Speech, Language and Communication Knowledge and Skills Matrix for the Early Years Workforce

Supporting the workforce to nurture early language and communication from the start.

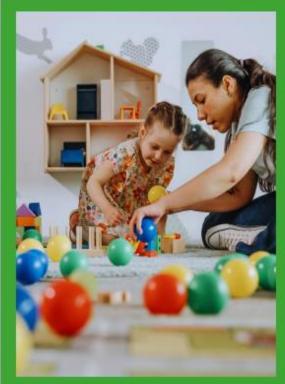




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1. Introduction and Purpose

The matrix has been created to support the development of Speech Language and Communication (SLC) knowledge and skills across the pre-birth to 5 children's workforce. It identifies the essential knowledge and skills (K&S) that practitioners across all sectors require within their role to support SLC development for all infants and children.

The matrix can be used by **individuals** to reflect on their own practice and competency, support supervision conversations and direct their learning journey. It can be used by **teams** to help them reflect on the quality of their environments and promote collaboration around SLC. It can be used by **organisations** to support workforce training and development plans.

The SLC Knowledge and Skills Matrix assists staff in fulfilling their responsibilities within the National Practice Model. Practice area descriptors align with the **GIRFEC** approach, promoting a child centred, strengths-based approach that considers a child's overall wellbeing. (Scottish Government, 2023)

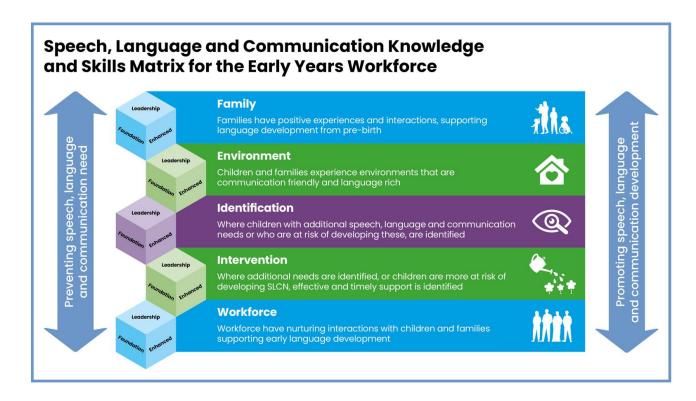
The SLC Knowledge and Skills matrix supports staff in meeting their obligations to uphold infant and children's rights under the UNCRC charter. It aligns with the **Voice of the Infant best practice guidance** and a commitment to the **Infant Pledge**. (UNICEF, 1989) (Scottish Government, March 2023)

This matrix is designed to assist individuals, teams and organisations to develop in the following key areas related to SLC development:

- Essential **knowledge for understanding** SLC development from pre-birth.
- Necessary skills for supporting SLC development in infants and children.
- Insights into factors influencing outcomes in children's SLC development.
- Collaborative skills required to effectively support SLC development.

The matrix is complemented by a self-evaluation tool designed to help individuals and teams reflect on and evaluate their competencies across the five practice areas.

2. The structure of the matrix



The matrix is made up of 5 practice areas, aligned with the key drivers in Scotland's Early Language Theory of Change: **family, environment, identification, intervention and workforce.** Together, these practice areas are essential to the delivery of SLC support for infants and children.

Three levels of skill are identified within each practice area: **Foundation**, **Enhanced** and **Leadership** Level. Alignment of the skill levels to specific job roles will be open to local interpretation and determined by the specific context and SLC environment in which these roles operate. Examples are given of what practice might look like at each level.

3. Who should use the matrix?

This matrix will be useful for practitioners working alongside and caring for infants, children and their families. This might include those involved with parents-to-be and infants in the very early days. The **Foundation** and **Enhanced** levels of the matrix are for practitioners in any sector. The **Leadership** level is for anyone who contributes to local planning of SLC supports, manages children's settings and/or staff delivering supports for SLC development.

The skill levels are not written with particular job roles in mind but instead should be considered based on work context, specific roles and responsibilities and in discussion with a supervisor or manager. For example, the enhanced skill level is appropriate for practitioners who have responsibility for SLC within their role. This level may also be required for practitioners supporting families where there is a higher risk of poorer SLC outcomes.

