of Education, London

¹¹ Anderson S. et al (2007) *Growing up in Scotland* Scottish Executive

¹² *Growing up in Scotland Research Findings 1* (2007) Scottish Executive

¹³ Spencer S., Olegg J., Stackhouse J. and Leicester S. (2006) *Language and Social Disadvantage: a preliminary study of the impact of social disadvantage at secondary school age* Proceedings of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists Conference May 2006

¹⁴ Palmer G. et al (2006) *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Scotland 2006* New Policy Institute, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

¹⁵ McClaren J. (2007) *Index of Wellbeing for Children in Scotland* Barnardos Scotland

¹⁶ Locke A., Ginsborg J. and Peers I. (2002) *Development and Disadvantage: implications for the early years* IJCD Vol 27 No 1

¹⁷ Markham C. and Taraneh D. (2006) *Parents' and Professionals' Perceptions of Quality of Life in Children with Speech and Language Difficulty* IJLCD Vol 41 No 2

¹⁸ Law J. et al (2007) *Communication Support Needs: a review of the literature* Scottish Executive Social Research

¹⁹ *A Strategy for Scotland's Languages Consultation Document* (2007) Scottish Executive

²⁰ Scottish Executive (2005) *Final Report of the NEET Workstream*

²¹ Afasic Scotland www.afasicScotland.org.uk/consultations

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The Cost

The cost to families

The financial and emotional cost of poor communication is reported by parents as causing stress across the family structure, with indications that concerns grow as children become older.

In his review of the literature on CSN, Law looks at different experiences of people with CSN across a range of contexts, specifically emphasising the potential for social exclusion of both individuals and their families.²²

The cost to Scotland

There are different ways of looking at the wider cost of children's poor communication. In terms of services, conservative estimates of the cost of speech and language therapy alone for children with special educational needs (SEN) in Scotland was £10.5 million in 1993.²³ However, considering the prevalence figures described above, this is likely to be much higher.

It has been estimated that 75% of children with *persistent* CSN at pre-school age are likely to be in need of special education.²⁴ A 2003 report predicted that the cost of including children with special educational needs would be £121 million.²⁵

With the introduction of the wider concept of additional support needs (ASN) introduced in 2005 which replaced SEN,²⁶ it has been suggested that there may be a rise in the identification of children with emotional or behavioural difficulties with a resulting impact on the numbers of children with identified CSN.²⁷ Taking this into account, together with inflation, associated risk of school exclusions, potential criminal activity, and of mental health issues the cost escalates considerably.

With the development of an increasingly global, knowledge-based economy, there is growing awareness of the importance of communication skills in the workforce. A survey of Scottish employers showed that communication was rated high as an essential skill when recruiting staff,²⁸ and yet in a more recent survey this was shown to be what was most frequently lacking in new recruits.²⁹ Interestingly, young people themselves view communication and interpersonal skills as the most important and essential life-skills.³⁰

In the US, because of the increase in communication-based jobs, communication support needs are increasingly thought of as a public health issue. Based on this, CSN are viewed by some as a health concern because untreated they adversely affect the economic well-being of a communication age society. Cost analysis shows that people with *persistent* CSN may cost the US up to \$186 billion a year.

No similar large scale cost analysis related to CSN has been carried out in Scotland, however because of their impact on school performance, lack of communication skills can be a major contributing factor in a child becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training at 16-18).

The NEET group has been identified as a particular issue for Scotland. Against a background of historically high levels of employment and low levels of unemployment, Scotland has the highest proportion of 16-19 year olds not in education, employment and training in the OECD.³¹ These levels are much higher in areas of social deprivation.³² At any one time there are about 35,000 young people who are NEET in Scotland - about 14% of the age group. It has been estimated that the cost to society of young people who are NEET is on average £97,000 per young person over their lifetime.³³

What We Know Can Make a Difference

The cost of poor communication skills to the individual, to families and to the nation is potentially long-term and significant, but there are ways that this can be reduced.

A central role for communication

Best practice for the development of children's communication identifies the need for speech and language to be 'embedded within the curriculum'.³⁴ The positioning of communication and language in children's learning, emotional and social development in both the early years³⁵ and school curriculum,³⁶ together with accompanying materials,^{37 38} has raised the profile of communication in Scotland.

