

A Co-produced, Community-based Voice Service for Trans and Non-binary People: Service Users' Views on Terminology, and Pathology-based Language

Sean Pert¹, Ellissia Porter², Chloë Barlow²

¹Speech and Language Therapy, Division of Psychology, Communication and Human Neuroscience, School of Health, Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health, The University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

²Indigo Gender Service, Manchester, UK

The service

**Trans and gender-diverse
community in Greater
Manchester, UK**

Indigo Gender Service (2024)



Terminology

Speech and Language Therapy for trans and non-binary people

- Current term used by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is **Voice and Communication Therapy** (VCT)
- The term avoids language linked to pathology and was the title of the groundbreaking book by Adler, Hirsch, and Mordaunt (2006)
- Adopted by WPATH for speech and voice therapy (2011)
- Variations around the term are used:
 - Gender Affirming Voice and Communication (ASHA, n.d.)
- ***Little or no information on how service users were involved in coining these terms***

Why consider terminology?

(Health Research Authority., 2024)

Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) to Voice and Communication Therapy (VCT)

De-pathologising language

Co-produced services:
community values and understanding

‘cis’ clinicians’ perspectives ≠
community’s understanding

“Trans people are the experts of their own experience”
(Indigo Gender Service, 2024)

Co-production session

- 2 evening co-production sessions
- Safe space: Relaxed seating with food and soft drinks provided
- 3 Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs), and 2 student SLTs
- Invited a total of 36 (15+21) service users who had completed VCT
- 6 service users attended (April 2024)
- 4 service users attended (October 2024)

What did service users say about terminology?

Themes raised by the group

- **'Therapy'** implies **disorder**
- **Distinctions** from 'Talking therapies' (Counselling) as this has caused confusion
- **Verbose**: Long and difficult to understand terms
- **Gender Affirming** was widely recognised, but some service users found the term 'patronising'.



Conclusions

- No single term is acceptable to **all** service users
- Agreement that current terminology is confusing and/or unacceptable, but **voice** must be included
- Alternative terms to VCT suggested by Service Users were:
 - Voice exploration (3/10)
 - Voice coaching (3/10)

Next steps

- Further service user groups to reach a consensus
- Difficult to get a representative sample as many service users are reluctant to share their views (may participate but won't consent to sharing of findings)
- Making the service more co-produced while maintaining the requirements of commissioner and a modern NHS funded service
 - Therapy Outcome Measures (TOMs) New non-pathology scale by Pert (Enderby & John 2025)
 - Gabbitas et al. (2025) reported on making TOMS into a Patient Reported Outcome Measure (PROM)
 - Feedback being sought from the RCSLT Clinical Excellence Network

References

Adler, R. K., Hirsch, S., & Mordaunt, M. (2006). *Voice and communication therapy for the transgender/transsexual client: a comprehensive clinical guide / edited by Richard K. Adler, Sandy Hirsch, Michelle Mordaunt*. Plural Publishing.

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). *Gender affirming voice and communication [Practice portal]*. <https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/professional-issues/gender-affirming-voice-and-communication/>

Enderby, P. and John, A. (eds)(2025). *Therapy Outcome Measure Handbook: Theory, User Guide and Scales*. J&R Press. <https://www.jr-press.co.uk/product/therapy-outcome-measure-handbook-theory-user-guide-and-scales/>

Gabbitas, R., Porter, E. and Pert, S. (2025). *Adapting a TOMS scale for Trans & Non-Binary Voice & Communication*. RCSLT Trans and Gender Diverse Clinical Excellence Network, Friday 28th March 2025 (Online).

Health Research Authority (20th May 2024). Putting people first – embedding public involvement in health and social care research. Putting people first - embedding public involvement in health and social care research - Health Research Authority (hra.nhs.uk). Date accessed: 17th June 2024

Indigo Gender Service (2024). Our mission, vision and values, Indigo Gender Service. Our mission, vision and values | Indigo Gender Service. Date accessed: 17th June 2024.

17. The World Professional Association for Transgender Health. *Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Nonconforming People*. 7th Version. 2011, <http://www.wpath.org>.