



**The Rt Hon Baroness Jacqui Smith
Minister for Skills**

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House of Lords
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30 May 2025

Dear Stephanie,

I am writing to you to follow up on the question you raised during the OPQ on the 20th May 2025 about the challenges which children and families face trying to access augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices.

Firstly, I'd like to recognise the important work that you and Cerebral Palsy (CP) Scotland do to support children with CP-related communication difficulties. I agree that early support is vital to securing positive outcomes for children with communication needs and that AAC devices can play an important part in this support. The Department's 'Rapid Literature Review into Assistive Technology in Education'¹ (2020) found strong evidence that providing children with a method of communicating, such as an AAC device, improves their independence, educational outcomes and quality of life. Furthermore, our recent 'Developing a competency framework for effective assistive technology training'² report (2025) recommended that many staff working in special schools and colleges would benefit from training in supporting students with AAC devices. So, we absolutely recognise the value of AAC devices in education.

We also know that children and young people with SEND frequently require access to additional support from a broad specialist workforce across education, health and care. To support with the demand, the Department, in partnership with NHS England, are funding the Early Language and Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme. This is trialling new ways of working to better identify and support children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) in early years and primary schools. This is being delivered through 9 regional pathfinder partnerships within our SEND and AP Change Programme.

Highlight reporting data for the ELSEC programme shows that therapy support teams have helped around 20,000 children so far and just over 3000 setting staff have been upskilled in delivering interventions since the beginning of the project. A final evaluation will take place following the end of the summer term 2026, supporting the development of a reformed SEND system that embeds earlier intervention and targeted support, enabling children to thrive at their mainstream

¹ [Rapid literature review on assistive technology in education](#) (page 6)

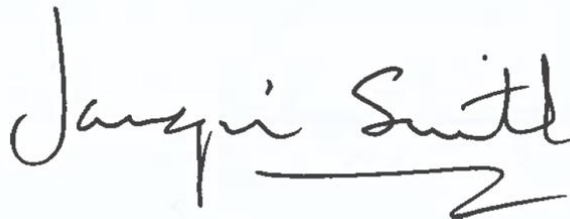
² [Developing a competency framework for effective assistive technology training](#) (page 92)

school and making sure all children have the best start in life.

We also know that continuing to build the pipeline of speech and language therapists is essential. That is why we introduced the speech and language degree apprenticeship, which is now in its third year of delivery and offers an alternative pathway to the traditional degree route into a successful career as a speech and language therapist.

Thank you again for taking the time to engage on these matters. I hope these further details have been useful and I will place a copy in the House libraries.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Jacqui Smith', with a stylized flourish underneath.

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