



**Olivia  
Compston**

**Speech and  
Language Therapist**

## Introduce yourself. Where do you work? What is your jobrole?

I'm Olivia Compston and I work in the Belfast Community Adult Learning Disability Team. I qualified in 2018 as a Speech and Language Therapist and have been working in this role since 2021.

## What does your job entail?

No two days are the same! I help to support the communication needs of adults with a learning disability. This involves completing assessments, working closely with their families, staff, and carers, and making a series of recommendations to best support their unique and individual needs throughout their lives. I also support my clients' eating, drinking, and swallowing needs. I have a role in helping mealtimes remain an enjoyable and safe experience for everyone.

## How did you get into this line of work?

I initially went to university to study English Literature and Politics, but found myself gravitating towards linguistic and language modules. Towards the end of my second year, a university tutor suggested I explore Speech and Language Therapy as a career. I gained some experience by volunteering in a special school, which allowed me to learn more about the role of an SLT and working with individuals who have communication and swallowing difficulties. I eventually graduated with a degree in English Language and Linguistics, and immediately enrolled in Ulster University to pursue a BSc in Speech and Language Therapy.

## Outline your career to date

After qualifying, I kept an open mind and took my first temporary job working with adults in a rehab hospital. I then accepted my first permanent role working primarily in a special school setting but with some general paediatric community work alongside. This role helped me realise my passion for working with people with learning disabilities - but I did miss the experiences and challenges that come with working with an adult caseload. I was then lucky enough to secure a Band 6 role in the adult learning disability team in Belfast Trust, which I love and continue to work in today.

## Tell us about your qualifications and training

I have a BA in English Language, which helped give me a bit of a foundation for then studying a BSc in Speech and Language Therapy. It is a three-year course that covers working with people with communication and swallowing needs of all ages, from newborn babies right up to the elderly. I've had the opportunity, through my employment, to take on further study, including a PGDip in Post Basic Dysphagia (swallowing difficulties) and lots of short courses such as Makaton, Talking Mats and Intensive Interaction.

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

Working as a speech therapist suits a person who is compassionate and caring. It also suits a person who is organised, patient, but also able to adapt and think on their feet as days don't always go to plan! You need to enjoy working with others as you will have the opportunity to work with a whole range of professionals on a daily basis but also meet and support people from all walks of life.

## What is the best advice you have ever received?

Always keep an open mind.

## What do you like to do in your spare time?

I love getting out for food and trying new restaurants/cafés (so it's unsurprising I've ended up in a job with a big focus on eating and drinking!). I also have a good go at baking and trying to play the piano again - despite being about 10 years out of practice.

## Who has inspired you most in your life?

My grandparents, they inspired my work ethic and have always supported me throughout all aspects of my life.

## What advice would you give your 16-year-old self?

You don't have to have everything figured out for your life and it's ok for things not to go to plan.