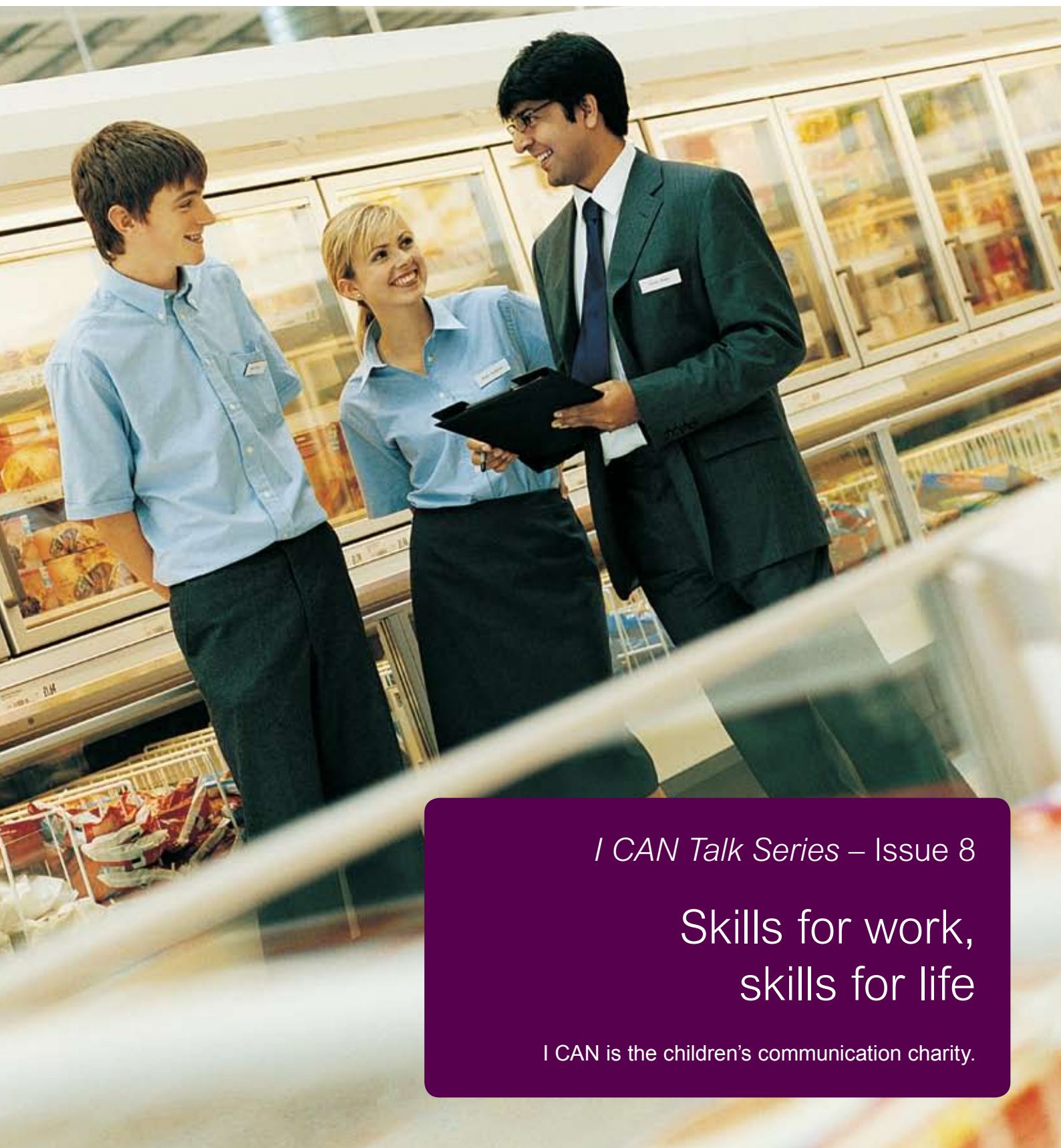


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# Skills for work, skills for life

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# Skills for work, skills for life

## Foreword

There's never been a time when soft skills centred on language have been more vital for children's futures.

Employers tell us that they place great value on skills such as team working, negotiation skills, confidence, and skills for problem solving. Top of their list are communication skills. Think about it – when did you last see a job advertised that didn't ask for 'good communication skills'? Or one that states 'excellent communication skills not required'?

But employers tell us that communication is the skill that is most frequently lacking in new recruits to the workplace. Across the UK there are more children and young people struggling with their communication skills than you might think. Speech and language problems are the most common form of developmental delay in young children. In some parts of the country, particularly in areas of social deprivation, 50% of children are starting school without the speech, language and communication skills they need to learn. This continues into secondary education, with significant numbers of young people leaving school without the language skills they need to get – and keep – a job.

What this means is that some children slip through the system with their communication needs not being met. Their poor language hampers their behaviour, relationships and learning, and limits their employment chances. Most are unaware that, with the right help they have the power to improve.

This report explores what is meant by soft skills in education and the workplace. It positions language as the foundation of all other skill areas. The report outlines the increasing importance of soft skills to employers. It examines how schools

are preparing children and young people for the world of work and adulthood and gives examples of good practice. Where young people are taught skills with an emphasis on communication, they find the transition to the workplace easier. In particular, we address the challenges of developing the soft skills of children and young people who struggle with speech, language and communication.

Poor skills cost the UK economy more than £10 billion a year in lost revenue from taxes, lower productivity and the increased burden on the welfare state. Almost 16% of 18 year olds are NEET (not in education, employment or training). Many of these young people struggle to communicate well. Helping children and young people develop their speech, language and communication is key to achieving the vision of the UK being a world leader in skills by 2020.

Communication is core business for BT and I CAN. But it needs to be everyone's business. It is too important to leave to chance or take for granted. The cost to children, to families and to the economy is simply too great.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Rake'.

**Sir Michael Rake**  
Chairman, BT Group plc



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth Vallance'.

**Lady Elizabeth Vallance**  
Chair of Trustees, I CAN

# Skills for work, skills for life

## Introduction

### Communication is central

Good communication, team working and confidence<sup>1</sup> are seen by employers as fundamental for success in the workplace.<sup>2</sup> They are valued by many above traditional qualifications:<sup>3</sup>

*“...in a business like ours, what we really need are personal skills – the skills of team-working and communicating with others.”<sup>4</sup>*

*Sir Terry Leahy, CBI Skills Summit, 2007*

These skills need a strong foundation of speech, language and communication. However, speech and language skills currently have no prominence in skills policy or practice. They are not properly understood as critical to the development of skills for the workplace.

