

In these straitened times, with local decision makers continuing the drive for outcomes-based commissioning of services, it is increasingly important for us all to illustrate the value of speech and language therapy by delivering and measuring our impact. This article looks at some of the common challenges we face in relation to outcomes and examines what SLTs are doing to overcome the perceived hurdles and support the future development of the speech and language therapy profession.

Challenge 1: Breaking away from the focus on outputs

Historically, decision makers have not approached the topic of outcomes in a consistent way and have required speech and language therapy services to report outputs rather than outcomes. It is important to differentiate between inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes (figure one):

- **Inputs** include the infrastructure that needs to be in place, such as the staffing, equipment, money and resources.
- **Processes** are the ‘what you do’ and the ‘how’, including activities, interventions and service models.
- **Outputs** can be thought of as the quantitative, immediate results of speech and language therapy input – for example, the number of new referrals seen for assessment, the number of treatments provided and the therapy goals achieved.

Outcomes are concerned with the longer-term impact on the service user, such as improved health and wellbeing, being involved in decisions and improved access to work and education. In other words, outcomes detail the difference that speech and language therapy makes to an individual’s day-to-day functioning.

One framework for thinking about outcomes is the ‘theory of change’ model. This framework can show how desired

Overcoming the challenges of outcomes

Kathryn Moyse reports on the culture change around delivering and measuring effective outcomes

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change is expected to come about by mapping the relationship between inputs through to ultimate outcomes and the impact speech and language therapy has on service users. Resources on outcomes and the theory of change are available online (www.rcslt.org/members/outcomes/outcomes).

Challenge 2: Capturing the impact of speech and language therapy

What we are trying to demonstrate should define our outcome measures. But how do we show the impact and the value of what we do? When thinking about outcomes, it can be helpful to think about what is

meaningful to whom (table one). Because outcomes mean different things to different people, it is crucial to define what we are trying to measure before deciding how to measure it and demonstrate our impact.

Members of the RCSLT Outcomes Project Team are involved in national speech and language therapy events around outcomes and there are some very useful resources on the RCSLT Outcome Measures webpages (www.rcslt.org/members/outcomes/resources). There are also Basecamp groups for members who are interested in staying up to date with local and national outcome measures work. Email: kathryn.moyse@rcslt.org for further information.

Challenge 3: Lack of regional or national uniform outcomes data

The shift towards outcomes-based commissioning has highlighted the importance of collecting reliable data in a consistent way that reflects speech and language therapy’s contribution to local and national level outcomes. This has been a key driver behind the RCSLT Outcomes Project, which is developing a national database to collect and collate outcome data from services across the UK.

The RCSLT carried out a rigorous appraisal

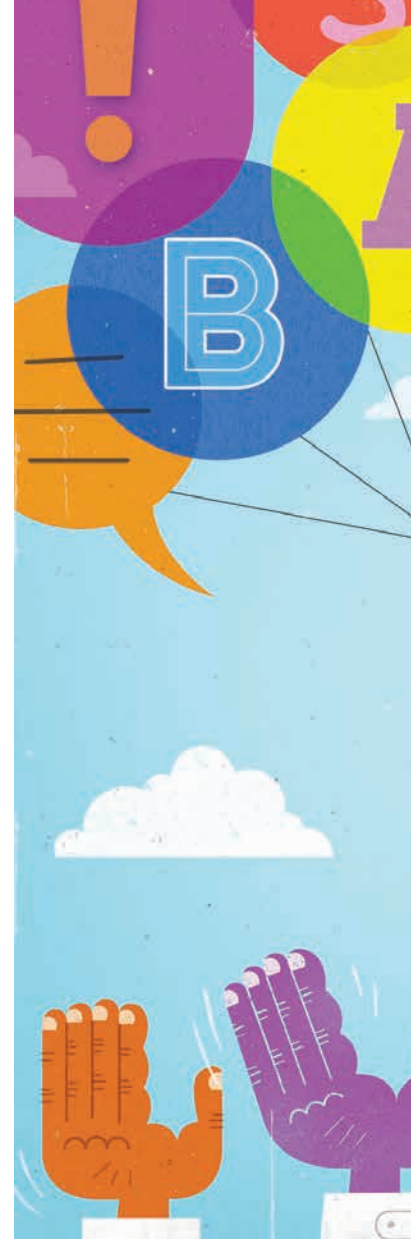


Table one: Outcomes: different things to different people

What is a meaningful outcome for the person receiving speech and language therapy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increased independence ■ Improved self-esteem ■ Increased confidence
What is a meaningful outcome for the healthcare provider?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Making a difference to individuals and their families ■ Delivering effective interventions ■ Meeting the local population needs
What is a meaningful outcome for the commissioner?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Value for money ■ Meeting national and local priorities ■ Use of evidence-based practice



the ‘best fit’ against these agreed criteria is the Therapy Outcome Measures (TOMs) (Enderby and John, 2015).

Practitioners can use TOMs to capture the impact of speech and language therapy input on an individual in relation to the domains of impairment, activity, participation and wellbeing. The tool allows the collation and amalgamation of individual level outcomes data to illustrate outcomes at service, regional and national levels. In this way TOMs addresses the needs of a range of stakeholders.

Challenge 4: The time burden associated with collecting data

As busy clinicians, how do we fit in collecting outcomes data into our everyday practice? One of the key features of TOMs is that it typically takes less than five minutes to complete a rating. To further facilitate the efficient and consistent collection of outcome data, the RCSLT Outcomes Project is developing a web-based tool into which SLTs can enter TOMs data directly and a national database will store the data. At the time of writing, the online tool is still under development, in response to feedback from the adult and paediatric speech and language therapy services involved in piloting the tool. We will announce the launch of the tool in the Bulletin and online in due course.

Challenge 5: Analysing and presenting outcomes data effectively

Speech and language therapists can use outcomes data for the purposes of benchmarking, quality assurance and to

demonstrate the impact of speech and language therapy on local and national level outcomes. Data entered into the national outcomes database using the web-based tool will be aggregated to produce reports. The data can be filtered in a number of ways (for example, by team, setting, age, medical diagnosis and clinical condition) to obtain reports on specific datasets. This will help to illustrate the change or maintenance in TOMs scores over time, for example. We aim to gather feedback on the most effective ways to report and analyse the data throughout the pilot project.

The RCSLT Outcomes Project Team is continuing to work with RCSLT members to strengthen the role of outcomes as a key part of speech and language therapy activity. The culture change is underway and together we are overcoming the common challenges we face in relation to our use of outcomes. I look forward to updating you on the next stages of the project’s development in future issue of the Bulletin. ■

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For more information on outcome measures, the theory of change and the RCSLT Outcomes Project, email: kathryn.moyse@rslt.org or visit: www.rslt.org/members/outcomes/outcomes



References & resources

Enderby P, John A. *Therapy outcome measures for rehabilitation professionals*, Third Edition, Guildford: J&R Press Ltd, 2015.

of more than 60 outcome measures against 11 criteria drawn up by members to identify an existing reliable and valid outcome measure for the national data collection.

These key criteria included the ability of the outcome measure to be used across a range of client groups, compatibility with existing tools, accessibility and ease of use. The measure the RCSLT identified as

Figure one: Inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes

