



‘Debate Higher’ Oracy Project Report

For

KS3 Learners 2018/19

By Aimhigher London

Context

Despite 20 years of Widening Participation being carried out by Aimhigher London and The HE Sector stark inequalities still exist especially when considering access to the most competitive of institutions and courses. A recent study from the Sutton Trust found that eight top independent schools between them had more successful acceptances to Oxbridge than nearly three quarters of the UK non-independent institutions between them, the findings to other top universities was still notably unequal:

*'Independent school pupils are 7 times more likely to gain a place at Oxford or Cambridge compared to those in non-selective state schools, and over twice as likely to take a place at Russell Group institutions. 60% of those from independent schools in higher education attend a Russell Group university, compared to just under a quarter of those from comprehensives and sixth form colleges.'*¹

During our encounters with both school and FE partners since 2017 we gained anecdotal feedback to support this, with many schools citing examples of gifted and academically able learners failing to gain successful acceptances onto the most competitive of courses, despite intensive support where possible from the schools. This led to the forming of a working group of our interested partners to look at how best to support this 'More Able' group of learners. A common denominator from both HEIs and schools was the gulf that appeared once the learner gained an interview; these learners it was noted through feedback would often struggle in comparison to the independent school learner in articulating their relevant experiences and skills in a clear and meaningful manner.

Aimhigher London (AHL) felt that the power of the spoken word and oracy skills was an area where collaboratively we could start to make a positive impact to these learners. It was agreed amongst the working group that any help and intervention should be done early to support the aspiration and embed some confidence building into these learners. A study by UCL Institute of Education in 2015² and revisited by The Sutton Trust in 2017³ found that the private school sector had the resources to put much more onus on extra-curricular activities that focussed on aspiration raising life skills, including debating, oracy and networking and that these skills could be seen as contributing toward the success of these learners at competitive HEIs and beyond into employment.

The Project

Three models were proposed, two of which involved either one HEI delivering all sessions to one school or multiple HEIs delivering to each school on school sites. Both of those models had issues around not allowing learners to experience multiple HEIs and also was less efficient in terms of delivery for the universities. The 3rd model proposal was adopted which meant each university took responsibility for an aspect of the programme and delivered it on their campus. This was to be done in an afternoon in each half term to be less disruptive to the school learner.

The themes to be explored in each HEI experience was split into six categories to match the expertise of the university, what was agreed amongst the Aimhigher team and working group and was supported by the research to be key aspects to explore. This led to us developing a framework of learning for the project and an agreement of who was to deliver.

AHL worked closely with each HEI to develop a session based upon their theme and the key learning objectives for that session. 1-2-1 planning meetings took place with all HEIs in addition to continued support via e communication. A draft session plan was requested from all universities in advance and was then finalised in partnership with AHL.

In addition to the main project was the intention to bring the project into the school, the idea was to support each school to embed oracy into their institutions. The embedding back into the wider school community was an area we were keen to see happen, even in a light touch way and we requested initial feedback and ideas from school staff on how this would be done. As part of the role of each HEI they were to produce a

crib sheet of key points and follow-on activities to be brought back into the schools to support this embedding of oracy. To compliment this AHL assigned schools to be linked to HEIs for follow on activities in schools supported by the HEI ambassadors.

We initially looked to enhance the project further with additional cultural visits outside of the school day, considering a theatre trip and parliament/court visit – this would have allowed the learner to relate the themes being explored into cultural experiences.

Targeting

The involved schools who had formed the working group were approached in addition to a school partner within Hounslow who had flagged interest in being involved. This left us with five schools, three were from our NCOP* target area and two from our wider Aimhigher partnership. The targeting of learners we left to the schools to determine however we did give them guidance to follow:

KS3/ from underrepresented groups within HE/ More Able or potential to be/ Lacking in confidence

10 pupils were selected from each school which allowed us to have a core group of 50 learners in total.

Overall recommendations

It is clear from the data below that a positive impact was gained through the project and an increase in confidence and understanding of the skills required for oracy is reported. In addition it is clear from teacher feedback that the wider school community benefitted from the project in relation to highlighting and embedding oracy.

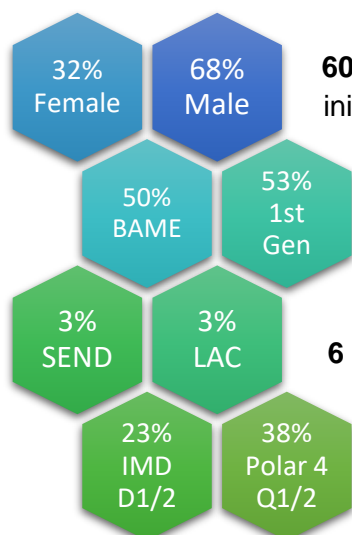
Where perhaps we were overly ambitious was in introducing cultural experiences, this proved difficult to organise and so was taken out of the project brief early on. However the positive feedback to visiting parliament as part of the final has led us to expand this day to include a formal tour for future projects. This will enhance the cultural experience without interrupting their school routine further.

School visits proved difficult to organise with some schools, perhaps due to not having a clear uniformed purpose to the session. However we did manage to attend some and deliver a tailored session on oracy to a wider group of learners, which through anecdotal feedback was received favourably. This is something we wish to reinforce as an option to each school with one visit per school but with clear aims to the session linked to the final 'Great Debate' and ultimately support each school's preparation for that in future.

We initially requested individual information in advance for each learner from the school and follow up information, this proved arduous for some schools and led to incomplete data which ultimately proved unusable for the purpose of evaluation. For future projects we will request some information on learners but in a more streamlined way that we hope will be simpler for schools to provide and will support an increase in those learners from our target groups.

We feel the data report below captured much of the positive outcomes and learning of this project and showed a positive progression across the year, however for future projects we would like to capture more of the individual journey and impact through a more qualitative approach. We did attempt filming of targeted individuals pre and post but continuity proved difficult. In future projects we are proposing use of film/photography to creatively demonstrate impact over time. It will help engage wider audiences, reach new and existing partners and leave a more lasting footprint of the project. In addition gathering of anecdotal feedback on the wider impact of this project from individuals will be sought, especially around the secondary aims of increasing participation to university and supporting learners from across boroughs to work together, recognise their commonalities and create new friendships.

Evaluation and Feedback for Debate Higher Oracy Project 2018/19



60 Key Stage 3 learners took part across the entire year. Each school was initially asked to identify 10 learners each, but due to drop out and rotation the numbers involved overall expanded.

5 schools involved: Springwest Academy (NCOP), Rivers Academy (NCOP) both from Hounslow. Carshalton Boys Sports College (NCOP) from Sutton. UAE Southbank from Southwark. Southborough High School from Kingston.

6 Universities delivered each taking responsibility for a session/theme. This led to us developing a framework of learning for the project and agreement of delivery.

Aimhigher London Debate Higher Embedding Oracy & Life Skills				
Programme Introduction	Learning the value & benefit of oracy as a life skill.	"There is an expectation that schools should ensure that all pupils communicate effectively. This plainly includes their ability to...speak articulately in a range of contexts" Ofsted 2014	Do you have a clear programme for developing students' oracy skills as well as their understanding of issues? Ofsted 2017	"Evidence of the link between oracy & higher attainment is firmly established." Neil Mercer, Cambridge University
Argument Masterclass	Learning skills & techniques. How to be prepared, fair, calm, clear & what to avoid.	Group shares skills with peers – perhaps leading mini workshops in Form or PSHE	School Leader facilitates Group leading Balloon Debate	Students develop the ability to form and articulate a clear and reasoned argument
Ethics Masterclass	Learning the fundamentals of ethics and how to balance an ethical topic.	Group shares knowledge and skills with peers – perhaps a presentation in year assembly	School Leader facilitates ethical discussion/debate with year group	Students understand basic ethical standards & balancing arguments
Media Masterclass	Learning to present platforms. Social media use & identifying fake news!	Group shares knowledge & skills with year group peers	School Leader facilitates year group discussions around media	Students understand the relevance of media in the digital age
Theatre Masterclass	Learning to project, breathe, stand and speak with confidence	Group shares knowledge & skills with year group peers	School Leader facilitates Group leading mini-workshops	Students develop confidence & presentation skills
The Great Debate	Bringing learned skills together to present your argument and field questions	Group shares amalgamated knowledge & skills with year group peers	School Leader facilitates year group Great Debate	Students demonstrate bringing together learned skills & knowledge

- Kingston University: Launch event – Intro to Debating Skills
- University of Roehampton: Session 2 – Argument & Persuasion
- Royal veterinary College: Session 3 – Ethics and Morals
- St Mary's University: Session 4 – Performance & Presentation
- Goldsmiths University of London: Session 5 – Media and Communication
- SOAS University of London: In Parliament – Final 'Great Debate' hosted by Rt Hon Seema Malhotra MP

Evaluation and the key aims of each session was to follow our framework for the project. We consulted early with academics who had experience of setting up oracy projects to advise on how best to gather evidence.