### Communication skills shortage

The clear recognition in the business world around the importance of communication skills in particular, is balanced by an equally clear concern about their shortage in today's workforce:

*“Literacy, communication skills, numeracy and enthusiasm are the most important employability skills in the view of respondents, and a lack of them in a candidate is a ‘deal-breaker’ for many employers. There may be a lack of clarity about how people acquire these skills; there is no doubt the UK economy has a burning need for more of them.”<sup>5</sup>*

*UK Commission for Employment and Skills 2009*

*“Communication skills are well known as an area of weakness among many young people.”<sup>6</sup>*  
CBI 2007

In the new global ‘knowledge’ economy, aspirations and competitiveness are rising. The workplace is constantly evolving. We are preparing young people for jobs that don't yet exist in an employment landscape that is as yet undefined.<sup>7</sup>

Speech, language and communication are the means by which all young people need to acquire the skills they need for work and life. They are the constants in a time of rapid change, making them ever more important.

Recent education policy has to some degree acknowledged these issues by introducing personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) to the curriculum. However, no recognition is made of the underlying speech, language and communication skills that are necessary to access PLTS. It is taken for granted that all young people will all have necessary speech, language and communication ability to access learning in this area.

This is not the case for children and young people with poor speech, language and communication skills.

1 *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions 2009* <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/227102/fair-access.pdf>

2 YouGov Survey commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council 2006 <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/LSC/2006/externalrelations/press/nat-bosseswanttohireoutfireteamplayers-pr-may2006.pdf> and Learning and Skills Council Employer Skills Survey 2005 <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/Lsc/2006/research/commissioned/nationalemployersskillsurvey2005keyfindings-rejune2006.pdf>

3 *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions 2009* <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/227102/fair-access.pdf>

4 *Speech by Sir Terry Leahy at the CBI Skills Summit 12/09/2007 – Tesco plc* [www.ukces.org.uk/upload/pdf/EmployabilityChallengeFullReport.pdf](http://www.ukces.org.uk/upload/pdf/EmployabilityChallengeFullReport.pdf)

5 *The Employability Challenge UK Commission for Employment and Skills 2009* <http://www.ukces.org.uk/tags/employability-challenge-full-report>

6 *CBI Report Embedding Employability in Work Experience 2007* [www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/timewellspent.pdf](http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/timewellspent.pdf)

7 [www.workinspiration.com](http://www.workinspiration.com)

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Many young people leaving school are at risk of a future being NEET or worse, offending. A significant proportion of these young people have impoverished language; limited vocabulary; poor sentence structure; difficulties with narrative and discourse as well as inability to interact effectively with a range of people in varied situations. These are precisely the language and communication skills needed for work and life.

Worryingly then, the basic skills strategies put in place to mediate against the risk of young people becoming NEET are in danger of being inaccessible to the very young people they are aiming to support. Their poor speech, language and communication skills are a major barrier. Apprenticeships, the 14-19 Diploma and other initiatives have no built-in element to support the development of language and communication skills. They are therefore potentially destined for failure before they even begin. So are many remedial literacy and numeracy programmes.

This report highlights the fundamental importance of speech, language and communication in developing many of the skills needed for success in the workplace. It looks at the issue from both an employer and educational perspective and highlights the potential impact of the continued lack of focus on these skills.

The report emphasises the importance of speech, language and communication as a necessary and integral element of skills development. It proposes a systematic approach to embedding speech, language and communication in the development of skills for work and life, including:

- a strong core of speech, language and communication embedded in apprenticeships and 14-19 curriculum, to ensure access to the most vulnerable youngsters
- teaching staff to understand and value these speech, language and communication skills in their own right and use as a vehicle to teaching other skills to sustain their development
- business and the education sector joining together to enable language and communication to be embedded in the teaching of skills in a meaningful and functional way to all young people to enhance skills for work and life.

For young people themselves, there needs to be a new message: good language and communication are essential skills for work. But crucially these are not skills that are set at birth, they are learnt. Young people need to know this and be confident that they can improve their speech, language and communication skills.

# Skills for work, skills for life

## Preparing children and young people

There is widespread recognition of the need for skills development at all ages and stages. However, neither educational policy nor practice acknowledges the central role of speech, language and communication in underpinning many of the skills needed for life and work. As a result there is no systematic approach to supporting these skills nationally.

### Employer's perspective – the skills they need

Employers value young people who have good communication, literacy and interaction skills<sup>8</sup> with many employers placing communication and other soft skills above qualifications.<sup>9</sup>

In a major study carried out by the Teaching, Learning and Research Programme (TLRP), in-depth interviews were carried out with leading companies across the world. It found that companies were more concerned with 'competence' rather than skill. For virtually all jobs, behavioural competencies or soft skills were identified as a priority.<sup>10</sup> The authors felt the outcomes of the study *"...challenge current policy assumptions about the role of education and skills in the global knowledge economy"*.<sup>11</sup>

This is further reflected in a wide range of employer views, surveys and research studies. In the foreword of *The Employability Challenge* by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills in 2009, Sir Michael Rake, Chairman, BT Group plc wrote: *"By working together well, individuals contribute to the productivity of the economy and*

*success of society, improve the lives of colleagues and customers, and realise their own creative potential. This is enabled by everyone coming out of the public employment and skills system being able to work in a team, communicate clearly, listen well, be interested and keen to learn, take criticism, solve problems, read, write and add. These employability skills are the lubricant of our increasingly complex and interconnected workplace."*<sup>12</sup>

Employers value staff who have effective communication, literacy and interaction skills.<sup>13</sup> In the service sector, it is often these soft skills that a company's reputation for professionalism and excellent customer service rests on.<sup>14</sup>

Research indicates a growing need for well developed personal and interaction skills. In the USA, for example the shift in employment patterns from manufacturing to the service sector has impacted the skills needed in the workforce, from more technical to softer skills.<sup>15</sup> In Britain, it is estimated that by 2020 there will be 3 million fewer low-skilled jobs than today.<sup>16</sup> There is an emphasis on more customised high value goods and services,<sup>17</sup> where success often depends on the quality of interactions between employees and their customers or clients.<sup>18</sup> In this context, young people need to be able to quickly acquire service specific language and to adapt their communication style and register to range of customers and clients.