4. Considerations

- The matrix can support workforce planning and development. It is not a programme of specific support for children. Instead it offers a broad range of skills and knowledge that can support any practitioner with a particular focus on creating the conditions for primary prevention and early intervention in SLC.
- The knowledge and skills matrix has been developed for use across Scotland and therefore does not include detailed local
 examples of available supports, practioner training or referral pathways for children to speech and language therapy services.
 Local areas may wish to supplement the matrix with additional information reflecting their own local arrangements, pathways
 and training offers.
- This matrix will be useful for practitioners working alongside and caring for any infants and children. Practitoners supporting
 children with additional support needs such as neurodevelopmental differences, genetic conditions etc should link with their
 local specialist children's services to discuss more specific workforce development needs.
- The matrix brings together indicators that describe the core knowledge and skills required to support children and families in
 the early years. Some descriptors and examples of practice will be more relevant to specific roles and settings than others.
 Practitioners are encouraged to critically reflect on how the matrix applies to their specific role to enhance their practice in
 meaningful and practical ways.

5. The SLC Knowledge and Skills Matrix - Skill Levels

Skill Levels	Foundation	Enhanced	Leadership
	All members of the pre-birth to 5 workforce who are in frequent contact with infants, children and their families.	Members of the pre-birth to 5 workforce who work with infants, children and their families where there is an increased risk of Speech, Language and Communication Need (SLCN). and Members of the pre-birth to 5 workforce who have a responsibility for SLC as part of their core role.	Members of the workforce who manage early years settings or workforce groups and contribute to local planning around speech, language and communication (SLC) for all infants and children.
Progression	The Enhanced level builds upon the Foundation level, providing more advanced knowledge and skills.		The Leadership level is designed to stand alone, outlining knowledge and skills required to provide a whole system approach to supporting SLC and supporting practitioners at a foundation and enhanced level.

The SLC Knowledge and Skills Matrix - Practice Areas and Descriptors

Family	Foundation	Enhanced	Leadership
Your knowledge, skills and confidence in working alongside parents/carers to support their infant / child's SLC development	I model and share SLC key messages with family members. I can signpost families to appropriate resources and services to gain more information about responsive communication I am aware of social and environmental factors associated with better and poorer outcomes for SLC development. I understand the benefits of parents using their home languages with infants and children.	I share knowledge with families about SLC development and how the home learning environment can support SLC development. I engage families in conversations about their infant/child's developing communication. I understand and recognise social and environmental factors associated with better and poorer outcomes for SLC development and I target family supports with these in mind. I model and coach families in supportive strategies and approaches. When I need more help to support a family with SLC, I seek this from other practitioners as appropriate. I can deliver an SLC intervention for children and their families.	I facilitate family engagement and family learning opportunities within my setting/service area. I include parents and the voice of the infant/child in SLC support and development plans. I ensure that families can access SLC support available in their area, taking into consideration social and environmental factors associated with better and poorer outcomes for SLC.

Examples of Practice

I share National Chatting Together messages with a family, e.g. 'copying my sounds, funny faces and gestures. I love it when you make me laugh by copying my gestures and gurgles, then pausing for me to take another turn.'

As a midwife, I explain the positive impact of talking and singing to your bump and model this in practice to help parents/carers build confidence in early interactions.

I direct families to the SLC advice they can find on Parent Club and BBC Tiny Happy People empowering families with SLC information.

As a childminder, I encourage parents to use their home language to build their confidence in early interactions.

I have a conversation with a parent about their infant/child's developing SLC skills, so interactions match the infant/child's developmental stage.

I notice when a parent watched and waited to see what their child/infant was interested in, before joining in by making a comment. I highlight this to the parent to build their confidence in what they are already doing to support SLC.

I deliver Bookbug at Home programme for families, so parents feel better equipped to play and interact with their infant/child.

When considering the needs of an infant/child in my care, I am aware of the social and environmental factors that mean they are more at risk of developing an SLC need, and I offer SLC family support e.g. PEEP Families Learning Together.

I establish Stay and Play sessions within my setting and explore ways to encourage families to attend.

