

English Speaking Board (International) Ltd.

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A open letter to Prof Dame Alison Peacock, Tim Oates CBE, Mary Myatt, Sarah Hubbard, Jonathan Keay, Prof Neil Mercer, Professor Robin Alexander and Emma Hardy Chair, Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group

Responding to the APPG session “what is the place for oracy in the curriculum, assessment and accountability system” 14th July 2020

I’m writing to you in the spirit of the APPG on Oracy – *Speak for Change* as I would like to engage with you as thought leaders. English Speaking Board International has a unique and exceptional perspective on the Assessment element of the discussion as we are an Ofqual regulated awarding body, offering oracy/communication/speaking and listening qualifications from Pre entry to Level 4, as well as a long standing member of the Oracy Network who support this initiative.

Our assessments give agency to the learners; it is their choice of subjects upon which to prepare and be assessed. We externally assess 12-14,000 learners a year, counting amongst our centres award winning special education providers such as Foxhills and Belfast Met; schools in opportunity areas such as Ipswich, Stoke on Trent, and the South West through our partnership with Articulacy as well as Nottingham, Liverpool and the third sector with charities such as [Reclaim](#) a youth leadership and social change organisation based in Moss Side, Manchester. The Chair of the APPG Emma Hardy MP, witnessed an outstanding contribution from a young woman from Reclaim at the launch of this APPG in 2018, as well as a contribution from one of our Ambassadors who spoke about his journey as a young person with Asperger’s syndrome. Such was his personal success he spoke brilliantly live on BBC breakfast television

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsnOyfbvDfA>

As an Ofqual regulated awarding body we have validity and reliability data to offer to the APPG’s work on the impact of an embedded classroom focus on oracy, having been externally assessing since 1953 and participating in many of the curriculum shifts in communication and speaking and listening across those decades. For example in 2019 across 9 centres, 300 KS3 learners and their teachers completed pre and post baseline assessments based on the KS3 spoken English standards, pre and post self and teacher assessments as well the regulated assessment. The highlights of the findings are in our written evidence.

To paraphrase Mary Myatt from a piece from August 2018 ‘I might have taught it, but have they got it’, we do our young a disservice by not providing learners with opportunities and also expecting them to express their ideas. Our oracy qualifications provide a route to having those opportunities and expectations. A number of our Level 3 qualifications have UCAS points to support those learners who choose higher education as their pathway.

Our assessment methodology aims are to build confidence, focus on the interactivity of communication and the personal development it creates. Our focus is not one of performance but communication – speaking, listening, preparing the learner to take their place in society as a worker and citizen. For social mobility we as citizens should be equipped to inform, instruct, draw out from others, explain, question, interpret, listen, disagree and advise

In our most popular qualifications we do this by focusing on 4 key components in our externally delivered summative assessments: giving a talk/presentation; reading out loud; reciting from memory and listening and questioning others. Learners take the assessment together in a small group so need to care and respond to each other's contributions to truly succeed.

Therefore we are writing to you as a speaker at the APPG event on 14th July to enter into further dialogue with us regarding positions expressed that formative assessment was preferable to assess Oracy. During the event Tina Renshaw, ESB's CEO challenged the comment by Robin Alexander that tests are for individuals, ESB validly 'tests' in a group context and assess interaction and listening. She also challenged and would welcome the Ofsted speakers reviewing ESB's data and assessment criteria and keeping an open mind about what is possible and valid in externally assessed forms of summative assessment in speaking and listening. We would really welcome an evidence based discussion with you as opinion leaders about our nearly 70 year history assessing history and invite you to interact with our centres who can present their views as to the value of this form of assessment for Speaking and listening/communication /oracy.

To really understand the value of this methodology you need to see it; to hear about the confidence it brings, the enjoyment of actually participating in the assessment and the validation to so many learners that they have achieved. Please find two video links that would give you a flavour of the value of the preparation and experience:

All Saints Academy Plymouth video:

<https://youtu.be/fNYbftvxqnw>

Young Speaker 2019 video:

<https://youtu.be/Fq6wm-xMTdQ>

As we recommended to the APPG in our written submission, we hope that one outcome of this focus is to 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. Tim Oates et al in their report '*Nice Aims, shame the law's a mess*' provided some language I'm going to refashion for this oracy discussion: a valuable outcome of this APPG's work would be to '*design a suitable ORACY toolkit for a decentralised and complex educational ecosystem*'.

Do please engage with us, as our teachers and learners deserve their assessment achievements to be recognised as a **pathway** to developing, possessing and practising their speaking, listening and oracy skills.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tina Renshaw', written in a cursive style.

Tina Renshaw CEO