In professions such as law, there is clear evidence that the ability to deal with people effectively

8 YouGov Survey commissioned by the Learning and Skills Council 2006 <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/LSC/2006/externalrelations/press/nat-bosseswanttohirenofireteamplayers-pr-may2006.pdf> and Learning and Skills Council Employer Skills Survey 2005 <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/Lsc/2006/research/commissioned/nat-nationalemployersskillsurvey2005keyfindings-rejune2006.pdf>

9 *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions* 2009 <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/227102/fair-access.pdf>

10 *Teaching and learning research briefing* October 2008 no. 53 [www.tlrp.org/publ/documents/BrownRB53final.pdf](http://www.tlrp.org/publ/documents/BrownRB53final.pdf)

11 *Ibid.*

12 *The Employability Challenge* UK Commission for Employment and Skills 2009 <http://www.ukces.org.uk/tags/employability-challenge-full-report>

13 Learning and Skills Council (2006) *National Employers Skills Survey: Key findings 2005* <http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/LSC/2006/research/commissioned/nat-nationalemployersskillsurvey2005keyfindings-re-june2006.pdf>

14 *Growth and Leadership Focus on Soft Skills: A Leadership Wake-up Call* Carole Nicolaides © 2002 [www.businessknowhow.com/growth/softskills.htm](http://www.businessknowhow.com/growth/softskills.htm)

15 I CAN 2006 *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication*

16 [www.workinspiration.com](http://www.workinspiration.com)

17 Delarue, A., Van Hootegem, G., Procter, S. and Burrigge, M. *Teamworking and Organisational Performance: A Review of Survey-based Research* *International Journal of Management Reviews* vol 10 no 2 (2007) pp127-148; Ichniowski, C., Kochan, T.A., Levine, D., Olson, C. and Strauss, G. *What Works at Work: Overview and Assessment in Industrial Relations* vol 35 no 3 (1996) pp299-333; Walton, R.E. *From Control to Commitment in the Workplace* *Harvard Business Review* vol 85 no 2 (1985) pp77-84

18 Coats, D. (2009) *Ed Advancing opportunity: the future of good work* The Smith Institute

and politely can determine professional success more than mere technical skills.<sup>19</sup> In others, such as the allied health professions, these skills are seen as integral to effective practice.<sup>20</sup> Having the language and communication skills to effectively listen, empathise and present information clearly and concisely are essential in a range of professions.

The *Skills at Work Survey* run by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) reinforces this trend,<sup>21</sup> noting a significant increase in the importance of influencing skills. They define these as a closely correlated set of competencies associated with communicating, analysing and persuading.<sup>22</sup> The ability to use language to create persuasive arguments that are well organised and coherent, is therefore essential.

Crucially, employers have reported that the one area they feel needs more improvement in young people in the workplace or on work experience are their communication skills.<sup>23,24</sup> They highlight specific areas for improvement, including understanding and responding to oral communication, as well as clarifying when instructions are unclear.<sup>25</sup> Young people therefore need to get better at repairing breakdowns in communication and have the appropriate language and communication skills to know when and how to seek support or clarification.

Around 60% of young people cite running their own business as their first career choice.<sup>26</sup> Many young people believe their own personal attributes are more important in helping them pursue a career than their qualifications. They would benefit from understanding the value placed on communication skills in the business world and the ways in which these skills can be enhanced to support their aspirations.

However, if young people lack effective communication skills, many of the initiatives in place to support their transition into the workplace – quality work experience, apprenticeships and entrepreneur programmes – will not be fruitful for those who need them most.

19 Giusti, Giuseppe (2008) *Soft Skills for Lawyers*, Chelsea Publishing ([3]) ISBN 978-0955892608 cited in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft\\_skills](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft_skills)

20 Stenglehofen, J. (1993) *Teaching Students in Clinical Settings* Chapman and Hall  
21 [www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/contactsandpeople/alanfelstead/SkillsatWork-1986to2006.pdf](http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/contactsandpeople/alanfelstead/SkillsatWork-1986to2006.pdf)

22 *Influence skills: persuading or influencing others, instructing, training or teaching people, making speeches or presentations, writing long reports, analysing complex problems in depth, and planning the activities of others*

23 *Working with the 3 Rs* CBI 2006 cited in <http://archive.basicsskills.co.uk/sharingpractice/detail.php?SharingPracticeID=397735658>

24 *Time Well Spent: Embedding employability in work experience* CBI 2007  
<http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/timewellspent.pdf>

25 *Working on the Three Rs Employers' Priorities for Functional Skills in Maths and English 2006* <http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/functionalskills0906.pdf>

26 [www.workinspiration.com](http://www.workinspiration.com)

# Skills for work, skills for life

## Employer's perspectives – the skills gap

Generations of business people have been educated to believe that effective management and leadership principally requires 'hard' strategic and analytical skills, a clear understanding of business dynamics and the ability to make effective decisions.<sup>27</sup> However, it is becoming clear that the so-called soft skills currently in demand are not an easy option:

*"Ironically, for many managers, the soft skills are the hard skills. Ask anyone who has had to manage change, deal with organisational politics, or build a disparate group of people into an effective team."*<sup>28</sup>

A wide range of employer's organisations and surveys highlight not only the fundamental need for skills such as communication skills, team working and confidence,<sup>29</sup> but the shortage of these skills throughout the workforce.<sup>30</sup> In job vacancies due to recognised skills shortages, two of the most common skills which are lacking are oral communication and customer handling.<sup>31,32,33</sup>

Moreover, the deficit is not just found in young people who start work at 16. Employers recognise a lack of skills such as communication and verbal reasoning in their graduate recruits.<sup>34</sup> There is also evidence that some employers are beginning to look overseas for workers with the right skill mix.<sup>35</sup>

Addressing this skill deficit is complex, as it is comparatively harder to teach these softer skills. Many sector skills councils<sup>36</sup> recognise the

importance of soft skills and highlight the need to embed the teaching of, for example, customer service and soft skills into the curriculum.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, some would suggest that the development of these skills should start as early as seven-years-old.<sup>38,39</sup>

Key leaders in the business world from individuals through to the CBI have repeatedly expressed concern about the lack of these skills in young people entering the workforce, with Sir Terry Leahy describing the standard of school leavers as "woefully low." More recently Sir Stuart Rose commented on the British education system claiming that businesses are "not always getting what we need."<sup>40</sup>

Speech and language skills are necessary not only for soft skills of communication and interaction, but for basic skills of literacy and mathematics.<sup>41</sup> The link between speech, language and literacy skills has been well documented with a range of research evidence highlighting a clear link between speech and spoken language difficulties with subsequent literacy difficulties.<sup>42,43</sup> Speech, language and communication are therefore essential components to enable the development of both soft skills and basic skills that employers are looking for.