We set out with evaluations being gathered based on Likert scale questions for each event. With particular focus on overall learning aims for pre and post evaluation. Within each of the additional four themed sessions Likert scale questions were carried out to show gaining of confidence in the related skills.

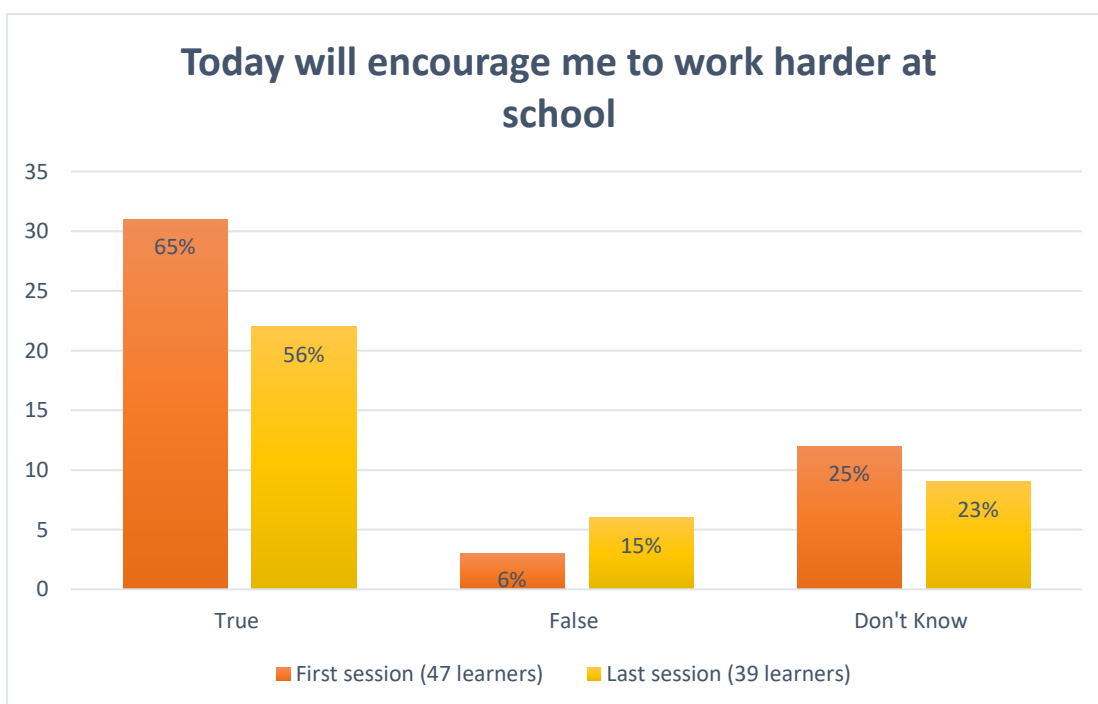
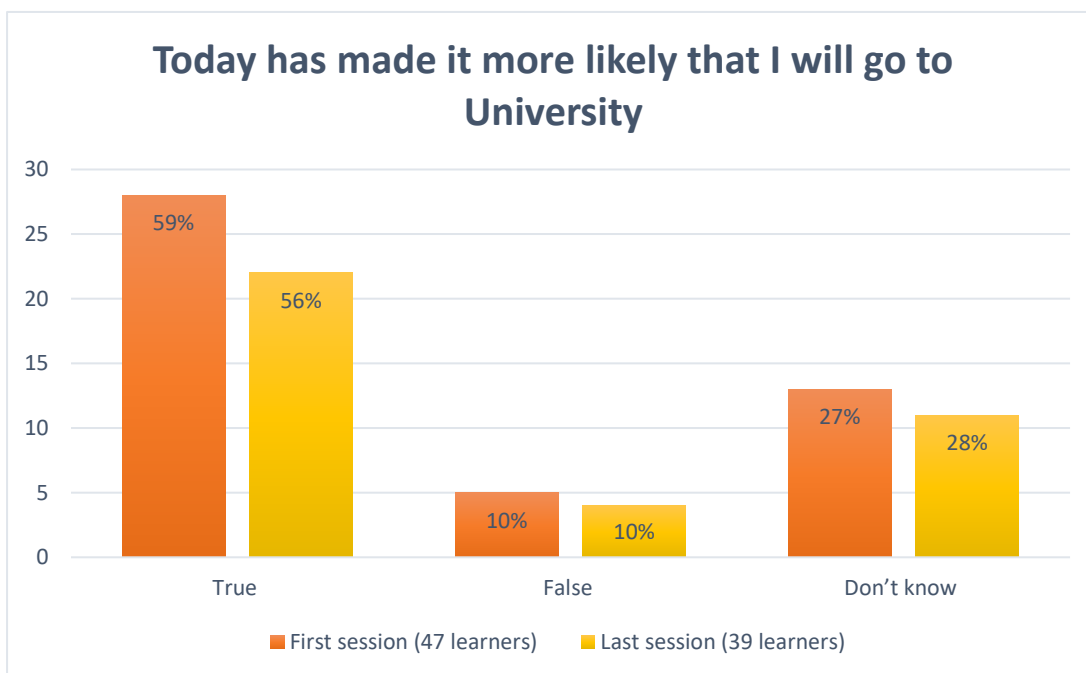
In addition teachers were asked to do regular observations of a small set of learners at each event and were asked for pre/post wider school involvement around oracy.

Overall Pre and Post comparison

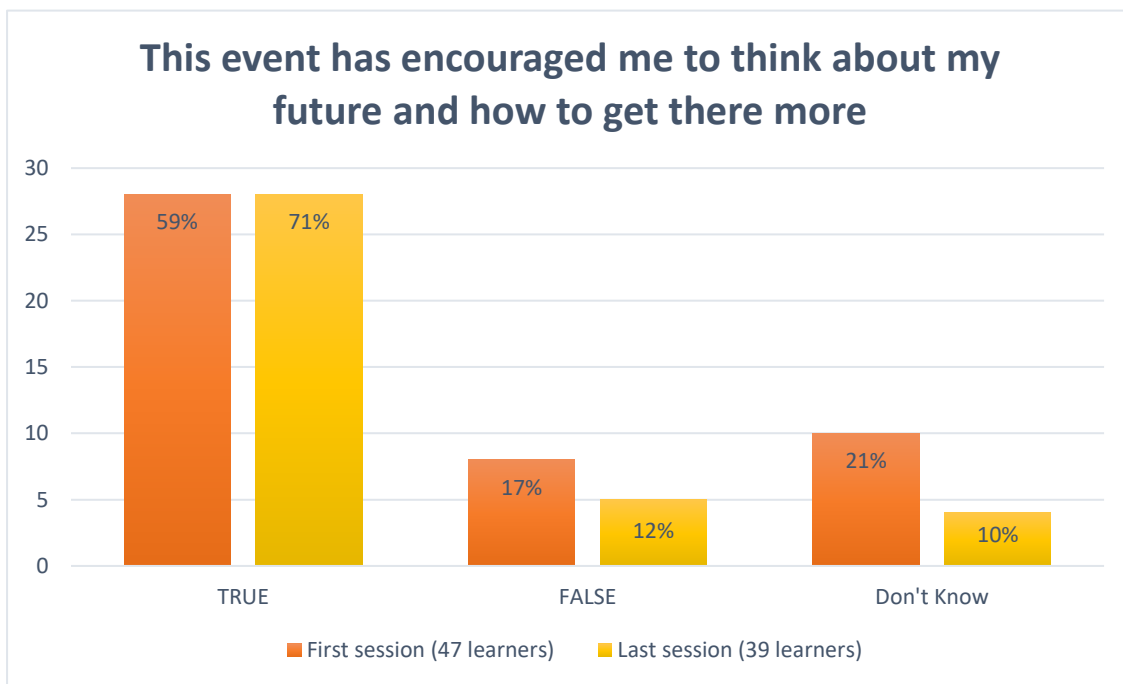
We asked 2 sets of questions at beginning in Sept 2018 and then revisited at the 'Final Great Debate' in July 2019. This final debate theme allowed learners to explore the nature of representations of their own identity within modern British curriculums.

