

Evaluation of “Shaping the Future” **Meeting Children’s Language and Learning Needs**

The conference took place on Thursday, 30th March, 2006 at the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown and was hosted by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) in partnership with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY).

A total number of 130 delegates attended on the day, of which almost half (61) completed an evaluation sheet about the event. Of those respondents, 38 provided additional comments and for the purpose of this evaluation a number of these have been selected as representing the main issues raised and are presented at the end of this document.

Q.1 Aims of the Conference

a) To share a vision of children’s speech and language therapy services

When asked how well they felt this aim had been achieved, 74% of respondents indicated that this had been ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’, 21% said ‘good’, while only 5% stated that it was ‘fair’.

b) To identify learning from best practice

61% of respondents said this had been either ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’, while 29% said ‘good’ and 10% ‘fair’.

One Speech and Language Therapist commented that it was

“a good ‘celebration’ of positive lessons learnt in some great examples of good practice”.

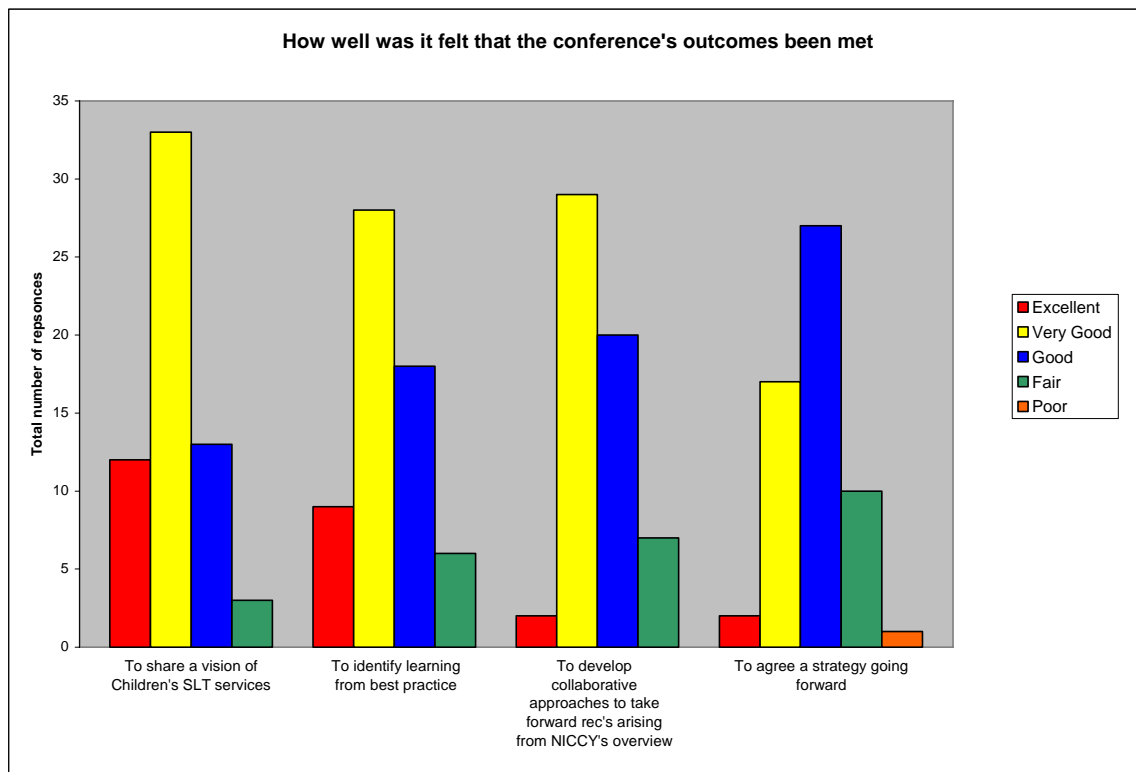
c) To develop collaborative approaches to take forward recommendations arising from the NICCY Overview of SLT Services in Northern Ireland 2004/05

A significant majority of respondents (81%) stated that this had been achieved at a 'very good' or 'good' level, while 3% said this had been 'excellent'. 11% felt this aspect had been 'fair' and 5% did not indicate a preference.

d) To agree a strategy going forward

72% of respondents said this had been either 'very good' or 'good', while 3% said 'excellent'. 16% stated this had been 'fair' and 2% 'poor'. The remaining 7% did not indicate a preferred response.