Despite criticisms of insufficient detail³⁹ and concerns that there may be a gap between policy and practice,⁴⁰ a recent HMIE inspection report notes evidence of good practice in developing children's language as a result of this raised profile, particularly in developing early language skills.⁴¹ However, this is inconsistent across the country and across age stages. The same report highlights the wider range of opportunities offered to pupils with effective communication skills and identifies the challenge for Scottish education in closing the gap between pupils' potential and their communication skills.

Current revisions of the curriculum into a single framework around a set of principles *A Curriculum for Excellence*, aims to ensure that the full range of skills and abilities relevant to becoming independent are acquired, as well as a focus on *Skills for Life*.⁴² The new curriculum aims to provide children and young people with a language rich environment in schools, with all teachers responsible for promoting language.⁴³ Whilst the emphasis on language skills for life, and highlighting the responsibility of teaching professionals is welcome there may currently be a lack of guidance for practitioners working with children with CSN.

Poverty and social exclusion are high on the political agenda in Scotland, but there is no specific mention of the role of communication, a fact also picked up in relation to disability policy.⁴⁴ Despite this, the fact that the most recent review of CSN focused on the barriers to inclusion and was commissioned as social research is encouraging.⁴⁵

Skilled and confident carers

Studies show that the home environment, where interactions between carer and child are particularly important, has as much impact on a child's language development as school.

There are many examples of initiatives which focus on working with parents to develop the communication skills of children with both *transient* and more *persistent* language difficulties. Parent-focused training programmes have been shown to be effective in developing carer confidence, as well as improving children's communication.

The important role of parents is emphasised in the current move to integrated children's services in *Getting it Right for Every Child*⁴⁶ and in developments in Scotland's children's policy.^{47 48} There is already documented evidence of the impact of this in relation to raising parental confidence and better planning for supporting children's communication.⁴⁹ On-going discussion surrounding early years pedagogy in Scotland will shape future provision.

This sees family involvement as playing a key role, with the development of family centres in response to local need.⁵⁰

²² Law J. et al (2007) *Communication Support Needs: a review of the literature* Scottish Executive Social Research

²³ *A Review of SLT, Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy for Children* (2003) Scottish Executive

²⁴ Snowling M.J., Adams J.W., Bishop D.V.M. and Stothard S.E. (2001) *Educational Attainment of School Leavers with a Pre-School History of Speech-Language Impairment* IJLCD Vol 36

²⁵ HMIE (2003) *Moving to Mainstream: the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools* Audit Scotland in Partnership with HMIE

²⁶ *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004* Scottish Parliament

²⁷ Law J. (2007) *Learning in the Asbo Age* Children in Scotland January 2007

²⁸ Scottish Executive (2000) *Adult Literacy in Scotland: employer survey report*

²⁹ *Futureskills (2007) Skills in Scotland 2006* Scottish Enterprise

³⁰ Powney J., Lowden K. and Hall S. (2000) *Young People's Lifeskills and the Future* Scottish Council for Research

³¹ Scottish Executive (2005) *Final Report of the NEET Workstream*

³² *More Choices, More Chances: a strategy to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training* (2006) Scottish Executive

³³ Godfrey C., Hutton S., Bradshaw J., Coles B., Craig G. and Johnson J. (2002) *Estimating the Cost of Being Not in Education, Employment or Training at Age 16-18* DfES

³⁴ Law J., Lindsay G., Peacey N., Gascoigne M., Soloff N., Radford J. and Band S. (2000) *Provision for Children with Speech and Language Needs in England and Wales* DfEE

³⁵ Scottish Executive (1999) *Curriculum Framework for Children 3-5*

³⁶ *5-14 Curriculum* www.ltscotland.org.uk/5to14/index.asp

³⁷ Ovens J. and Hurrell A. (2005) *Talking for Scotland* HMIE Scottish Executive

³⁸ *The Elaborated 5-14 Curriculum and Associated Programmes of Study* (2001) Scottish Executive

³⁹ Reid J., Millar S., Tate L., Donaldson M., Dean E.C., Thompson G.O.B and Grieve R. (1996) *Pupils with Special Educational Needs: the role of speech and language therapists* SOEID

⁴⁰ Afasic (2003) *Comments on the Scottish Executive's Review of Speech and Language Therapy, Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy for Children* www.afasicscotland.org.uk

⁴¹ *Improving Achievement in English Language in Primary and Secondary Schools* (2003) HMIE