The importance of the link between education and employer is emphasised in much of the policy around skills. More than ever, effective collaboration, common understanding and shared goals between educators and employers are

27 <http://www.personneltoday.com/articles/2006/09/19/37247/the-soft-skills-are-the-hardest-of-all.html>

28 *Personnel Today* (2006) The soft skills are the hardest of all [www.personneltoday.com/articles/2006/09/19/37247/the-soft-skills-are-the-hardest-of-all.html](http://www.personneltoday.com/articles/2006/09/19/37247/the-soft-skills-are-the-hardest-of-all.html)

29 *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*

30 *ibid*

31 *UK Commission for Employment and Skills – Ambition 2020* [www.ukces.org.uk/upload/pdf/UKCES\\_FullReport\\_USB\\_A2020.pdf](http://www.ukces.org.uk/upload/pdf/UKCES_FullReport_USB_A2020.pdf)

32 [www.bettersoftskills.com/research.htm](http://www.bettersoftskills.com/research.htm)

33 *Watkins, R. (2004) Perspectives on a research agenda for learning and skills* Learning and Skills Council

34 *Association of Graduate Recruiters survey* (2006)

35 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3819231.stm>

36 *Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are independent, employer-led, UK-wide organisations designed to build a skills system that is driven by employer demand. There are currently 25 SSCs covering over 90% of the economy* [www.ukces.org.uk/sector-skills-councils/about-sscs/](http://www.ukces.org.uk/sector-skills-councils/about-sscs/)

37 [www.goskills.org/files/Go-Skills\\_Report.pdf](http://www.goskills.org/files/Go-Skills_Report.pdf)

38 [www.trainingzone.co.uk/cgi-bin/item.cgi?id=163990](http://www.trainingzone.co.uk/cgi-bin/item.cgi?id=163990) January 2007

39 *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions 2009* <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/227102/fair-access.pdf>

40 [www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/6638699/Sir-Stuart-Rose-Schools-are-not-providing-workers-with-the-right-skills.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/6638699/Sir-Stuart-Rose-Schools-are-not-providing-workers-with-the-right-skills.html)

41 *Rose J. (2006) Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading* DfES

42 *Dockerill, J. and Lindsay, G. Specific Speech and Language Difficulties and Literacy in T. Nunes and P. Bryant (eds) (2003) Handbook of Children's Literacy pp 403-435* London Kluwer Academic Publishers

43 *Myer, L. and Botting, N. (2008) Literacy in the mainstream inner-city school: its relationship to spoken language* *Child Language in Teaching and Therapy* 24, 1pp28-114



of the utmost importance. Despite this, there is clear concern in the business world that this is not happening. However, shared attention to the lifelong development of communication alongside other skills is a goal which, when shared between schools and the workplace, make the difference for many young people.

### Education perspective

Within education, there is a longstanding debate about the balance between teaching knowledge and teaching skills. One view is that pupils should take away not just knowledge but a capacity to learn, from their education.<sup>44</sup> The argument continues today<sup>45</sup> with emphasis on developing the intellectual, personal and social resources that will enable pupils to “*flourish ... in a diverse and changing world*,”<sup>46</sup> for example, through the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme.<sup>47</sup> Skills are enhanced via Assessment for Learning (AfL), the Assessing Pupil's Progress (APP) initiative, and the wider PLTS now part of the new secondary curriculum.<sup>48</sup>

However, all of these programmes require young people to be able to use language to reflect on their own learning and use higher order language skills to analyse, problem solve and communicate outcomes. Without language ability, SEAL and all initiatives mediated by language will be inaccessible to many of the young people who would gain most from it.

The *Rose Report* highlighted the importance of language, not only for accessing literacy, but across the whole of the curriculum and the child's development.<sup>49</sup> According to the Gilbert Report, soft skills are as important in education as in the workplace. However, it argues that because speech, language and communication and other soft skills are difficult to measure, these fundamental skills are not given due weight or priority.<sup>50</sup> The danger is that teachers will measure what is easy, rather than what is necessary<sup>51</sup> and therefore neglect and undervalue these bedrock skills.

Education systems in Sweden and Finland tackle this issue differently; the first few years of school life are spent building the social and emotional abilities which make children ‘school ready.’ Both nations are at the top of the educational attainment leagues.<sup>52</sup>

Speech, language and communication are often the vehicle for teaching many of the skills in demand by employers, as well as being important in their own right. Emphasis on spoken communication is advocated from multiple sources, acknowledged as central to the curriculum, to enable learning and support literacy skills.<sup>53,54</sup> Spoken communication is also fundamental to the development of skills needed by employers. However, there remains criticism of the limited attention given to the development of speaking and listening both in schools<sup>55</sup> and the post-16 sector.<sup>56</sup>

44 Claxton, G. (2007) *Extending Young People's Capacity to Learn British Journal of Educational Studies* Vol. 55 No.2 June 2007 pp 1–20

45 *ibid.*

46 ESRC TLRP *Evidence-informed principles for teaching and learning: No 1 March 2006*

47 <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/87009>

48 <http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/skills/plts/index.aspx>

49 Rose, J. (2006) *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading DfES*

50 Gilbert, C. (2006) *2020 Vision Report of the Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group*

51 Claxton, G. (2007) *Extending Young People's Capacity to Learn British Journal of Educational Studies* Vol.55 No.2 June 2007 pp 1–20

52 *Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens* Graham Allen MP and Iain Duncan Smith MP 2008 Centre for Social Justice and Smith Institute

53 Rose, J. (2006) *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading DfES*

54 <http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/>

55 See OFSTED [2005] *English 2000-2005: A review of inspection evidence* HMI 235156

56 Green, A. and Howard, U. [2007] *Skills and social practices: making common cause* NRDC

# Skills for work, skills for life

## Supporting the skills journey; what works?

The importance of skills development from cradle to grave cannot be underestimated. Early consideration of skills development is essential to prepare young people for the global economy in which they will be working. Speech, language and communication have an essential role to play in supporting the development of these skills.

