

Position Statement on Practice Education during Initial Speech and Language Therapy Education Programmes

Completed by the CPLOL Education Commission

Adopted by the General Assembly, Turin, October 2009

1 Introduction

The ESLA Minimum Standards for Education provides guidelines on the content and organization of initial speech and language therapy (SLT) education (see Revision of Minimum standards for Education Completed by the Education Commission Adopted at the CPLOL General Assembly, Riga 12 May 2007).

This position statement relates to the practice components of the education of future SLTs and includes SLT clinical work in health, and educational settings and other SLT work contexts (hereinafter 'clinical practice'). It aims to further underline the importance of the quality, quantity and position of clinical practice during initial SLT education.

Clinical practice is the element of education where students, under professional supervision, learn to develop and refine the unique skills of the SLT, to integrate and apply the knowledge in the practical aspects of their future occupation and develop essential reflection and clinical decision-making skills of the SLT practitioner. The skills and occupational tools that clinical practice provides for the student cannot under any circumstance be replaced with purely theoretical studies.

2 Principles

The revised Minimum Standards for Education (Adopted in Riga, 12 May 2007) states the following principles on clinical practice:

"5. The programme should integrate the teaching of theory, as well as the teaching of methodological skills with the teaching of the practical applications of theory, and include a substantial element of clinical practicum."

"7. The programme should enable students to acquire and be able to demonstrate general knowledge in all fields which enable them to work with all types of clients and with clients of all ages with communication and/or swallowing disorders and also in the prevention of these conditions."

"8. The programme should make the student aware of the legal and ethical responsibilities in the context of his professional practice and the requirement to practice safely and ethically."

3 Main Points

To ensure the quality of the initial speech and language therapy education it is imperative that clinical practice -

- a) is an obligatory part of initial education
- b) is a substantial part of the educational programme
- c) takes place under the supervision of competent and experienced supervisors
- d) is integrated with theoretical knowledge and should take place throughout the curriculum
- e) is varied enough to prepare the student to be competent for all kinds of different professional settings and encounters and be able to deal competently with new situations within the SLT scope of practice.

3a) It is imperative that clinical practice is an obligatory part of initial education. To be a skilled practitioner it is of equal importance to master the methodological and practical skills, as well as the theory, of speech and language therapy.

3b) In order for the student to acquire and incorporate the core practical skills necessary for practising as an SLT these skills have to be trained and executed frequently, and in different situations for the student to generalise and master them fully. The amount of clinical practice offered to the student must be substantial and varied enough for this process of mastery to take place. Clinical practice activities should amount to a minimum of one quarter of the educational programme.

3c) To ensure the quality of clinical practice it is of utmost importance that it is carried out under the supervision of competent, qualified speech and language therapists (who themselves have that unique blend of SLT skills, understanding and knowledge to prepare the student for their future occupation/work/responsibilities).

To achieve this -

- Clinical supervisors/practice educators should always be approved by the university (at which the initial education is given).
- Clinical supervisors should be given recognition for the important role they perform.
- Clinical supervisors should have (a minimum of) 2 years of full time professional practice experience, in the field they will be supervising in, before being eligible to supervise students.
- Clinical supervisors should receive training from the university to develop and enhance skills required in coaching and clinical supervision and should become familiar with relevant course content and format.
- Clinical supervisors should undertake CPD and be regularly evaluated.

3d) In order for the student to fully link and integrate theoretical and practical knowledge and skills, it is preferable that theory and practice is delivered concurrently in such a way that enables the student's acquisition of appropriately evidence-based clinical reasoning and clinical/technical skills and provides the opportunity to develop these in the practice setting.

3e) The clinical practice should enable the student to gain experience with a range of communication and swallowing disorders. It is therefore recommended that the student -

- gains experience in SLT with clients with a range of disorders of communication and/or swallowing and also in the prevention of these conditions
- has experience in managing clients of all ages
- is given the opportunity to observe the work of a range of practising speech language therapists
- works directly with clients, carers/family and other professionals and/or as part of a multi disciplinary team
- is familiarised with the administration of an appropriate range of up to date tools of assessment, both qualitative and quantitative, standardised and non standardised, formal and informal
- is trained in how to plan, execute, evaluate and adapt therapy according to the outcomes of assessment, the needs of the client and progress in therapy
- is educated in giving advice and information about the client's SLT diagnosis and management and how to ease the impact of the disorder on the client.

4 Internship

After the completion of initial education it is advisable that newly qualified SLTs are given the opportunity to start their professional life in a controlled situation and with the support of other SLT professionals. Newly qualified SLTs should therefore be offered the possibility of doing an internship or period of supported practice. This internship should be mentored by an experienced SLT.