Figure 1: Aims



Q.2 Outcomes

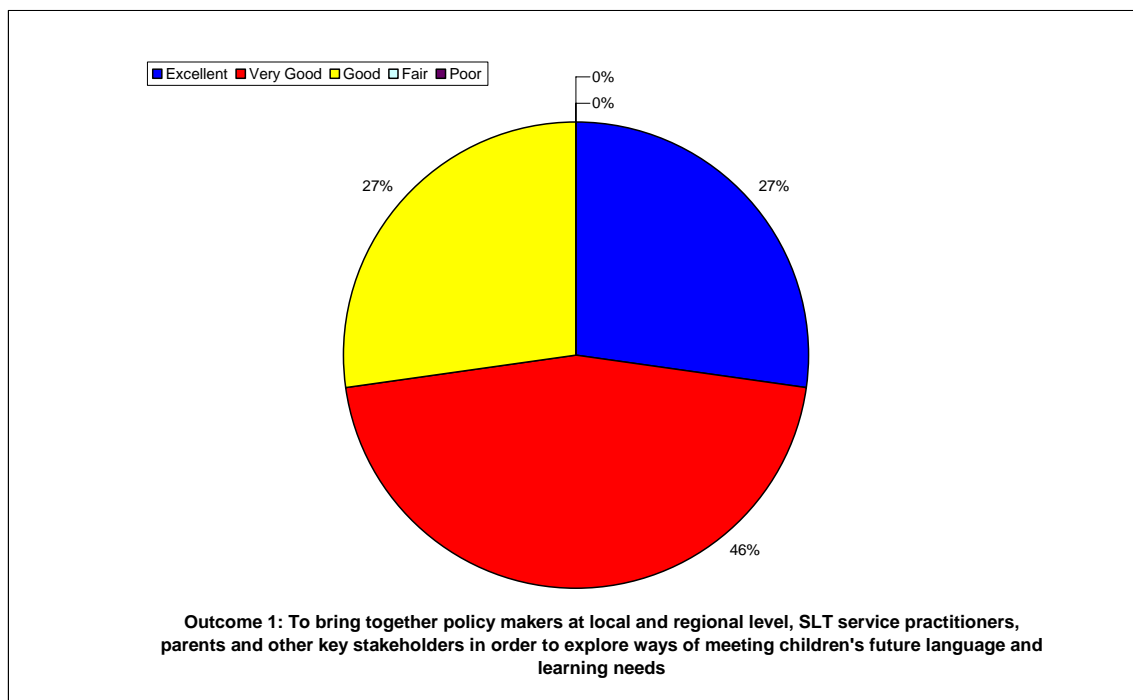
Respondents were asked how well they thought each of the following outcomes had been achieved:

a) Outcome 1

To bring together policy makers at local and regional level, SLT service practitioners, parents and other key stakeholders in order to explore ways of meeting children's future language and learning needs

73% of respondents said this had been 'very good' or 'excellent', and 27% stated 'good'.

