



## Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group Inquiry

### What status does oracy have in the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish education systems?

The Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group's (APPG) *Speak for Change* Inquiry is seeking to improve oracy education in all schools in England. As part of this we are exploring what measures other UK nations have taken to improve oracy education and what England can learn from this.

#### Purpose of gathering this evidence

We are seeking to gather evidence about how other UK nations are seeking to improve oracy education and whether provision is greater across schools in these areas. This evidence will support MPs to make recommendations to improve oracy education within the English education system.

In England, there is currently no shared understanding or common expectation for oracy in schools, meaning it can be viewed as a peripheral or optional undertaking by some teachers. Specifically MPs are keen to understand whether changes to the curriculum, assessment and accountability frameworks in other nations have had an impact on incentivising more schools and motivating teachers to embed oracy across their curriculum, and what impact these measures have in practice.

One of the biggest challenges for the Oracy APPG Inquiry is to understand how best to incentivise and support teachers and schools to focus or prioritise oracy, and whether to endorse greater autonomy for teachers or a more centralised and prescriptive approach. Therefore, it is particularly helpful to understand the motivation behind any changes within the curriculum, assessment and accountability systems in other UK nations, and how measures are supported, resourced and implemented in practice.

#### Specific questions

1. What national measures have been undertaken in Northern Ireland to support the delivery of a high quality oracy education in all schools? Our curriculum in Northern for primary and secondary school pupils affords the cross curricular skill of communication the same footing as using mathematics and using information and communications technology (ICT). The three main strands of communication are talking and listening, reading and writing. All pupils must attain a level in these skills prior to joining secondary school at which time our education strategy, *Count, read: succeed* stipulates that

each school ensure that pupils entering their organisations must complete secondary school having improved by one level in their cross curricular skills. In addition all pupils must demonstrate their knowledge of Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TSPC) in all subject areas and at the core of this is listening and actively providing opinions and feedback. Within TSPC are five sub-groups: thinking problem-solving and decision making, self-management, working with others, managing information and being creative. The successful delivery of all of the different aspects of TSPC involve questioning, using different types of questions and having a sense of audience; adapting your language to suit a range of listeners

2. Specifically, what status and priority is given to oracy (spoken language, oral communication, speaking & listening etc.) in the Northern Ireland Curriculum? Where does it feature - as a subject-led approach within English and/or across subjects, or as a stand-alone skill or competency? Oracy is a core element of the Northern Ireland Curriculum for primary and post primary pupils. Cross Curricular Skill Communication is often the remit of the post primary school's Head of Literacy or Literacy Coordinator in primary school; they are key stakeholders in the school's development planning. Our Education and Training Inspectorate would expect to see evidence of pupil progression from Key Stage Two (end of P7) to KS3 end of Year 10 (Year 9 in the English system). \*The assessment of Cross Curricular Skills Communication (CCS) has been problematic for a number of years and many post-primary teachers in particular did not participate in the awarding of a pupil level. Anecdotally, primary schools have been accused of inflating these CCS Communication levels.

GCSE English Language Speaking and Listening equates to 20% of the final grade. Pupils are assessed over two years on discussion groups, role-plays and individual presentation which afford pupil choice and address the need for a clarity and confidence in communication. Our Careers Departments also offer two statutory opportunities for pupils to engage in interviews with teachers and adults from the professions they are interested in.

3. How is implementation of relevant measures within the Curriculum supported and appropriately resourced? For instance, relating to assessments, teacher training, accountability framework, any other special requirements?

All of our four teacher training institutions verse their students in the delivery of oracy through the key skills discussed in the first point.

Assessment at KS3 will be incorporated into one of the two of the English Department's reports schools must provide in NI. (One written report and one-data report.) Originally all departments were tasked with a key skills focus and were meant to report one out of every few years on oracy for KS3. Teachers of other subjects felt they did not have the training to do this and in a short time reporting on oracy was returned to the current specialist in this field, the English teachers. (The original aim of CCS Communication was that the English teachers would not report on oracy. The rationale being that more productive talking would result in all classrooms if teachers had to assess oracy. CCS Communication coordinators were unable to train the entire staff on the use of oracy given the scale of the training needed. The awarding of levels has since been suspended and clarification is being awaited.

