NHS Careers

Speech and language therapist

Join the team and make a difference

Speech and language therapists work with children and adults who have difficulties with speech, language and communication or with eating, drinking and swallowing. They combine an understanding of how the brain forms and interprets language with a knowledge of how we produce and understand sounds, words and sentences and how the mouth and throat function.



What will you do?

You will be working in a variety of settings to assess the extent of someone's difficulty and help them find ways of managing it. Children are an important client group – you could be doing research-based, scientific investigations to discover why their speech, language or communication has not fully developed and then working with them to improve it. In some cases, poor hearing might be part of the problem and you would work with audiologists and ear, nose and throat specialists to find ways forward.

You will also see a wide range of adult clients, from young people with poor communication skills through to stroke patients whose powers of speech or swallowing have been impaired. Your work combines physical and psychological awareness. Technical equipment will help you analyse voice patterns and examine the factors involved in producing speech. However, in your assessment and treatment you will also be taking account of factors such as family and social circumstances.

Treating clients will often mean working with them over a prolonged period to improve

Where will you work?	What skills and qualities will you need?
You are likely to work in one or more of the following settings: • hospitals – inpatients and outpatients clinics • local clinics and health centres • community services and people's own homes • schools.	• the capacity to listen carefully • good communication skills • the confidence to relate to a wide range of people of all ages • the ability to make your own decisions and work in co-operation with others • a responsible, professional approach, respecting client confidentiality

their skills and, especially with children, involving parents and families, teachers, carers and social services. So it's important that you can build and maintain good relationships with a wide range of people.

What entry routes are available?

To practise as a speech and language therapist in the NHS, you will need a degree or postgraduate qualification in speech and language therapy recognised by the Health Professions Council (HPC).

Degree programmes last three or four years, full time, combining study with clinical placements. If you are a graduate with a relevant degree, you can take a two-year accelerated postgraduate course. The NHS provides financial support to eligible students on NHS-funded courses. For more information, visit **www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/students**. Once you have your qualification, you will need to register with the HPC to practise as a speech and language therapist.

There are opportunities for speech and language therapy assistants and bilingual co-workers who play an important part in supporting qualified therapists. They work with therapists in helping clients to develop their communication skills and advising on culture and language differences. There are no formal educational requirements for these roles, but relevant experience and language skills will be useful. Assistants and co-workers will be encouraged to gain qualifications in this area of work, and may be supported on foundation degree courses, which could lead to a full degree and professional qualification. For further information, see the *clinical support worker* factsheet.

For more information on the range of opportunities available in the allied health professions, please visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/qualifications. This gives more specific details about what qualifications are necessary for each role. You can search for current vacancies and download job descriptions at www.jobs.nhs.uk

How can you develop your career?

As your clinical experience grows you can move into more senior posts and specialise in working with a particular group of clients or type of speech and language disorder, such as speech delay in children or neurological disorders such as Parkinson's disease. You will have the opportunity to do further study and research in your chosen specialism, and you can become involved in teaching.

As well as moving to more senior and specialised roles within this area, you will also have the chance to take on additional responsibilities and progress within the organisation, as part of the Career Framework. For more information about this initiative please see the *Careers in the allied health professions* booklet.

Pay

The national pay system in the NHS is called Agenda for Change (AfC). This applies to all staff except doctors, dentists and very senior managers. These are examples of roles and the AfC bands at which they may be paid: speech and language therapy assistant (Band 4); speech and language therapist (Band 5); specialist speech and language therapist (Band 6); speech and language therapist – advanced (Band 7). To find out more about pay bands, and to see the most up-to-date salary information, visit **www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/payandbenefits**

To find out more about careers in the allied health professions, please visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/working

For more information on the professional bodies relevant to the allied health professions, visit www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/list/contacts

© Crown Copyright [February 2012]