

## 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](mailto:inquiry@oracyappg.org.uk) with the subject line of 'Oracy APPG inquiry'

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Full name:

English Speaking Board (International) Ltd

School or Organisation:

Chief Executive

Role:

Written evidence:

This is submitted on behalf of English Speaking Board (International) Ltd

## **Introduction**

1. English Speaking Board (International) Ltd. (ESB), has a unique contribution to the debate on oracy. For nearly 70 years we have been assessing the speaking and listening, spoken English and communication skills of learners in primary, secondary and tertiary education, and employees in workplace settings. Such history of assessment practice presents an exceptional insight as to the value and impact, provision and access and barriers in oracy education during many periods of educational policy and societal change. We are an awarding body regulated in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.
2. It has been a consistent aim since our inception to encourage ease and accuracy in communication and discussion in every branch of life and work. Therefore, we most often have referred to our work as 'speaking and listening', 'spoken English' or 'communication'. ESB assesses a broad range of areas within this remit, through a range of curriculum areas. Our focus is on the interactivity of communication and the personal development it creates, rather than a predominant focus on the performance or rhetorical aspects of public speaking.
3. When we asked our learners how the focus on oracy with ESB has impacted on them at school one said:

*"It has had a tremendous impact. It has made me a much more confident person; I am now able to speak in assemblies and it has really helped me with my day to day conversations as well".*

Another was asked their view about the freedom to be assessed for their oracy skills based on their own choices and interests:

*"For me, it was completely rewarding. To be able to communicate your own interests to your peers or even someone I don't know, it gives me even more encouragement".*

4. We perceive our role in oracy development as that of innovators, for as far back as 1956, we recognised that technology developments have made our whole world more speech conscious, and with this comes an awareness that clarity of communication, and an ability to express thoughts simply, sincerely and persuasively, are qualities needed by everyone in this specialised, competitive world. For whatever the industrial, professional or social responsibilities are, every individual will have to inform, instruct, listen, explain, question, interpret, disagree and advise.

### **The Impact of Oracy**

#### **Oracy assessment in schools**

5. In 2015 we began a pilot with Stoke LEA. For two years the LEA worked in partnership with its schools to use ESB assessments to contribute to their literacy improvement agenda. Rob Johnstone (Assistant Director of Learning and Services for Stoke-on-Trent LEA) spoke of the reasons for the partnership:

*“We made the decision to partner with ESB because it fits in with our improving education strategy, focusing on communication and literacy skills. We felt it would give the learners of Stoke a competitive edge, giving them the best possible chance in job interviews situations against their peers from other parts of the country.... to go on and succeed in the world of training, work and further education”.*

6. What has always been evident to us is the centrality of oracy in achievement – commensurate with literacy and numeracy. They are the building blocks of effective learning, participation, economic achievement and development, Louise Miller-Marshall, former Principal at Pilton College, Plymouth shared this view:

*“Speaking skills are essential to students all the way through their education. It is very clear that when young people are learning new concepts and ideas that being able to articulate those ideas verbally is a precursor to them being able to write those ideas down”.*

7. An ESB research project took place in 2019 across 9 enterprises (8 state schools and one third sector organisation) which gathered data from over 300 learners.
8. The enterprises were piloting a new pathways qualification for learners to develop oracy skills in the ways that were most suited to them and their individual strengths, learning styles, and interests. This unique approach used a variety of oracy activities to measure learners' oracy ability. All four pathways involved a group listening and responding element, where learners took part in discussions and asked and answered questions from their peers.
9. From each centre, we collected data: pre- and post-assessment learner questionnaires; pre- and post-baseline assessments based on Key Stage 3 Spoken English standards. The results of the project were clear, with both teachers and learners recognising the indisputable impact of this project on the learners' oracy skills and general confidence. In the Speech to Inform Pathway, learners reported a significant growth in confidence after they had completed the project:
  - **21%** increase in confidence for the 4-minute curriculum/personal interest talk;
  - **20%** increase in confidence for a persuasive argument;
  - **19%** increase in confidence for taking part in a formal discussion; **and**
  - **11%** increase in confidence for reviewing a news item.
10. Further data from this pathway showed that over 20% of students had moved from 'not competent' to 'competent' in the following Key Stage 3 Spoken English requirements (as evaluated by their teachers):
  - **23%** competent in using Standard English confidently in a range of formal and informal contexts, including classroom discussion;
  - **34%** competent in giving short speeches and presentations;
  - **24%** competent in expressing their own ideas and keeping to the point;
  - **23%** competent in participating in formal debates and structured discussions; **and**
  - **35%** competent in summarising/or building on what has been said in debates and structured discussions.
11. However, it was through our Speech for Employability Pathway that learners reported the most striking increase in confidence:
  - **63%** increase for making a telephone call;

- **53%** increase for taking part in an interview with the assessor ;
- **43%** increase for giving a 4-minute employability-related talk; **and**
- **40%** increase for taking part in a formal discussion.