⁴² Curriculum Review Group (2004) *A Curriculum for Excellence* Scottish Executive

⁴³ *Building the Curriculum 1* (2006) www.curriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk

⁴⁴ Law J. et al (2007) *Communication Support Needs: a review of the literature* Scottish Executive Social Research

⁴⁵ Law J. et al (2007) *ibid*

⁴⁶ *Getting it Right for Every Child* www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/people/young-people/childrenservices/girfec/background

⁴⁷ *Building the Curriculum 1* (2006) www.curriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk

⁴⁸ *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004* Scottish Parliament

⁴⁹ *Children in Scotland (2007) Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) 2004: sharing practice across sectors*

⁵⁰ *Response to the Education Committee Report on the Early Years Inquiry* (2006) Scottish Executive

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What We Know Can Make a Difference

Sure Start Scotland aims to give children a better start in life through working closely with families, with many programmes including an emphasis on language and communication. Although not yet rigorously evaluated in terms of life outcomes for the child, there are indications of the impact of programmes such as *Play and Learn*⁵¹ on parent confidence and parent-child interaction.⁵² Other community-based initiatives such as *play@home*,⁵³ as well as those supporting parents of children with communication support needs e.g. the *Chat Pack* initiative⁵⁴ have shown an impact on children's speech and language. The importance of a programme design which encourages specialist staff to work directly with parents has recently been reiterated in a Sure Start evaluation.⁵⁵

Interestingly, data from Sure Start Scotland mapping exercises shows that many children are cared for by grandparents; the importance of interactions of other caregivers has also been emphasised.⁵⁶

Focused early intervention

There is extensive evidence of the effectiveness of early, intensive programmes of intervention and support in the early years. Early intervention for both *transient* language difficulties and *persistent* language disorders has been shown to have a positive impact on the long-term cost to individuals, families and to the nation.

Cost-benefit analysis carried out in the US, shows long term financial benefits and healthy returns for investment of public money if intervention happens as early as possible. This has been calculated to be as much as \$17 benefit for every \$1 spent.

There is evidence from the UK that specialist, intensive early intervention for pre-school children with *persistent* communication support needs is cost-effective when compared with more generalised support.

The current interest in early years education within Scotland as demonstrated by a review of international perspectives,⁵⁷ and an educational inquiry⁵⁸ recognises this crucial stage for language development and seems to be accompanied by a commitment to invest in early years. The role of early years settings in promoting language has long been emphasised.⁵⁹ However in Scotland, in contrast to England, there was little connection between the amount of pre-school experience and children's developmental profiles when starting school.⁶⁰ This has prompted discussion around the need to understand this discrepancy, with some criticism⁶¹ for the lack of structure within the birth to three guidance,⁶² and lack of specific emphasis on the important role of communication in children's development.

A recent UK Sure Start report recommends that all early years programmes serving deprived areas should focus on early identification of children's language difficulties and the promotion of language acquisition.⁶³ There are early indications that Sure Start Scotland projects have had an impact on children's development⁶⁴ and the planned evaluation is welcomed.

What We Know Can Make a Difference

Integrated approaches

A multi-agency, integrated approach is considered best practice for meeting children's communication needs from both a policy and professional viewpoint. This may be focused on the child's environment as well as more child-focused, specialist interventions.

In Scotland, children's policy advocates more integrated practice.⁶⁵ Mechanisms such as Co-ordinated Support Plans are designed to encourage cross-agency working.⁶⁶ The sharing of effective collaborative practice which supports the implementation of the ASL Act has been encouraged both locally – sharing projects such as *The Circle Collaboration Project* and *Therapies Inclusion Practice*⁶⁷ – and nationally through a live document, describing the impact of multi-agency, cross sector projects with a particular emphasis on transition.⁶⁸ One such project shows the effectiveness of a structured approach in developing children's language thereby preparing them for the transition to literacy, and to primary school.⁶⁹

A communication-supportive environment at pre-school and primary school will enhance a child's language at this crucial stage and minimise the impact of *transient* communication difficulties. A Language Support Model,⁷⁰ developed at the University of Strathclyde and including guidelines for a communication-friendly classroom, has been effective in supporting teachers' understanding of communication support needs. Other programmes have also been developed which focus on physical aspects⁷¹ or whole schools.⁷² There is a call for further development and evaluation of such systems.⁷³

In supporting children's *transient* communication needs, service models that draw on the skills of others are seen as positive.⁷⁴ There is discussion around the crucial role of the speech and language therapist (SLT). Some view this as more of a public health role with involvement in training and support⁷⁵ but what is considered most important is ensuring an appropriate skill and experience;⁷⁶ this is discussed in the following section.