Figure 2: Outcome 1

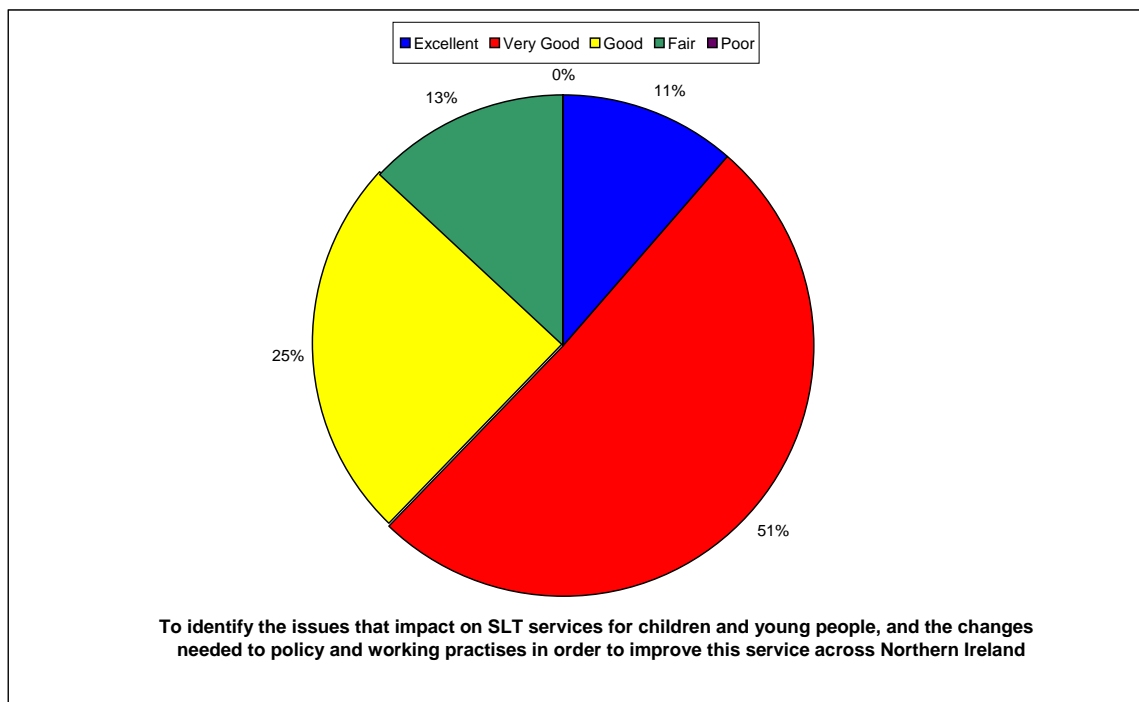


b) Outcome 2

To identify the issues that impact on SLT services for children and young people, and the changes needed to policy and working practices in order to improve this service across Northern Ireland

The majority of respondents (76%) felt this outcome had been achieved at a 'very good' or 'good' level, while 11% said it was 'excellent'. The remaining 13% stated this had been 'fair'.

