Oracy APPG

Written evidence

Members of the Oracy APPG will consider written, verbal and audio-visual evidence and oversee oral evidence sessions. All evidence will inform the final report.

The extended deadline for submitting written evidence is 20th September 2019. We would appreciate if the submissions would follow the following guidelines:

- Be in a Word format

- No longer than 3000 words

- State clearly who the submission is from, and whether it is sent in a personal capacity or on behalf of an organisation

- Begin with a short summary in bullet point form

- Have numbered paragraphs

- Where appropriate, provide references

  Please write your evidence below and email the completed form via email to inquiry@oracyappg.org.uk with the subject line of 'Oracy APPG inquiry'

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School or Organisation: Pearson

Role: Director of Stakeholder & Portfolio Management (Interim)

Summary

1. Pearson is the world's learning company providing content, assessment and digital services to learners, educational institutions, employers, governments (national and local) individuals, and other partners globally.

2. As well as being a FTSE 100 with our own very successful apprenticeship scheme, as a learning company and awarding organisation, we are expert in academic education, and in working with business and employers to create career-focussed education such as BTECs, Higher Nationals, Apprenticeships, and short courses.

3. We are keen to support the oracy agenda and this is woven into much of our content at all levels. We have responded to this inquiry under the three headings: value and impact; provision and access; and barriers.

4. **Value and impact**: Oracy does not have the same status as reading or writing and the reasons for this are varied.

5. These skills should have higher status. 1) They cannot be assumed to be naturally developed and, 2) They equip young people to make the most of their educational experiences, to develop the skills needed for the future, for success and satisfaction in their work, and for life in general by helping them develop life skills and supporting confidence and access.

6. **Provision and access**: Pearson recognises the development of oracy skills as an important part of the preparation of learners for further educational development, employment and for life and provide content, assessment, and digital services to learners for primary and secondary schools, colleges, training providers, employers and universities to develop oracy skills.

7. Our vocational portfolio develops the mix of transferable skills and personal behaviours needed to deal with the challenges of the modern workplace. There are, therefore, qualifications at all levels which offer learners the opportunity to develop and be assessed on their oracy skills.

8. Opportunities for the development of oracy are more limited in GCSEs and A levels, in which assessment is now mainly through examinations. In recognition of this [Pearson have partnered with the Speakers Trust](#) to help develop oracy.

9. **Barriers**: There are several barriers to developing oracy skills. They key barrier is a lack of focus on oracy at different stages of the curriculum.

10. Should you wish to discuss any of our comments further, please do contact us on the email given.

Value and impact

11. We know that oracy does not have the same status as reading or writing. Assumptions are made about natural development in spoken language, they can be more difficult to assess compared with reading and writing, and oracy often falls outside of the national curriculum and examination assessment objectives.

12. Oracy should have the same status as reading and writing in our education system.

13. First, because these skills cannot be assumed to be naturally developed. The <u>English Speaking Union</u> highlights this with these key facts:

14. Disadvantaged children are 2.3 times more likely to be identified as having speech, language and communication needs than those in more affluent areas. (The Communication Trust)

15. In many parts of the country, over 50 per cent of students start school lacking vital oracy skills. (The Communication Trust)

16. Some pupils in inner-city classes contribute on average just four words per lesson. (National Literacy Trust)

17. The UK's poorest children start school 19 months behind their wealthier peers in language and vocabulary. (National Literacy Trust)

18. Secondly, because in education, work, and in life, we rely just as heavily, or more so, on good communication through spoken language as on reading and writing. Oracy skills equip young people to make the most of their educational experiences, to develop the skills needed for the future, for success and satisfaction in their work, and for life in general by helping them develop life skills and supporting confidence and access.

19. Good oracy education develops the ability to listen intently and meaningfully and helps open up the world for young people. People without good oracy education, for example, can lack confidence and struggle with eye contact when discussing or presenting, or tend to listen for specific purposes; reaffirmation of their beliefs or for a pause to give them the opportunity to speak. This can lead to, for example, finding it difficult to ask follow-up questions because they are unable to listen intently to answers. Those proficient in oracy develop negotiation skills, presentation skills and learn how to develop rapport in order to perform well in interviews and to develop their careers.