I facilitate the training and establishment of a baby massage programme to be delivered by HCSW's to targeted families with a specific focus on interaction and relationship building.

I ensure that SLC messaging is included in existing family learning and engagement opportunities e.g. toddler sessions.

I gather parental feedback on a family SLC support my service delivers to help me shape future offers.

Environment	Foundation	Enhanced	Leadership
Your knowledge, skills and confidence in providing a language and communication supporting environment	I understand that an infant or child's language and communication environment includes the physical space and the quality of the interactions with adults within that environment. I understand the importance of providing language nurturing interactions that support communication development in any home or early learning and childcare setting. I can describe what a communication supportive environment looks like in any home or early learning and childcare setting.	I actively model, promote and develop a language and communication supportive environment where I work. I coach others in providing a language and communication supportive environment including any home or early learning and childcare setting. I can provide adaptations to the environment to accommodate infant/ children's differing communication styles and stages. I can identify and address potential barriers to a language and communication supportive environment in my setting. I know how to access support to ensure an appropriate language and communication environment for all infants and children in my setting.	I ensure staff receive training in providing a language and communication supportive environment. I assure the quality of the language and communication supportive environment in my setting/service area I ensure that language and communication supportive environments are prioritised in local improvement plans. I know about SLC environment resources and tools appropriate to my setting and can support staff to use these. I engage with multi-agency colleagues to ensure language and communication supportive practice is embedded across my area of responsibility.

Examples of Practice

I use observation and reflection to notice opportunities to support communication in my setting.

I learn from more experienced colleagues through coaching and shadowing.

I seek opportunities for learning in relation to a language and communication supportive environment. As an EY practitioner, I organise my setting to provide well defined areas e.g. quiet areas, talking areas etc with symbols, pictures, and labels.

I seek opportunities to responsively interact with infants and children within play activities and daily routines and encourage other to do the same.

As a health visitor, I model being at baby's eye level and coach parents to notice how their baby is feeling.

I demonstrate language and communication supportive strategies such as following the child's lead, to parents and colleagues.

As a childminder, I make sure background noise is kept down to provide the best language learning environment for the children in my care.

I embed our selected communication environment standards into setting development plans.

I encourage and support staff evaluate the language and communication environment using a suitable self-reflection tool.

I support staff to access professional learning from appropriate multi-agency colleagues as available.

Identification	Foundation	Enhanced	Leadership
Your knowledge, skills and confidence in identifying children's needs and identifying opportunities for prevention.	I am aware of the main core components of communication (receptive language, expressive language, speech and interaction). I know what to expect as infant/children's SLC develops and I am aware that not all children will follow the same developmental pattern. With support, I can identify infants/children in my care who may have communication differences. I am aware of the factors associated with better or poorer SLC outcomes. When I need help to have a discussion with a family about their child's SLC development, I seek this from more experienced practitioners.	I am aware of and can describe the main core components of communication (receptive language, expressive language, speech, and interaction) and other related developmental components including attention, listening, taking turns, and pointing. I can describe what to expect in SLC development and relate this to infants/children in my care. I can confidently identify infants/children in my care who may have communication differences I understand the impact of factors associated with better or poorer SLC outcomes and can describe these in relation to infants/children in my care I have an awareness of the range of SLC differences, including neuro-developmental and sensory differences that can have an impact on SLC.	I contribute to the design and development of services that recognise and respond to potential SLC risks. In collaboration with other agencies, I gather and examine data to inform local systems and pathways for supporting SLC development. I ensure that service delivery and planning is influenced by an awareness of the factors associated with better and poorer outcomes for SLC development. I support local pathways to include identification as part of a wider systems approach to SLC development.

	I can contribute to locally preferred screening and tracking tools for SLC development	I can use locally preferred screening and tracking tools to identify SLCN. I use information from screening tools, and observations of the infant/child and their environment, to identify need. I can discuss SLC concerns with families and practitioners, in line with local pathways. I support less experienced colleagues to recognise and contribute to the early identification of SLCN. I understand the importance of home language when thinking about identification of SLC concerns	
Examples of Practice	I notice when an infant/ child in my care does not consistently understand verbal language. With support from colleagues, I can give parents and caregivers feedback or information about their child's communication in my ELC setting.	I complete a locally preferred developmental tracker tool that includes speech language and communication development. I observe caregiver interactions with their child as part of a developmental review.	I establish tracking and monitoring of children's communication in the setting/service. I know how and when to access local pathways when early SLC support is required and share this with my team.

