

STAMMA

2026 Interim Report: Jan-June

ADVOCACY SERVICE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are hugely grateful to Cathy Casserley, Cole Khan and Osborne Clarke for their wise support and guidance. The quality of guidance we are given, both in writing and verbally is exemplary.

And we are enormously grateful to Lara and Nick Cournoyer for their generous funding of the Advocacy Service. None of this would be happening without you!

CONTENTS

Background 3

Partners 3

Goals & Achievements 2026 / 2027 4

Cases 5-8

Feedback 8

Project Work 9

- British Council 9
- Advocates Gateway 9
- Parliamentary Modernisation Committee 9
- Research 10
- Norfolk Stammering Service 10
- HM Passport Office 10

Summary 10

BACKGROUND

The Advocacy Service has become a hugely important part of STAMMA's work, providing a unique lifeline for anyone who's been unfairly treated or discriminated against specifically because they stammer.

We listen carefully to each individual's experiences on a case-by-case basis and try to help them get them better outcomes.

This in turn, informs our campaigning work, providing case examples which demonstrate the very real barriers that people who stammer face in their day-to-day lives, which is key to getting businesses to engage.

The Advocacy Service helps us highlight patterns of failure and use them to push for systemic change across organisations and sectors, so that the next generation of people who stammer won't be marked down for stammering in a language exam. They won't be hung up on when they call their GP to book an appointment, or falsely flagged for fraud when they stammer on their name when calling their bank. They won't be disregarded for a leadership position or passed over for promotion because they stammered in a job interview.

The recruitment of Clara Burn as Complex Caseworker has been a game-changer. Her attention to detail and the rapport she builds with service users means we are able to swiftly grasp the strengths and weaknesses of a case. Without her we would not have been able to cope with the uplift in use of the service in the first half of 2026.

The knowledge and experience built up by staff and volunteers working in the service means we now have a better understand of what works and what doesn't and where we can use our limited resources to best effect.


Catherine Casserley


Shazia Khan, Cole Khan

The Advocacy Service was soft-launched on 14th July 2023. That year we had 14 cases progress through the service. Now in its fourth year, we've worked on 42 cases so far, some of which will undoubtedly develop into projects .

PARTNERS

Partnering with us in this service are:

Cathy Casserley, provides barrister support to the service, primarily in the form of Tier 3 reviews and discussions as/when her expertise is required.

Cole Khan provide paid support for individual cases when required.

Osborne Clarke rovide pro-bono solicitor support in the form of a monthly meeting and advisory sessions, as well as signposting the team to useful resources. Osborne Clarke have also helped us develop guidance in specific areas.

2026 SERVICE GOALS	OUTCOMES	2026/2027 GOALS
Increase promotion of the service.	We've actively promoted the service on the website, on LinkedIn and direct to members.	Given the current demand on the Advocacy Service we are unwilling to give this any more publicity until we've further funding in place.
Work with at least 45 individual cases within the service.	We worked with 33 cases in 2025, so an increase to 45 felt ambitious. However, in the first 6 months, we've already worked with 42 cases.	Provided we can maintain current staffing levels, around 80 cases a year is sufficient.
To work with at least 10 organisations so they can proactively reduce discrimination towards people who stammer.	Over 2026 we've worked with the Advocates Gateway; NHS Norfolk who are now on the cusp of re-opening their NHS service for adults who stammer; worked with the British Council to improve IELTS oral exams; challenged the Citizens Advice Bureau over their refusal to provide written guidance; and continue to be a leading partner in the Inclusive Parliament Coalition.	Some of these cases are still to be resolved: NHS Norfolk, the British Council, Citizens Advice Bureau and Modernisation of Parliament. We also want to give evidence to NHS 111 on calls to the service, talk to Apple about their screening - and we're still part-way through the year.
Launch event for the Advocates Gateway Toolkit.	We are waiting on details of the updated autism guidance for a joint event.	We are looking at launching the event in the House of Lords later this year or early in 2027, we need a sponsor for this.
Share findings of the witness credibility research.We worked with Katie Maras at Bath University to study how people who stammer are affected by different questioning styles and by jury perceptions in court.	The research showed witnesses give clearer evidence under prompted recall - findings were published in the British Journal of Psychology and presented at the Oxford Stuttering & Cluttering Research Conference.	Kirsten has been invited to present the research at the Many Voices on Stuttering & Cluttering conference in Poland, July 2026, and give a keynote.
Remove fluency criteria from oral exam marking schemes.	A tougher nut to crack as the Equality Act provides less protection.	However, we've a new case involving AI marking and fluency criteria (Pearson) which might help us find an effective route to challenge.
Land multi-year funding for staff costs to ensure the longevity of the service.	At the start of year, we launched a Philanthropy Workstream to bring in a further income stream to support our services. This is still in its infancy.	The workload is such that without the Complex Caseworker, it isn't sustainable.