The 3 first questions below make up the core of repeated questions we use across much of our LPP work, they are a simple way to gauge aspiration and attitude to learning.

In first 2 questions we see slightly more impact in the initial session, to be expected as once final session occurs they have had five interventions with HEIs and so impact of these questions has lessened.



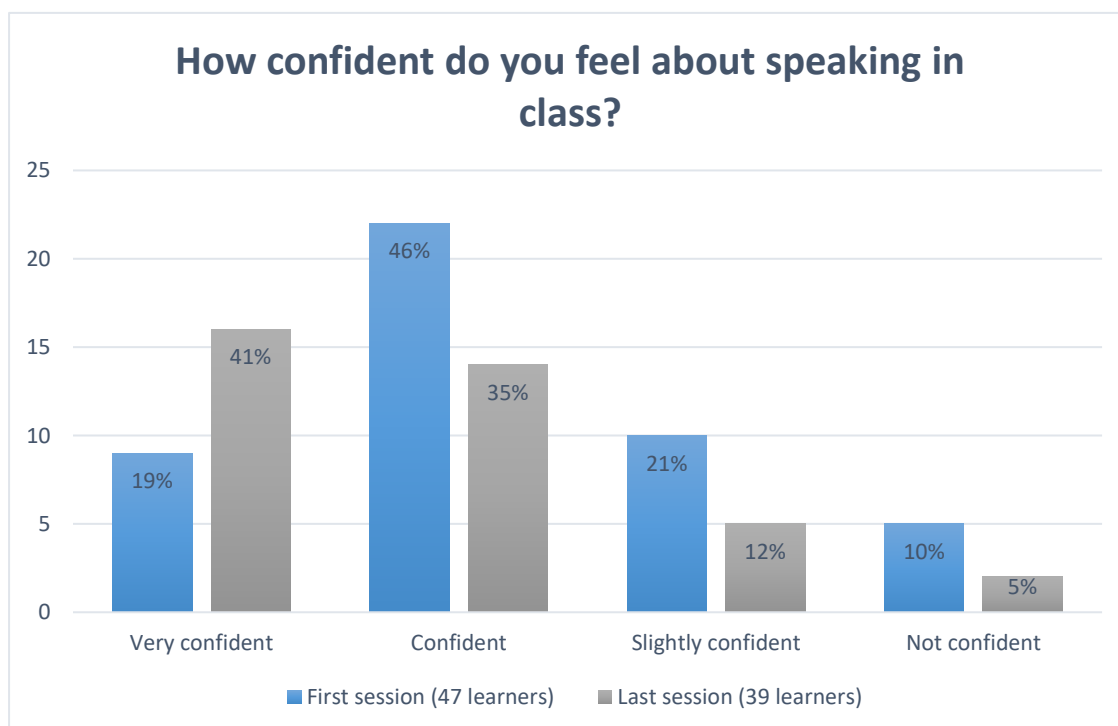
Within final question we do see a positive growth of impact being generated and we feel this is indicative of the theme and activity being explored but also potential influence of setting within parliament.



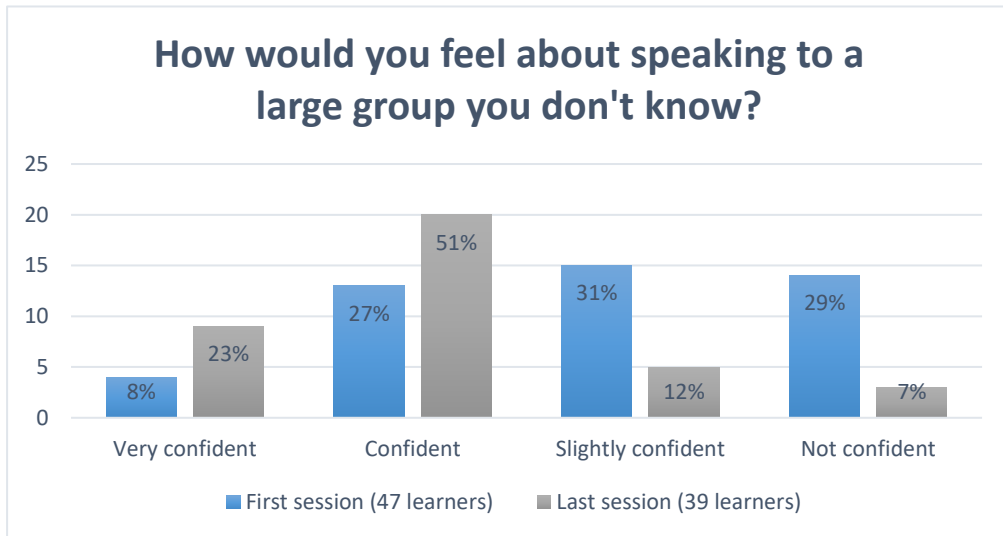
Overall comparative learning Pre/Post against Oracy skills/themes:

We devised questions based around main themes that could be revisited. The results are positive especially in the shift of those who have moved from confident/slightly confident to very confident from beginning to end of project, particularly in those first two questions.

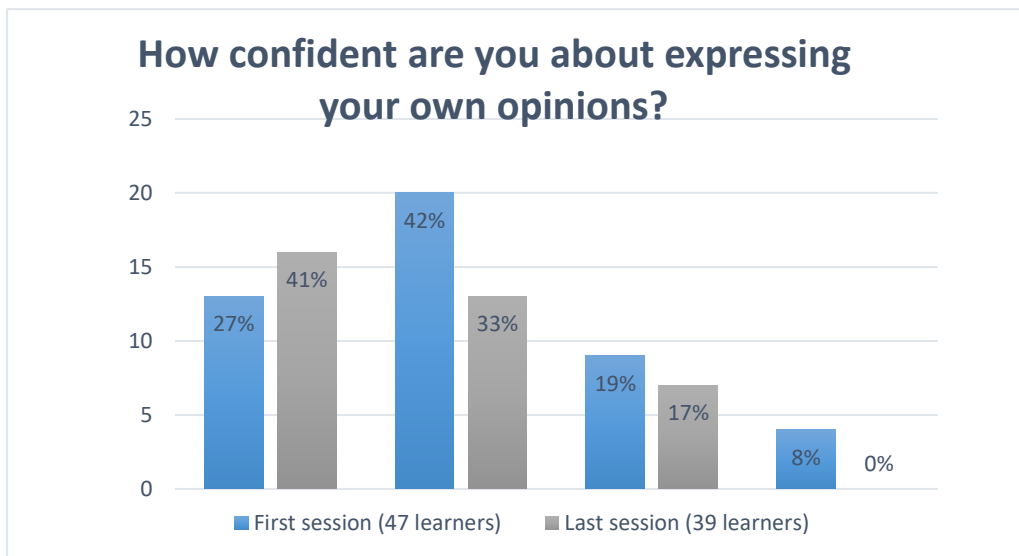
- 11% rise overall in confidence about speaking up in class and a significant 22% rise in those feeling 'very confident'



