

A brief history of UK speech (and language) therapy's professional regulation through registration

Introduction

Professional registration is considered important for many professions, including speech and language therapists in the UK, for a variety of reasons including:

- protection of the public from unqualified or incompetent practitioners
- adherence to a code of practice and ethics
- protection of the profession's title
- understanding of how many SLTs are practising.

The route that the profession took from no registration to statutory registration is outlined below, with major changes in the 1940s, 1950s and 1990s marking the way.

1920s-1930s: no registration

As the profession developed swiftly in the 1920s and especially in the 1930s, there was no professional regulation and so there was concern about charlatans advertising cures for speech problems. 'There arose a veritable scourge of 'quacks': untrained confidence operators, some of whom practised, in almost furtive privacy, guaranteed 'secret' methods; others burst upon the public with huge hoardings announcing 'new' and allegedly successful courses of treatment. These practitioners appeared from nowhere and vanished without trace when their methods, either of therapy or of remuneration, were called into question. The activities of these charlatans made it obvious, to bona-fide therapists, that action must be taken to regularise the status of their profession' (Eldridge, 1968, p. 103). Eldridge echoes Sykes (1962) in his discussion of the reasons for the development of two professional associations for speech therapists in the mid-1930s. He suggests that the main one was 'the protection of patients from quacks and poorly qualified therapists' (p. 21).

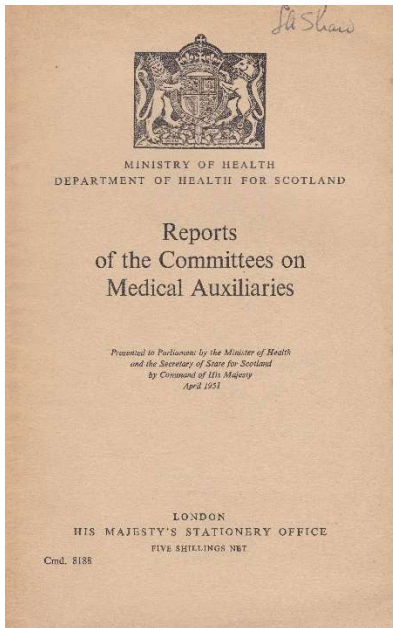
1940s: registration as a medical auxiliary

It was the issue of registration that brought together the British Society of Speech Therapists and Association of Speech Therapists to become the College of Speech Therapists. Once the professional body was formed, its members and licentiates were fully registered as medical auxiliaries via the British Medical Association's Board of Registration of Medical Auxiliaries (from 1944, although the formal inauguration was delayed to 1945 because of war conditions).

1950s: the decade of withdrawal

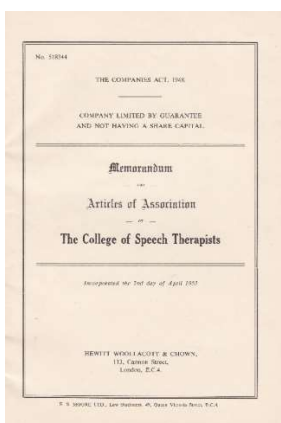
'It seems reasonable to suppose that the few Speech Therapists practising in the Hospital Service in 1945 welcomed association with the Board of Registration of Medical Auxiliaries, but that ten years later, the numbers had grown sufficiently to make the security which registration offered unnecessary and even inhibiting, since the College was the sole recognised licensing body, and the 'freelance' and unqualified therapists were dying out' (Sykes, 1962, p. 54).

The Cope Report (1951) began the decade that led to the College opting out of the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Bill. College Council minutes of 19 May 1951 record that Council was unanimous in its reaction to the report and in the actions to be taken in its light. This included the acceptance of the principle of statutory registration, but not the method recommended in the Cope Report. The 1960 editorial (pp. 51-54) in *Speech Pathology and Therapy*¹ 3/2 and Sykes (1962, pp. 52-62) set out in some detail the resulting activity.



