



Norfolk and Suffolk Health and Care Awards 2026

Research and Innovation Award

The Speech and Language Therapy ITU Team

West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust

This nomination recognises Joanne's innovative leadership in establishing a Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) service within the Intensive Therapy Unit (ITU) at West Suffolk Hospital, addressing a previously unmet clinical need. Despite strong evidence supporting SALT involvement in critical care, the service had not existed locally. Joanne identified this gap and, without additional staffing, developed a fully integrated SALT presence within ITU. Through creativity and efficiency improvements across the wider acute service, she released capacity to support this work, building a resilient team and training junior colleagues.

Joanne and Louise transformed clinical practice by embedding SALT into daily ITU activity, including handovers, ward rounds and rehabilitation meetings. They developed key guidelines for tracheostomy weaning and above-cuff vocalisation, ensuring consistent, evidence-based care and enabling critically ill patients to communicate earlier in their recovery. Joanne also introduced a FEES (Fibreoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing) service and is progressing innovative therapies such as Pharyngeal Electrical Stimulation.

The impact has been significant. Referrals to SALT have more than tripled, staff across the multidisciplinary team now receive regular training, and SALT input is valued as essential to patient care. Patients report improved communication, confidence and understanding of their recovery, with many regaining their voice during critical stages of treatment. Early SALT intervention supports safer ventilator weaning, reduces complications, and can shorten ITU stays.

This work has also extended beyond the hospital, with support provided to community teams managing tracheostomy patients. Overall, this project demonstrates exceptional leadership, innovation and system-wide impact, improving patient outcomes, staff capability and the quality of critical care services.