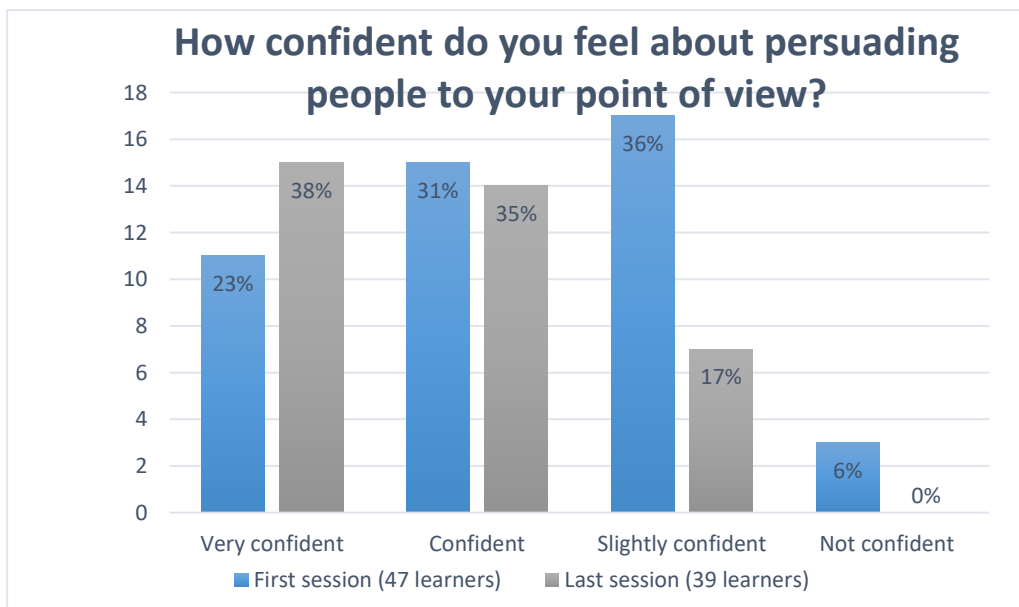
- 39% rise in overall confidence about speaking to large group you don't know with 15% rise in those now feeling 'very confident' and significantly a 41% decrease in those that were feeling 'slightly/not confident'



- 14 % rise in those feeling 'very confident' about expressing their own opinion and an 8% decrease to none of those feeling 'not confident'.



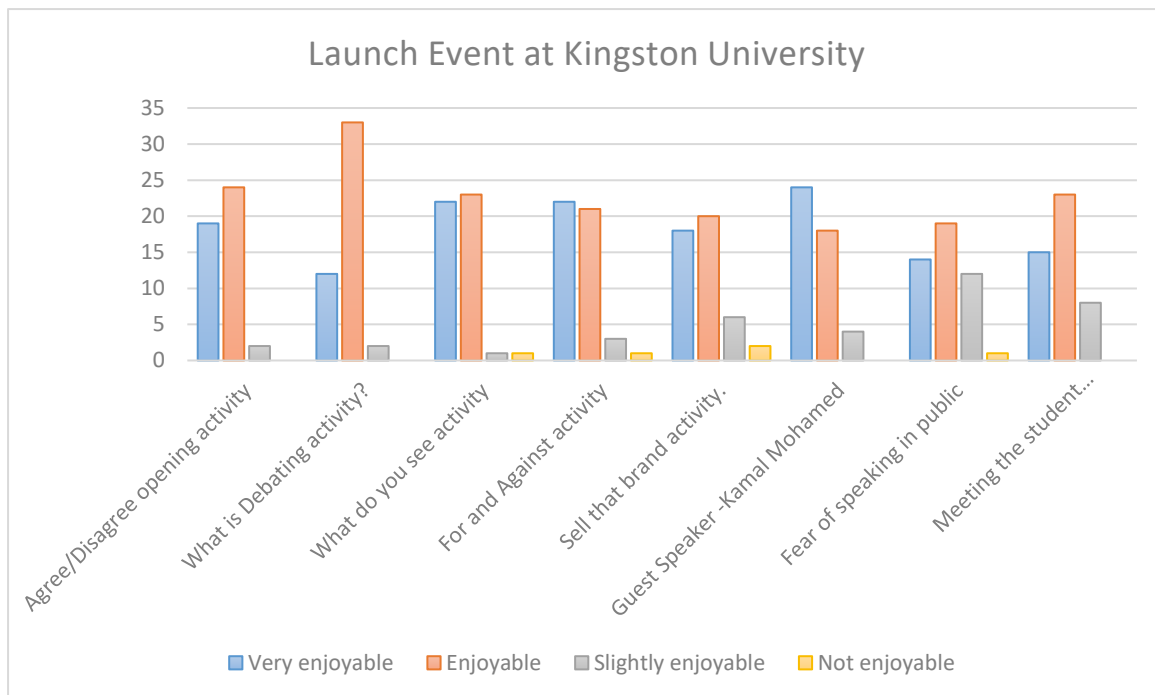
- 19% rise in those feeling overall confidence about persuading people to your point of view with a 15% rise in those feeling 'very confident' and significantly a decrease of 25% of those feeling slightly/not confident.



Individual Event feedback:

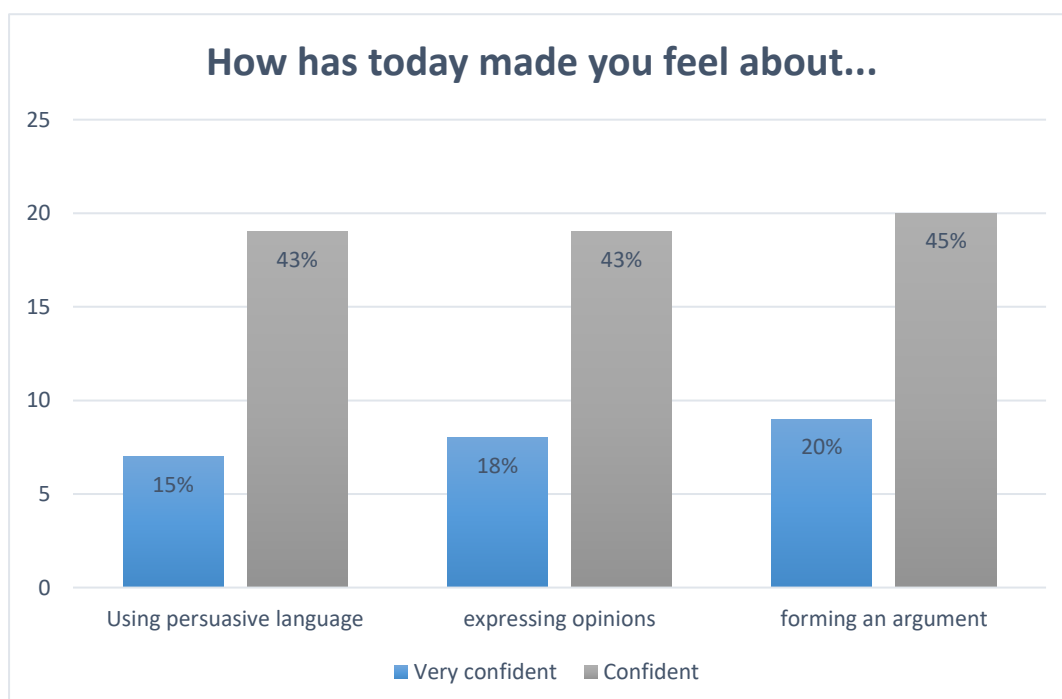
Launch Event at Kingston University exploring 'Intro to Debate' and public speaking. Featured multiple mini sessions including icebreaker activities, mini talks on public speaking and Spoken Word poet presentation. 47 learners responded.

- Undoubtedly the icebreaker type quick activities were favoured with the 96% rating the 'what is debating' activity as enjoyable/very enjoyable. The 'Talks' were enjoyed but less so and perhaps in future we need to consider interspersing any talks amongst other more action based activities.

