

7 August 2024

## **Information on Speech & Language Therapy Stammering Services**

**I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act regarding the services provided by Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) for children and young people who stammer in Northern Ireland.**

- 1. Do you offer speech and language therapy services for children and young people who stammer? If so, what is the age range for this service?**

Yes, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust offer this service to children aged from 18 months to 18 years.

- 2. How are children and young people who stammer referred to the speech and language therapy service, and what are the referral criteria?**

Referrals come from a range of sources, including staff in education, family GPs, Paediatricians and other medical consultants, and families themselves.

- 3. Do you have a dedicated dysfluency / stammering pathway? What is the process and criteria for being placed on the pathway?**

The Speech & Language Therapy service have a clinical pathway for children who stammer.

Requests for assessment come to the service via electronic referral systems.

Requests are placed on the waiting list for initial appointment, chronologically with all other initial appointment requests but they are prioritised in the event of the overall wait being greater than 13 weeks (subject to specialist staffing being available).

- 4. Do you have a Clinical Lead for stammering in your children and young people service? As of July 2024, how many speech and language therapists work directly with children and young people who stammer?**

Our service to children who stammer is led by the clinical lead for stammering and is supported by a specialist clinician. Both posts are part-time and, together, contribute approx. 0.8 WTE per week to management of the stammering caseload. Staff at non-specialist grades also contribute to the management of children who stammer, under the supervision of the lead and specialist clinicians.

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5. **If you do not have access to a Clinical lead SLT (Speech and Language Therapist) for stammering, or other stammering specialist SLTs, how do you manage more complex stammering cases?**

If our clinical lead is unavailable, the service seek appropriate support from other teams

6. **Who commissions speech and language therapy stammering services for children and young people in your Trust? Do third sector organisations fund or contribute to funding any speech and language therapy stammering services for children and young people in your Trust area?**

Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG) of the Department of Health.

No third sector organisations fund or contribute to funding any speech and language therapy stammering services in Belfast Trust area.

7. **How many children and young people were awaiting an assessment by a SLT for stammering in July 2023 and in July 2024?**

In July 2023: We are unable to report on children who were waiting for an assessment for stammering, as this data is not accessible from the overall referral numbers

In July 2024: 38 children were waiting for an assessment for stammering

8. **As of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024, could you provide the waiting times from referral to initial assessment for children and young people referred for stammering? Please categorise the data into the following timeframes: less than 12 weeks, 12 to 18 weeks, 19 to 26 weeks, 27 to 52 weeks, 1 to 2 years, and over 2 years.**

For all children aged up to 7 years the wait time is less than 12 weeks

Less than 12 weeks: 5

For children aged 8+ years, due to a staff sickness absence and maternity leave the wait was:

27-52 weeks:	14
19-26 weeks:	7
12-19 weeks:	10
Less than 12 weeks:	<5

We are now in the process of offering these children an initial appointment.

**Use of <5 (less than five):** We are unable to provide an exact figure - exempt from release under Section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act, as the small numbers involved could make patients personally identifiable. Disclosure would constitute a breach of the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

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- 9. As of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024, could you provide the waiting times from initial assessment to the start of therapy for children and young people referred for stammering? Please categorise the data into the following timeframes: less than 12 weeks, 12 to 18 weeks, 19 to 26 weeks, 27 to 52 weeks, 1 to 2 years, and over 2 years.**

Children aged up to 7 years:

Less than 12 weeks: <5 waiting  
No others waiting for intervention or review appointment

Children aged over 7 years:

27 - 52 weeks: <5 waiting at 1<sup>st</sup> July but now booked for intervention appointment and 16 for review appointment

19 - 26 weeks: 6 - now all booked for an intervention appointment. None waiting for a review appointment

Up to 19 weeks: No one waiting for intervention or review.

- 10. How many sessions do SLTs typically provide to children and young people who stammer (e.g. once a week for six weeks)?**

Children aged up to seven years who stammer receive plain PCI intervention, which consists of six therapy appointments followed by a review appointment. Older children receive appointments determined by individual need.

- 11. Are Independent Patient Funding Requests utilised for speech and language therapy stammering services? If so, could these requests be made for children who stammer to access specialist services outside of Northern Ireland?**

In the event that we had a clinical need to request a specialist intervention not available within our service, we would seek funding.

- 12. Would you ever refer or signpost children and young people who stammer to a specialist service or centre outside of your Trust area? If so, how often has this occurred between 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023 and 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024?**

It is possible but this has never occurred.

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**13. Do you provide information about and / or do you signpost to other organisations who can offer support for childhood stammering? If so, who do you signpost to?**

The Trust would signpost to the Michael Palin Centre.

**14. What therapy approaches (e.g. Palin PCI, Lidcombe) do your speech and language therapy service offer to children and young people who stammer? Do you offer individual or group therapy to children who stammer, or both?**

Palin PCI  
Palin family communication therapy (age 8-14 years)  
Lidcombe

Most intervention is individual but we consider, on an ongoing basis, whether there is a need for group intervention.

**15. Where do your SLTs access their specialist training from?**

- Michael Palin Centre
- In-service training

**16. What barriers exist to your SLTs accessing necessary training courses in stammering (e.g. cost and funding, availability of specialised courses, time out of clinic, high staff turnover, institutional supports, etc.)?**

Frequency of locally available courses.

**17. What information is provided to education setting staff about stammering? Would this information typically be provided for individual children and young people on your caseload, or as part of education setting staff training more generally?**

At present, training to education settings is provided for individual children.