Figure 3: Outcome 2

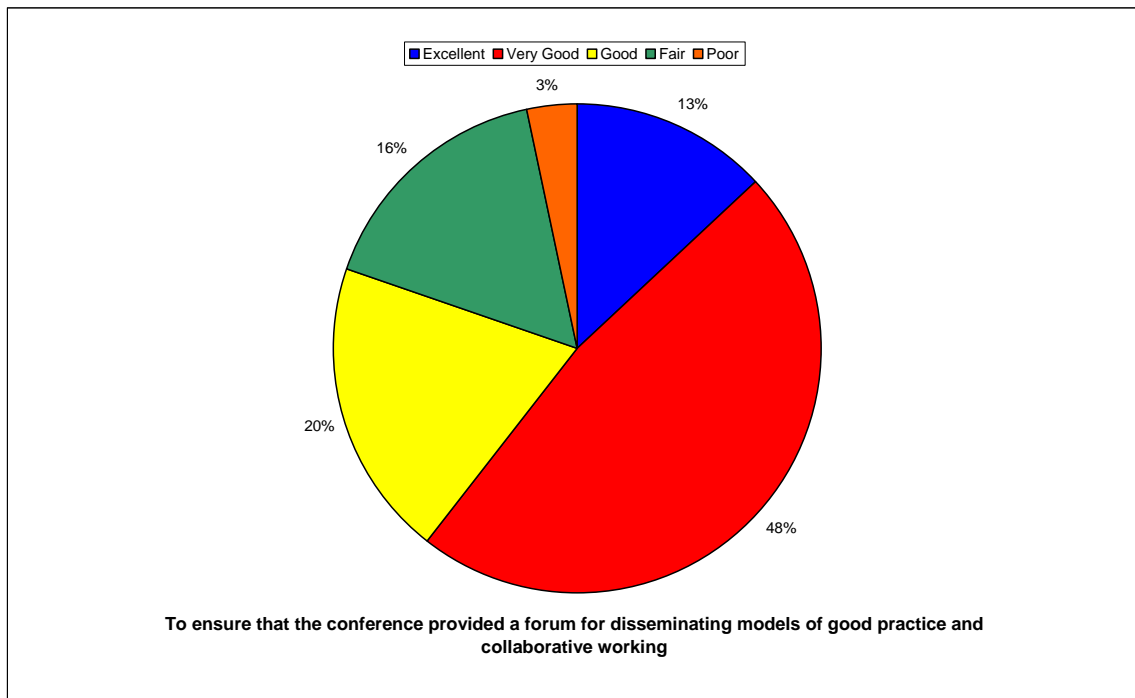


c) Outcome 3

Ensure that the Conference provided a forum for disseminating models of good practice and collaborative working

68% of respondents indicated this had been 'very good' or 'good', and 13% felt it was 'excellent'. 16% stated this aspect had been 'fair' and 3% 'poor'.

Figure 4: Outcome 3

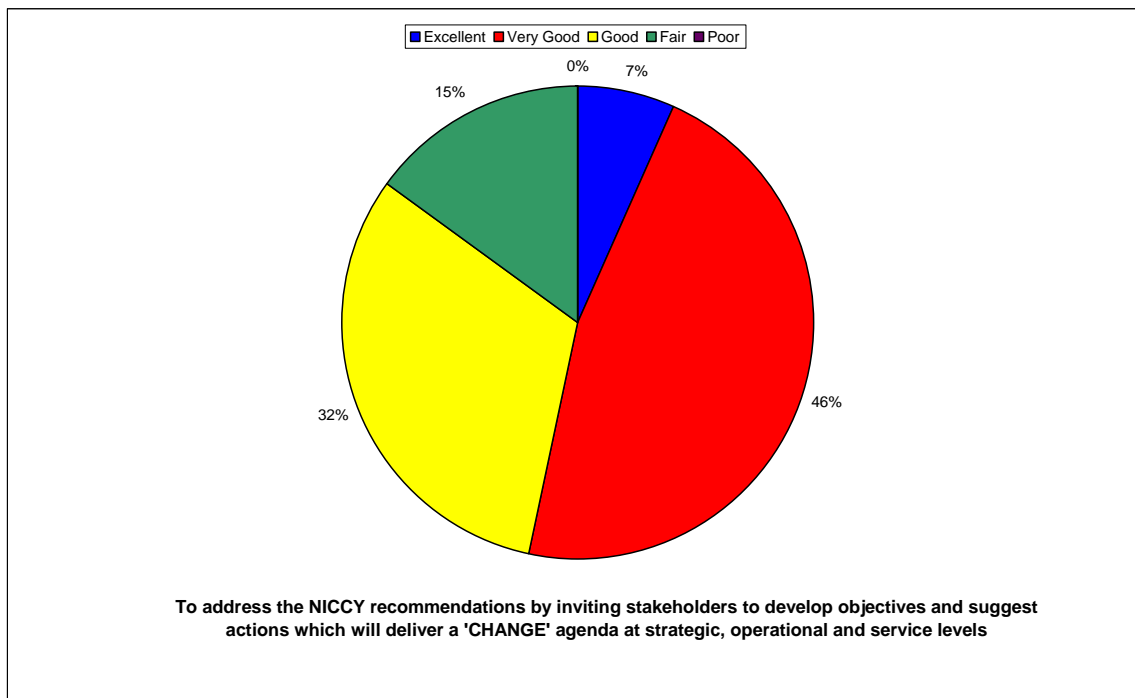


d) Outcome 4

To address the NICCY recommendations by inviting stakeholders to develop objectives and suggest actions which will deliver a 'CHANGE' agenda at strategic, operational and service levels

The significant majority of respondents thought this outcome had been achieved successfully, with 78% stating it was 'very good' or 'good', and 7% that it was 'excellent'. The remaining 15% said 'fair'.