### At home

The role of parents and families is seen as important in supporting young people's early aspiration<sup>57</sup> and has a major impact on their attainment. It is argued that any policy concerned with development of skills should ensure the family is at its core<sup>58</sup> with the importance of children's early years for their future outcomes strongly emphasised.<sup>59</sup>

Children benefit from a responsive, language-rich environment, with positive communication opportunities for the development of skills for work and life.<sup>60</sup> The importance of parents in fostering these skills therefore is seen as key, particularly across early years. There is evidence of successful approaches to working with vulnerable families to improve the home learning environment.<sup>61</sup> Talking to young children is well evidenced as being key to their linguistic and intellectual development.<sup>62</sup> However, for many parents advice around the importance of speech, language and communication is not always accessible<sup>63</sup> and

parents in low socio-economic groups in particular suggest they need more information about why communication is important.<sup>64</sup>

### In school

A number of research projects have evidenced positive changes for children and young people in developing the skills employers are looking for.

The evidence has shown that providing opportunities alone for children to work and talk together has no real benefit.<sup>65</sup> Children and young people need guidance on how to work in groups, how to use their language to question and negotiate and to become independent learners, which helps them develop those skills employers are craving in their workforce.

Explicit teaching and teacher demonstration of skills, such as listening and questioning have been found to be effective.<sup>66</sup> This is the same for skills inherent in 'learning how to learn' sessions, such as communication, reflection, self awareness, resilience and self confidence.<sup>67</sup> Children need a good foundation of speech and language to access these opportunities, and then practise using them in real life situations. Collaborative learning, for example, enables children to practise skills needed in the workplace and has been found to help learning and understanding.<sup>68</sup>

In some educational settings in the USA, learning outcomes are embedded in complex projects

57 *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions 2009* <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/227102/fair-access.pdf>

58 Heckman cited in 0 – 5: *Small Children make a big difference* Provocation Series Volume 3 Number 1 Alan Sinclair The Work Foundation (January 2007)

59 *Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens* Graham Allen MP and Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP Centre for Social Justice and Smith Institute 2008

60 Cross, M. *I CAN Talk Language and Social Exclusion* Issue 4 | CAN 2007

61 *Supporting parents in promoting early learning: Early learning partnerships project* Department for Children, Families and Schools [www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/015140/index.shtml](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/015140/index.shtml)

62 Hart and Risley (1995) *Meaningful differences in everyday parenting and intellectual development in young American children*

63 *Sure Start Children's Centres – Survey of Parents* Department for Children, Families and Schools Research Report RR083 2009

64 [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)

65 Howe, C. and Mercer, N. (2007) *Children's Social Development, Peer Interaction and Classroom Learning (Primary Review Research Survey 211b)* Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education

66 *Widening access to educational opportunities through teaching children how to reason together* Wegerif, R., Littleton, K., Dawes, L., Mercer, N. and Rowe, D. *Westminster Studies in Education* Vol. 27 No. 2 2004

67 *Research Papers in Education* Vol. 21, No. 2, June 2006, pp. 119–132 *Learning How to Learn and Assessment for Learning: a theoretical inquiry* Paul Black\*, Robert McCormick, Mary James and David Pedder

68 Howe, C. and Mercer, N. (2007) *Children's Social Development, Peer Interaction and Classroom Learning (Primary Review Research Survey 211b)* Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education

designed to build soft skills as well as course-content knowledge.<sup>69</sup> Case studies from the Functional Skills Project reinforce this, emphasising the need for skills to be taught through “purposeful ‘real-life’ or realistic activities with a strong focus on discussion, explanation, decision making and problem solving.”<sup>70</sup> All of these activities rely on language skills, such as verbal reasoning, descriptive language and abstract vocabulary for explanations and problem solving.

Some schools and colleges are adopting innovative ways to learn readiness for work; designing products and services, business enterprise challenges, enterprise fairs and involving employers in the delivery of curriculum subjects. Unlike conventional lessons, these activities are often student-led, enabling young people to develop and deepen the skills that they will need at work.<sup>71</sup> Students need to understand and use language to lead and develop such projects. They also need language to communicate business ideas. Communication skills are required team working; such as listening, taking account of others’ perspectives and using language to create persuasive, well organised and coherent arguments.

Third sector organisations are supporting readiness for work through specific projects such as the *Learning to Lead* project, which supports young people to explore different roles within the team, to develop existing skills and

ideas and build up new life skills.<sup>72</sup> The *Words for Work* project aims to support speaking and listening skills and confidence of staff entering the workplace.<sup>73</sup>

I CAN’s *Secondary Talk* programme aims to ensure support for all young people’s SLCN in secondary schools and in doing so supports skills needed for work. *Secondary Talk* recognises the need for awareness raising amongst young people about the importance of good communication skills as a vital first step.

The programme includes a tool to identify young people who have hidden speech, language and communication difficulties. It provides schools with vital clear paths of action and resources that they can employ to tackle these deficits amongst their students. It also provides opportunities for businesses to get involved in raising awareness and supporting young people to develop the communication skills that will help them into to work and to thrive once there.

Linking business and education, BT has produced *The Personal Skills Journey*, which explores skills commonly used in the world of work and aims to support young people to develop these skills.<sup>74</sup> It is designed to provide students with knowledge and skills which, if applied, will increase their marketability in the transition from ‘learning to earning’. Skills covered include a look at diversity and inclusion; the importance of respect and valuing the difference in young people and others.