I notice when communication	I notice when a child can follow	I ensure that my team understand
differences impact on a child's	verbal instructions without clues or	the importance of early
access to everyday activities.	gestures or when they need these.	identification of SLC concerns or risk factors and their role within
I notice when a child is happy and confident communicating and	I use my knowledge of the factors associated with better or poorer	this process.
when they are not.	SLC outcomes to identify families who might need support for their child's language development	I support my staff to listen to parent/caregiver concerns about their child's SLC and to respond to these.
	I provide discussion opportunities and advice to colleagues when they have concerns about a child's SLC.	

Intervention	Foundation	Enhanced	Leadership
Your knowledge, skills, and confidence in providing supportive interactions, strategies and programmes to support children's developing SLC.	I understand the importance of responsive communication and ensure I use it with all infants/children at every opportunity. I know where families can access appropriate resources and services to gain more information about responsive communication.	I consistently use, and encourage others to use, quality responsive communication strategies, e.g. copying sounds, facial expressions, gestures and words, as part of my day-to-day communication with all infants and children. I can deliver locally offered intervention packages that support SLC, to identified groups/individuals and their families. I can provide families with the information and resources they need to support their infant/child's SLC, either directly or indirectly by working with other services.	I have knowledge of and understand what quality responsive communication looks like, and the benefits and importance for all infants / children. I have a comprehensive understanding of the range of offers that support SLC in my local system, including universal and targeted approaches. I can support my team to signpost families to appropriate resources and services to gain more information about responsive communication (or other interventions as appropriate) I use local knowledge and data to make the best use of available intervention programmes that support SLC.
Examples of Practice	I can signpost families to local resources and interventions, e.g. Bookbug / PEEP so they receive the information they need about SLC.	I deliver a locally offered intervention package that supports SLC, e.g. Peep TALK I invite families for a Stay and Play session to share information about	I link with other service leads in my local area to ensure a shared understanding of local offers. I facilitate Bookbug for the Home training for Health Visiting support

I can signpost families to national SLC resources, e.g. Getting Ready to Chat Together messages on Parent Club website / Activity Cards with SLC tips in the Bookbug Baby Bag. As a childminder I chat to children in my care about what we are doing as we walk to the toy library. I make sure I make comments rather than only asking questions and make sure they have time to take a turn, with or without words.	SLC and quality responsive communication strategies to support the home learning environment.	workers as part of my local training and development plan. I use local and national data to prioritise SLC development and target resources to where they will have the greatest impact for families
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Workforce	Foundation	Enhanced	Leadership
Your knowledge, skills, and confidence in supporting and working collaboratively with the wider SLC team around a child.	I can describe my role in supporting infants/children's SLC. I understand the role of others in supporting infants/children's SLC across the pre-birth to 5 workforce. I am confident in engaging with the wider SLC team around the infant/ child as appropriate.	I work collaboratively with others to understand infant/ children's SLC needs and to co-produce support and/or advice for their families. I provide modelling and coaching to support my colleagues with planning and delivery of SLC approaches. I share my knowledge with others and use my experience to promote my colleague's capability around SLC. I can describe the range of SLC	I am responsible for SLC workforce development and capacity building. This will link to regular performance review and improvement in relation to SLC supports. I contribute to the SLC training and development plan for my area.
Examples of Practice	I offer the right advice to families to mitigate some of the risks of the infant/child developing SLCN. I confidently describe and share SLC concerns with others within supervision. This will ensure the infant/child gets the support they need.	I collaborate with my colleagues in planning and delivering a home support programme that supports SLC for a family in my care. I deliver a session to my colleagues to develop their knowledge about using responsive interactions in our ELC setting. I follow this up by modelling best practice on the nursery floor.	I attend and contribute to the SLC forum in my area to ensure that the early years workforce is equipped to deliver the SLC plan. I embed SLC as a key part of the development plan for my setting. I deliver a team session to reflect on our progress in providing preventative SLC supports SLC.

