

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'

Ruby Nightingale

Full name:

The Sutton Trust

School or Organisation:

Communications and Public Affairs Manager

Role:

Written evidence:

This evidence is submitted by the Sutton Trust.

Summary:

- Oracy education can have a positive impact on pupils both throughout their education and in the workplace.
- The development of skills such as oracy in state schools is patchy, with schools with the lowest proportion of pupils eligible for FSM more likely to offer activities such as debating and performing arts.
- There are also socioeconomic gaps in take-up of such activities, with disadvantaged pupils less likely to participate.

- There are examples of good practice in developing oracy in state schools, and it is vital that this best practice is shared and informs strategies to develop these skills in schools.
- Barriers to highly quality provision for all include a focus on academic results in schools and the lack of available evidence and information for teachers.

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?

1. Oracy education can have a positive impact at all stages of education through to employment. Trials of oral language interventions in schools by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) consistently show a positive impact on learning, including on oral language skills and reading comprehension.¹ On average, pupils who participate in oral language interventions make approximately five months' additional progress over the course of the year.²

2. The development of oracy skills in school can also have a positive impact on improving access to the workplace, particularly for young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. 94% of employers say that life skills, such as confidence, motivation and communication, are at least as important as academic results for the success of young people, with nearly one third saying even more so.³ Oracy is a crucial skill for adult life, from the confidence it can bring to the development of verbal communication skills that are vital in the workplace. The development of these essential life skills are crucial to improving outcomes and ensuring that every individual is able to achieve their potential.

3. There is some evidence that debating, an activity used for the development of oracy and communication skills, can be beneficial for highly able students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Research the Trust has previously highlighted examined a project looking at high attaining, predominately low-income students taking part in urban debate leagues in Chicago. This work found that students who took part were 70% more likely to graduate, and three times less likely to drop out of school than similar non-participating students with the same levels of prior attainment. Pupils from less well-off homes who have shown promise early in their school career are both a vulnerable and extremely important group for social mobility, but very little is known about how best to support this group of students. While more research is needed, oracy education is one of very few possible interventions with research showing potential for this group.⁴

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

¹ Education Endowment Foundation (2019) *Teaching and Learning Toolkit: Oral language interventions*. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/oral-language-interventions/>

² Ibid

³ Cullinane, C., and Montacute, R. (2017) *Life Lessons*. Sutton Trust.

⁴ Montacute, R. (2018) *Potential for Success*. Sutton Trust.

4. Provision of life skills development in state schools is patchy. The extra resources available to independent schools allow them to impart essential life skills through lessons more consistently than in state schools, and they are able to offer activities such as debating, performing arts and public speaking. However, there are also inequalities within the state sector, in provision for pupils from less advantaged backgrounds. Secondary schools with the lowest proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals are twice as likely to offer debating clubs as schools with the highest (70% compared to 35%).⁵ There are similar issues within performing arts, with 90% of the most advantaged state schools offering performing arts activities, compared to 68% of the least advantaged.⁶

5. Where schools do offer opportunities to develop these skills, there are also disparities in the take-up of activities. Sutton Trust research has highlighted substantial socio-economic gaps, with pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds less likely to take up extracurricular activities than their better off peers (46% compared to 66%), and just half of those receiving free school meals taking part.⁷ There are also disparities between the levels of provision reported by teachers and actual take-up by pupils: 45% of teachers say their school provided debating, yet just 2% reported participating.⁸

6. While this provides an overall picture of the inequalities in the provision of life skills development, there are examples of good practice in state schools. School 21, a free school in London, prioritises developing students' oracy skills. The school utilises a range of strategies to help students develop these skills, including encouraging students to speak throughout all lessons, to speak regularly in assemblies and to give presentations on their own progress at parents' evenings. The Education Endowment Foundation has undertaken two pilots of the school's programmes, and findings suggest the approach is promising.⁹ Sharing evidence-based good practice across schools is vital and such evidence should be used to inform strategies to develop essential life skills.

7. Another example of good practice in oracy that the Sutton Trust have previously highlighted is St Francis Xavier's College, a comprehensive school in Liverpool which has run a successful debating society for the last decade. In 2018, the school reached the final of a national debating competition, run by the English-Speaking Union, which is regularly dominated by teams from independent schools. Their debate coach told us the impact he felt the activity had on students, including increased confidence, and improved performance in exams. He also spoke about the benefits for highly able students to be able to stretch themselves through the activity. However, St Xavier's coach was an experienced debater himself who was volunteering his time, and he told us he felt other schools would have difficulty in mirroring the success of Francis Xavier, as competitive debating can be difficult to master without support from someone with previous experience. The success of the school shows that state schools can succeed at debating, but also highlights that most state schools will find it difficult to compete against private schools with greater levels of resource. The school's

⁵ Cullinane, C., and Montacute, R. (2017) *Life Lessons*. Sutton Trust.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Education Endowment Foundation (2018) *Voice 21: Improving Oracy*. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/voice-21>

coach did however tell us that even without competitive success, he felt that a debating club could still be tremendously worthwhile for pupils.¹⁰

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?

8. A key challenge facing schools is around developing life skills while preparing students for academic exams. A focus on academic results and no accountability mechanism for the development of these skills means that such provision is easier to side-line when there are time pressures. A focus from Ofsted on the curriculum and quality of education as a whole in the new framework is welcome, but the Trust would also like to see more work undertaken to explore how schools can be incentivised in the development of essential life skills. One option would be to include the extent to which schools are actively promoting life skills development – particularly for those from more disadvantaged groups – in Ofsted inspection criteria.

9. The availability of information for teachers can also act as a barrier, with only 13% of teachers aware of sources where they could find help on how to best develop students' life skills.¹¹ There should be collaboration between the Department for Education, Ofsted and the sector to provide guidance and resources for teachers. Evidence should be at the heart of life skills and oracy education, and resources such as the Sutton Trust-EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit should be used to inform the most effective strategies for schools and teachers.

10. Overall, state schools should be given the resources, support and incentives to embed the development of these skills in their ethos, curriculum and extra-curricular activities. A 'whole-school' approach to improving the development of these skills is crucial. Life skills education, including oracy education, should be embedded in the day to day curriculum, through extra-curricular activities, and through dedicated programmes. These values should be embedded in the school ethos, assemblies, lessons, school clubs and societies, and in staff-student and staff-parent relationships, as the consistency of message and environment is crucial for embedding life skills.

¹⁰ Cullinane, C., and Montacute, R. (2017) *Life Lessons*. Sutton Trust.

¹¹ Ibid