Figure 5: Outcome 4



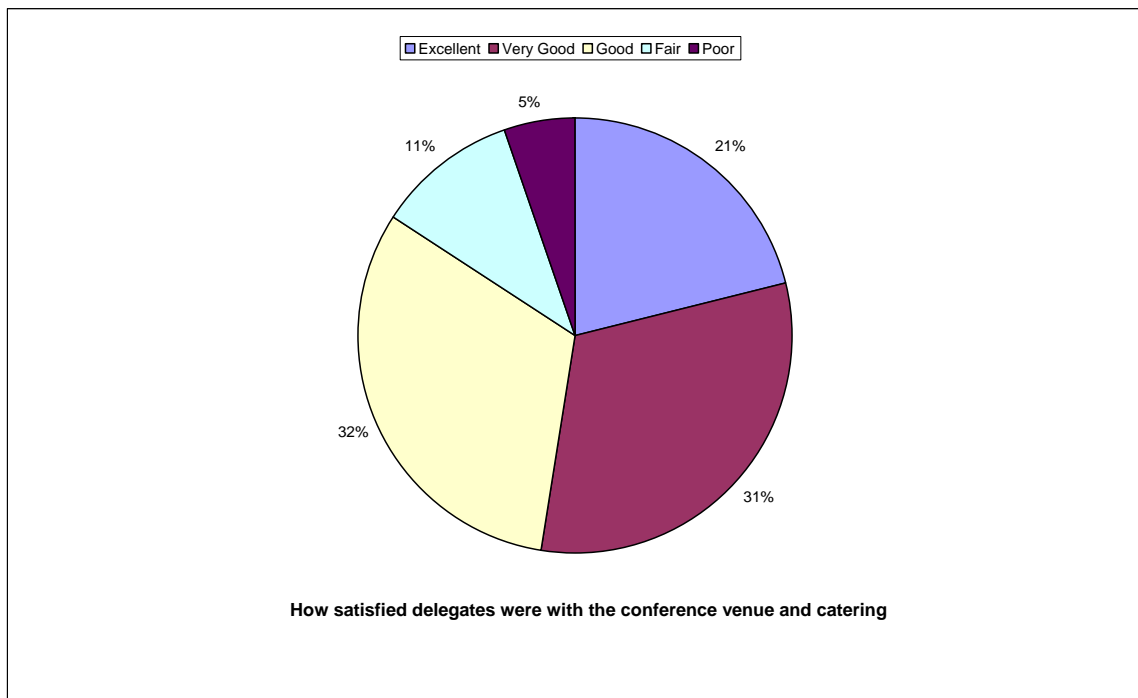
Q.3 Facilities

Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the conference venue and catering.

63% indicated that it was 'very good' or 'good' and 21% 'excellent'. Of the remaining respondents, 11% stated this was 'fair' and 5% 'poor'.

A number of delegates commented on the excellent catering, and good choice of location. However, several expressed their disappointment with poor acoustics in the main hall (16)

Figure 6: Facilities



Q.4 Further Comments

Respondents were invited to provide comments about the conference and some examples are as follows:

- The overall day:

"A very thought provoking day. Impressed with the levels of commitment to change by delegates and the range of work already being carried out by speakers".

“Please keep all the momentum going and build on Nigel’s commitment and vision”

“...it was very fitting that an issue that was so close to Nigel’s heart continued to move forward...he would have been very proud of you all. A sincere thanks....for all the hard work that went into the day”.