CASES

Here are 10 examples from this year that give a flavour of our casework and its impact.

WHAT HAPPENED	WHAT WE DID	WHAT WE LEARNED	OUTCOME	WHAT NEXT?
'A' has multiple disabilities including stammering and is in receipt of PIP. Their circumstances have changed meaning they may need to make a new PIP application. They sought advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau who refused to provide guidance in writing and insist they will only do so over the phone. A finds the phone a very difficult channel due to stammering.	We wrote to A's local branch of the Citizens Advice Bureau to raise the issue, to highlight the discrimination and request they provide adjustments. To date there has been no response, so we have now provided Instructions to Counsel to access legal guidance.	We've been surprised that the Citizens Advice Bureau, who provide lots of guidance around disability benefits, are failing in their duty to provide reasonable adjustments.	The cases is ongoing.	Our first goal is to enable A to access guidance from her local branch of the Citizens Advice Bureau. Beyond that, we will review whether this is a one-off incident or more systemic across the Citizens Advice Bureau.
'B' is a witness in a court case and potentially the victim of a serious crime. They stammer and have a huge fear around speaking in court. Appropriate adjustments do not seem to have been considered and B has been advised by police that, if they cannot speak in court, the case will be withdrawn imminently.	We shared with B the *Equal Treatment Bench Book* and the recently published *Advocates Gateway Stammering Toolkit* that we created. B has shared these with the detective working on the case.	The police and legal representatives are not yet aware of the toolkit's existence.	Ongoing. The legal system moves slowly and we're awaiting confirmation that adjustments have been implemented and that the case is going ahead.	We need to raise awareness of the Stammering Toolkit. Funding and capacity allowing, we're aiming to hold a launch event later this year.
'AB' is an Uber driver who stammers and was at risk of losing their job after two passengers misinterpreted stammering as a sign of intoxication. AB is now terrified to work in case another customer complains and he gets struck off Uber's listings.	We wrote to Uber to outline the situation and their obligations under the Equality Act, and ask that it be taken into account in any future complaints. This was actioned. We worked with AB to help him feel comfortable about disclosing his stammer via a printed sign in his cab.	The risks that public misunderstanding about stammering poses for livelihood of individuals who stammer have around lack of support from employers.	Positive outcome. AB is now working with more confidence.	Feeds into STAMMA's work with employers around the importance of line managers understanding speech disabilities and the impact of associated stigma.

CASES

WHAT HAPPENED	WHAT WE DID	WHAT WE LEARNED	OUTCOME	WHAT NEXT?
'P-186' called her GP surgery. Answered by an AI receptionist that kept asking for her name and then saying there was background noise when she stammered. The AI agent did not transfer the call to a human and P-186 could not book the appointment. They sent a complaint but received no response.	STAMMA wrote to the surgery but has, as yet, received no response.	GP surgeries are implementing AI technology without due regard for the way it discriminates against certain patient groups and reduces access to healthcare.	Ongoing. In July, we will be increasing pressure on the GP surgery to respond to the complaint. If there is still no response we will then seek legal guidance regarding next steps.	We are in discussion with NHS 111 to provide a cohort of people who stammer to test their AI technology. We're providing representatives to a Patient & Public Involvement Group working with Health Innovation East on their rollout of Ambient Voice Technology across healthcare sites.
'P-173' was refused extra time for an oral exam with the Royal College of Surgeons (RCS). She can't get through the content of the exam in the time available and score the requisite marks for the pass. Looking for 2 mins extra time per station.	Supporting letter provided by STAMMA. RCS again stated it would cause too much disruption to other candidates. STAMMA suggested they put P-173 at the end of the day so that it doesn't impact other candidates, and highlighted that other medical examiners provide a separate circuit for candidates needing adjustments. RCS refused, stating it was too expensive. We sought legal guidance and developed a plan. In the meantime, P-173's husband accepted an offer for 30 seconds extra time from the RCS.	Unlike other medical examiners, including RCGP and RCPsych, Royal College of Surgeons refuse to put candidates who need reasonable adjustments on a separate circuit.	Ongoing. As P-173's husband had accepted the 30 seconds extra time on her behalf, we can't take further action until that plays out. P-173 will take the exam with the extra 30 seconds. If she fails again, we will implement the new challenge supported by Cathy Casserley.	Awaiting outcome of exam.
'CU' was successful in landing job interviews but was never the successful candidate. Felt that examiners were consistently doubting her competence when they heard her stammer.	STAMMA provided a letter for interviewers to raise awareness of stammering, inform them how CU worked through moments of stammering and to implement reasonable adjustments for interviews.	This is a common experience in interviews for candidates who stammer but this sort of discrimination is often very hard to prove.	CU started using the letter and was delighted when she immediately got a job.	STAMMA has developed a Colleague Accessibility Lab, offering training to employers around recruitment and retention, as well as workplace adjustments.