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69 *Partnership for 21st Century Skills*

70 *Functional skills project* [http://www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_6062.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_6062.aspx)

71 *Delivering functional skills, Lessons learnt from the pilot Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2009*

72 <http://actionforchildren.org.uk/uploads/media/36/7857.pdf>

73 [www.literacytrust.org.uk/literacynews/wordsforwork.html](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/literacynews/wordsforwork.html)

74 [www.bt.com/learningskillsresources](http://www.bt.com/learningskillsresources)

# Skills for work, skills for life

## *Supporting the skills journey; what works?*

The Communication Trust (TCT)<sup>75</sup> works to develop and support communication for all children and young people.<sup>76</sup> Workforce development is recognised as key to supporting improved outcomes for all children.<sup>77,78,79</sup> However, teachers have reported a lack of confidence both in assessing the spoken language of their pupils and in implementing strategies to support the development of communication skills.<sup>80</sup> TCT has developed the Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF), which is a competency-based framework, enabling those working with children to identify the skills and knowledge they have and those which they need to develop in order to support the communication of all children.

### **In the workplace**

The 2006 CBI Employment Trends survey reported a widespread view among employers that work experience could help young people develop their employability skills. The most important of 'employability skills' was oral communication.<sup>81</sup> Recently a national call to action has encouraged businesses to focus on providing inspiring work experiences for young people.<sup>82</sup>

However, young people will need effective language and communication skills in order to access and take full advantage of these opportunities. Employers have a vital role in reinforcing to students the need for effective communication amongst other personal skills and in providing work experience placements that support and develop these skills.

There are examples where a focus on communication skills during work experience has enabled students to think about and practise these skills. At Bentley Motors, for instance, students have to report on activities such as communication and teamwork.

Accord puts a particular emphasis on written and oral communication skills. Work experience at the Crown Prosecution Service involves student and prosecutor role playing the arguments and possible counter-arguments that might arise in court.<sup>83</sup>

*“The students enjoy this exercise as it encourages them to use their analytical skills and builds confidence in their ability to communicate effectively.”<sup>84</sup>*

Exposure to innovative businesses and social enterprises can convey to young people the importance of the wider 'employability' skills, help prepare them for career pathways that are less straightforward, and show them the skills they will need to compete in the job market.<sup>85</sup> In this way, work-related placements are helping young people learn as much about the future as the present world of work.

A further emphasis on language and communication from employers would stress to young people the adaptable nature of these skills across a wide range of career opportunities. Young people would benefit from detailed knowledge on how language is used to effectively engage with customers and clients and how clear,

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

76 *I CAN Talk Speech, Language and Communication and the Children's Workforce Issue 6 (2008) The Communication Trust / I CAN*

77 *Every Child Matters: change for children (2004) HM Government*

78 *Department for Children, Families and Schools (2007) The Children's Plan; Building Brighter Futures*

79 *Aiming High for Disabled Children: better support for families (May 2007)*

80 [www.ican.org.uk/talkingpoint](http://www.ican.org.uk/talkingpoint)

81 [www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/timewellspent.pdf](http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/timewellspent.pdf)

82 [www.workinspiration.com](http://www.workinspiration.com)

83 [www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/timewellspent.pdf](http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/timewellspent.pdf)

84 *ibid.*

85 *Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy (2008) Creative Opportunity: A study of work-related learning opportunities in the Creative Industries for young people aged 14-19 London: NESTA; Freshminds (2008) Third Sector Opportunities: A study of work-related opportunities in the Third Sector for young people aged 14-19 London: NESTA Rural Opportunities: A study of work-related learning opportunities in the rural economy for young people aged 14-19 London: NESTA. The reports are available at [www.nesta.org.uk](http://www.nesta.org.uk)*

empathic and effective communication can be used to support problem-solving and team work.

Some universities are aiming to embed employability skills within their teaching.<sup>86</sup> They aim to provide students with a variety of inter and extra-curricula opportunities alongside work experience that will enable them to enhance their employability.<sup>87</sup> Other projects focus on non-cognitive skills such as team working, communication and assertiveness<sup>88</sup> or other soft and employability skills.<sup>89</sup>

It has been found that organisations, particularly those frequently dealing with customers face-to-face, are generally more prosperous if they train their staff to use soft skills.<sup>90</sup> However, the Basic Skills Agency presented a strong argument for developing speaking and listening skills before young people enter the workplace to enable a successful transition to work.<sup>91</sup>

Work based training often has an emphasis on basic skills or life skills and although soft skills are being recognised, the explicit recognition of a strong foundation of speech, language and communication needed to support all of these skills is largely ignored. So many of the skills needed for work and for life depend on good speech, language and communication; they can no longer be taken for granted.

### Implications of not working on these skills

Across the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the UK is in the bottom

25% of member countries in getting young people into work, education or training.<sup>92</sup> The cost to our economy is substantial. Government figures suggest that each new entrant into the NEET group aged 16 will cost the public £97,000 over their lifetime, with those who never re-engage with the world of work costing as much as £300,000.<sup>93</sup> A 2007 study by the Prince's Trust put the economic cost of youth unemployment through lost productivity and benefits payments at £4.69 billion a year.<sup>94</sup>

There is awareness of the increasing importance of 'non-cognitive' factors in determining outcomes, from educational attainment to employment prospects, and in securing greater social cohesion.<sup>95</sup> However, there is insufficient emphasis on the impact of poor speech, language and communication skills. Young people who are NEET are more likely to have experienced social disadvantage<sup>96</sup> and so may be less likely to have access to experiences that help them to develop the skills and attitudes needed by employers.<sup>97</sup> It is argued that children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to have a less orderly and secure local environment, parents who are less engaged and are at much higher risk of impoverished language skills.<sup>98</sup>

Consequently, while activities to promote development of 'non-cognitive' factors and underlying language skills are of value to all children and young people, they are of particular value to certain groups in minimising social exclusion and closing the attainment gap.<sup>99</sup>

86 [www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/publications/learningandemployability](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/publications/learningandemployability)

87 [www.uclan.ac.uk/ahss/ceth/employability\\_framework.php](http://www.uclan.ac.uk/ahss/ceth/employability_framework.php)

88 *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions 2009* <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/227102/fair-access.pdf>

89 *ibid.*

90 Paajanen, George (1992) *Employment Inventory Reports Technology Based Solutions / Personnel Decisions Inc* cited in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft\\_skills](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft_skills)

91 *Talking at work* © The Basic Skills Agency at NIACE December 2007

92 Cited in 0 – 5: *Small Children make a big difference Provocation Series Volume 3 Number 1* Alan Sinclair, *The Work Foundation* (January 2007)

93 *Estimating the cost of being 'not in education, employment or training' at age 16-18* Department for Education and Skills Research Report 346, June 2002 cited in CBI neet oct 2008