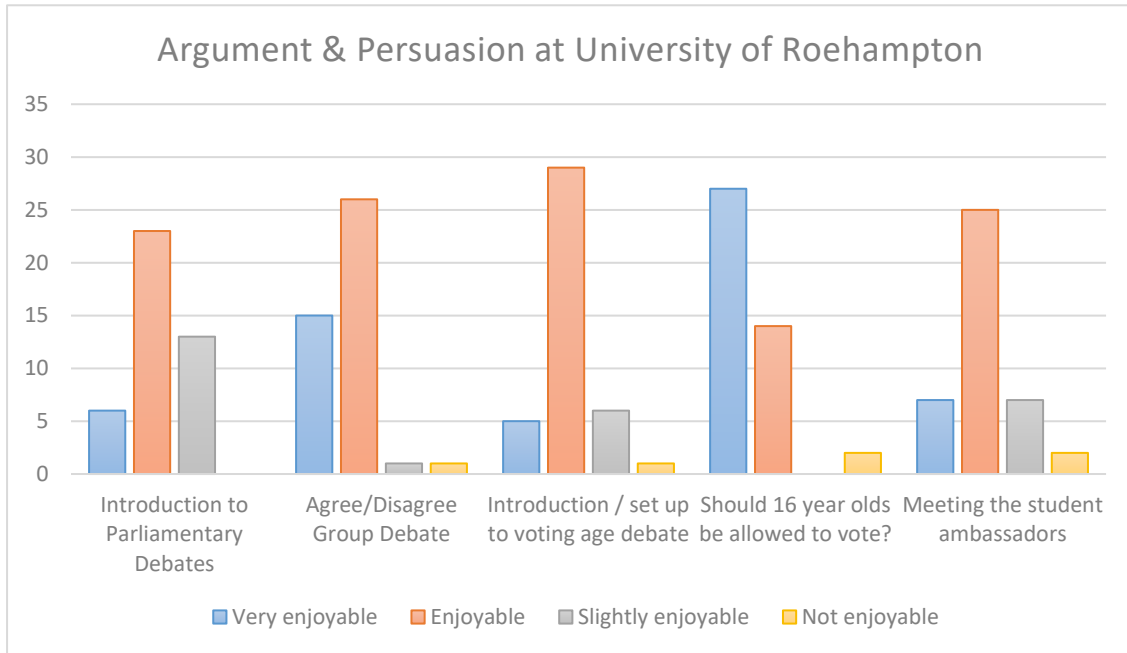


Session 2 at University of Roehampton exploring 'Argument and Persuasion' in partnership with Law department, featuring Introduction to Parliamentary style debates, split group debates and then final full debate. 44 Learners responded. Notable learning highlights against oracy theme post session:

- 58% felt confident/very confident about using persuasive language
- 61% felt confident/very confident about expressing opinions
- 65% felt confident/very confident about forming an argument

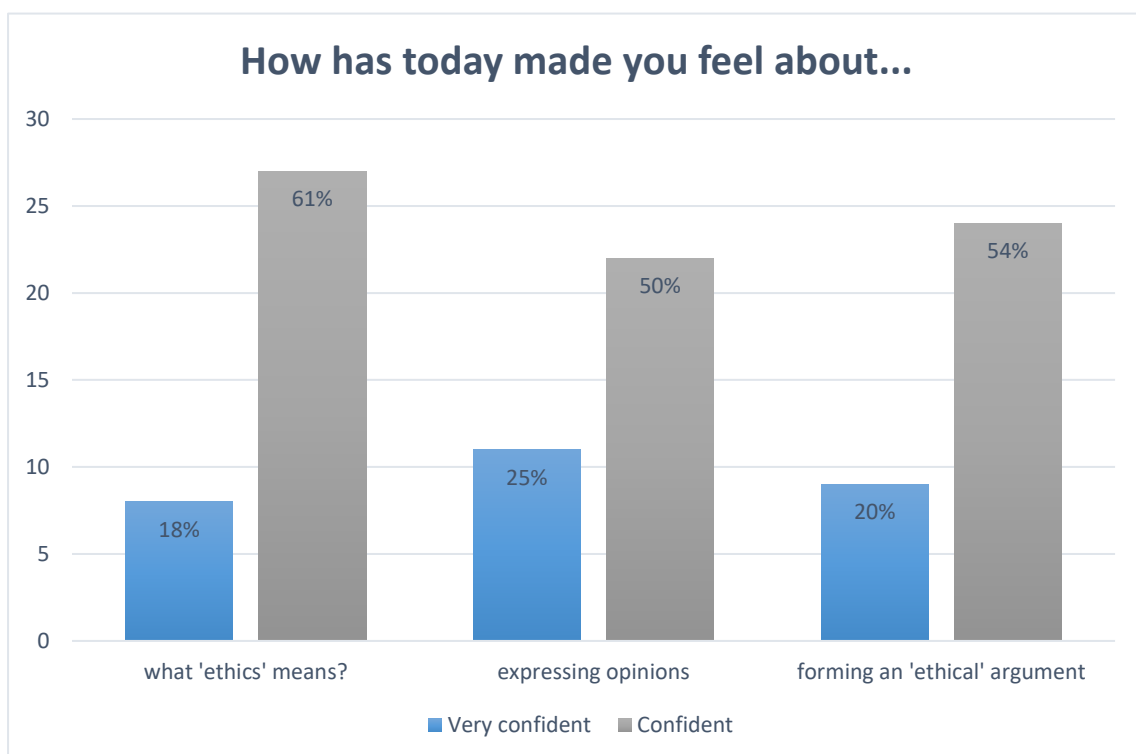


- Again the introduction and information based 'talking at' type activity scores less enjoyment with an overall high 93% favouring the agree/disagree and debate as enjoyable/very enjoyable activity but significantly with 61% stating the actual debate itself as 'very enjoyable'.

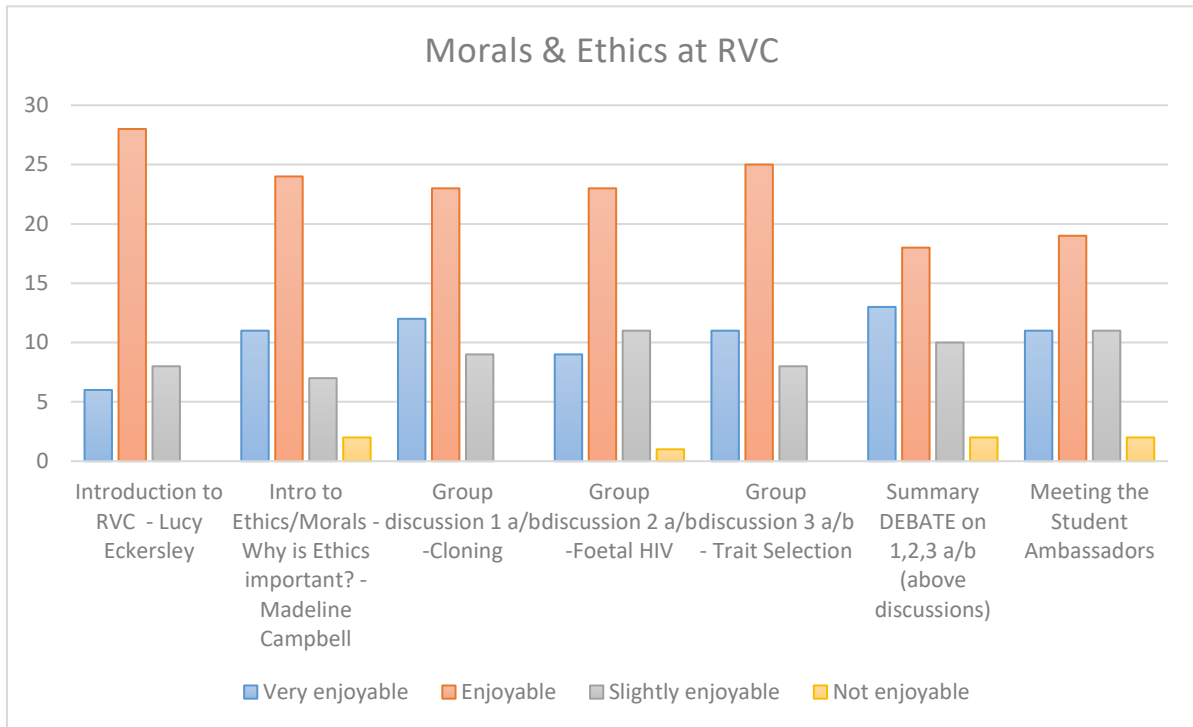


Session 3 at RVC exploring 'Morals and Ethics' featuring an ethics lecture by an academic followed by debating groups and then back into larger Q&A and feedback academic lecture style. 44 learners responded. Notable learning highlights against oracy theme post session:

