

## Real-life story - Max Elswood

Max (with help from his mum) found that a speech and language therapy degree matched his passion for communication. He is now looking forward to starting his first job in a few months.??



Max Elswood Speech and language therapy student

**Employer or university** University of St Mark and St John

**Salary range** ?20k-?30k

### What made you decide to become a speech and language therapist?

I knew that I wanted to do something in healthcare and I looked at a few different options. I didn't want to be a doctor, but I still wanted a career that allowed me to show my passion for communication.

I came across lots of allied health professions, such as radiology and prosthetics, but settled on speech and language therapy mainly because of the wide variety and scope that the career offers. There is such a breadth of career pathways and specialisms that appeal to so many different people within the field. For example, over my three years at university I have explored many avenues ? from working with children and adults in a hospital setting, to working for MI5 or in courtrooms with specialist knowledge what makes our voices unique. Having been taught such a range of expertise, you could be seeing different people every day. Empowering people to communicate is something that really appealed to me as being a career that was challenging as well as rewarding.?

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### How did you become a speech and language therapy student?

I actually grew up wanting to be a vet, but I did some work experience and realised it wasn't the career for

me. I knew I wanted to do something where caring for others was an everyday part of the job. The care aspect has always been really important to me. When I was choosing my subjects at college, I kept my options open and chose subjects ranging from biology to English.

Once it came to choosing my degree, I did what most people do and I sat down with my mum! We went through all the care-related career paths and came across speech and language therapy. Immediately, I was interested. I'm a very creative person and I felt that speech and language therapy would give me the opportunity to use creativity with clinical reasoning to have a positive impact on people's lives.

Speech and language therapy combines all the things I was looking for in a career: creativity, medicine and communication. During my gap year I worked as a teaching assistant and had some experience supporting young people with special educational needs. This confirmed that a career in speech and language therapy was the right choice for me.

Having such an impact on someone's quality of life makes me proud to be studying speech and language therapy.

## **What do you do on a day to day basis?**

One of the best things about my degree is the variety of placements that I've had the opportunity to experience, each one has equipped me with a specific set of skills and knowledge which I will take with me when I step into my first job after finishing my degree.

I've worked in a variety of settings, ranging from a hospital to a nursery and I've enjoyed each one as much as the last. During one placement, I had the opportunity to work on a stroke ward. 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.

My time working in a residential facility for young adults with communication needs was very different, and it was great to see the wide range of specialisms that are out there within the profession. I was working closely with 18 to 21-year olds, providing them with functional language therapy that they could use in conversation. The group I was working with were preparing to do a qualification in English. Helping them reach that goal and leaving a lasting positive influence on someone's life was really rewarding.

University consists of engaging and interactive lectures with a wide variety of modules and topics. The lecturers always try to make you think about your clinical decision-making, giving you the confidence you need to make the most of your time on placement and beyond.

There are loads of academic opportunities that come with the degree too. I recently worked with an adult with aphasia (a language disorder that is common after a stroke) and my lecturer has decided to use my videoed interactions with him at a conference on conversation analysis. To get that sort of exposure is great for my confidence and my career.

## **What are the best bits?**

I love the fact that I get to work with different people all the time and learn more about their lives. Without thinking about it, so many of us take our ability to communicate for granted. People that don't have this luxury are so appreciative of your willingness to have a chat to them. It makes me proud to be able to say that my degree is setting me up to make a difference to those that need compassionate care.

From my experience, you see the impact of your work very quickly. Communication is fundamental to people's mental health and well-being so it's not long before both you and your client are smiling. Having such an impact on someone's quality of life makes me proud to be studying speech and language therapy.

## Next steps and tips for others

At the moment, I am currently working with the University of Exeter on a research project, looking at the effects of singing on quality of life for people with aphasia. It's definitely an interesting area of research, so I'm looking forward to seeing hearing about the results. I am also working on some research of my own, developing a new aphasia therapy. It's great to do a degree which allows me to have both academic and clinical opportunities; this gives me plenty of ideas when I finish university and look at different specialisms within the profession.

In terms of a job when I finish university, I have enjoyed working with adults most so that's the area that I'd like to move into. There is such a massive range of specialisms out there to attract so many different people. I'm about to move into my final 3-month placement and I am confident that will lead directly (and seamlessly) into my first job!

I feel that many peoples' perceptions of speech and language therapy is either 'teaching people how to speak properly' or playing on the floor of a nursery with young ones. The fact is that these perceptions couldn't be further from the truth.

In my view, I think that this may be the reason for such an under-representation of men in the profession. I would like to be able to encourage other young men to get involved in a profession that is as equally as clinical as it is caring.

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