



Niamh Leonard

Band 6 Speech and
Language Therapist

Can you give us a brief outline of your work history?

After qualifying, my first post involved working in mainstream and special schools in a trust in England. Since moving back to Northern Ireland, I have previously worked in community clinics and learning support/autism support units attached to mainstream schools. I have been in my current post with the RISE NI team for just over a year and love the multidisciplinary team working element!

What made you decide this career path?

I have always been interested in languages and communication, but once I did a bit of research into Speech and Language Therapy, I was excited by the breadth of the profession (I hadn't previously been aware that the role included eating, drinking, and swallowing, as well as communication). My work experience as a support worker with children with autism and learning disabilities, and personal experience of seeing the impact of Speech and Language Therapy for a close family member, increased my desire to get into the profession.

How did you train for this role/educational route?

I completed a Psychology undergraduate degree at the University of Edinburgh. Two years after graduation, I went back to Manchester Metropolitan University to complete a Pre-Reg MSc in Speech and Language Therapy, which was a condensed (and intense!) two year Master's degree.

What qualities are required for your job – personal and professional?

You need to be a good written and verbal communicator, but also an effective listener, empathetic, caring, organised, and flexible/adaptable.

What does a typical day involve?

My day is so varied – I might have school visits for assessment and/or intervention (1:1, group, or whole class), transdisciplinary team meetings, meetings or consultations with teachers and/or parents, or delivering training. You also have to make time for clinical admin such as note writing and reports. No two days are the same!

What do you like best about your job?

I love working as a team with children, families, and teachers to make a difference to the child's ability to access the curriculum.

What advice would you give anyone thinking of doing your job?

If you value the impact of communication and eating and drinking across everyone's everyday lives and are looking for a busy, varied job where flexibility and adaptability is key, it's a great career to go for!