Training took place for all CCS Communication leads throughout Northern Ireland and time and money was invested so this staff could cascade their training to other departments. DE invested in

the delivery of CCS Communication training through CCEA and have maintained this training despite the assessment being placed in interim measures, paused while the pay agreement for NI teachers was negotiated.

Overall, where does the quality of oracy education and the development of oral language feature in the NI accountability system? Normally oracy in the primary sector will be reported on to parents at the end of the school year. Key Stage Three pupils (11-14 year olds) will have their oracy reported on annually by the English Dept.

What are school inspectors routinely looking for in relation to oracy?

At a webinar facilitated by the Education and Training Inspectorate, Inspectors spoke of wishing to find a sense of a buzz around the school about literacy which will be evident in classrooms and through the opportunities that pupils are afforded for debate and public speaking throughout across the curriculum. Some of the activities on offer and very popular in NI schools included Poetry Aloud KS3-KS5, Bar Mock Trial, KS4-KS5 Edgar Graham Memorial, KS5, QUB Literific, Edgar Graham Memorial and Soroptimists both KS4 and KS5.

4. Overall, what is the culture among the teaching profession in Northern Ireland regarding oracy education?

An eagerness exists for oracy in the classroom for engagement purposes. I have given two talks on Literacy in the Science classroom in the Association for Science Teachers past two conferences in St Mary's University College which were both full to capacity, so the appetite is strong. Fighting Words Northern Ireland also offers fantastic opportunities

5. What motivates and incentivises schools and teachers in Northern Ireland to focus and prioritise oracy in the classroom? What barriers and challenges do schools face in focusing and prioritising oracy?

Our barriers are the pressure for performativity in schools which can displace the additional time it takes to facilitate lessons incorporating oracy. The time out of class to participate in these events (most of the above extra-curricular list are evening or weekend events. This does place additional pressure on staff.)

Staff are motivated by the impact on their pupils in terms of the growing confidence and improved outcomes that exist for those involved in the transferrable skill of oracy.

### About the *Speak for Change* Inquiry

For the purpose of the Inquiry, we are exploring oracy as meaning both learning to talk and learning through talk. Oracy is the ability to articulate ideas, develop understanding and engage with others through spoken language. It is both a set of teachable skills that are essential for life and a tool for teaching and learning.

The Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) was established in 2018 and is made up of MPs from across the political spectrum. The Oracy APPG is collecting evidence for the *Speak for Change* Parliamentary Inquiry, which was launched last year and is seeking to improve oracy education for every child in every school. Specifically, the Inquiry is investigating:

**i) Value and impact:** What is the impact of oracy education at different life stages from early years through to employment, and how can the delivery of effective oracy education contribute to individual and societal outcomes?

**ii) Provision and access:** What is the current state of provision of oracy education across schools in England, who is missing out and what factors create unequal access to oracy education?

**iii) Barriers to improving oracy education:** What are the barriers to provision of a quality oracy education for all, and what is the role of government and other bodies in incentivising provision?

There is a growing consensus across society including government, employers, teachers, and parents, as to the importance of oracy in education. The Oracy APPG wants to support this momentum and ensure oracy has the appropriate value within the education system. While many schools in England are at the forefront of innovative oracy practice in the classroom, delivering the purposeful teaching of speaking skills and providing varied opportunities for children to use their voice, this isn't the case for every child in every school.

There is currently no shared understanding or common expectation for oracy across schools in England, meaning it can be viewed as a peripheral or optional undertaking by some teachers. At the heart of the Oracy APPG's [Speak for Change Inquiry](#) is the desire to listen to teachers about the barriers they face in prioritising oracy, what support they need, and what incentives would help them support every child to become a confident and agile communicator. At a time of even greater pressure on teachers, the widening of the disadvantage gap and the heightened wellbeing needs of children, the Oracy APPG wants to ensure every child has the speaking skills they need to succeed.

The Inquiry will make recommendations that impact upon schools in England only, however, we are exploring and considering the differences in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and what can be learnt from other measures.

Education charity [Voice 21](#) provides the secretariat for the Oracy APPG but the Inquiry is supported by over 20 organisations and individuals who form the Oracy Network. Further information can be found at [www.oracyappg.org.uk](http://www.oracyappg.org.uk).

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