CASES

WHAT HAPPENED	WHAT WE DID	WHAT WE LEARNED	OUTCOME	WHAT NEXT?
'P-179' needed extra time for an A-level oral language exam, but the school refused to apply for this, seemingly misinterpreting stammering as a lack of exam preparation.	We liaised with the family and the school to request reasonable adjustments including extra time, and give information to examiners to ensure the student is not marked down for stammering.	Even familiar school teachers are not always aware of the way highly time-pressured situations can increase the frequency of stammering, so don't always proactively consider reasonable adjustments for oral exams.	Situation resolved with appropriate reasonable adjustments implemented. Student and family very happy.	Funding and capacity in our Family Support services allowing , in 2027 we want to create an oral exams adjustments pack for schools.
'P-161' works in a supermarket and finds it difficult to use a headset to talk to colleagues. As a reasonable adjustment, she was allowed to speak face-to-face with colleagues. She was being harassed by a colleague who objected to this and kept getting unfamiliar line managers to insist she wear a headset. This made her anxious and afraid to go to work.	We wrote a letter to the supermarket, outlining the issue, highlighting the impact on P-161, reminding them of their legal obligations under the Equality Act and setting out steps to ensure *effective* implementation of the reasonable adjustment and to eliminate the harassment.	Even employers who set a lot of store by providing inclusive working environments struggle to implement reasonable adjustments. There's a tendency to 'look away' when something isn't working correctly, rather than to address the situation.	The supermarket brought in a manager from head office to review the situation, update the records and speak to everyone concerned. The harassment has now stopped and P-161 is much happier at work again.	
'P-192' is a teenager applying for his first adult passport. He couldn't say his name due to stammering in a phone interview and the passport office wouldn't accept his father's explanation or let him speak for his son. The family missed a planned holiday and lost money. A face-to-face interview is booked but passport office are refusing to implement adjustments or create a clear pathway to this.	STAMMA had one webchat conversation and 8 phone conversations with the passport office trying to get appropriate reasonable adjustments implemented for imminent face-to-face interview. Letter sent via email outlining reasonable adjustment request. The primary request is that P-192 can respond verbally or in writing to questions so that he can express himself effectively.	There is no straightforward route for requesting adjustments to interviews. In our 9 conversations with them, the information we've received has been different response every time. This echoes the experience of P-192's father who found it similarly impossible to get consistent reliable information from the passport office or to be given contact details for the interviewers.	The interview is due to take place later this July. P-192 and his father are taking a copy of the letter from STAMMA as well as an Speech & therapist report with them for the interview. Unclear whether reasonable adjustments will be implemented or not.	Once we have supported P-192 to work through the interview process, we will launch a wider project to address the issue with the passport office so that applicants who stammer or have other speech disabilities will not be discriminated against in future.

CASES

WHAT HAPPENED	WHAT WE DID	WHAT WE LEARNED	OUTCOME	WHAT NEXT?
'OS' is training to be an electrician and has to take exams that involve lots of speaking. He stammers more under exam conditions and finds this very tiring. He approached the examiners to ask if he could split the exams across two days, so that he had a rest period in between and would, therefore, find it easier to speak in the second exam. The examiner responded "Yes, you can, if you can say that again without stammering."	We supported OS in wording a formal complaint.	Surprising to see this sort of casual discrimination still happening in professional settings.	OS received a very positive response from the organisation apologising for the incident and addressing it with the examiner concerned. OS is feeling empowered and confident about the future and his ability to advocate for himself.	

FEEDBACK

"Your resources, guidance, and advocacy have truly made a meaningful difference in my journey. Through the confidence and support I gained from STAMMA, I am pleased to share that I have successfully secured a position as a receptionist with my local NHS Trust. This opportunity means a great deal to me. Your impact is truly life-changing." CU, March 2026

"I feel a weight lifted off my shoulders. I feel like this stupid comment he made has been the best thing for me, it's lit a fire inside me and a negative experience has actually turned full circle and I'm seeing positives in it." OS, June 2026

"I want to personally thank you for all your time and dedication. We are both incredibly grateful, and your support has meant more to us than you could ever know." Advocacy Service user supported to access adjustments for oral assessments at university, January 2026

"The part of advocacy I found most beneficial was how you explained to the management team and the other employees that the way I was treated was a form of bullying. I really don't think that they were aware how intimidating their attitude was."
Advocacy Service user, May 2026

"The Advocacy Service made me feel less alone during a very difficult time. Knowing that someone was listening, understanding my situation, and helping me express my needs clearly."
Advocacy Service user, February 2026

"The most helpful part was the supporting letter provided for my college. It clearly explained my situation and helped me request extra time for my oral exams. You took the time to listen and provide practical help, which makes a real difference."
Advocacy Service user, February 2026

PROJECT WORK

The British Council

We began working with the British Council after receiving multiple reports from candidates who stammer that reasonable adjustments for oral exams were being refused or agreed to, but not implemented at test centres across the world.