20. Many universities see the importance of oracy for employment and provide facilities for leaners to develop these skills and include presentations in their methods of assessment. Professor Steve West, Vice-Chancellor of the University of West of England, stated "Employers are not only interested in degree classifications and subject knowledge, but also graduates' ability to communicate, problem-solve, work in teams, present or pitch and so on. If we are to prepare students for this, we need to offer opportunities for them to develop those skills."

21. We know employers understand that those engaged in creative activities and customer-related roles, need well-developed communication and collaborative problem-solving skills. They want people who can make clear presentations, work well in teams, listen properly to people, and solve problems collaboratively.

22. The 2017 Sutton Trust report, <u>Life Lessons: Improving essential life skills for young people</u>, highlights that 94% of employers deem life skills such as communication just as important as academic results for the success of young people.

23. In the 2019 CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey report, <u>Education and learning for the modern world</u>, 15% of employers place oral communication among the top three of the wide range of knowledge and skills required within their workforce to maintain their competitiveness and succeed in the modern world. The report highlights that rise of automation and other technologies is likely to mean less hands-on jobs and a growth in roles which oversee the design, application and effective operation of these processes.

24. The 2019 Pearson Global Learner Survey found that recognition of the importance of the soft skills underlined by oracy, such as teamwork and collaboration, is global, and individuals want to build these skills, in addition to the more traditionally recognised skills. Over 80% of people in all 11 global areas surveyed believe these uniquely human skills will become even more important in the future and more important to keep up with for the future, than STEM.

25. The 2018 Future Skills report from Pearson/Nesta highlights the growing body of work that underscores the role of 'noncognitive' skills, including social skills and leadership skills. It highlights that in the US, nearly all job growth since 1980 has been in occupations that are relatively social-skill intensive. One possible explanation is that social skills provide the tools for the versatile coordination which underpins a productive workplace - again those uniquely human skills.

26. Oracy skills are an important part of a young person's 'cultural capital' when making first steps from school or college into university or to work. In 2017 Pearson in partnership with the University of Exeter undertook a piece of research [unpublished, available on request] to better understand the experience of BTEC students at a Russell Group university. The findings from this research, comprising over 100 interviews with learners at all stages of their undergraduate programmes, showed that much of the disadvantage that learners experienced (or perceived) is linked to their own feelings of inadequacy based on class and parental background. The research showed that in many cases BTEC learners (usually educated in state schools) lacked confidence and the means to express themselves, not because they were necessarily of a lower ability, but they did not have the inter-personal skills and confidence to do so.

27. Learners attending the university from independent schools are more likely to have studied a curriculum which included topics such as oracy, to enable articulation and engagement.

28. For those that do not receive oracy education the opportunity to communicate meaningfully and engage with others in education and in the world of work is diminished. This can have an impact on social mobility, on success in education, on opportunities in the workplace, and on life chances more generally.

Provision and access

29. Pearson recognises the development of oracy skills as an important part of the preparation of learners for further educational development, employment and for life.

30. We provide content, assessment, and digital services to learners for primary and secondary schools, colleges, training providers, employers and universities to develop oracy skills.

31. Our vocational portfolio develops the mix of transferable skills and personal behaviours needed to deal with the challenges of the modern workplace. There are, therefore, qualifications at all levels which offer learners the opportunity to develop and be assessed on their oracy skills. The development of these skills is encouraged by allowing learners, for example, to meet certain learning aims through the delivery of an oral presentation. In some cases, there is a mandatory requirement for such a presentation, although flexible arrangements are allowed for learners who are unable to present orally to ensure the qualifications are inclusive.

32. Opportunities for the development of oracy are more limited in GCSEs and A levels, in which assessment is now mainly through examinations in most subjects.

Primary schools

33. Pearson offers 'Wordsmith Philosophy' for primary schools. Wordsmith is underpinned by four core principles developed in conjunction with the UK's leading Literacy experts: contextualised grammar, purpose and audience, varied and whole texts, and talk for writing. Under talk for writing, 'talk 'allows children to explore and extend their vocabulary. The principle underlines the importance oracy is given within the programme.

