

## 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.

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:

School or Organisation:

Role:

Written evidence:

- OUP firmly believe language opens the doors to education and future life chances
- Our research shows there is a widening language gap that has been exacerbated by Covid, that needs to be addressed not just in the early years, but throughout school.
- Transition from primary to secondary school is a key moment for children where demands on their vocabulary are significantly increased
- We seek to increase awareness of this problem and share examples of best practice in vocabulary development through our reach to schools, our webinar and podcast programmes, case studies and our publishing.
- We believe this can be supported by improved cohesion between primary and secondary curriculum, more focus on professional development and how best to develop vocabulary, and close links between home and school.
- The value of oral language development is reflected in the selection of Nuffield Early Language Intervention as part of the NTP programme.

OUP has a deeply rooted commitment to young people’s language development – it sits at the heart of education. We seek to drive positive change in educational outcomes through our publishing and nowhere can be more important than the area of language and literacy.

Through the [Oxford Children’s Corpus](#) and the associated [research](#) stemming from this, we monitor closely the language pupils read and write. As part of our ongoing “Word Gap” research programme, we are committed to engaging with schools to better understand the language needs of pupils of all abilities and the challenges facing teachers. Our findings are published in the Oxford Language reports.

In 2017, following increasing feedback from teachers that the word gap – where children’s vocabulary levels were below age expectations – was impacting on all aspects of school life, we decided to embark on a major piece of research to look at what exactly that impact was across primary and secondary schools. The findings were published in 2018 in our first [Oxford Language Report: Why Closing the Word Gap Matters](#) and they were very disturbing. Over half the teachers surveyed reported that up to 40% of their pupils lacked the vocabulary to access their learning. Not only that, but it was felt the problem was getting worse in more than 60% of primary and secondary schools.

What also emerged from these findings was the impact this was having on young people. Language underpins progress, it impacts on attainment, affects self-esteem and behaviour and plays a huge role in a child’s future life chances. It is clearly an area that, if addressed, could make a profound impact.

Since that time, awareness has been greatly raised and there are policy initiatives very much targeting the early years and language development, with Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) – a high impact intervention focusing on the development of oral language, published by OUP – now a key strand of the EEF’s National Tutoring Programme. However, while Early Years is hugely important, we have also been concerned to keep monitoring vocabulary development across schools.

In the course of a three-year programme of research, we have gathered over 3500 survey responses from teachers to gain a better understanding of the impact and trends of the word gap and its ongoing impact on young people.

Our most recent language report, developed with the Centre for Education and Youth: [Bridging the Word Gap at Transition](#), builds on our earlier work, but this time we wanted to shine a light on an area that emerged as really significant. Transition – that pivotal time when pupils move from primary into Secondary. We wanted to ask two important questions:

- What role does vocabulary play in pupils making a successful transition between primary and secondary school?
- How can schools support pupils' vocabulary development during this transition.

We learned that in schools, roughly 43% of pupils had a word gap at transition. As they progressed from primary into secondary, Y7 pupils were exposed to a huge amount of new language. Up to 3 or 4 times as many words a day, partly as a result of the increase in “academic vocabulary”. As with our last report, the word gap was felt to impact on academic performance and test results, behaviour, self-esteem, and future opportunities. We were due to publish this report and its findings in the Spring of 2020 having sought input from schools and language experts as to what policies, strategies and activities could be employed to counteract the word gap's damaging effects. However, with the onset of the pandemic, we embarked on further research in May to gauge how teachers felt the pandemic was impacting on the word gap. Our research findings corroborated this with 92% of respondents stating that they felt the Summer lockdown would contribute to widening the vocabulary gap. Having gone on to experience two further lockdowns, there is no doubt that for some children, this will have had a serious impact on pupil language. The challenges are significant and there are many calls on teachers' time and priorities, but our findings suggest time must be found to address this issue as language opens the doors to everything else.

While our reports have not specifically addressed oracy in its widest sense, we strongly believe that children need a rich language environment to close the word gap. Through the evidence base for [NELI](#), now in 6500 schools as part of the NTP roll out, we see the enormous value of giving children the best start at school through oral language development. We also strongly believe that children's vocabulary and language mastery needs to be fully supported throughout their school journey both by teachers and parents to ensure they can truly express themselves and fulfil their learning and life potential. Without this, confidence, enjoyment of school, academic outcomes, a sense of wellbeing and future employment prospects all suffer.