12. Again, significant numbers of learners improved their competency in the Key Stage 3 Spoken English requirements:

- **46%** competent in using Standard English confidently in a range of formal and informal contexts, including classroom discussion;
- **44%** competent in giving short speeches and presentations, and in summarising/or building on what has been said in debates and structured discussions;
- **32%** competent in participating in formal debates and structured discussions; **and**
- **20%** competent in expressing their own ideas and keeping to the point.

13. And teachers felt students had moved from 'competent' to 'highly competent' after the assessment:

- **24%** highly competent in expressing their own ideas and keeping to the point;
- **12%** highly competent in using Standard English confidently in a range of formal and informal contexts, including classroom discussion;
- **12%** highly competent in giving short speeches and presentations; **and**
- **10%** highly competent in participating in formal debates and structured discussions.

**14.** The data and feedback from this project indicate not only the enormous impact that the development of communication skills can have on a learner's self-confidence, but also the fact that teachers truly recognise how critical it is that learners continue to have the opportunity to develop these skills.

### **Oracy, Employers, and the Economy**

15. It is critical, not only for our young people, but for society and the economy as a whole, to ensure that oracy is explicitly taught in every school. There is a plethora of

research to demonstrate that interpersonal and communication skills are those most sought after by employers, and yet they also tell us that their employees do not possess those skills.

16. Research from Sutton Trust in February 2019, for the APPG for Social Mobility, found that from the age of five, the UK's most disadvantaged children can be 19 months behind their more affluent peers in vocabulary development, and this deficit can have life-long consequences. By not developing our children's language and communication skills from the earliest opportunity, we are limiting our workforce and the economy. The report states: "Children with poor vocabulary age five are more than twice as likely to be unemployed aged 34".

17. The CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Annual Report – November 2018, with responses representing over 28,000 businesses made the following findings, which are all intrinsically linked to oracy:

- Qualifications are valued by employers as indicators of achievement and ability but developing the right attitudes and behaviours for success in all aspects of life is vital. Broader skills such as resilience, communication and problem-solving are also highly important when recruiting, with over half (60%) rating these skills as among their top three priorities.
- Standards of literacy and numeracy are a cause for concern, with one in four employers (25%) not satisfied, while around two in five businesses are not satisfied with the aptitude and readiness for work of young applicants (44%) and/or broader skills such as communicating and problem-solving (38%).

18. By assessing learners in small groups, and by evaluating the listening and interrogative skills of the learners with each other, ESB creates an experience for them which they will encounter throughout their studying and working lives - becoming familiar with unfamiliar information and vocabulary; presenting information succinctly and being able to select vocabulary which puts across their

message; imparting a perspective that has value to them; recalling prepared information and listening to others and seeking confirmation or better understanding, and supporting others by listening attentively and supporting their contribution.

### **Provision and Access**

19. Whilst it is our 'business' to speak of the place of external assessment as part of this enquiry, it is also our position that the work of the members of the Oracy Network presents many ways for teachers, educational providers and learners to access oracy learning, and to practise those skills. Teachers are creative professionals and we support frameworks and tools for oracy that allow them to choose what suits their learners and schools.

20. Our position is that English Speaking Board's assessment methodology is an authentic one in the assessment of spoken English and speaking and listening. How we assess reflects the values learned by effective communication: each learner is treated as an individual who has individual interests and an individual temperament. The assessor must identify with the learner's ~~candidate's~~ background and interests. The learner is not a performer of studied pieces, but a person taking their place in society as a worker, a citizen.

21. Avril Newman (Principal at Sir William Burrough Primary School, Limehouse and Trustee of ESB):

*"We have been doing ESB for 13 years now and it has been a great gift for the school. We feel very strongly that our learners finding their voices, and speaking out in a confident, articulate and authentic way is one of the best gifts we can give them. ESB also provides a structure and a purpose both inside and outside of the classroom".*

### **The Link between Oracy, Social Mobility & Social Inclusion**

22. The Newsom Report of 1963 remarked that:

*“There is no gift like the gift of speech, and the level at which people have learned to use it determines the level....at which their life is lived”.*

23. One of our centres is the third sector a youth leadership and social change organisation called Reclaim. It was set up in Moss Side, a deprived inner city area of Manchester in 2007. They exist to end the leadership inequality that prevents working class young people with talent, imagination, ambition and drive from fulfilling their leadership potential. They have an oracy intent “we support young people who refuse to be silent, they fight for their voices to be heard”. Our work with these young people recently culminated in a 2019 graduation ceremony where we witnessed their confidence and competence and their self-belief that they can be the change.

