

Written Ministerial Statement

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Justice

Appointment of a Speech and Language Therapist to the Youth Justice Agency

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Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The Youth Justice Agency has been involved in an ongoing programme of work with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) to develop support mechanisms for young people with speech, language and communication issues within the youth justice system.

A key element of this programme has been the successful piloting within the Agency's Lisburn Area Office and Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre of an e-learning tool which had been developed by the RCSLT. An evaluation of the six month pilot published by the RCSLT in April 2013 found that 79 of the 147 (54%) young people who were assessed were identified as having communication needs. The RCSLT and the Youth Justice Agency have recognised the need for this to be addressed through the provision of speech and language therapy.

In response to this clearly identified need, I have **authorised the appointment of a dedicated Speech & Language Therapist resource for the Youth Justice Agency based at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre**. This temporary post will be funded by the Youth Justice Agency although the appointee will be recruited and managed via a secondment arrangement with the South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust. It is hoped to have this service up and running by the end of this calendar year.

This appointment will help to ensure that young people within the youth justice system who have speech, language and communication issues will have those needs identified at an early stage and will be offered specialised support to help them better understand their surroundings and engage more effectively in programmes to address their offending behaviour.