- 61% felt very confident about what ethics means
- 74% felt confident/very confident about forming an ethical argument

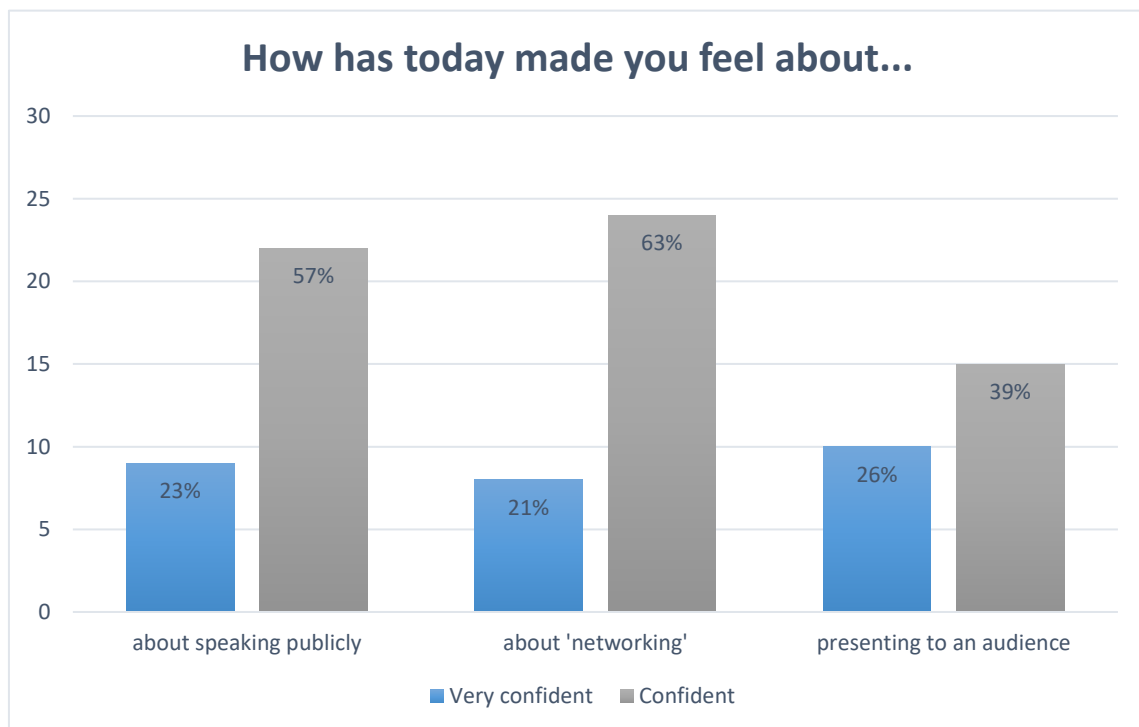


- In terms of which aspects of session were most enjoyable at RVC it is fairly consistent here for the opening lecture styles and the breakaway group debate, with 75% plus stating these aspects of the session as enjoyable/very enjoyable.

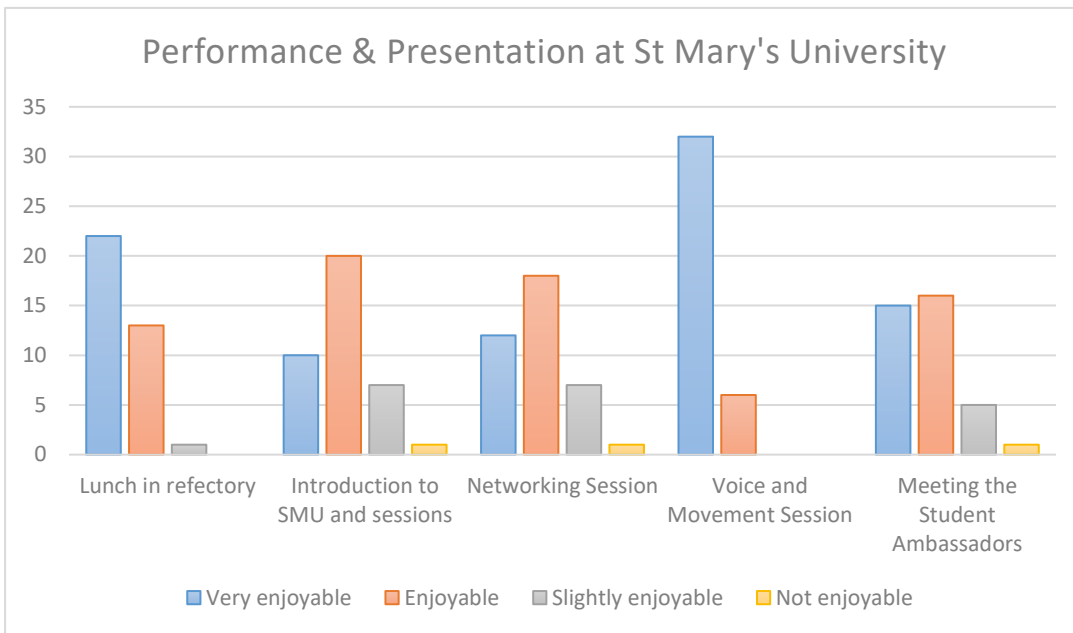


Session 4 at St Marys University exploring Performance and Presentation through the Drama Department and external networking trainer. This visit also included an experience of student lunch in the refectory with mini tours with ambassadors. 38 learners responded. Notable learning highlights against oracy theme post session:

- 63% felt confident about networking
- 80% felt confident/very confident about speaking publicly



- Again a positive experience overall with the Drama department led session being the standout activity of the day with 84% stating it as very enjoyable closely followed by the student lunch experience and Networking session.

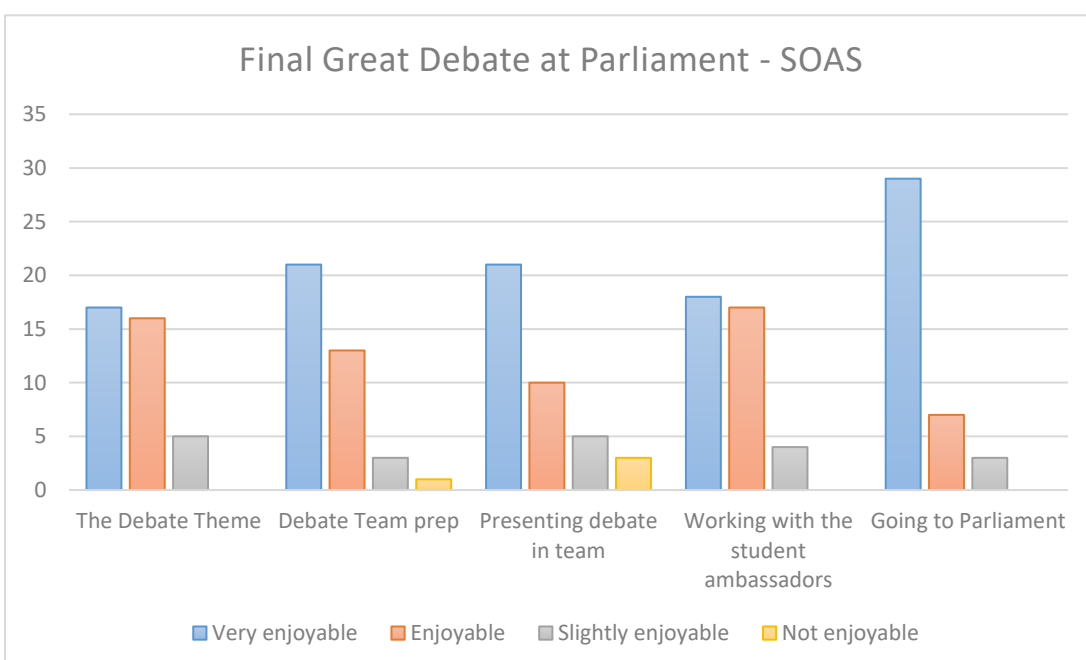


Final session 'Great Debate' at the Houses of Parliament facilitated by SOAS University of London.

