



Celebrating AHPs: Looking Back, Leaping Forward – Voices for Change at the Scottish Parliament

The Allied Health Professions Federation Scotland (AHPFS) Celebration Event marked a pivotal moment – one we must harness to drive meaningful change for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

The evening celebrated the dedication, innovation and impact of Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) across Scotland but even more importantly the future impact that AHPs can have on health and social care.

Sponsored by Jackie Baillie MSP, this event, held in the striking Holyrood Room within the Scottish Parliament building, brought together leaders, practitioners, and those with lived experience to shine a spotlight on the vital role AHPs play throughout every stage of a person's health journey.

Speeches were given by Jackie, Neil Gray, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Carolyn McDonald, Chief AHP Officer, Olive, a sixth-year student who shared her personal story of working with AHPs - and myself.



Jackie Baillie MSP (event sponsor)

As I listened to the other speakers, I was struck by how closely their messages aligned with the key asks I planned to share. Whilst this alignment should not have been surprising, it powerfully reinforced that now is a pivotal moment for AHPs to be bold in shaping lasting change.

These shared messages revealed several recurring themes that speak to the heart of AHP practice: a commitment to true person-centred care where professionals listen and act on what matters to the person; outcomes - how AHPs change lives, rather than simply count procedures or waiting times; embracing change in service design, delivery and roles for the benefit of people and populations. But essentially, how health and social care policy is running in parallel with what AHPs have known for a long time but have struggled to influence lasting, transformative change.



Neil Gray, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care

Building on these themes, my speech focussed on the scale, scope and potential of the AHP workforce. I highlighted that Allied Health Professionals are the third largest clinical workforce in the NHS, with colleagues also working in local authorities and the voluntary sector.

AHPs are at the forefront of bridging the gap between physical and mental health, providing access to rehabilitation, prehabilitation and re-ablement as well as leading the innovative practice supporting the essential shift to focus on prevention and early intervention. But I questioned how we can affect lasting, transformative change in health and social care and then reinforced the 3 key priorities made by AHPFS to policymakers and stakeholders which we believe will deliver change:

- ✓ **Embed AHP Leadership Across Health and Social Care**
- ✓ **Expand Routes into the Professions**
- ✓ **Ensure Timely and Equitable Access to AHP Services**

These priorities are not just aspirations, they are essential steps towards a more equitable, effective and person-centred health and care system. We must embrace diverse perspectives and creative tensions to spark innovation in health and social care, ensuring AHPs are in the board rooms and at the decision-making tables, alongside those already established in decision-making spaces, to ensure that change happens.



Carolyn McDonald, Chief Allied Health Professions Officer (CAHPO)

The future workforce needs new and different ways to access AHP education and to be financially supported to do this. And most importantly, we need to make real the improvement ideas that AHPs already have for the benefit of the people of Scotland. These priorities will help strengthen the profession, support the workforce, and ensure that people across Scotland have access to the care they need.

Allied Health Professionals are not a nice to have in the health and care system, we are absolutely essential in the provision of safe, effective, sustainable, transformative service delivery.

The event brought together voices from across health and social care, uniting policymakers, practitioners, and service users to discuss the impact and future of AHP services across Scotland and the energy and conversations in the room evidenced that people are ready for change.

The star of the evening was Olive. Her story was a poignant reminder of the human impact of AHP care and her words reminded us that behind every service, every policy and every professional, there is a person whose life can be transformed by compassionate co-ordinated care. Her journey, shaped by over 20 AHPs, exemplifies the transformative power of listening, collaboration, and truly person-centred practice. She highlighted the impact of AHPs listening and understanding her priorities and how their collaboration and care ensured her needs were met and her outcomes achieved.

Olive's story is one of many – but we need meaningful change across health and care to ensure many more lives can be transformed. It is our time to come together in collaboration to support the vital role of AHPs in health and social care, to make a difference for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

The time for change is now – and AHPs are ready to lead it.



Hilary Munro, Chair Allied Health Professions Federation Scotland