The Cope Report

On 2 April 1953 the College of Speech Therapists received a Certificate of Incorporation under the Companies Act by the Board of Trade: <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/00518344> (accessed 20 January 2021)



1953 College Memorandum and Articles of Association

By 1955, the College of Speech Therapists withdrew from the Register of Medical Auxiliaries and started its own register. 'Dissatisfaction was also felt with the negotiating machinery for salary scales

¹ College of Speech Therapists' journal

and conditions of work. Consequently in 1956, the College withdrew from the National Health Service Whitley Council' (Sykes, 1962, p. 55). In 1959, it withdrew from the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Bill on the grounds that speech therapy was an independent profession, not supplementary to medicine. This was agreed in parliament on 4 May 1960.

The topic can also be tracked through *Bulletin*². Statutory registration was the main subject of the Chairman's 1957 AGM address (No. 75) and 1959 address (No. 97) and of a short piece by Joyce Wilkins (No. 96). A résumé of recent events by the Chairman and a personal statement were produced in No. 102 followed by a report from the Chairman (No. 107) and a letter to College's Patron (No. 110). A new-style register went to press (No. 92) - no longer following the style of the BRMA. The College Register was renamed 'Directory' in No. 183 and a note about the work involved in and cost of directory was given in No. 189.

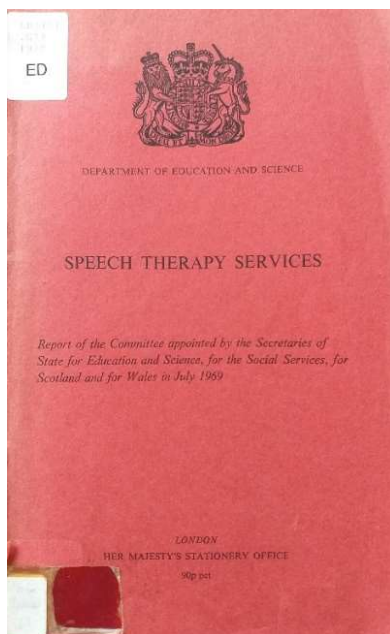
There was no significant change in SLTs' registration for the next 30 years, although it was an ongoing discussion theme within the profession.

1970s-80s: in the light of the Quirk Report

The Quirk Report of 1972 included the question of registration among its recommendations:

Recommendation 9.52: (i) 'a Central Council for Speech Therapy should be established for the approval of courses of training and the registration of speech therapists as qualified to practise' and (ii) only registered speech therapists should be employed (p. 110).

College considered this for many years, with the profession receiving updates and proposals through *Bulletin* (eg Porter, 1980; McCartney, 1987; McCartney, 1990) but without coming to any fundamental decisions so no changes were implemented.



Quirk Report

² College of Speech Therapists' magazine

1990s: voluntary then statutory registration

Times had changed from the 1950s when 'a society which had gained autonomy and control by virtue of the inner strength and cohesion of its member [was] unwilling to sacrifice it for the doubtful privilege of statutory registration (Sykes, 1962, p. 55). SLTs began voluntary registration with College in 1991 (*Bulletin* No. 491; Smith, 1992) as a step towards statutory registration and protection of the profession's title. Members logged their continuing education and professional development from 1993 and eventually voted in favour of external regulation by the Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine (CPSM) in 1998 and began registering with CPSM from 1999. Of a 57% return of ballot papers, 97% voted in favour of statutory registration and 92% in favour of joining the CPSM (No. 553). The profession joined just three weeks before entry was frozen (No. 567). A speech and language therapy board within CPSM first met in January 2000 (No. 577) and CPSM started registering speech and language therapists in October 2000 (No. 580).

Speech and language therapy became a state regulated profession, regulated from 2000 by the CPSM's replacement organisation, the Health Professions Council. This in turn became the Health and Care Professions Council - HCPC - from 2012: <https://www.hcpc-uk.org/about-us/what-we-do/> (accessed 20 January 2021). Anyone wishing to practise as an SLT in the UK now has to register with the HCPC. College explains this: <https://www.rcslt.org/speech-and-language-therapy/regulation/> (accessed 20 January 2021) and advises on how SLTs can meet HCPC standards: <https://www.rcslt.org/speech-and-language-therapy/rcslt-guidance-to-meet-hcpc-standards/> (accessed 20 January 2021).

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