24. Here are their views as to the provision and access of oracy skill development:

Reclaim learner:

*“[ESB’s Speech Pathways] really helped me with my ability to speak in front of others and made me more aware of current issues happening in the world because of the freedom I had to choose my own topics. It was amazing”.*

Becky Bainbridge (Director of Programmes):

*“Their communication skills have progressed so much since we started with ESB. We had a couple of girls who really struggled to even speak in a group situation and now they’re standing on a stage and talking eloquently. It’s something money can’t buy”.*

Katie Cosgrave (Alumni Lead):

*“It is so important that we continue to run ESB qualifications. Oracy needs to be taught in schools, communication is so key to success. It has been acknowledged that it helps with mental health, education – almost everything”.*

25. One of ESB’s Ambassadors spoke to the Oracy APPG launch in April 2018 about his perspectives on social mobility as a learner with Asperger’s. Although recognising that like many people who live with Asperger’s he had good language skills, he felt that oracy training enhanced his communication skills. He recounted that:

*"I wanted social communication but didn't know how to go about getting it. That changed in Year 4 when I found ESB, which was so beneficial to me. It helped me with presenting skills, it helped me with eye contact which I used to struggle with a lot, it also showed me how to interact with people. It also helped me to listen to people, I didn't know how to see things from other people's perspectives, but talking to people and learning to understand them was brilliant. I also experienced an unparalleled sense of achievement with every qualification I got, which boosted my confidence even more. Oracy Skills, developed from an early age can help bridge the social mobility gap for people like me, with disabilities such as Autism".*

### **Barriers**

26. NATE (The National Association for the Teaching of English) says:

*"For decades, means have been found to assess students' achievement in the spoken language...by its nature, (it) may be harder to assess accurately than written language, but the presence of difficulty is no reason to duck the challenge".*

27. We hold that the forms of external assessment, pioneered by English Speaking Board, validate the teaching and learning of the teachers, as well as providing a positive, learner-centred experience of assessment; something which unfortunately is not the norm for most learners. Christabel Burniston, our founder, spoke about this in 1964. She said:

*"An examination which liberates and stimulates will liberate and stimulate teaching.... An imaginative oral examination which breaks down subject barriers, which includes the by paths of a child's interest and enthusiasms, which encourages exploration on the way and a friendly exchange of ideas...will not only be assessing what the child knows or says, but what they have become".*

28. We find that there is not enough differentiation in the current National Curriculum for English in terms of Spoken Language to facilitate the delivery of high quality oracy education, and the guidance given is insufficient for such a crucial skill set. The requirements focus largely on formal speaking and listening (presentations, speeches, debate, performance) and do not make enough reference to the broader

range of talk possibilities. An additional challenge is the position that academies and free schools in England, are not required to follow the National Curriculum as long as they teach a “broad and balanced curriculum” that provides children with the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to develop into well-rounded, informed individuals.

29. The Welsh Curriculum, on the other hand, provides schools with online performance descriptors of competence in oracy. These descriptors comprehensively demonstrate the characteristics which a pupil must show in order to achieve and to exceed the expected standard.

30. The focus on oracy in the independent sector is consistent and strong, however, over the last two decades we have witnessed a move away from a focus on communication skills in the state sector. As presented by Neil Mercer of Cambridge University at a 2018 Oracy Conference for Higher Education:

*The amount and quality of the dialogue children experience at home is one of best predictors of their eventual academic attainment  
(Hart & Risley, 1995; also Roy, Chiatt & Dodd, 2014).*

*School offers the only chance for some children to develop a full repertoire of talk skills. But very few schools teach oracy: e.g. only 3 out of 35 PGCE students had talk training - and they were from private schools.*

31. The impact of this is that there are generations of learners and now teachers who did not have an oracy education, who may feel that they do not have the skills and building blocks to be articulate teachers, managers, leaders and team members as well as teachers of oracy. Oracy education, through the work of the members of the Oracy Network is building a self-sustaining momentum, but it is still a reality for the minority of state schools, whether mainstream or special provision.

## **32. Conclusion**

What remains constant is the presence of ESB advocating for the place of oracy in the curriculum across all three sectors and in employment and our evidence to support the impact of building confidence in speaking and listening to all societies' stakeholders.

Nearly 70 years ago our founder Christabel Burniston MBE, said:

*“The art of communication through the spoken word has never been of such vital importance as it is today”.*

33. Society and education has changed dramatically and positively in those intervening 70 years, yet communication stills lies at the heart of humanity and progress.

### **Recommendations**

34. The voice of teachers and school leaders in any successful change is central.

Therefore, fulsome engagement with teachers, school leaders and their professional associations is key to any outcomes of this APPG being successful.

35. Give teachers permission and direction to have oracy as a central building block of the learning journey, alongside numeracy and literacy, without prescribing a specific 'way'. Given the centrality of oracy to a learner's achievement and development, we request that assessment pathways include external assessment of oracy as is present in the assessment of many other parts of the learning journey.

36. Undertake dialogue with those devising the curriculum for teacher training to identify oracy skills for teachers both for their personal development, as well as their professional understanding of the role of oracy in their learners' personal development and academic achievement.

37. The Department for Education should strengthen the place of communication and language in its strategy to improve social mobility (Bercow: Ten Years On report).

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?