This was a formalised debate with for/against argument to carry forward a motion in parliament based upon a theme about depictions of identity in their current British school curriculum and whether it needed to be updated or not. Each school worked as a team in prep groups with a set of ambassadors.

Judges marked against a set criteria looking at aspects/skills of oracy related to our overall learning framework. Judging panel was made up of Aimhigher London Director Catherine Fenwick, University of Cambridge academic and Oracy expert Dr Peter Dudley and SOAS Student representative Kwan Choi.

- Overall feedback for the activity was positive with 79% plus stating positive enjoyment of all aspects. The most enjoyable part of final unsurprisingly was the setting with 74% stating the visit as very enjoyable.



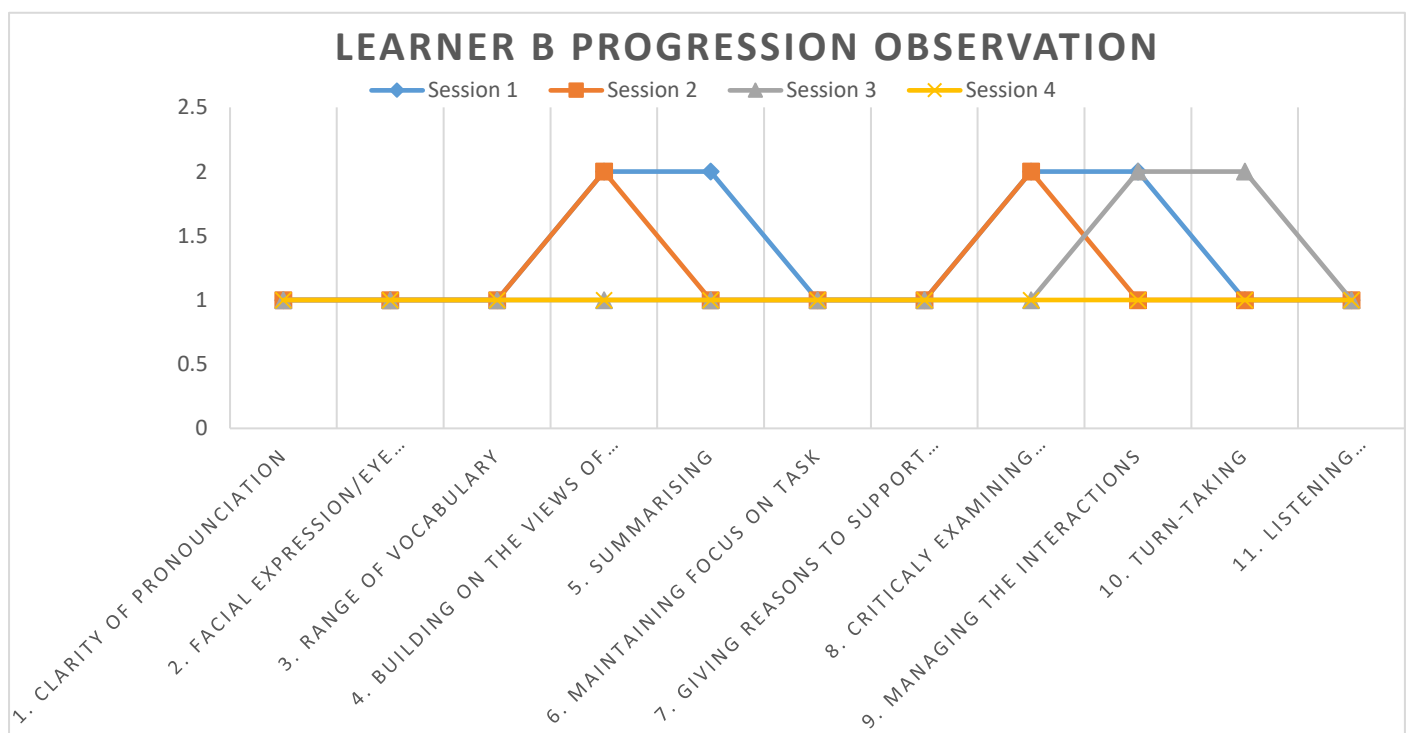
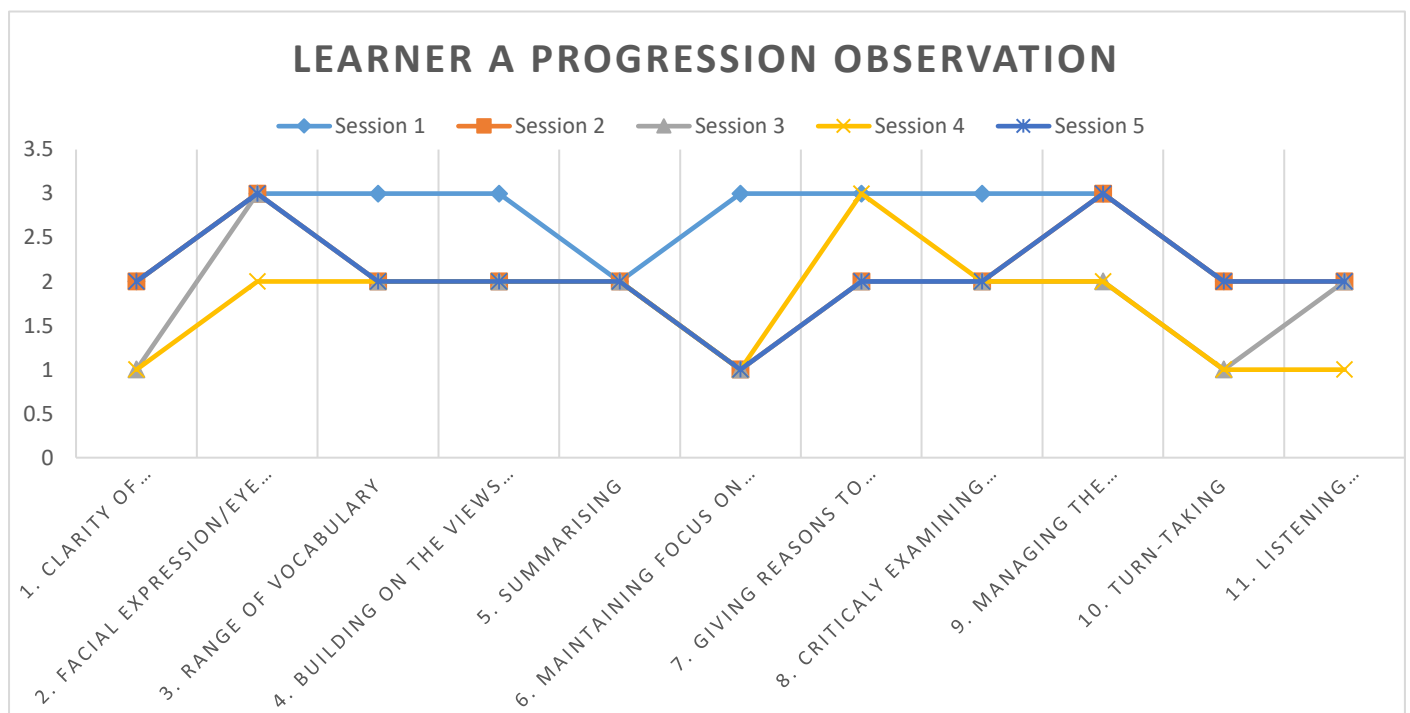
Teacher Observation Feedback