N.B. Some descriptors overlap across practice areas but will appear only once. Building knowledge and skills across all five areas is integral to the overall approach.

6. Glossary, Resources and References

Glossary

Descriptors - The individual knowledge or skill components that make up each skill level.

Factors associated with better and poorer outcomes for SLC - These are biomedical, genetic, social-environmental factors and parental communication approaches that interact in a dynamic and unique way to impact early speech, language, and communication development outcomes. (Which factors are associated with better and poorer SLC outcomes? | Early Speech, Language and Communication Development: Which Factors are Associated with Better or Poorer Outcomes? | Resources | Education Scotland National Early Language and Communication Team-Glow Blogs Scotland 2025)

GIRFEC (Getting It Right for Every Child) is The Scottish Government's commitment to provide all children, young people, and their families with the right support at the right time. It provides Scotland with a consistent framework and shared language for promoting, supporting, and safeguarding the wellbeing of children and young people. Scottish Government. (2023). *Getting it right for every child*. From SG: https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/

Intervention - Within the matrix, intervention is the term used to describe any action, behaviour, approach, or programme that supports infants' and children's developing SLC.

Language and Communication Supportive Environment - A broad term to describe interactions, experiences, and spaces that can support language and communication development for all babies and young children in the places where they play and learn.

Modelling and Coaching - This approach to training and development involves guiding individuals by providing demonstration and strength-based feedback, helping them observe, practise, and self-reflect in a supportive learning environment.

Practice Areas - The matrix descriptors are divided into five areas that align with the key drivers of Scotland's Early Language Theory of Change: Family, Environment, Identification, Intervention, and Workforce.

Primary Prevention - An approach to prevention at the level of the whole population aiming to reduce the incidence of a condition and prevent its later development.

Responsive Interactions - These are serve-and-return interactions where adults respond in a timely way to infants' and children's movements, noises, and communications, building a secure and supportive environment where children's SLC can develop.

Scottish Model of Infant participation - An extension to UNCRC in Scotland, advocating for meaningful participation rights specifically for infants and young children. https://www.gov.scot/publications/voice-infant-best-practice-guidelines-infant-pledge/pages/3/

Screening and Tracking Tools - Any locally agreed assessment, measurement, and recording of children's progress in SLC development.

Skill Level - The degree of knowledge, capability, and confidence an individual has in each of the practice areas.

Speech, Language, and Communication (SLC) - Encompasses all aspects of communication, including the ability to express, understand, and engage in meaningful interactions through verbal and non-verbal means.

Targeted Offers - Supports made available where children have early emerging SLC differences or where there are factors associated with poorer SLC outcomes.

Universal Offers - Supports designed to meet the SLC development needs of every child.

UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) - A landmark international agreement outlining the rights of every child, ensuring their protection, development, and participation in society. The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 directly incorporates the UNCRC agreement into domestic law.

Resources referenced in descriptors and practice examples.

<u>Chatting Together Messages | National Early Language and Communication (NELC) Project</u> National Early Language and Communication Team. (2025).

We're here for you | Parent Club Scottish Government. (2025).

BBC Tiny Happy People BBC

Bookbug - Scottish Book Trust

Scottish Book Trust

Bookbug Bags - Children's Book Bags - Scottish Book Trust - Scottish Book Trust

Scottish Book Trust. Activity Cards with SLC tips are included in the Bookbug Baby Bag (gifted between 3-5 weeks by Health Visiting teams).

Bookbug for the Home Training - Scottish Book Trust
Scottish Book Trust

Families Learning Together (Scotland) | www.peeple.org.uk

Peeple.org

Stay and Play Sessions. information on family engagement included in Education Scotland Realising the Ambition 2020 https://education.gov.scot/media/3bjpr3wa/realisingtheambition.pdf

Baby Massage | Early Years Scotland Early Years Scotland

Milestone cards are included in Scotland's Baby Box.

Scotland's Baby Boxes-mygov.scot

Scottish Government. 2024 Scotland's Baby Boxes.