Vocational provision

34. In the Pearson BTEC Level 1/2 Tech Awards (for 14-16 year-olds), evidence for some of the assessments may include an oral presentation with assessor questioning. For example, in a units from the Pearson BTEC Level 1/2 Tech Award in Enterprise, one of the learning aims, 'Pitch a micro-enterprise activity', requires learners to give a presentation in which they must demonstrate a range of presentation and communication skills when pitching their plan.

35. In the Pearson BTEC Level 2 qualifications designed for post-16 year-olds (Firsts, Technicals, and Industry Skills), the Pearson BTEC Level 3 BTEC Nationals, and higher level professional qualifications, learners may meet some of the learning aims by giving an oral presentation and teachers and tutors are encouraged to include them in their methods of assessment. The assessment objective requires the development of oracy within the context of specific work-related skills, such as leading/delivering an activity, or feeding back to a client or customer. Where relevant, schools and colleges are encouraged to involve employers in the audiences that assess these presentations.

36. The Pearson BTEC Level 4 and 5 Higher Nationals encourage teachers and tutors to include presentations as a method of assessment where appropriate. Also, where relevant, colleges are encouraged to involve employers in the audiences that assess these presentations.

37. Our Apprenticeships, from Level 2 to Level 6, assess the knowledge, skills and behaviours outlined in the Apprenticeship Standard. These develop oracy as they ensure apprentices are fully competent in a job role.

38. We also offer a range of digital and print learning content designed to help learners and employers to develop for example, professionalism, adaptability, negotiating and Influencing, teamwork, resilience, and problem-solving.

39. The new T Levels being developed by Pearson, in Digital and Construction, both have a task requiring a presentation to a client in the Employer Set Project.

Functional skills

40. In Functional Skills qualifications, oracy skills have equal weight to reading and writing skills. A standalone unit in listening and speaking needs to be passed in order to receive the full qualification (unlike GCSE). Functional Skills learners are expected to be able to follow spoken narratives, asking for clarification where needed. They also need to effectively adapt their contributions to different people and situations and register the contributions of others.

New Essential Digital Skills Qualifications

41. The new Essential Digital Skills Qualifications (EDSQ), at Entry level have an observation assessment where discussion can take place.

Academic provision

42. The GCSEs in English Language have a speaking and listening endorsement which is compulsory. However, the speaking and listening requirement no longer contributes to the overall grade for the GCSE. In previous iterations of the qualification, learners were able to respond to a stimulus in a written, multi-modal or spoken format, which did provide some parity of status between written and oral fluency. However, this option is no longer permitted.

43. This structural change has had an impact on its status given 'what is assessed tends to be what gets done' and has likely led to changes in the focus on speaking skills as part of 14-16 English.

44. This has exacerbated been by an increased focus in the English subject criteria on Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPAG) and written accuracy more broadly. This creates a high degree of focus and time on writing which contributes towards 50% of the GCSE English Language grade.

45. In Modern Foreign Languages qualifications, speaking and listening have equal status to reading and writing and they are assessed.

46. The underlying assumption seems to be that for English, these skills are either unimportant, or they are developed naturally.

47. In the case of A levels, only the languages and PE include assessment of oral communication.

48. In both the Level 1 Foundation Project and the Level 2 Higher Project qualifications, learners may communicate the outcomes of their project through an oral presentation in front of an audience. In the Level 3 Extended Project Qualification, the findings should be presented to an audience through a presentation, describing what was done, the findings and conclusions that can be drawn from it. The assessment requirements state: "It must be appropriate to the selected audience in terms of length, language used, room selected and conditions, and also in terms of any handouts and ICT used. The presentation must demonstrate the use of appropriate communication skills and the learner should be able to respond to questioning from the audience in a capable manner."

Barriers

49. The opportunity that younger learners have to develop oracy skills depends on the programme of study that they follow.

50. At the heart of vocational qualifications is the development of the mix of transferable skills and personal behaviours to deal with the challenges of the modern workplace. Oracy skills are therefore a key element of our vocational portfolio.

51. Research based on 2017 performance tables showed that, at key stage 4, 48.7% of learners studied an 'academic only' programme while a further 35.3% followed a 'mainly academic' programme of study. (*Vocational Qualifications at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5: who takes them and how they fit into students' programmes of study Research Report Carmen Vidal Rodeiro & Sylvia Vitello 31 March 2020*.)