This relates to the oral components of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exams. Lack of adjustments discriminate against candidates who stammer, making it impossible even for extremely competent candidates to achieve the marks required by UK employers and institutions, including the General Medical Council.

The Advocacy Service put together a report and recommendations, outlining cases and legal guidance regarding how the legal frameworks apply to UK-run test centres outside of the UK. We have been working with Jane Franklin, the Global Head of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion at the British Council and her colleagues, to explore ways to ensure consistent application of reasonable adjustments in the future, including appropriate formats for information and training for examiners. We will report on final outcomes when it is complete.

Fluency

As part of the project, we have challenged the inclusion of fluency criteria within the IELTS marking schemes. This is not under the purview of the British Council but with one of the other partner organisations who are responsible for IELTS. The British Council is reticent to be seen to be interfering with marking criteria, so we are seeking introductions to the partners responsible. Interestingly, we have recently received initial reports of another examining body, Pearson explicitly are involved in English Language Competence exams who explicitly using fluency criteria as part of their marking schemes, and using AI examiners that seem to be marking down candidates who stammer.

When we have completed the reasonable adjustments project with the British Council, we will move on to the fluency criteria component. It may well be that the Pearson case will be our most effective door into this issue, and we can then take the learning from that to further our work with the IELTS exams, as well as GCSE and A-Level language exams.

Advocates Gateway

This has been a long-term project, but the **Stammering Toolkit** was completed and published early in 2026. The fact that it exists and is available for download from the Advocates Gateway website doesn't yet mean that law firms are aware of it. If funding and capacity allow, we'd like to hold an evening event at the House of Lords later this year where we can invite representatives from a range of law firms to hear about the toolkit and why it's important.

Parliamentary Modernisation Committee

STAMMA continues to be a leading partner, alongside the Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists, in the Inclusive Parliament Coalition. This consists of 30 communication-related charities who, over two years, have pushed Parliament to ensure that people with communication disabilities have a voice in parliament. We've submitted verbal and written evidence and continue to respond to statements published by the Parliamentary Modernisation Committee.

In March 2026, the House of Commons Administration - the body that will put the Committee's accessibility recommendations into practice - set out its own plans for improvements. The Coalition **responded**. We are now waiting for an autumn meeting with the Committee when Parliament is back in session.

Research

Last year, the research work on witness credibility and the way witnesses who stammer are perceived by jurors was published in the *British Journal of Psychology*.

This was a collaboration between STAMMA and the University of Bath. Before we develop questioning guidance for the police and the courts, the findings need to be replicated to explore how robust they are. As part of promoting this work, Kirsten will be speaking at the *Many Voices on Stuttering & Cluttering* conference in Poland at the end of July.

Norfolk Stammering Service

Since its abrupt closure two years ago, the Advocacy Service has been challenging NHS Norfolk's decision to close their NHS service for adults who stammer. We've provided written reports, spoken at council meetings, alerted local MPs and written to councillors.

Following this, Norfolk Integrated Care Board initiated a tendering process to reopen the service. We've been assured that a new agreement with a provider is in process, however this had not yet happened. We've been informed that the delay is temporary, and will continue to follow up to ensure that this vital service is not lost.

HM Passport Office

Following the passport interview case we are currently involved with, and the apparent lack of any clear route to implement reasonable adjustments for passport interviews, we intend to launch a project in this area (see page 7). Our aim is to influence the HM Passport Office to improve their ways of working so that never again is a passport refused and an applicant humiliated and shamed simply because, as someone who stammers, they found it difficult to say their name on demand.

SUMMARY

We are immensely proud of the work of the Advocacy Service. It clearly has an impact an impact, with some service users describing the support as "life-changing".

But the Advocacy Service is more than that. It tells us where the problems are so that we can direct our campaign work accordingly. And it gives us the credibility to influence organisations and create collaborations where we really can make a difference, changing the way systems and organisations work. So it's not just the person in front of us who benefits as we work with them to turn a negative experience into something more positive. It's also for that next generation, who can grow up in a world that, rather than ridicules, humiliates and excludes them for stammering, makes space for them.

Kirsten Howells

Deputy CEO / Director of Services

STAMMA

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