“I felt the enthusiasm shown by the speakers was most apparent from those immediately associated with the S.L.T profession. I felt the other speakers’ addresses lacked this enthusiasm and insight – I hope this is not reflected in proposed action to be taken”.

“Very well organised by organising committee. Good to see it well attended”.

“The idea of the conference was brave and well executed. However, achieving the planned outcomes and aims will be long and challenging. My feeling was that many delegates are only truly beginning the journey to inclusive, user-led and person-centred services.....I would appeal to RCSLT, NICCY and the task force to explore a strategic approach to changing cultures and giving practitioners the skills to deliver transdisciplinary services in a way which makes sense to children and families”.

“Great to have such a high profile conference outside the Belfast area. Thank you”.

- Some respondents felt the conference programme was too ambitious, while others expressed disappointment that there was no feedback from the breakout groups:

“Too much packed into the day – should have been a two day conference with more practical examples of good practice”.

“Some of the speakers were talking about very similar issues. Was it really necessary to have so many people making much the same point i.e. more collaboration? Also, in the sharing good practice section was it realistic to have six speakers talking about three different projects in half an hour?”

“More time should have been given over to discussion and Q&A. Delegates need to be able to participate to feel they have ownership of a conference just as children need to participate to have ownership of their therapy”.

“Outcomes from individual workshop sessions not discussed. Restrictions on time”.

“Feedback from afternoon ‘Breakout groups’ would have been useful – more time devoted to the questions posed and suggestions for the way forward. Some reference made to this by Sue Roulstone at end of the day – her comments were very welcome”.

- Several respondents highlighted the need for a joint approach between the Departments of Health and Education, and also expressed concern about timescales around collaborative working:

“Disappointed in the length of time DHSS and DE had to do ‘joint up working’. 5 years??? Proformas already exist for Trans Agency/Multi Agency working”.

“NICCY expected a response and an improvement of services from speech and language services within one year. Collaborative working standards have been four years in the planning – it’s too slow!!”.

“As a board officer responsible for special education provision, I am not aware of any improvement/benefits coming from the Inter Dept group established 2001. Any gains experienced in Belfast area come from close working relationships established at Ground Level with health managers.”

“From my experience as a parent I have not experienced any ‘joint up’ approach by these two departments – no partnership working”.

“The most disappointing presentation was that from Department of Health and Dept of Education and their collective failure to establish the taskforce or even have any strategic plan to work more collaboratively

together re all levels of health and education have got to work together from top down to bottom up”.

“There is a great enthusiasm for joint working present in NI among ELBs, schools, Health Trusts and Health Boards which, if done properly, will be appreciated by parents and voluntary groups. But for success, the initiatives already in place **MUST** be rolled out to all children and therefore joint working must be joint funded. This means that the DE and DoH **MUST** move swiftly on fundamental change – not only to funding but to education regulations e.g. Legal responsibility for therapy provision on statements must become responsibility of joint trusts. New models of service delivery **MUST** be backed up by a public information campaign with training to related professions including the judiciary and law members of Tribunal Panels”.

- Some delegates felt that the conference had not adequately highlighted good practice across Board areas:

“It would have been beneficial to see models of good practice that are happening WHSSB/WELB – statistically we did not fair well. The quality of service is not reflected statistically due to a multitude of factors. It would have been a pleasant balance”.

“It would have been better to have had an example of good practice from each board area”.

“Biased view provided. Not representative of regional projects”.

“Had WHSSB nothing to present?”

“Rather than select aspects of good practice from a restricted area of the province perhaps an overview of the good practice across NI would have been more conducive to discussion in the breakout groups”.

- Others commented on the situation within the WHSSB:

“It is of vital importance that the good practice examples we heard of today are adopted by the WHSSB and WELB”.

"I was very disappointed that the turn out from the Western Board was poor, either no show or left early. I really don't hold out much hope that things will change anyway. The Western Board can hide behind the real figures and failures anyway no-one in any position of authority challenges them. They talk the talk but don't walk the walk".