For children with more *persistent* CSN, close collaboration between school staff and SLTs is advocated.⁷⁷ This is not always easy,⁷⁸ but ways for improving collaborative conversations are being investigated⁷⁹ and there is evidence of effective partnership work within primary⁸⁰ and secondary schools.⁸¹

It is recommended that intervention with school-aged children should be school-based.⁸² A recent study in Scotland has evaluated the relative effectiveness of different types of intervention in primary schools for children with *persistent* CSN. This found that in schools, intervention developing aspects of children's language was effective when children worked directly with SLTs, as well as when they worked with SLT assistants. The study recognises the key role of the SLT in working with more complex language difficulties, and asks for further research into school-based intervention involving a wider range of educational personnel as well as parents.⁸³

Focused interventions for children and young people with *persistent* CSN have been shown to be effective across age ranges and settings. A governor of a youth offending institute in Scotland speaks enthusiastically of the work a SLT undertakes with young adults,⁸⁴ supporting them in developing communication skills and being able to participate more fully in mediation.⁸⁵

⁵¹ *Play and Learn* (2004) Sure Start Scotland Bulletin 16

⁵² Cunningham-Burley S., Carty A., Martin C. and Birch A. (2005) *Report on the Development and Expansion of Sure Start Scotland Services since 2001* Scottish Centre for Social Research

⁵³ Nelson J. (2004) *play@home* Early Years Matters www.itscotland.org.uk

⁵⁴ Duncan S. (2007) *The Chat Pack Initiative* RCSLT Bulletin February 2007

⁵⁵ Melhuish E., Belsky J. and Leyland A. (2007) *Promoting Speech and Language: a themed study in 15 Sure Start local programmes* Sure Start Evaluation Report 002

⁵⁶ Melhuish E., Belsky J. and Leyland A. (2007) *ibid*

⁵⁷ Stevens C. (2006) *Early Years Education: perspectives from a review of the international literature* Scottish Executive

⁵⁸ *Education Committee Enquiry* (2006) Scottish Parliament

⁵⁹ Powney J. et al (1995) *Provision for Pre-Fives in Scotland* Scottish Centre for Research in Education

⁶⁰ Merrel C. and Tymms P. (2007) *What children know and can do when they start school and how this varies between countries* Journal of Early Childhood Research

⁶¹ *Education Committee Enquiry* (2006) Scottish Parliament

⁶² *Birth to Three: supporting our youngest children* (2005) Scottish Executive

⁶³ Melhuish E., Belsky J. and Leyland A. (2007) *ibid*

⁶⁴ Cunningham-Burley S., Carty A., Martin C. and Birch A. (2005) *Sure Start Scotland Mapping Exercise 2004* Scottish Executive Social Research

⁶⁵ *Getting it Right for Every Child* www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/people/young-people/childrenservices/girfec/background

⁶⁶ *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004)* Scottish Executive

⁶⁷ www.asl.scot.nhs.uk

⁶⁸ Scottish Executive (2007) *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004: sharing practice across sectors, across Scotland*

⁶⁹ Durham F., Keary J. and McShane L. (2007) *Putting Partnership into Practice in Dumfries and Galloway* I CAN Conference September 2007

⁷⁰ McCartney E. (2006) *Language and Literacy Support for Busy Mainstream Classes* I CAN Conference 2006 www.strath.ac.uk/eps/centres/divisions/st/teachingresources/ism/

⁷¹ Jarman E. (2007) *Communication Friendly Spaces* Basic Skills Agency

⁷² *Early Talk Programme* www.ican.org.uk/earlytalk

⁷³ Law J. et al (2007) *Communication Support Needs: a review of the literature* Scottish Executive Social Research

⁷⁴ Gascoigne M. (2006) *Supporting Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs within Integrated Children's Services* Position Paper RCSLT

⁷⁵ Melhuish E., Belsky J. and Leyland A. (2007) *ibid*

⁷⁶ Afasic (2003) *Comments on the Scottish Executive's Review of Speech and Language Therapy, Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy for Children* www.afasicscotland.org.uk