Which factors are associated with better and poorer SLC outcomes? | Early Speech, Language and Communication Development: Which Factors are Associated with Better or Poorer Outcomes? | Resources | Education Scotland National Early Language and Communication Team-Glow Blogs Scotland 2025

How can we create a Language and Communication Supportive Environment in Early Learning and Childcare settings? NELC 25 awaiting publication.

References

Scottish Government. (2023). Getting it right for every child. From SG: https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/

Scottish Government. (March 2023). *Voice of the Infant: best practice guidelines and infant pledge*. Retrieved from Scottish Government: https://www.gov.scot/publications/voice-infant-best-practice-guidelines-infant-pledge/

UNICEF. (1989, Nov). UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Retrieved from UNICEF.org.

The continuous professional learning (CPL) portal for the childcare profession hosted by The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). https://cpldirectory.elc.sssc.uk.com/

Talk with Me website and resources: a Welsh Government initiative aimed at supporting children's speech, language, and communication development. https://www.gov.wales/talk-with-me

<u>The Speech, Language and Communication Framework (SLCF) - SLCF - The Communication Trust</u> professional development tool, accessible to all, which sets out the key skills needed to support the speech, language and communication development of all children and young people. Speech and Language UK.

Adapted GIRFEC My World Triangle of SLC GIRFEC My World Triangle and SLC | National Early Language and Communication (NELC) Project

7. Appendix

Early Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) Knowledge and Skills (K&S) Matrix **Self-Evaluation Tool**

How to use the Self-Evaluation Tool.

The self-evaluation tool supplements the K&S matrix and is for anyone in any role who wishes to keep track of their learning, evidence their progression through the SLC K&S Matrix or plan future learning. It can be used to update or refresh previously attained competences. The self-evaluation tool and matrix may be embedded into the formal learning and development structures of your employing organisation and the self-evaluation tool may form part of your formal appraisal process.

The first two levels on the matrix are hierarchical in that the enhanced level builds on the foundation level. It is expected that a practitioner may be developing competencies across these two levels at the same time. However, it is important to build competency through each of the 5 practice areas before being deemed to achieve at that level. The leadership level is for anyone who contributes to local planning of SLC supports, manages children's settings and/or delivers supports for SLC development.

We asked stakeholders how they might use the K&S matrix, and a wide range of applications were suggested including:



Self-Evaluation Tool Scale

Practitioners will use a three-point scale to assess their competencies across the K&S Matrix, allowing for meaningful self-reflection and identification of areas for professional growth. Identified K&S may be rated as:

Emerging: I am just beginning to develop knowledge and skills at this level. I continue to need support.

Developing: I am gaining confidence and competence in this practice area, and I am on my way to achieving this level. I might still need occasional support.

Achieved: I am confident in my knowledge, and I am capable at this level of skill. I usually perform these skills independently and I can support others to develop in this area.

Practice Areas and Evaluation

How am I doing?	Name		Date
Practice Area	Foundation	Enhanced	Leadership
ENVIRONMENTS	□ Emerging	☐ Emerging	☐ Emerging
	□ Developing	□ Developing	□ Developing
	☐ Achieved	☐ Achieved	☐ Achieved
FAMILIES	□ Emerging	☐ Emerging	☐ Emerging
	□ Developing	□ Developing	□ Developing
	☐ Achieved	☐ Achieved	☐ Achieved
IDENTIFICATION	☐ Emerging	☐ Emerging	☐ Emerging
	□ Developing	□ Developing	□ Developing
	☐ Achieved	☐ Achieved	☐ Achieved
INTERVENTION	☐ Emerging	☐ Emerging	☐ Emerging
	□ Developing	□ Developing	□ Developing
	☐ Achieved	☐ Achieved	☐ Achieved
WORKFORCE	□ Emerging	☐ Emerging	☐ Emerging
	□ Developing	□ Developing	□ Developing
	☐ Achieved	☐ Achieved	☐ Achieved

Reflection Questions

These questions may help you to rate your skill level.

- 1. Can you give an example of a time when you demonstrated this descriptor?
- 2. What impact did this have on infants, children, and their families?
- 3. Would you do something differently next time?
- 4. What feedback have you had from children, parents, or colleagues?
- 5. What will you do next to continue your learning journey in this area?