Speech and language therapist

Speech and language therapy is an exciting and varied career. It offers you the chance to make a difference, a high degree of flexibility and excellent employment prospects. You’ll work with patients every day to help improve their care and their lives.

If you enjoy science, education, social sciences, languages, linguistics and medicine, speech and language therapy could be the right profession for you.

"It was humbling to be able to see the difference you can make as a speech and language therapist to someone’s life when they are at their most vulnerable." Max Elswood, student speech and language therapist.

Read Max's story in full. [1]

Working life

Speech and language therapists provide life-changing treatment, support and care for children and adults who have difficulties with communication, or with eating, drinking and swallowing. You'll help people who, for physical or psychological reasons, have problems speaking and communicating. Patients range from children whose speech is slow to develop, to older people whose ability to speak has been impaired by illness or injury. It also includes treatment for those who have difficulty with eating or swallowing.

What you’ll do as a speech and language therapist

You'll see a huge variety of patients and help them with many different issues as a speech and language therapist. Some examples of things you might work on include:

- helping adults and children with learning difficulties communicate with others
- helping people overcome their stammering
- helping adults with speech difficulties as a result of head, neck or throat cancer

Variety is one of the most exciting things about being a speech and language therapist. As well as seeing different patients and conditions you’ll also have the opportunity to work in a multi-disciplinary team in a range of settings from hospitals to community clinics to the homes of patients.
You'll also help children with:

- mild, moderate or severe learning difficulties
- physical disabilities
- language delay
- specific difficulties in producing sounds
- hearing impairment
- cleft lip and palate
- stammering
- autism/social interaction difficulties
- dyslexia
- voice disorders
- selective mutism
- mental health
- developmental language disorder [2].

You'll help adults with:

- communication or eating and swallowing problems following neurological impairments and degenerative conditions, including stroke [3], head injury, Parkinson’s disease and dementia
- voice problems
- mental health issues
- learning difficulties
- physical disabilities
- stammering
- hearing impairment

You would also work closely with teachers and other health professionals, such as doctors [4], nurses [5] and psychologists [6]. They may also supervise the work of speech and language therapy assistants [7].

How to become a speech and language therapist

To become a speech and language therapist you’ll need to train and study at degree or postgraduate level. Entry requirements vary depending on where you’d like to study. You can find the speech and language therapy course to suit you using our Course Finder tool. [8] A degree apprenticeship standard has also been approved.

Want to learn more?

- Find out about the entry requirements and training for speech and language therapy. [9]

- Pay and conditions
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  Speech and language therapists in the NHS work standard hours, which are likely to be
around 37.5 a week. You'll usually start at band 5 of the Agenda for Change [10] pay scales.

Elsewhere, your hours will depend on where you work. You may work evenings and weekends to suit private clients.

You may have to travel between client appointments.

- Where the role can lead

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While studying, you may join the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists [11]. You'll have to keep their skills and knowledge up to date with annual continuing professional development (CPD). The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists helps qualified speech and language therapists to keep up to date with the latest research, and runs courses, conferences and seminars where therapists can exchange ideas and update their skills.

Freelance therapists can join the Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice [12], which also runs courses and conferences.

You may choose to specialise in a particular area of practice such as cleft and lip palate, people with swallowing difficulties or learning disability. Other options include teaching or research [13].

You could also take courses in advanced clinical practice or move into management, either within speech and language therapy services or general management. As head of a local speech and language therapy service you would be responsible for a team of staff and for managing a budget.

Some speech and language therapists set up their own practice, on their own or with other professionals. They take on private clients, sometimes alongside NHS work. There may be opportunities to work overseas.

- Job market and vacancies

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In November 2018, there were 16,505 speech and language therapists registered with the Health and Care Professions Council [14].

Most NHS trusts advertise their vacancies on NHS Jobs [15]. Some advertise on their own websites. You can find a list of NHS organisations NHS Choices [16].
If you’re applying for a role either directly in the NHS or in an organisation that provides NHS services, you’ll be asked to show how you think the NHS values apply in your everyday work. The same will be true if you are applying for a university course funded by the NHS.

Find out more about NHS values [17].

- Further information

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- Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists [18]
- Association of Speech and Language Therapists in Independent Practice [19]
- Health and Care Professions Council [20]

Other roles that may interest you

- Speech and language therapy assistant [21]
- Podiatrist [22]
- Occupational therapist [23]
- Occupational therapy support worker [24]

Source URL: https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/roles-allied-health-professions/speech-and-language-therapist

Links
[8] http://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/course-finder?field_leading_to_a_career_in_tid=205&amp;field_qualification_type_tid=All&amp;field_study_mode_tid=All&amp;
[9] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/speech-and-language-therapist/entry-requirements-and
[17] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/about/working-health/nhs-constitution