⁷⁷ Gascoigne M. (2006) *ibid*

⁷⁸ McCartney E. (1999) *Barriers to Collaboration: an analysis of systemic barriers to collaboration between teachers and speech and language therapists* JLCD Vol 43 No 4

⁷⁹ Reid J. and Farmer H. *Collaborative Conversations between Teachers and Speech and Language Therapists* I CAN Conference 2007

⁸⁰ Durham F., Keary J. and McShane L. (2007) *Putting Partnership into Practice in Dumfries and Galloway* I CAN Conference September 2007

⁸¹ Nash M. et al (2007) *Afasic Scotland Conference*

⁸² RCSLT (2005) *Clinical Guidelines* Speechmark Publishing

⁸³ Boyle J., McCartney E., Forbes J. and O'Hare A. (2007) *A Randomised Control Trial and Economic Evaluation of Direct Versus Indirect and Individual Versus Group Modes of Speech and Language Therapy for Children with Primary Language Impairment* Health Technology Assessment Vol 11 No 25

⁸⁴ *Young Offenders Debate Continues* RCSLT Bulletin January 2007

⁸⁵ Robson T. (2005) *Using Talking Mats with Young Offenders* RCSLT Bulletin Sept 2005

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What We Know Can Make a Difference

Skilled and confident workforce

Appropriate understanding, skill and experience across the children's workforce are central to achieving real change in children's communication. These impact both on accurate and timely identification of communication needs, and also on the effectiveness of support. Many training programmes have been developed which aim to develop practitioners understanding of language development and intervention.

The importance of a skilled workforce in working with children is recognised widely within recent reports and reviews in Scotland both in the early years⁸⁶ and beyond.⁸⁷ The current review of the early years and childcare workforce⁸⁸ is based on evidence of the effectiveness of well qualified workers, particularly in areas of social deprivation.⁸⁹ It identifies the need for a core set of skills, which despite lacking a focus on children's communication,⁹⁰ will facilitate closer integrated working.

Skilled staff are essential for developing children's language and communication,⁹¹ but there is concern around the limited knowledge and confidence of staff⁹² and calls for more professional development opportunities.⁹³ In education settings, the need for reciprocal⁹⁴ and shared⁹⁵ professional development has been highlighted as key to meeting the needs of children with CSN. The current review of the *Joint Professional Development Framework (JPDF)*⁹⁶ aims to extend this to all practitioners working with children's language.

In Scotland, there is a growing body of evidence confirming the effectiveness and impact of developing the knowledge and skill not just through formalised training packages⁹⁷ but through joint working,⁹⁸ sharing practice and resources. The Learning and Teaching in Scotland website⁹⁹ has a forum for sharing examples of successful practice such as language groups in North Lanarkshire; other sites have online resources for practitioners.^{100 101}

Conclusion

Poor communication skills cost individuals, families and the nation dearly. In a world where communication is crucial to social and economic success, good speech and language skills are central to 21st century children's life chances.

Many children with either *transient* language difficulties or more *persistent* communication support needs can - with support - go on to learn, socialise and communicate in the right way and at the right time.

In the year since *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication* was published there has been a growing recognition across the UK of the crucial role that language plays in children's development. However, it is clear that we do not yet know enough about what makes a difference for children. More research is needed, particularly to identify effective interventions across the age range.

In Scotland, it is recognised that there is a gap in the literature with regard to the costs of CSN to the individual and to society.¹⁰² The ongoing interest around education in the early years; the differences in achievement in areas of social deprivation; the figures that reveal links between social deprivation and lower levels of vocabulary development and an increased likelihood of being NEET are all prompting discussion and action within Scotland.

This report updates and summarises current thinking on the prevalence of CSN and the impact of good practice, and helps show the importance of ensuring that language and communication is a key part of the debate. This comes at a key time, with the government's programme for change in Scotland and the government's review into services for children with speech, language and communication needs across the UK.

Where there is evidence of effective practice, national models and national dissemination are needed in order for all children to benefit.

I CAN Talk Series

I CAN Talk is a series of papers exploring contemporary issues in children's communication development and disability. *I CAN Talk* papers review current research and literature and offer practical evidence-based solutions to inform debate on speech and language and to support practitioners, parents and policy makers.

I CAN Talk Communication Disability and Literacy Difficulties Issue 1
I CAN Talk The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication Issue 2

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