- Comments in relation to resources were also made by some respondents, for example:

"Resource issues are addressed by a "juggling" act usually. Also, the Sp+L Project which may be one of the few positives to come from government, is having a very beneficial effect in the sample schools, so I am delighted to hear that this proven model will be taken forward and will be resourced for mainstream and hopeful spread into special schools. To date the project has suffered from lack of funding and uncertainty of resourcing and future stability."

"A recurrent theme throughout the day has been resources. Hopefully this will be the start of a process of awareness of the immediacy of funding required to meet all our aims".

".....[there] is lack of Government funding

- 1) To restructure
- 2) Recruitment and retention of S+L Therapists
- 3) Time to allow S+L managers to look at more cost effective means of delivering services
- 4) Training for school staff".

- A number of delegates commented on the government announcement of additional funding and a regional Taskforce:

"The Task Force confirmation is excellent news and long overdue".

"I welcome the announcement of the additional funding and the new regional Task Force".

"Four million pot will have to be divided amongst other professionals and interest groups".

"A stream of annually recurring funding [is] needed to make significant changes in service provision".

"I will look forward to seeing how the information shared on collaborative and school based approaches is supported by DE / DHSSPS by using the funding allocated by Govt to back such initiatives and renew and evaluate this model for practice (and possible development in mainstream schools in future)".

- Some respondents highlighted the need for practical action, with children being the main focus:

"It all sounds great but as a parent I could paper the walls with models of good practice and task group reports, reviews and recommendations but can you really hold the services to account, on the ground I do not see any improvements, in fact, I think that things are actually getting worse. Our children are second class citizens receiving second class services. We need to stop talking, its action we want to see".

"Task forces and report writing are all very well but if this does not translate into improved services for children they are a waste of time".

"Quality of service essential; child-led rather than resource-led".

- Other comments:

"Many of the things discussed are already happening – specialist teachers are employed, we do link with mainstream teachers, we work collaboratively with other professionals. What we need is an answer to the postcode lottery. My unit has approx 4 times more need to address than provision available. All children on our waiting list would have significant long term needs – we are not able to meet them – what happens to them? This is not addressed today. I did not get an opportunity to say what is needed".

"....stop pilots – or at least make sure there is money there to sustain their success!!! Pilots don't encourage experienced expertise to stay – people move on to ensure job security".

“Please ensure that comments from parents and those working at the coal face with children are taken on board”.

“It seemed to me that a lot of emphasis was placed upon reducing waiting lists and managing caseloads rather than quality of purposeful provision!”.

“I have grave concerns that there is a push to move SLT from a clinic room to a room in a school without considering the need to move away from a medical model. SLT’s do not ‘cure’ children’s communication difficulties!! This needs to be fully understood”.

“Funding is an issue constantly raised. Given that there are not adequate structures within Trusts, Boards and the Department to enable AHP’s to have an equal voice at decision-making tables, could the Royal College of Speech and language Therapy work in conjunction with the other AHP Professional Bodies to find a way to develop a more united force for AHP’s? There is an inherent weakness in separate professions individually lobbying government and it is therefore ‘easier’ to have a position whereby AHP services are ‘represented’ at senior levels by other professions e.g. nursing/social work. A lack of AHP representation at senior levels weakens the overall position of AHP’s in securing funding, modernising services for people with needs that could be effectively met by the skills of AHP’s”.

“Could any future follow-up reviews please include SureStart – there are excellent speech and language therapy services being provided to children through SureStart with no waiting lists, very little non-attendance and collaborative working with a range of professionals. We also start work in the antenatal period, giving parents ideas on how to encourage speech and language development. The picture for children requiring SLT within NI is therefore not all bleak!”

“A NI Minister’s presence e.g. Angela Smith or Shaun Woodward would have been welcomed”.

“Days like today need follow-up otherwise they are pointless. Government should direct managers from health and education to liaise

and implement the programmes presented and provide necessary funding”.

“Ask people to look at the poster presentations – a lot of work wasn’t even acknowledged”.