Speech and language therapist

Job description
Speech and language therapists diagnose and treat people of all ages with speech, language and communication difficulties. Working with other professionals in multidisciplinary teams, the therapist works closely with patients and their families to establish a treatment programme to help each patient communicate as effectively as possible.

Speech and language therapists work with a variety of people – from young children, perhaps with difficulties such as stammering, to older people recovering from strokes and other brain injuries.

They assess, diagnose and treat clients for a variety of disorders including:
• Childhood speech and language disorders
• Stammers
• Acquired speech and language disorders (such as from brain injury or disease)
• Voice disorders
• Eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties.

Speech and Language Therapists also work with clients who cannot communicate through normal means to develop alternative forms of communication, or use specialised computer devices. They work and liaise with parents, carers and other professionals, such as teachers, nurses, occupational therapists and doctors.

Work activities
• Carrying out assessment and treatment at clinics and patients’ homes.
• Collaborating with service users, family members, carers and other staff in the setting of treatment.
• Using technical equipment to analyse voice patterns and examine the factors involved in producing speech.
• Introducing and supporting new ways of working with families to prevent future speech and language difficulties.
• Delivering training to parents and teachers, allowing them to help in the patient’s recovery.
• Referring patients to other specialists when necessary.
• Liaising with other professionals such as doctors and ear/nose/throat (ENT) specialists.
• Keeping detailed clinical notes and drafting reports on patient symptoms, treatments and progress.
• Teaching exercises to help eliminate speech problems.
• Attending clinics and participating in relevant meetings, case conferences as appropriate.

Work conditions
Travel: during the working day can be frequent as therapists may work in several different locations during the working week.

Working hours: mainly 9 to 5, Monday to Friday with possibility of extra hours.

Location: in towns or cities throughout the country.

Opportunities for self-employment: often possible.

Typical employers
• Hospitals
• Clinics
• Rehabilitation centres
• Private practices
• Community services
• Disability services
• Voluntary organisations.

Career development
Most newly qualified speech and language therapists work with a general caseload for at least a year, usually both adults and children before choosing a particular group of clients or type of clinical work in which to specialise.

As clinical experience grows so too do opportunities to 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. Others move into research, teaching or management.

(continued overleaf)
Speech and language therapist (continued)

Salaries
Republic of Ireland: Starting salaries are in excess of €37,000 and rise to in excess of €78,000 for speech and language therapist manager-in-charge Grade III.

Entry requirements and training
Republic of Ireland: Speech and Language Therapy is one of the 12 designated professionals to be regulated by the Health and Social Care Professionals Council. Only professionals registered with the council may use the protected professional title, speech and language therapist.

There are now four Irish Association of Speech & Language Therapists (IASLT) accredited courses leading to a qualification in speech and language therapy in the Republic of Ireland. Three of these (NUI Galway, University College Cork, Trinity College Dublin) are full time four-year undergraduate programmes, leading to an honours degree.

UK: In order to practice in the UK as a Speech and Language Therapist, you must be registered with the Health Professions Council.

Specific degree subjects required
An undergraduate or postgraduate degree in Speech and Language Therapy accredited by IASLT.

- University College Cork: BSc (Hons) in Speech and Language Therapy
- NUI Galway: BSc in Speech and Language Therapy
- Trinity College Dublin: BSc Clinical Linguistics

Or be in possession of a Licentiateship of the College of Speech Therapists.

Other relevant degree subjects
- Linguistics
- Medicine
- Nursing
- Psychology.

Postgraduate study
A pre-entry postgraduate qualification is not a requirement for those with an undergraduate degree in Speech and Language Therapy accredited by IASLT. A two-year full time graduate-entry MSc in Speech and Language Therapy is offered by the University of Limerick (UL).

In addition, all four universities (UCC, NUIG, TCD, UL) offer opportunities for continuing professional development, including postgraduate degrees. Graduates can apply to undertake either a masters level or a doctoral degree by research.

Specific entry requirements
A driving licence and access to independent transport may be required.

Training
The practical components of the courses are very important. These may take place in schools, hospitals and community health clinics and help to develop your skills in the assessment and treatment of people with communication disorders.

Tips for applications
It is worth visiting your local speech and language therapists to get a flavour of the things they do. Join the IASLT as a student member.
Speech and language therapist (continued)

Skills and qualities

• Confidence to relate to a wide range of people and enjoy working with people of all ages.
• Capacity to listen carefully combined with excellent verbal and written communication skills.
• Ability to make your own decisions as well as work in co-operation with others.
• Empathy, patience and excellent motivational skills.
• Responsible, professional approach, respecting client confidentiality.

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