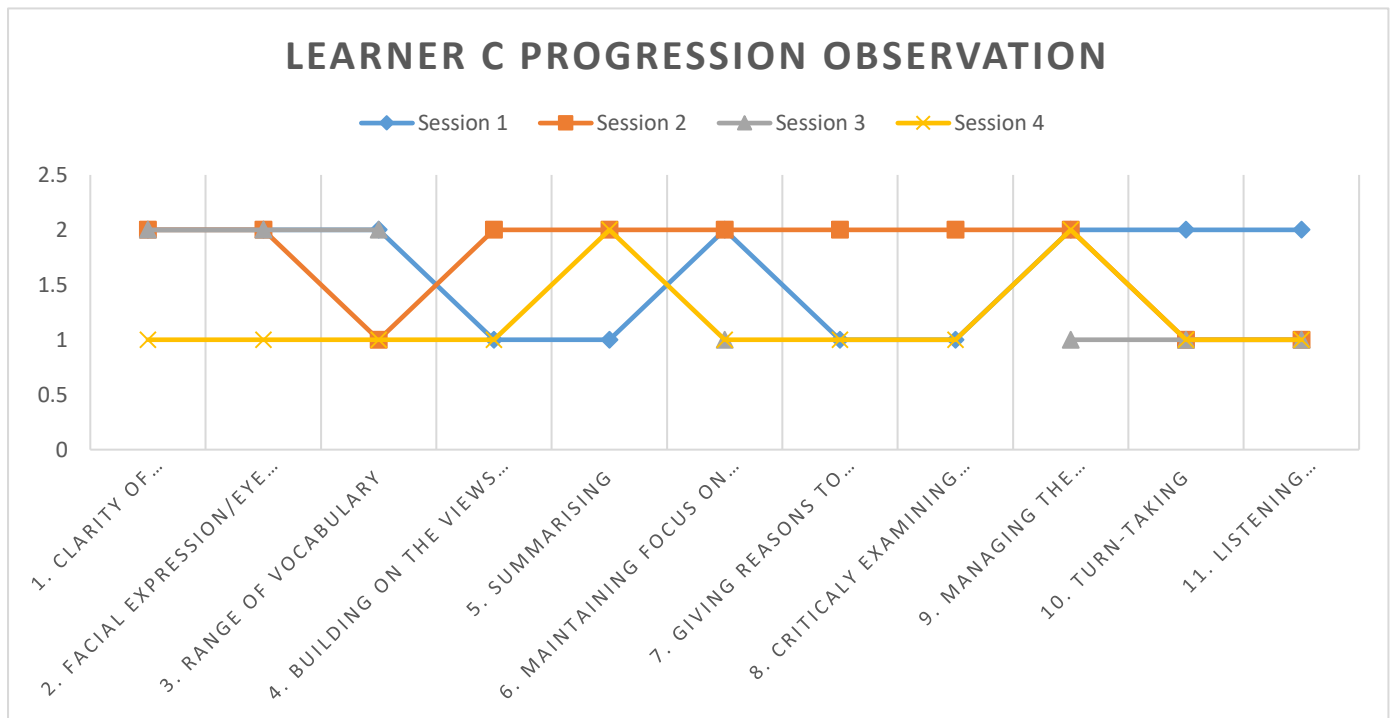
Teachers were asked to do regular observations of a small set of learners based upon 11 criteria and asked to rate the learners progress within each session on a scale of 1-3.

1. means consistently demonstrates this skill
2. means demonstrates this skill some of the time
3. means 'rarely or doesn't demonstrate this skill yet

Due to inconsistencies in observations and change of staff at some events it proved a difficult evaluation to evidence fully. Below is a sample from three of the most consistent schools showing mapping of skills across sessions for one student each.

Each observation shows positive growth as the learner moves through the programme with learner B and C showing the most consistent positive improvement against the set of oracy skills, with high level of 1s by their final sessions.





Reflection on learner evaluation

Overall the progress of skills gained, learning and understanding about oracy skills for the majority of learners is very positive as the data gathered suggests and we can evidence that the project has had a positive effect on improving the confidence and understanding of oracy skills in these learners. The style of learning overall worked and garnered positive feedback but we need to be mindful in future of interspersing different type of activities particularly in relation to more static talk led parts of the session. The individual tracking of learners does show a positive increase in gaining more consistency in the oracy skills across the year. However so much of the data gathered was inconsistent or inconclusive that a different and more qualitative approach on tracking individual progress could be looked at for future projects. Other information was gathered and requested on the learners at the beginning and end of project, but again unfortunately due to inconsistent return of data and follow up data for comparison has not been included here.

Teacher feedback

A pre and post survey was done with teachers mainly to capture the wider impact of the project within their schools. Within *Appendix A* at end are answers to four comparative questions for each school that took part. It is clear overall that the project has had a positive effect on improving and embedding oracy and the related activities within the schools generally, especially within three of the schools that at first had very little or no activity and by end of project is citing a debate club, Year 9 curriculum project and increased formal activity across the school. In addition across four of the schools that took part is an introduction and increase of lower year learners debating and presenting to either KS5 learners and in one case at the formal school council. Most schools cited an increase in confidence of their learners from the project but with some citing an increase in the social skills they have gained by mixing with other schools and having cultural experiences like parliament.

“Today was amazing. Today developed their skills in school. Understood their own strengths and how they compare to peers from other schools” – Teacher from participating school at Final Debate.

‘Had a wonderful time meeting the students involved in [@AimHigherSouth](#) and seeing how the organization unleashes young people's potential. [#aimhigher](#)’

‘A superb event - so impressed by your team and how you supported the young people. Proud to have been a part of it! And great to meet you all [@aimhigherSouth](#) [@DrDudley13](#)’

Quotes from our host, Rt Hon Seema Malhotra MP and one of our judges, Dr Peter Dudley, Cambridge Academic

1. <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/AccessToAdvantage-2018.pdf>
 2. http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1571520/1/Green_box023.pdf
 3. https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Life-Lessons-Report_FINAL.pdf

* National Collaborative Outreach Project – Schools/learners are worked with based upon OFS target of learners with the lowest participation in HE nationally

Appendix A

Teacher related feedback pre and post project.

What Oracy related activity currently takes place in your school?			
Teachers Pre		Teachers Post	
SWA	Debated around email	SWA	A year long debate themed course for year 9
CBSC	N/A	CBSC	Debate club/some subject specific activity
UAE	Debate Fridays	UAE	Oracy lessons. As the Oracy teacher, apply the four standard in every verbal topic covered. Debate is widely liked in our school.
RAWL	Maps cut competition, drop down, first give	RAWL	An emerging debate club. Book club where group discuss issues featuring in the books we read. Projects with presentations.
SHS	Young enterprise, Jack Petchy, Speakout, BBC reporter, various curriculum events	SHS	As before with Spoken word poetry

What do you hope your learners will gain/gained from the project?			
Teachers Pre		Teachers Post	
SWA	Confidence, experience, widened horizons. Gain confidence in speaking to new people/in front of a large group	SWA	Confidence, exposure to issues in society
CBSC	Confidence and greater self esteem	CBSC	Today was amazing. Today developed their skills in school. Understood their own strengths and how they compare to peers from other schools
UAE	Confidence and a voice	UAE	Structuring their arguments. Responding to different opinions logically and thoughtfully. I would like them to have learned how to share the spotlight and be polite and respectful to other schools.
RAWL	Confidence and better ability	RAWL	Increased confidence in putting opinions forward. Ability to understand others point of view, ability to form argument.
SHS	The confidence and skills to develop a reasoned argument	SHS	Confidence and thinking time

What activities do you plan to implement/have implemented in your school?			
	Teachers Pre	Teachers Post	
SWA	Further debates, presentations. Sessions with the Springwest scholars on presenting and debating	SWA	Students were given opportunities to strengthen Oracy skills in school by participation in assemblies and other activities
CBSC	Debate club and Oracy ambassadors	CBSC	Using debate higher members to chair school council
UAE	Debate club	UAE	We have a debate club implemented after school to help students gain confidence in speaking
RAWL	Presentations to class / SLT	RAWL	They have debated with 6 th form debate clubs
SHS	Weekly debates	SHS	N/A

What do you hope your school will/has gained from the programme?			
	Teachers Pre	Teachers Post	
SWA	Aspirational ambassadors. Confident and independent learners.	SWA	Skills are passed onto year group
CBSC	Embedding in some aspect in some classes	CBSC	Students have developed confidence especially today
UAE	Enhanced debate skills	UAE	Higher confidence in public speaking. Respect to others, team work, control and confidence for those who struggle
RAWL	A better culture and debate	RAWL	Networking with other schools is a very positive experience. University links and insights to uni.
SHS	More planned oracy activities in lesson time	SHS	We might be further ahead with this than I thought