94 Prince's Trust (2007) *The cost of exclusion; counting the cost of youth disadvantage in the UK*

95 Margo, J., Dixon, M. with Pearce, N. and Reed, H., *Freedom's orphans: raising youth in a changing world* (ISBN 186030303x) Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) 2006

96 CBI (2008) *Towards a NEET solution. Tackling underachievement in young people* <http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/CBI-NEET-Oct08.pdf> 99

97 *ibid.*

98 Locke, A., Ginsborg, J., and Peers, I. (2002) *Development and Disadvantage: implications for early years* *International Journal of Language and Communications Disorders* Vol 27 No 1

99 Gilbert, C. (2006) *2020 Vision Report of the Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group*

# Skills for work, skills for life

## Supporting the skills journey; what works?

### Children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)

In some parts of the country, particularly in areas of social disadvantage, around half of children going into school do so without adequate speech, language and communication skills for their age.<sup>100</sup> There is growing evidence identifying significant numbers of secondary school pupils with similar needs.<sup>101, 102</sup> In a study in one inner city secondary school, the number of young people with these difficulties was found to be 75%.<sup>103</sup>

There is strong evidence of a clear link between social disadvantage and language delay<sup>104, 105</sup> and emerging evidence of a high incidence of poor language skills, often unidentified, in young offenders<sup>106</sup> and looked after children.<sup>107</sup>

*“...by age 4, a child in a professional family would have experienced almost 45 million words, compared to a child in a family receiving public assistance who experienced around 13 million words.”<sup>108</sup>*

These disparities are strongly linked to differences in children’s early rates of vocabulary growth, vocabulary use, and general accomplishments and are strong indicators of differences in school performance at age 9. Poor language compromises a young person’s ability to learn and socialise and impacts on their ability to achieve the skills they need for employment and life.

The long-term implications are enormous – poor literacy, poor academic performance, potential for school exclusion, possibly leading to youth justice or NEET.<sup>109</sup> Supporting speech, language and communication and development of skills is an essential component in breaking the cycle of disadvantage.<sup>110</sup>

Around 10% of all children and young people have more persistent SLCN.<sup>111</sup> A young person with SLCN may have difficulty in one or any combination speech, language and communication. SLCN is often known as a ‘hidden disability’, as it is not always easily recognisable and young people can become quite proficient at hiding the true nature of their difficulties. Problems with comprehension, expressive language and vocabulary are all very hard to detect.

100 Basic Skills Agency (2002) *Summary Report into Young Children’s Skills on Entry to Education*

101 Spencer, S., Clegg, 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

102 Spencer, S. *Language and social disadvantage: Does language play a role in the attainment and outcomes of mainstream secondary age pupils in areas of social disadvantage?* Presentation at Afasic Fourth International Symposium 2007

103 Sage, R. (2005) *Communicating with Students Who Have Learning and Behaviour Difficulties: A Continuing Professional Development Programme Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties* 10, 4, 281-297

104 Locke, A., Ginsborg, J. and Peers, I. (2002) *Development and Disadvantage: Implications for the early years* *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 2002 Vol 27 No 1

105 [www.stokespeaksout.org/aboutus.html](http://www.stokespeaksout.org/aboutus.html)

106 Bryan, K. 2004 *Preliminary Study of the Prevalence of Speech and Language Difficulties in Young Offenders* *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 39, 391-400  
12 Snow, P.C. and Powell, M.B. (2007) *Oral Language Competence, Social Skills and High-risk Boys: what are juvenile offenders trying to tell us?* *Children and Society (Online Early Articles)* doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2006.00076.x

107 Cross, M. *Lost for Words* (1999) *Child and Family Social Work* 4(3): 249-57

108 Hart, B., and Risley, R.T. (1995) *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

109 I CAN Talk *The Cost to the Nation of Children’s Poor Communication Issue 2* I CAN 2006

110 Jean Gross (Ed) 2008 *Primary Schools and Early Intervention: getting in early* (Editor Jean Gross) The Smith Institute and the Centre for Social Justice November 2008

111 See I CAN prevalence calculations and Law et al (2000) *Provision for children’s speech and language needs in England and Wales: facilitating communication between education and health services* DFES research report 239

It is more challenging for young people with SLCN to acquire skills for work and for life. Poor oral language skills can impact on all aspects of learning, communication, social interaction as well as self esteem; skills valued by employers, skills needed for work and life.<sup>112</sup>

In a world where communication skills are increasingly in demand, young people with SLCN are clearly at a disadvantage.<sup>113</sup> Skills such as communication, problem solving and team work can be taught to children with SLCN from an early age and there are examples of good practice in teaching young people these skills with a strong inter-professional approach seen as key. Third sector organisations such as I CAN, The Communication Trust and Afasic have a range of programmes to support development of these skills as do government initiatives such as the Inclusion Development Programme. There are also many examples of good practice within schools across the country.<sup>114, 115</sup>

Post-16 education has been shown to offer the potential of success for young people with SLCN, both academically and socially, though research shows low levels of reading and writing skills need to be identified and supported early.<sup>116</sup> Many

young people with SLCN have an optimistic view of their post-16 courses and feel positive about the future.<sup>117</sup> Support to develop these key skills is essential and there are examples of good practice where this is already happening.

112 Snowling, M.J., Adams, J.W., Bishop, D.V.M. and Stothard, S.E. (2001) Educational Attainments of School Leavers with a Pre-School History of Speech-Language Impairments *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* 36

Botting, N. and Conti-Ramsden, G. (2000) Social and Behavioural Difficulties in Children with Language Impairment *Child Language in Teaching and Therapy* 16

113 Clegg, J., Hollis, C., Mawhood, L. and Rutter, M. (2005) Developmental Language Disorders – a follow-up in later, adult life. Cognitive, language and psychosocial outcomes *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 46 2 128-149

114 Meath's Learning to Learn Report on Talking Point [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)

115 North East Case Study on Talking Point [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)

116 Raising the achievements of children and young people with specific speech and language difficulties and other special educational needs through school, to work and college Julie Dockrell<sup>1</sup>, Geoff Lindsay<sup>2</sup>, Olympia Palikara<sup>1</sup> and Mairi-Ann Cullen<sup>2</sup> March 2007

117 *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders* Vol. 44 No 1 56–78 Voices of young people with a history of specific language impairment (SLI) in the first year of post-16 education Olympia Palikara, Geoff Lindsay and Julie Dockrell

# Skills for work, skills for life

## Summary

We know from a wide range of evidence that employers greatly value skills such as communication, team work and problem solving and these skills are becoming more important in the rapidly changing global economy; they are currency the UK workforce needs for economic success.