52. The same study showed that, at key stage 5, 58.8% studied an 'academic only' programme while a further 7.3% followed a 'mostly academic programme. Numbers taking the Level 3 Extended Project Qualification have shown small increases over the years but still only around 10% of learners on level 3 programmes take the qualification.

53. This lack of a balanced curriculum means that many do not access qualifications designed to help learners develop the skills they need. The current education system, with its emphasis on academic knowledge, struggles to instil a broad range of technical and career-focussed skills amongst young people. This was highlighted in the 2018 report from the Commission on Sustainable Learning for Work, Life and a Changing Economy.

54. As previously highlighted, one barrier teachers and tutors face in providing in quality oracy education at key stage 4 is the design of the latest GCSE in English.

55. Part of the reason for not including the speaking and listening requirement in the overall grade, is the fact that GCSEs are in the main, externally assessed, and it was considered impractical to assess speaking and listening in this way. Given developments in technology, the regulator and awarding organisations should be able to develop a reliable way of assessing these skills.

56. In recognition of this Pearson have partnered with the Speakers Trust to help develop oracy. The Trust offers two workshops which develop learners' confidence and skills in presenting and in public speaking which meet the requirements of the GCSE English spoken language endorsement. Learners can submit their workshop performances for their GCSE sample. The model is currently being explored to see if it can be expanded into other subjects.

57. We highlighted in the previous section that the 'Project' qualifications, at Levels 1 to 3, allow learners to develop oracy. Given the flexibility of the project qualifications learners could be encouraged to take these qualifications as part of their curriculum in order to develop their oracy skills.

58. However, even where oracy is developed in the curriculum, it is not given the level of attention it needs. As previously highlighted research shows that in many cases BTEC learners (usually educated in state schools) lack confidence and the means to express themselves at selective universities, not because they were necessarily of a lower ability, but they did not have the inter-personal skills and confidence to do so.

59. This suggests that the key barrier to the development of these skills is a lack of focus on oracy at different stages of the curriculum.

Additional guidance:

Value and impact

1. Given many teachers recognise the importance of oracy, why does spoken language not have the same status as reading and writing in our education system? Should it have the same status, and if so why?

2. What are the consequences if children and young people do not receive oracy education?

3. What is the value and impact of quality oracy education at i) different life stages, ii) in different settings, and iii) on different types of pupils (for instance pupils from varied socioeconomic backgrounds or with special educational needs)?

4. How can it help deliver the wider curriculum at school?

5. What is the impact of quality oracy education on future life chances? Specifically, how does it affect employment and what value do businesses give oracy?

6. What do children and young people at school and entering employment want to be able to access, what skills to they want to leave school with?

7. What is the value and impact of oracy education in relation to other key agendas such as social mobility and wellbeing/ mental health?

8. How can the ability to communicate effectively contribute to engaging more young people from all backgrounds to become active citizens, participating fully in social action and public life as adults?

Provision and access

1. What should high quality oracy education look like?

2. Can you provide evidence of how oracy education is being provided in different areas/education settings/extra-curricular provision, by teachers but also other practitioners that work with children?

3. What are the views of teachers, school leaders and educational bodies regarding the current provision of oracy education?

4. Where can we identify good practice and can you give examples?

5. What factors create unequal access to oracy education (i.e. socio-economic, region, type of school, special needs)? How can these factors be overcome?

6. Relating to region more specifically, how should an oracy-focused approach be altered depending on the context?

Barriers

1. What are the barriers that teachers face in providing quality oracy education, within the education system and beyond?

2. What support do teachers need to improve the delivery of oracy education?

3. What accountability is currently present in the system? How can we further incentivise teachers to deliver more oracy education to children and young people?

4. What is the role of government and other bodies in creating greater incentives and how can this be realised?

5. What is the role of assessment in increasing provision of oracy education? What is the most appropriate form of assessment of oracy skills?

6. Are the speaking and listening elements of the current curriculum sufficient in order to deliver high quality oracy education?

7. What is the best approach – more accountability within the system or a less prescriptive approach?

8. Are there examples of other educational pedagogies where provision has improved and we can draw parallels and learn lessons?