We also know these skills are lacking in the UK workforce, with particular concern around young people entering the workplace, without the necessary communication skills. The impact of this skills deficit on UK economic success is potentially devastating.

Speech, language and communication are vital components of these skills, yet they are either taken for granted or misunderstood. Little emphasis is given to developing speech, language and communication at school or the workplace as part of skills development; these skills are inadequately measured or quantified and rarely broken down into the component parts necessary to ensure young people understand and develop them. Teachers report a worrying lack of confidence in developing speaking and listening skills in their students.

A growing number of programmes and interventions focus on developing skills in children, young people and young recruits. However, the picture is disparate and non systematic; many interventions are short term or project based and fragmented in their use. Very few acknowledge or have explicit focus on speech, language and communication.

Clarity for both employers and educators is needed around what good speech, language and

communication looks like and how these skills can be developed and used to support aspects of employability skills. Holistic approaches need to be adopted to embed speech, language and communication in good practice strategies for skills development. A long term approach to explicitly and systematically include speech, language and communication within skills development would enhance development of these skills in all children and young people. This should have a particular focus on the transition from education to work.

In the global economy we want and need young people who are confident communicators regardless of the audience or situation; young people who can communicate with their customers, promote their business, build a team, negotiate and problem solve. More than ever, young people need a wide range of personal employability skills that can be applied in any workplace setting. Raising young people's awareness about the importance of communication skills for getting – and keeping – a good job will be important in coming years.

Speech, language and communication are at the core of many generic skills needed for work and for life. Ensuring a systematic approach to developing these skills could make a fundamental difference.



# Skills for work, skills for life

## Glossary

**Skills** – capabilities and expertise in a particular occupation or activity<sup>118</sup>

**Generic skills** – skills needed for most jobs, such as team working and communication skills

**Qualifications** – the most common measure of skills<sup>119</sup>

**World class skills**<sup>120</sup> – Leitch Report on the review of skills

**Basic skills** – historically have been the skills of numeracy and literacy and now include information technology<sup>121</sup>

**Functional skills** – the practical application of basic skills

**Functional skills qualifications** – qualifications in English, ICT and Mathematics being introduced in England (2010).<sup>122</sup> Introduced nationally across schools, colleges, work-based learning and adult learning providers. Also being introduced as key features of GCSEs, Diplomas, Apprenticeships and Foundation Learning Tier, as well as being available as stand alone qualifications

**Soft skills** – term used mainly in the business world to encompass a range of skills such as interpersonal skills, team working, negotiation skills, communication skills, time management, team management and delegation skills

**Influence skills**<sup>123</sup> – a closely correlated set of activities associated with communicating, analysing and persuading

**Employability skills** – the skills almost everyone needs to do almost any job<sup>124</sup>

**Competence** – a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes

and desire which lead to effective, embodied human action in the world, in a particular domain

**Personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS)** – a set of skills identified in education aiming to develop independent enquirers, creative thinkers, reflective learners, team workers, self-managers and effective participants

**Speech** – speech sounds used to build up words, without too many hesitations or repetitions to enable clarity

**Language** – understanding and using words to build up sentences, which are deployed in conversations and narratives. It means understanding and following the rules of grammar so that what we communicate makes sense

**Communication** – verbal and non verbal means of communication including the way in which language is used to interact with others, using verbal and non-verbal rules

**SLCN** – difficulties with any aspect or a combination of speech, language and communication hidden disability – SLCN can be 'hidden', as it is not always easily recognisable and children can become quite proficient at hiding the true nature of their difficulties

**Prevalence** – numbers of young people with SLCN

**Complex or persistent SLCN** – SLCN which is long term or complicated in its nature; estimated to be around 10% of all children around 7% of whom have SLCN as their main area of difficulty<sup>125</sup> and others who have SLCN as part of another condition, such as autistic spectrum disorder, hearing impairment or learning difficulties.

118 Leitch (2006) *Review of Skills. Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills* HMSO

119 Qualifications can be grouped into five different levels: full level 2 equates to 5 good GCSEs or their vocational equivalents, full level 3 to two or more A Levels and level 4 and above to degree level qualifications. Levels of literacy and numeracy tend to be based on surveys or on the proportion of the workforce with English or Maths qualifications

120 Leitch Review of Skills December 2006  
[http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/leitch\\_review\\_index.htm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/leitch_review_index.htm)

121 [www.qca.org.uk/qca\\_4534.aspx](http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_4534.aspx)

122 *Functional skills support programme; Teaching and learning functional English* (2008)

123 [www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/contactsandpeople/alanfelstead/SkillsatWork-1986to2006.pdf](http://www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/contactsandpeople/alanfelstead/SkillsatWork-1986to2006.pdf)

124 [www.ukces.org.uk/upload/pdf/EmployabilityChallengeFullReport.pdf](http://www.ukces.org.uk/upload/pdf/EmployabilityChallengeFullReport.pdf)

125 Tomblin, J.B. et al (1997) *Prevalence of Specific Language Impairment in Kindergarten Children* *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research* 40 in Lindsay, G. and Dockrell, J. with Mackie, C. and Becky Letchford (2002) *Educational Provision for Children with Specific Speech and Language Difficulties in England and Wales* CEDAR

# Skills for work, skills for life

## *I CAN Talk Series*

*I CAN Talk* is a series of reports exploring contemporary issues in children's speech, language and communication. *I CAN Talk* reports 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 Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Literacy Difficulties Issue 1*

*I CAN Talk The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication Issue 2*

*I CAN Talk The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication (Scotland Edition) Issue 3*

*I CAN Talk Language and Social Exclusion Issue 4*

*I CAN Talk Speech, Language and Communication and the Children's Workforce (I CAN / The Communication Trust) Issue 5*

*I CAN Talk Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Primary School-aged Children Issue 6*

*I CAN Talk Speech, Language and Communication Needs and the Early Years Issue 7*

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